

## 9 Trust in markets

### Economies of regard and spaces of contestation in alternative food networks

*Colin Sage*<sup>1</sup>

“Los mercados de alimentación son la sala de espera de la cocina”  
 (“Food markets are the waiting room of cuisine”)

Pep Palau (2004: 158)

#### **Introduction**

Around the world, markets<sup>2</sup> are vital places that provide the backbone of the local food economy. Invariably occupying a strategic central location, markets draw together local people in the buying and selling of food. For the traveler, markets are privileged spaces that offer a window into “real life”; an opportunity to observe people engaged in an everyday activity that provides a microscopic lens on the local food culture. In an age when the giant retail chains appear to be sweeping all before them, it is heartening to know that local markets are undergoing something of a renaissance. Whereas supermarkets stock foods largely transformed from their natural states to accommodate the demands of long-distance transportation, central warehousing, and long shelf life, local markets deal principally in fresh products with shorter life spans and much of it sourced within the region. Consequently, people are gradually returning to markets because they appreciate the human interaction, the character and taste of the food and the sense of trust that comes from shopping personally.

In recent years, Europe and North America have witnessed a significant growth in new forms of food retailing whereby fresh and high-quality produce is sold directly by the producers themselves. The most visible examples are the development of farmers’ markets (FM) in many urban locations, but there has also been a revitalization of street and covered municipal markets as well as the growth of other new retail arrangements such as farm shops, box schemes, community supported agriculture, forms of co-operative bulk purchase, and so on. The common feature of these initiatives is that they serve to reconnect food producers and consumers in a new and direct way, a relationship largely severed in recent years by the dominance of corporate multiple retailers. The term “alternative food networks” is often used as a

label to cover this wide variety of innovative forms of production and sales (Renting *et al.* 2003; Goodman 2003).

What lies behind the emergence of these alternative networks and the revitalization of markets as sites of exchange? It is apparent that, particularly in Europe among people with high disposable incomes, there is a generalized disenchantment with the modern food system. This may seem somewhat paradoxical given its apparent success in delivering an unprecedented abundance and diversity of foods while consumers are spending the smallest proportion of their household budget on food. Yet analysis of the wider “external” costs associated with the modern food system reveals numerous environmental problems. These stretch from the fields and feedlots (soil erosion, excessive nutrient loading, loss of biological diversity) to the multiple indirect environmental consequences of global sourcing and centralized distribution<sup>3</sup> (Pretty *et al.* 2005; Church 2005; Paxton 1994; La Trobe and Acott 2000). Moreover, intensification and cost reduction in the livestock sector has probably encouraged the greatest public concern as industry practices produced the BSE crisis, dioxin contamination of poultry feed, foot and mouth disease, salmonella infection in eggs, and so on. Despite these setbacks, the food industry enabled rising meat and dairy product consumption, much to the growing concern of health specialists about the consequences of excessive dietary intakes of saturated fats and refined sugars (Lang and Heasman 2004; Winson 2004).

Above all, the modern food system produced standardization, creating global brands and global consumption patterns (Lind and Barham 2004). The domination of the global food industry by relatively few corporations, such that the top three food companies together had combined sales of almost US\$ 100 billion in 2000, is constantly being extended through consolidation and concentration (Lang and Heasman 2004). This process, which we are constantly reassured is in the interests of the consumer in providing convenience, time saving, choice, and low price, has resulted in a fundamental transformation of our food system. Increasing numbers of people are now asking themselves: what are the hidden costs of this “convenience?” Is the time supposedly saved in shopping and in food preparation used for life-enhancing pursuits? And how has the selection, preparation, and consumption of food been reduced to just another chore in the general commodification of life rather than a source of pleasure and enjoyment?

Across Europe and North America, new networks of producers, consumers, and others are beginning to embody an alternative to the more standardized industrial mode of food supply. While they take on a variety of forms, what these networks have in common is an ability to redistribute value throughout the network (other than to find it concentrated in the hands of retailers). The high level of personal interaction that is a hallmark of exchange within these new networks, for example in farmers’ markets, offers a novel experience to customers who have become accustomed to the impersonal nature of human contact reduced to the barcode scanning of the

contents of their shopping basket. Such experiences have the capacity to recover the collective human experience associated with the preparation and exchange of foods and contribute to the *remoralization* of the food economy (Sage 2003).

This chapter interrogates the meaning of these exchanges, arguing that they go far beyond a simple commercial transaction, and comprise hybrid elements of both moral and money economies. While performing their respective practices and routines, both producers and consumers come to a mutual understanding of the value of the product and of the exchange. Through the grant and pursuit of regard, transacting partners become entangled in a reciprocal relationship whereby the intrinsic benefits of personalized interaction are valued. The central thesis of the chapter is that for too long we have diminished the importance of non-monetary dimensions of exchange and that we need to re-establish the moral economy of food markets.

