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Embeddedness and local food systems: notes on two types of direct agricultural market☆

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Abstract

Direct agricultural markets, predicated on face-to-face ties between producers and consumers, are often seen as central components of local food systems. Activists and academic analysts often assume that trust and social connection characterize direct agricultural markets, distinguishing local food systems from the "global food system". This article examines that premise about direct agricultural markets, using the concept of social embeddedness from economic sociology to analyze the interplay of the economic and the social. Specifically, it draws on Block's (1990) elaboration of the concepts of marketness and instrumentalism to qualify the concept of social embeddedness. Taken together, and augmented by consideration of how they relate to power and privilege, these concepts provide an analytical framework that more accurately describes the social relations of two types of direct agricultural markets — the farmers' market and community supported agriculture. In providing an alternative market, farmers' markets create a context for closer social ties between farmers and consumers, but remain fundamentally rooted in commodity relations. In attempting to construct an alternative *to the* market, as reflected in an explicit emphasis on community and in the distinctive "share" relationship, community supported agriculture moves closer towards the decommodification of food. Nonetheless, in both types of direct markets, tensions between embeddedness, on the one hand, and marketness and instrumentalism, on the other, suggest how power and privilege may sometimes rest more with educated, middle-class consumers than with farmers or less-advantaged consumers. Recognizing how marketness and instrumentalism complicate social embeddedness is critical for understanding the viability, development and prospects of local food systems. © 2000 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Direct agricultural markets, based on face-to-face links between producers and consumers, present an apparent counterpoint to large scale, more industrialized systems of food production and distribution, now under the growing control of a few seemingly unpeopled, yet powerful transnational corporations. If relations between producers and consumers are distant and anonymous in more "global food systems", in local, direct markets, they are immediate, personal and enacted in shared space (Lyson and Green, in press). Such direct market venues as farmers' markets, community-supported agriculture, vegetable box schemes, and other cooperative distribution and delivery programs have proliferated, especially in the last decade, in many advanced industrial countries (Festing, 1998; Groh and McFadden, 1997; Kneen, 1993; Powell, 1995). They strike a popular nerve, for the apparent novelty now of farmers and consumers interacting, perhaps addressing one another by name, even knowing small details of one another's lives. Direct agricultural markets promise human connection at the place where production and consumption of food converge, an experience not available either to consumers shopping at "superstores" or "hypermarkets" or to farmers selling through conventional wholesale commodity markets. Such direct agricultural markets would seem to mitigate, however modestly, growing public uneasiness about the social and ecological attributes of food (Goodman and Redclift, 1991).

For the most part, interest in local food systems — whether academic or applied — has been the stepchild of sustainable agriculture, given some association between local, direct agricultural markets and organic or

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low-input farming. Yet the legacy of sustainable agriculture poses analytical problems for local food systems. The impetus and nature of sustainable agriculture have generally been framed emphasizing either technological change and production practices (Bird et al., 1995; Buttel and Shulman, 1997) or social movements (Barham, 1997; Hassanein, 1997; Hassanein and Kloppenburg, 1995; Meares, 1997). On the one hand, sustainable agriculture involves the innovation, development and diffusion of more environmentally sensitive production practices. On the other, it entails a form of resistance to and mobilization against the socially and environmentally destructive conventional agricultural paradigm. But neither theories of technology change nor of social movements address the workings of sustainable agriculture very far beyond the farmgate. New economic arrangements, including various direct agricultural markets, have emerged to distribute goods produced and consumed in local food systems. Their forms and consequences are better analyzed from the perspective of economic sociology, which explicitly addresses the context, process and outcomes of exchange.

