Farmer’s Markets as Social and Economic Drivers of Local Food Systems

BALTA SERC II: B5 and B7

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FM in Canada: $3.09 Billion
The Context

- FMs visible face of local food systems in communities
- Intertwined social and economic benefits
- Number and size of markets growing steadily in BC and AB
- Regional clustering of FMs apparent in both provinces
- Successful examples of social economy enterprises
Research Questions

- What is the current and potential role of farmers’ markets in BC and AB as social and economic drivers of local food systems?
- What is the nature, extent and significance of horizontal and vertical linkages amongst geographically clustered markets and other aspects of the short supply chain?
- As social economy enterprises, what impacts do FMs have on the communities and regions they are situated in?
Research Methods and Workplan

- Delphi Inquiry with experts to explore current and future role, challenges and needs (Nov 2008 - Jan 2010)
- Documentary and narrative research of regionally clustered FMs in two locations in both BC and AB (June 2009 – Feb 2010)
Theoretical Framework

Exploratory but informed by:

- **Cluster theory**
  - geographically proximate groups linked through competition and collaboration (Porter 1998; Davies and Larkin 2001)

- **Embeddedness**
  - social ties, relations of regard/trust (Sage 2003)
  - spatial context, short food supply chains and locality (Penker 2006)

- **Actor Network Theory** (Latour, 1991; Jaroz, 2005)
  - Mapping the connections and relations within networks of actors
Literature Review Summary

- FMs as actors within the phenomena of local food system clustering over time and space (Marsden, Banks and Bristow, 2000)

- FMs role in assisting the protection of farmland and the promotion of local economies (Brown and Miller, 2007)

- Inter-related challenges facing FM include tenure (Connell, 2006), governance and regulation (Black, 2005)
## Delphi Participants

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Delphi Results

Diverse opinions on shape/contour of LFS

- Geographic boundaries
- Components of a given local food system
- Marketing channels (what is local?)
- The nature & role of geographic clustering
Preliminary Delphi Findings

- Constraints on Increased Demand for Local Food
  - limited availability (1-2% of local food passes through FMs in AB and BC, but in some cases much higher)
  - limited access (certain marketing channels under-utilized)
  - lack of consumer information and awareness
Preliminary Delphi Findings cont...

- **Constraints on Increased Supply of Local Food**
  - low prices relative to the cost of production
  - underdeveloped marketing options
  - lack of government support

- **What’s needed to enhance Local Food systems?**
  - Local and regional branding
  - initiatives to stimulate consumer demand
  - improved coordination
Contradictions/Challenges

- The no. 1 and 2 answers for Constraints on demand are limited availability and access, both supply side issues.

- Why is the response for enhancing local food systems (both for our participants and for Canadian policy) focused on the demand side?

- Lack of awareness of the potential benefits of clustering and fear of unhealthy competition.
FM s in BC and AB
Conventional Clusters versus FM as clusters

- Geographically bounded
  Local focus versus global/export

- Self organizing
  - Historical path with key actors and events

- Focus on similar products and/or services
  - FM focus on a diversified product range

- Dependant on production
  - Production and customer/demand base

- Benefits of knowledge flows
  - Technology versus production/marketing systems
FM cluster relationships

- Vendor to vendor
- Vendor to market
- Market to market within a cluster
- FM and external relations
  - Customers, community organizations, FM associations, government
- FM markets and vertical linkages in the supply chain
Shaping the success of clusters

- Leadership
- Location - supply and demand
  - Diversified product profile, consistency of product supply, urban versus rural
- Infrastructure and security of tenure
- Social and civic support
- Organization and regulations
- Strengthening both horizontal and vertical linkages
Drivers of local food systems?

- FMs prime venue for creating social/economic links amongst farmers and consumers, educating about LFS, building community

- Clustering holds potential for enhancing FMs as ‘drivers of LFS’ need for strategic policy, planning and action:
  - Collaboration across sectors, strengthening links in short supply chain, cross marketing options, leadership, infrastructure development