The chapter makes the case for markets as sites where trust in food can be recovered through the act of buying it directly from the producer. The rise of alternative food networks (AFN), the features of which are discussed in the following section, has enabled some consumers to procure food in this way. One of the most popular and fastest-growing expressions of AFN has been the development of FM, which are outlined in the third section. Farmers' markets potentially embrace all the necessary elements of a moral economy of food, representing the embodiment of the local, more sustainable ways of producing and distributing food, and the recovery of trust between producer and consumer. The issues of trust, embeddedness, and mutual regard are discussed in the fourth section, which highlights the significance of a non-economic (i.e. moral) dimension in market transactions.

Yet, we should not underestimate the power of corporate capital or state bureaucracies to obstruct or refashion the potentially transformative nature of such spaces of exchange. The fifth section provides a case study of recent developments in Ireland that demonstrate how markets also serve as a contested arena between quite different visions of the use of public space and the ways in which we procure our food. Finally, the Conclusions underline the importance of public policy in ensuring that markets are enabled to provide people with the opportunity to acquire fresh, local produce at reasonable prices as an alternative to that provided by corporate food retailers. This would help strengthen the recovery of a moral economy around food and re-establish the importance of individual responsibility in food consumption practices.

### **Features of alternative food networks**

In a highly globalized world economic system, it is to be expected that food has become a commodity like any other, to be produced at the lowest price and subject to corporate processes in order to wring out the most profit

(Friedland 2004). Thus, much of the modern food system yields products that have been genetically mutated, irradiated, extruded, and made to appear as natural, nutritious and “just picked,” no matter if they have traveled halfway around the world. It is in relation to these concealed methods of production, the distancing of consumers from their food supply and their growing skepticism and distrust of labeling providing bland reassurances about its “farm-fresh quality,” replete with associational images (Watts *et al.* 2005) that has led to a loss of confidence and trust in the conventional food supply system. Cook and Crang refer to a process of fetishization whereby “consumed commodities and their valuations are divorced for and by consumers from the social relations of their production and provision through the construction of ignorances about the biographies and geographies of what we consume” (1996: 135). This may help to explain the fearfulness and disempowerment of consumers at times of food scares. It may also account for the apparent quality “turn” of some consumers away from industrially produced foods and towards products that can demonstrate provenance to a place of origin, and therefore reassurance that it is safe to eat (Goodman 2002).

This “turn to quality” has consequently underpinned the emergence of alternative food networks, or short food supply chains, arising from consumer concerns for human health and food safety as well as other wider ethical considerations (animal welfare, fair trade, sustainability). Such developments have demonstrated that food markets are not the result of some “invisible” hand external to the social world but are produced by various actors in the food chain – consumers, producers, retailers, processors, etc. (Renting *et al.* 2003). This has encouraged the view that alternative food networks might help reverse long-established trends toward corporate concentration in the food sector and improve the share of total value accruing to primary producers. By breaking with the long, complex, and logistically organized supply chains run for the benefit of the major corporations, food networks have the potential to forge new links between producers and consumers. Indeed, by resocializing food, consumers – generally those with higher disposable incomes – are enabled and empowered to exercise a more reflexive and critical judgment about the relative desirability and quality of different food products (Renting *et al.* 2003) and build local food systems for community development (Feenstra 1997).

While claims for the transformational power of short food supply chains may be overstated, there is no question that FM and other new retail forms are bringing together ever-larger numbers of producers and consumers within a fundamentally different type of relationship than that found in conventional supply chains. One reason for this is that the product reaches the consumer embedded with information about the place of production, the methods employed, and the values of the people involved.

Marsden and colleagues (Marsden *et al.* 2000; Renting *et al.* 2003) have developed a three-fold typology of short food supply chains:

1. *Face to face*: where the consumer purchases a product directly from the grower, farmer, or producer. This category includes farmers' markets, farm shops and roadside stalls, pick-your-own, box schemes, and home deliveries extending to mail order schemes involving telephone or on-line purchases. In all cases, authenticity and trust are mediated through direct personal interaction with the producer.
2. *Spatial proximity*: although products may travel longer distances they are still predominantly retailed within the region of origin, invariably by people who have knowledge about the producer, the conditions of production, and appreciation of the attributes of the product. While this category includes more complex institutional arrangements for sales, the regional identity of the product is at the forefront. Examples include consumer co-operatives, fairs, gastronomic tourism, arrangements between producer farm shops, regionally themed restaurant menus, and so on.
3. *Spatially extended*: while distribution into national and even international markets may appear to contradict the notion of *short* supply chains, this category refers to products with reputations and embedded with value-laden information about the place and characteristics of production. Regional specialities such as Parmigiano Reggiano cheese and Champagne wine or fair trade products such as Guatemalan coffee are, in their different ways, products that are strongly differentiated from anonymous commodities, commanding a premium price and often retailed through distinctive supply networks. In order to maintain the "exclusivity" of the product formalized codes, involving independent regulation and certification and established on a juridical basis, have been created to protect it from inferior imitations. Such codes include national and European designation of regional origin (PDO/PGI) or fair trade labeling (Parrott *et al.* 2002; Tregear 2003).

Clearly, as these categories demonstrate, short food supply chains encompass a wide range of different forms of interaction between producers and consumers. However, it is in the reinvigoration of markets in all their various forms where the influence of alternative food networks has become most apparent.