Economic sociology stresses that markets are socially structured institutions, infused with cultural norms and meaning (Lie, 1997; Swedberg, 1991; Zelizer, 1988). Rather than the self-interested movements of atomized, "rational" economic actors, as assumed by neoclassical economics, economic behavior is embedded in and mediated by a complex, often extensive web of social relations (Block, 1990; Granovetter, 1985; Granovetter, 1990; Mingione, 1991). The concept of social embeddedness is arguably the major contribution of this "new economic sociology" (Swedberg, 1997). It finds its roots in the work of Karl Polanyi (1957), who wrote that "the human economy… is embedded and enmeshed in institutions, economic *and* non-economic. The inclusion of the non-economic is vital" (p. 250) (emphasis added). Since Polanyi, writing on embeddedness has developed in various ways. Network analysts have stressed the formal characteristics and operation of social networks in economic institutions (Granovetter, 1985,1990,1992), whereas others have emphasized how embeddedness corresponds to social capital and trust (Portes and Landholt, 1996; Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993). For many, the notion of social embeddedness has become a convenient shorthand for social ties, assumed to modify and enhance human economic interactions.

Embeddedness, in this sense of social connection, reciprocity and trust, is often seen as the hallmark (and comparative advantage) of direct agricultural markets. Economic sociologists, however, note that the level of social embeddedness of economic activity has *always* been substantial (Granovetter, 1985,1992). Although embeddedness seems an obvious feature of pre-capitalist or transitional economies, it is still very much a feature of modern, capitalist economies, despite popular beliefs about "the discipline of the market". The forms of mediation and insulation from the "market" may have changed over time, but the overall effect — a socially constituted economy — has been remarkably consistent. Therefore if embeddedness is evident in all sorts of markets, might it also be possible to find trappings of the market in economic contexts suffused with social ties?

In this article, I suggest that the concept of social embeddedness, if employed in a cautious, critical fashion, is useful for analysing direct agricultural markets. Embeddedness should not be seen simply as the friendly antithesis of the market. To develop this idea, I draw on the work of sociologist Fred Block (1990), who uses the related concepts of marketness and instrumentalism to qualify embeddedness. Block's analytical framework more accurately captures the sometimes contradictory social relations of direct agricultural markets. Indeed, I argue it is precisely this tension between embeddedness, on the one hand, and marketness and instrumentalism, on the other, that brings to light how dynamics of power and privilege continue to characterize — sometimes subtly — many direct agricultural markets. Drawing largely on examples from the United States, I apply notions of embeddedness, marketness, and instrumentalism to examine how the social and the economic are entwined in two prominent types of direct agricultural markets — the farmers' market and community supported agriculture (CSA).

2. Embeddedness: substance and shadows

> The farm trucks are parked on the sidewalks. Displays are in the street. Broad-canopied green, orange, purple and red umbrellas shield produce from the sun. We have an awning, bolted to the truck. Anders Thueson, with a Magic Marker, is writing our prices on brown paper bags, taping them up as signs. "Is plum spelled with a 'b'?" he asks. [David] Hemingway tells him no. A tall, slim woman in a straw hat says to me, "I come down here get broke every Tuesday. Weigh these eggplants, please." "There you are. Do you want those in a bag?" "You gave me good weight. You don't have to give me bags." McPhee (1979, p. 24).

Social ties and personal connections in no way preclude instrumental behaviors or the relevance of price. In practice, all jostle side by side. Presumably a regular customer at the inner-city farmers' market John McPhee describes, the straw-hatted woman still looks for bargains. She expects the exchange at this stall at least to be fair; even better, if it is advantageous for her. When the vendor "gives her good weight" — charges less than the scales register — she notes the favor and magnanimously foregoes the bags to which she would ordinarily feel entitled. This is certainly an embedded market exchange.

But the banter and gestures make clear that embeddedness does not entail the complete absence of market sensibilities.

Block (1990) develops this important point by elaborating two related concepts — marketness and instrumentalism — which together comprise a sort of conceptual shadow to social embeddedness. According to Block, all economic transactions take place along a continuum of marketness. As he explains, "high marketness means that there is nothing to interfere with the dominance of price considerations, but as one moves down the continuum to lower levels of marketness, nonprice considerations take on greater importance. It is not as though prices are irrelevant under conditions of low marketness, it is just that they compete with other variables, so that one would expect price differences to be much larger before they led actors to respond (Block, 1990, p. 51)." Clarifying the relationship, he explains that as "the marketness of transactions diminishes, economic behavior tends to become more embedded in a more complex web of social relations" (p. 53).