### **The growth and significance of farmers' markets**

Markets at which food constitutes the principal element (thereby putting to one side "flea" markets, car boot sales and street markets where cheap clothing is the prevailing item) may still take a number of different forms. There are the municipal markets, mostly of nineteenth-century origin, established by local authorities in the interests of public health and civic planning, which continue to take place in covered, serviced central sites of architectural and civic interest.<sup>4</sup> Next are the periodic street markets that

take place one or more days per week in a central square or street. Although such markets remain an important feature of most towns in France and Spain, they have experienced significant decline in Northern Europe in the post-war period under pressure of competition from the convenience of supermarket shopping. However, during the last ten or so years there has been a significant revitalization of street trading including a rapid expansion in the number of farmers' markets. While they are a new expression of a long-established tradition of weekly markets, FM have captured the imagination of consumers, food writers, and many small producers, providing an outlet for the sale of produce.

Farmers' markets appear to be an excellent way by which small growers, farmers, and other food producers can market their produce directly to the public without the high transaction costs or minimum volume requirements associated with conventional food supply chains. Although they are of little relevance for producers of bulk commodities or those involved in contract sales to food manufacturers and retailers, they offer real opportunities for increasing returns to farmers. For example, Pretty (2002) compares the paltry 8–10 percent share of each euro, dollar, or pound spent by consumers on food that finds its way back to the farmer through normal marketing mechanisms with the 80–90 percent when sold by that farmer directly to the consumer.

Starting in the United States, the number of FM there has grown from 1,700 in 1994 to over 3,700 in 2004. According to the US Department of Agriculture in their FM study of 2000, around 19,000 farmers sell their produce only at FM, with aggregate annual turnover exceeding US\$ 1 billion. An important feature of the US experience is that 58 percent of FM participate in food poverty schemes, such as accepting food stamps, and in this way help to improve nutrition by facilitating increased consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables (USDA 2005). For the UK, Pretty (2002) reports that in 2001 there were 200 established FM trading, although the National Association of Farmers' Markets (NAFM) has only given its approval to just over half this number of markets that conform to NAFM criteria. In Japan, there are an estimated 2,500 FM, while in Ireland around 90 markets have been established, most of which have developed in the last three or four years. The situation in Ireland is discussed in more detail below. The key question that we have to ask, however, is "what explains this rapid growth and the desire of so many people to want to purchase some of their food from open-air stalls rather than at the supermarket?"

Holloway and Kneafsey, drawing on ideas derived from recent work in geography, approach FM both as a space of consumption and as a terrain where various networks of relationships between actors intersect. Underpinning the emergence of a farmers' market is a shared commitment to the locality and to its social and economic development. However, constructing meanings around the products, their producers, and the act of engaging in a farmers' market can lead to quite contradictory interpretations. On the one hand, Holloway and Kneafsey suggest that FM can be read as a reactionary

or nostalgic space attempting to recover some golden age of wholesomeness and rusticity. In their observations of a farmers' market in the English Midlands, they note the presence amongst stallholders of old-fashioned clothing, the prominence of Union Jack flags, and an attempt to evoke a sense of nostalgia for a traditional rural identity. On the other hand, however, a farmers' market constitutes an alternative space that partly subverts the conventional space of food shopping (while celebrating free-market entrepreneurialism). It challenges the dominance of the supermarket retailing-productivist agriculture nexus and provides a means to circumvent the consumption spaces controlled by powerful actors in the food chain. In this way FM

hold the potential for a challenging of conventional production, retail and consumption patterns by alternatives which embrace discourses of the local, environmental awareness and direct contact between producer and consumer.

(Holloway and Kneafsey 2000: 298)

Indeed, it can be argued that FM present the opportunity to re-embed the exchange process for food into localized social relationships (Kirwan 2004).

### **Social embeddedness, trust, and regard**

At a time when the acquisition of products is becoming depersonalized (by supermarkets, hypermarkets, self-service and other modern facilities), the public appreciates being able to trust someone who knows the product, someone they can speak to personally, and who can offer information and advice about the origin and the characteristics of the desired purchase.

(Medina 2004: 266)

This desire for face-to-face contact, whether as a reaction to the anonymity and depersonalization of the modern food retailing experience, or in search of human reassurance about the provenance and integrity of a food product, has been a recent feature of modern western consumers. In order to trust the food, one must first trust the producer, and direct personal interaction offers consumers the opportunity to make their own judgment. Such transactions foster new relations of proximity and help to both resocialize food through face-to-face contact and respatialize it on the basis of its local origin. Social relations underpinning economic transactions are what defines the term embeddedness. Originating with the economic historian Karl Polanyi, embeddedness has become a vital concept in the study of alternative food networks, conveying important principles of social connectivity, reciprocity, and trust. These are characteristics which are essential to all economic life in general, but which fundamentally underpin direct agricultural marketing

initiatives. In a seminal interpretation of the concept, Mark Granovetter stresses “the role of concrete personal relations and structures (or ‘networks’) of such relations in generating trust and discouraging malfeasance” (1985:490).<sup>5</sup>

Within the modern food system, concerns relating to risk, safety, and traceability are placing emphasis on the embeddedness of a product in a particular place or production process, thus establishing its ecologically embedded character (“naturalness”) and provenance. This attachment to locality (often made explicit in a place name for the product) conveys a trustworthiness and credibility that can be further verified through short food supply chains. However, according to Murdoch *et al.* (2000), an overly simplistic attachment of embeddedness to spatial proximity can lend itself to a fetishizing of localness while underplaying the qualities embedded *in* the product. Others have taken issue with the tendency to conflate spatial relations (the “local”) with social relations of production (Hinrichs 2003), equate “alternativeness” with embeddedness (Winter 2003) or investment in the “local” as a redoubt against globalized mass consumption of “placeless foods” (DuPuis and Goodman 2005).

Yet embeddedness matters and is likely to matter more in the future given rising concerns about food safety and ecological consequences (Murdoch *et al.* 2000). Indeed, there is abundant evidence that corporate retailers are increasingly conscious of it: by the appearance of more “local” and organic foods, in-store promotions providing opportunities for shoppers to meet with specialty food producers, and in a few cases even holding farmers’ markets on the supermarket car parks. Social connectivity and trust have consequently become vital elements in transactions around food, although this is not to preclude the relevance of price or instrumental behavior.

In order to further deepen our appreciation for and understanding of the distinctive qualities of social interaction that characterize exchange within farmers’ markets, it is helpful to draw upon the notion of regard developed by Avner Offer (1997). Offer’s paper addresses the persistence of non-market exchange, where “goods and services continue to be transferred without the benefit of markets or prices, to be exchanged as *gifts*” (450). The preference for reciprocal exchange, he argues,

... arises out of the intrinsic benefits of social and personal interaction, from the satisfactions of *regard* ... [and is] ... preferred when trade involves a personal interaction, and when goods and services are unique, expensive, or have many dimensions of quality.

(Offer 1997: 450)

In contrast to neo-classical market exchange, where personal acquaintance is immaterial and the material gains from trade are all that matter, reciprocal exchange embodies a “process benefit, usually in the form of a personal relationship.” Offer continues:

Personal interaction ranks very high among the sources of satisfaction. It can take many forms: acknowledgement, attention, acceptance, respect, reputation, status, power, intimacy, love, friendship, kinship, sociability. To wrap it all into one term, interaction is driven by the grant and pursuit of *regard*.

(1997: 451)

Regard provides, according to Offer (1997), a powerful incentive for trust, and trust itself resembles a gift – a unilateral transfer with no certainty of reciprocity. However, trust “economizes on the ‘transaction costs’ of monitoring, compliance, and enforcement.” In this way, regard provides an additional motivation for economic exchange; it offers a transaction benefit.

Roger Lee, in a study of small horticultural nurseries in the south of England, argues that the grant and pursuit of regard may, “through a form of mutually recognized reciprocity between transacting partners, displace narrowly economic relationships (normally imposed by financial evaluations) and enable sub-optimal production and exchange” (Lee 2000: 139). Thus the buyer discounts the uncertainties, idiosyncrasies, and usually higher prices associated with small enterprises heavily reliant upon the labor of their owners. For, in addition to the desired product, the buyer gains insight into the production system, status, and identity associated with the consumption of a good with limited distribution and enhanced expertise, for example ways of preparing or serving the food. The producer, on the other hand, not only realizes the value of the good but also acquires an extension of regard based on their specialized knowledge. This regard, importantly, is not simply acquired at the moment of transaction, but may be extended through a widening of the circle of consumers through the sharing of food and deepened by consumer loyalty.

For small producers selling through local markets, it may be very important to maintain consumer loyalty by establishing the preferences of customers and signaling their efforts to meet them. This personalization of gifts, argues Offer, “serves the function of authenticating the regard signal” (1997: 454). Yet giving gives rise to obligation, argues Offer, creating an emotional bond that some may find excessively intimate and which constrains their “freedom of choice” to shop wherever they like. In a similar vein, Hinrichs (2000) observes in her discussion of community-supported agriculture how members may be unhappy receiving bags of produce with which they are unfamiliar and in quantities they did not request, yet feel obliged to maintain their custom. Even within a nominally “free” market of buyers and sellers of local produce, a sense of entanglement may arise from the hybridity of moral and money economies that impose certain obligations and responsibilities on both transacting parties.

**Contested rights and public space: Challenges to the legitimacy of markets In Ireland**

Thus far, the chapter has presented an unproblematic view of contemporary markets as spaces where trust, regard, and reciprocity prevail. While the preceding section made the case for a moral economy of market relations, it is necessary to recognize that markets might also be sites of contestation in which competing interests are played out, where conflicts can also take place as much as the grant and pursuit of regard. Clearly, markets offer opportunities for the extraction of rents and the leveraging of differential in the value of goods that are bought and sold. They also occupy a physical space which, in an era of rising land values, might realize more lucrative returns under other forms of commercial development than that generated by a weekly market. The way that markets have evolved and the contemporary pressures they face clearly reflect the particular regional circumstances shaped by history, legal status, and patterns of social and economic development. As an insight into some of the challenges faced by markets today, this section provides examples from Ireland, which has otherwise witnessed a resurgence in street and farmers' markets during recent years. Nevertheless, these two cases illustrate the way in which commercial imperatives and statutory regulation can work to eliminate long-standing market traditions if not challenged by alternative visions that seek to recover a moral economy of food.

The need to dispose of surplus by which to acquire necessities not directly produced by the household gave rise to sites of exchange from earliest times. The gradual formalization of these sites into periodic markets and fairs became an important instrument of political authority and a means to capture economic rent. As in much of the rest of Western Europe, the thirteenth century was a period of economic expansion in Anglo-Norman Ireland and the steady growth in commerce was marked by an increase in the number of fairs and markets. These were generally founded on the basis of a charter by the British crown to local lords and, in return for the right to levy tolls, obliged the founder to provide weights and measures and to preserve law and order (Cronin *et al.* 2001). The granting of rights to hold a fair (effectively an extravagant market held once per year around a feast day for up to 15 days) or market (held in a named place on a specified day of the week) represented a potentially lucrative income from tolls for charter holders. Unsurprisingly these rights were carefully guarded and periodically renewed by royal patent to ensure their legal basis was maintained. This situation prevailed in Ireland until the late nineteenth and early twentieth century when local councils effectively bought out the toll rights of charter holders and set about asserting municipal control. Critically, however, the royal charters also provided the basis for proprietary or customary rights to sell produce on the specified day and in the designated place.

A survey conducted in 1880 revealed that there were 264 towns with market rights in Ireland, where farmers and others were legally entitled to

sell their produce in the town on the designated market day (*Irish Farmers Journal* 2003). Yet, under the 1995 Casual Trading Act, market rights may self-extinguish after ten years if they have not been exercised. This has created some confusion and legal uncertainty where attempts to “regularize” trading by moving it away from commercial areas and to restrict its development have been challenged by traders seeking to maintain these historic “rights.” Two recent cases from West Cork highlight the ways in which market spaces can become sites of competing visions of the “appropriate” use of public space, where private commercial interests seek to prevail over civic values of personal interaction, trust, and regard.

Bantry, a town whose name and reputation far exceeds its size, has long been the site of a weekly market. Indeed, the rights to hold a market were granted by the Crown to the First Earl of Cork in the seventeenth century. On the first Friday of every month the market is known as the “fair day” market, with a larger number of stalls clustering around Wolfe Tone Square and adjacent streets, selling a wide variety of fresh and high-quality craft foods, fish, poultry, clothes, and bric-a-brac. During recent years, however, the shopkeepers of the town had complained that the market was an impediment to business, that market stallholders pay no rates, leave rubbish, are unhygienic, and so on. In response to these complaints Cork County Council decided to establish a dedicated market site close to the foreshore of the bay and well away from the commercial hub of the town using by-laws under the Casual Trading Act of 1995. Market stallholders were unimpressed, arguing that the proposed relocation was unsuitable, remote, and far too small to accommodate the number of traders who traditionally use the Square. Nevertheless, the County Council informed them that from 11 January 2002 they would be required to have a casual trading license to trade in this new area and that to trade elsewhere would constitute a legal infringement.

On the stated day, Toby Simmons, a well-known market trader selling olives and related foods, set up and traded from his stall in the centre of town as usual. At 11 a.m. Council officials informed him that he was not trading in the designated area and unless he removed his stall by 12:15 p.m. the *Gardaí* (police) would impound his goods. At 12:45 p.m. *Gardaí* closed in on the stall and gave Mr. Simmons a final opportunity to remove his stall. He declined on the grounds of historic market rights to trade. At 1:20 p.m. a council van drew up and *Gardaí* loaded the first barrel of olives into the van, rendering them unfit for resale. His entire stock of olives, and his stall tables, umbrella, and takings for the day were impounded and removed.

By the end of January, Toby Simmons applied for and was granted a temporary injunction preventing Cork County Council from disturbing him while trading, so that on 1 February, fair day, he and others were trading once more. More importantly, however, together with the Irish Organization for Market and Street Traders Ltd, he sought and won an interlocutory injunction at the High Court with Mr. Justice O’Caoimh arguing that powers to regulate casual trading do not extend to defeat the proprietary rights of

members of the public (The High Court 2002). Bantry market remains in its long-standing location and continues to attract people from across the region as it has for many years.

Yet despite this ruling, other town councils have sought to intimidate market traders with threats of legal action if they continue to exercise this proprietary right. In Skibbereen, two market traders were arrested by *Gardaí* in 2004, locked up for a day and their stock impounded. The two argued that traditional market rights have existed in the town since the granting of a charter from King Charles II in 1688 and that this made their arrest and subsequent loss wrongful. In 1981, the High Court confirmed the status of market rights in Skibbereen in the *Quill v. Skibbereen Urban District Council (UDC)* case stating that “the franchise granted by the charter still exists and has not been terminated.” Subsequently on 25 July 2005 in Skibbereen, District Court Judge Terence Finn ruled in favor of the two traders and criticized the local authority for their failure to act in the interests of all in dealing with casual trading.

The role of local authorities in facilitating or hindering local market trading is a topic considered in other chapters in this volume. There are numerous examples in the UK and the USA where local town councils and other institutions have played a highly supportive role in facilitating FM by granting licenses, providing publicity, and liaising with other stakeholders. In Ireland this has not been the case so far, and indeed in Skibbereen the UDC has shown little but prevarication and hostility towards efforts to create a local market. It rejected outright proposals from a local group, Growing Awareness (GA), to develop such a market. Subsequently, GA, mostly comprising small organic farmers and growers, established that market rights existed on the “Fair Field,” an area in the centre of town. Besides the 1688 rights, a second patent was issued to the Townshend family in 1778. In May 1898, a High Court judge conveyed the freehold title of the Fair Field to Skibbereen Town Commissioners subject to market rights and other rights of way. In 1958, the UDC leased the Fair Field to Cork Co-operative Marts Ltd, which then acquired the freehold including the market rights. Subsequently, the company sold the site to property developers. These developers, speculating on the rapidly rising land values in Ireland during the past 15 years, sought and received from the local council permission to build a supermarket for the German discount multiple, Lidl. However, in all of these transactions market rights had not been extinguished.

In May 2001, Growing Awareness began trading on the Fair Field, though as the summer wore on, the developers sought to close access to the site by erecting a steel fence and chaining the access gates. As rights of way exist across the site, GA was able to ensure that the gates remained open, although one of the developers sat in his black Mercedes parked across the entrance restricting access to all but pedestrians on market days. The symbolism of this confrontation possibly captures the struggle to maintain a moral economy of mutual regard between producers and consumers at a time when

corporate-controlled production and consumption networks prevail. For on the one side are a group of property developers enjoying the conditions of rampant land speculation and an associated culture of political corruption that rezones land use and provides planning permission for large discount supermarkets that will effectively eliminate much of the retail competition in the town. Opposing them is a more disparate group of growers and artisan food producers, many of whom are non-nationals, but who seek to maintain market rights in the interests of bringing fresh wholesome food to the people of Skibbereen at competitive prices.

The symbolism of this dispute underlines the salience of Holloway and Kneafsey's (2000) observation of the ways in which the spaces of FM hold the potential for challenging conventional retail and consumption patterns by alternatives which embrace discourses of the local, environmental awareness and direct contact between producer and consumer. Moreover, it also attests to the relevance of their call for closer examination of the ways such spaces become increasingly regulated as part of the tendency towards bureaucratic and capitalist appropriation of potentially alternative economic spaces.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has presented the case for markets as opportunities for face-to-face transactions between producers and consumers with the potential for recovering a moral economy around food. While recognizing the need to qualify embeddedness, the chapter has argued that the grant and pursuit of regard, involving personal acknowledgement of trust, loyalty, and expertise, is a significant non-monetary reward in its own right. In this respect, markets have a powerful advantage over the highly impersonal conventional food retailing practices.

The power of local markets lies in their providing both a spatial alternative to conventional food supply chains (reducing distances traveled by food, encouraging people to reconnect with their regional "food shed," together with its seasonal possibilities) and a social alternative (encouraging greater community integration, employment opportunities, trust). However, local authorities, statutory agencies (environmental health, planning) and vested economic interests all have the power to facilitate or to thwart efforts to (re-)establish or maintain local markets. There are at least three ways by which the attitudes of such bodies toward local markets might be reflected:

- Their ability to recognize the potential of food to become a useful tool of economic policy and the role that markets can play as vital nodes for the retention of value within the region;
- Their understanding of how markets may serve as incubators of small businesses, enabling producers to gain first-hand feedback from customers on their tastes and preferences without the high entry costs of other forms of retailing, encouraging competition in the pursuit of quality;

- Their vision of town centers as being the historic site of markets where, for hundreds of years, people have mingled and shopped for food, as opposed to car-dominated streets with traffic heading for peripheral urban hypermarkets.

Of course, there are many more criteria that might equally reveal official public attitudes toward the value of local markets. Not least is whether national food policy is effectively a *laissez-faire* matter left to the practices of the global food corporations, or whether there is any connection in public policy between the state of the nation's health and the national diet (Sage 2005). In the absence of political will to raise nutritional standards, for example by encouraging an increase in consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables, then markets might simply be considered an anachronism and supermarket retailers given the green light to build more out of town shopping centers selling processed and packaged foodstuffs. Fortunately there are a growing number of cases where the official attitude towards markets is positive.

Evidence from the United States has demonstrated that markets do have nutritional and health benefits, especially when located in low-income areas, by making fresh affordable food available (FoE 2000). In the UK, the recent rapid expansion in the number of farmers' markets has been welcomed by national government and has involved the active participation of local authorities in supporting local food initiatives (ibid.). In Toronto, of course, markets play a role within a wide range of services that underpins the commitment of that city to food security for all (Toronto Food Policy Council 2005).

While the official view in Ireland remains dominated by a bureaucratic and "hyper-hygienist" approach in which markets are treated with suspicion as a relic from the distant past, growing numbers of people across the country are choosing to buy foods embedded with positive characteristics. Desiring a reassurance of traceability, environmentally sound methods of production, and good taste, consumers enjoy purchasing these products at markets from the producers themselves. For those resourceful individuals seeking new ways of retaining value within the family farm in the face of the remorseless downward pressure on farm-gate prices paid by the corporate food sector, markets offer a valuable outlet for the low-volume, craft-based production of quality foods that they have developed. It is too early, as yet, to speak of this as a national synergy, a new and powerful alliance of consumers and producers coming together in an alternative setting. Yet, although incipient, the growth in the number of farmers' markets across Ireland attests to the desire of people for greater meaning in the quality of their food and the way it is acquired. Whether such markets will challenge conventional retail and consumption patterns through its alternative discourse emphasizing the local, the environment, and a new ethics of production, remains to be seen. However, it will be ironic if increasing numbers of farmers' markets are

established on the grounds of long-standing customary rights originally granted by a foreign medieval monarch.

### Bibliography

- Chubb, A. (1998) *Farmers' Markets: The UK potential*, Bristol: Eco-logic Books.
- Church, N. (2005) *Why our food is so dependent on oil*. Online. Available: [www.321energy.com/editorials/church/church040205.html](http://www.321energy.com/editorials/church/church040205.html) (accessed 13 April 2005).
- Cook, I. and Crang, P. (1996) 'The world on a plate: Culinary culture, displacement and geographical knowledges,' *Journal of Material Culture*, 1(2): 131–53.
- Cronin, D., Gilligan, J., and Holton, K. (2001) 'Introduction,' in D. Cronin, J. Gilligan, K. Holton (eds) *Irish Fairs and Markets: Studies in local history*, Dublin: Four Courts Press.
- DuPuis, M. and Goodman, D. (2005) 'Should we go "home" to eat? Towards a reflexive politics of localism,' *Journal of Rural Studies*, 21: 359–71.
- Feenstra, G. (1997) 'Local food systems and sustainable communities,' *American Journal of Alternative Agriculture*, 12(1): 28–36.
- Friedland, W. (2004) 'Agrifood globalization and commodity systems,' *International Journal of Sociology of Agriculture and Food*, 12: 5–16.
- FoE (Friends of the Earth) (2000) *The economic benefits of farmers' markets*, London: Friends of the Earth Trust.
- Goodman, D. (2002) 'Rethinking food production-consumption: Integrative perspectives,' *Sociologia Ruralis*, 42(4): 271–77.
- (2003) 'Editorial: The quality "turn" and alternative food practices: reflections and agenda,' *Journal of Rural Studies*, 19: 1–7.
- Granovetter, M. (1985) 'Economic action and social structure: The problem of embeddedness,' *American Journal of Sociology*, 91(3): 481–510.
- High Court, The (2002) 'Judgement of Mr Justice Aindrias Ó' Caoimh delivered 22 February 2002.' Online. Available: [www.austlii.edu.au/~andrew/balilii/IEHC/new/1262p-02\\_k.rtf](http://www.austlii.edu.au/~andrew/balilii/IEHC/new/1262p-02_k.rtf) (accessed 3 October 2005).
- Hinrichs, C. (2000) 'Embeddedness and local food systems: notes on two types of direct agricultural market,' *Journal of Rural Studies*, 16: 295–303.
- (2003) 'The practice and politics of food system localization,' *Journal of Rural Studies*, 19: 33–45.
- Holloway, L. and Kneafsey, M. (2000) 'Reading the space of the farmers' market: A preliminary investigation from the UK,' *Sociologia Ruralis*, 40(3): 285–99.
- Irish Farmers Journal* (2003) 'Market rights: use them or lose them.' Online. Available: [www.farmersjournal.ie/2003/0823/ruralliving/countrylifestyle/feature.shtml](http://www.farmersjournal.ie/2003/0823/ruralliving/countrylifestyle/feature.shtml) (accessed 3 October 2005).
- Kirwan, J. (2004) 'Alternative strategies in the UK agro-food system: Interrogating the alterity of farmers' markets,' *Sociologia Ruralis*, 44(4): 395–415.
- Lang, T. and Heasman, M. (2004) *Food Wars: The global battle for mouths, minds and markets*, London: Earthscan.
- La Trobe, H. and Acott, T. (2000) 'Localising the global food system,' *International Journal of Sustainable Development and World Economy*, 7: 309–20.
- Lee, R. (2000) 'Shelter from the storm? Geographies of regard in the worlds of horticultural consumption and production,' *Geoforum* 31: 137–57.
- Lind, D. and Barham, E. (2004) 'The social life of the tortilla: Food, cultural politics, and contested commodification,' *Agriculture and Human Values*, 21: 47–60.

- Marsden, T., Banks, J. and Bristow, G. (2000) 'Food supply chain approaches: Exploring their role in rural development,' *Sociologia Ruralis*, 40(4): 424–38.
- Medina, F. X. (2004) 'Los futuros de los mercados: Reflexión y prospective,' in J. Angli, J. Bacaria *et al.* (eds) *Mercados del Mediterráneo*, Barcelona: Lunweg Editores.
- Murdoch, J., Marsden, T. and Banks, J. (2000) 'Quality, nature, and embeddedness: Some theoretical considerations in the context of the food sector,' *Economic Geography*, 76(2): 107–25.
- Offer, A. (1997) 'Between the gift and the market: the economy of regard,' *Economic History Review*, L(3): 450–76.
- Palau, P. (2004) 'Colores, aromas y sabores de los mercados mediterráneos (The colours, aromas and tastes of Mediterranean markets),' in J. Angli and J. Bacaria *et al.* (eds) *Mercados del Mediterráneo*, Barcelona: Lunweg Editores.
- Parrott, N., Wilson, N. and Murdoch, J. (2002) 'Spatializing quality: Regional protection and the alternative geography of food,' *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 9(3): 241–61.
- Paxton, A. (1994) *The Food Miles Report*, London: SAFE Alliance.
- Pretty, J. (2002) *Agri-culture: Reconnecting people, land and nature*, London: Earthscan.
- Pretty, J., Ball, A., Lang, T. and Morrison, J. (2005) 'Farm costs and food miles: An assessment of the full cost of the UK weekly food basket,' *Food Policy*, 30: 1–19.
- Renting, H., Marsden, T. and Banks, J. (2003) 'Understanding alternative food networks: exploring the role of short food supply chain in rural development,' *Environment and Planning A*, 35(3): 393–412.
- Sage, C. (2003) 'Social embeddedness and relations of regard: alternative "good food" networks in south-west Ireland,' *Journal of Rural Studies*, 19(1): 47–60.
- Sage, C. and Sexton, R. (2005) 'The food culture of Cork,' in J. Crowley, R. Devoy, D. Linehan, P. O'Flanagan (eds) *The Atlas of Cork*, Cork: Cork University Press.
- Toronto Food Policy Council. (2005) *Annual Report 2004*, Toronto: TFPC.
- Sage, C. (2005) 'Food for thought,' *Irish Times Health Supplement*, 28 June: 2.
- Tregear, A. (2003) 'From Stilton to Vimto: Using food history to rethink typical products in rural development,' *Sociologia Ruralis*, 43: 91–107.
- USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) (2005) Online. Available: [www.ams.usda.gov/farmermarkets](http://www.ams.usda.gov/farmermarkets) (accessed 3 October 2005).
- Watts, D., Ilberry, B. and Maye, D. (2005) 'Making reconnections in agro-food geography: alternative systems of food provision,' *Progress in Human Geography*, 29(1): 22–40.
- Winson, A. (2004) 'Bringing political economy into the debate on the obesity epidemic,' *Agriculture and Human Values*, 21: 299–312.
- Winter, M. (2003) 'Embeddedness, the new food economy and defensive localism,' *Journal of Rural Studies*, 19: 23–32.

## Notes

- 1 I wish to acknowledge the financial support of the Higher Education Authority's Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions, Cycle 3. I would also like to acknowledge the helpful advice of Caroline Robinson, Chairperson of the Irish Food Market Traders Association, Madeline McKeever of Growing Awareness, and an anonymous reviewer of this chapter.

- 2 The term markets is used here as a generic category to encompass a complex of independent vendors gathered within a defined space, whether open-air or under-cover, unregulated or licensed, under the auspices of a local authority or an individual entrepreneur. The term therefore includes long-standing street trading venues, farmers' markets, as well as municipal covered markets characteristic of many European cities. The central concern of this chapter, however, is with food markets and especially the nature of the relationships formed by market vendors and their customers, the consumers. The generic category of markets is therefore set apart from other forms of food retailing especially that represented by supermarkets.
- 3 Rising volumes of air-freighted food from around the world and lengthening distances traveled by road are all contributing to rising "food miles." According to Church, "UK imports of food products and animal feed involved transportation by sea, air and road amounting to over 83 billion tonne-kilometres (which) required 1.6 billion litres of fuel ... and ... resulted in 4.1 million tones of carbon dioxide emissions" (Church 2005: 4).
- 4 For example, Cork city possesses a fine municipal covered market. Originally opened in 1788, the English Market was redeveloped during the 1860s by Sir John Benson, whose Italianate design features cast-iron pillars and ornate brackets, brickwork, and a lofty vaulted glass roof. Today the English Market is a cornucopia of delicious ancient and modern foods featuring such Cork specialities as tripe, drisheen, offal, and pigs' feet alongside contemporary European products such as cheese, olives, pasta, champagne, and Belgian chocolates (Sage and Sexton 2005).
- 5 I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer of this chapter for drawing to my attention the significance of Granovetter's (1985) reworking of embeddedness and its contribution to breaking down the traditionalist/modernist binary that has characterized orthodox approaches within the social sciences.