If marketness expresses the relevance of price in the transaction, instrumentalism captures the nature of individual motivation. High instrumentalism occurs when actors prioritize economic goals and engage in opportunistic behavior to achieve them. In contrast, low instrumentalism reflects prioritization of such non-economic goals and concerns, as friendship, family or ethnic ties, morality or spirituality. Greater levels of instrumentalism tend to undermine the influence of responsive or reflective social ties.

Block (1990) stresses that marketness and instrumentalism are related dimensions, usually moving in tandem. If marketness expresses the supremacy of price, a stark landscape marked only by the bottom line, instrumentalism reveals an enacted supremacy of self, apart from society, over others. All markets then are characterized by fluctuating mixes of social embeddedness, marketness and instrumentalism, and the gray terrain where they meet needs to be explored. In other words, embeddedness rarely stands in diametric opposition to marketness and instrumentalism. The critique of the market through such fields as economic sociology has focused attention on social networks and culture in a variety of economic forms. A more critical view of embeddedness recognizes that price may still matter and that self-interest may be at work, sometimes even in the midst of vigorous, meaningful social ties.

This insight — that marketness and instrumentalism might color and complicate social embeddedness — has been difficult to activate in the case of local food systems analysis. Among activists, proponents and many early academic researchers of these forms, there has been a tendency to celebrate social embeddedness — particularly in the guise of social familiarity, trust, civic engagement and the like — and to minimize any evidence of marketness or instrumentalism on the part of actors in the local food system. Too often, marketness and instrumentalism are seen as the currency only of powerful, but faceless players in distant reaches of the dominant global system (Bonanno et al., 1994; McMichael, 1994). But do face-to-face social ties in direct agricultural markets automatically ensure a positive outcome? And positive for whom? Rather than assuming social embeddedness as a unique, distinguishing, almost magical attribute of direct agricultural markets, the social embeddedness — as well as the marketness and instrumentalism — of such economic forms should be more critically examined.

3. Direct agricultural markets as the centerpiece of local food systems

According to community nutritionist Gail Feenstra (1997, p. 28), local food systems "are rooted in particular places, aim to be economically viable for farmers and consumers, use ecologically sound production and distribution practices and enhance social equity and democracy for all members of the community". They include an array of new (and not-so-new) market arrangements, such as farmers' markets, community-supported agriculture, roadside farm stands, U-pick operations, local bakeries and breweries, specialty food processors, and the like.[1] These disparate economic forms can all be understood as "expressions of proximity" (Kneen, 1993), based on familiarity with and commitment to nearby place, community and environment. Seen by many analysts and proponents as explicitly and beneficially linked to the needs and interests of local households, neighborhoods, and communities, such direct agricultural markets privilege locality and seasonality over distance and durability (Friedmann, 1993).

Interests of farmers, consumers and localities together drive the resurgence in direct agricultural marketing (Kinsey, 1994). Through direct marketing, the reasoning goes, family farmers can receive a larger proportion of the income generated by their crops, even out their cash flows, and reassert farm-level control over their production decisions (Maggos, 1987; Welsh, 1997). Consumers obtain fresh, high-quality farm products at reasonable prices, as well as unusual local specialty products (sometimes at premium prices) (Lockeretz, 1986). Localities

[1] Fully considered, local food systems also include non-commercial ventures, such as food banks, school lunch programs, local nutrition education, gleaning projects and food policy councils, as well as downstream activities, such as institutional, municipal and backyard composting and food waste management (Dahlberg, 1993; Tansey and Worsley, 1995). This article limits its focus to aspects of local food systems that entail market relations in the delivery of food from producer to consumer.

increasingly recognize how direct agricultural marketing contributes not only to the rural farm economy, but to local tourism and small business development (Atkinson and Williams, 1994).

Farmers' markets and community-supported agriculture (CSA) are often invoked in the same breath as signal manifestations of the direct, "relationship" marketing, which distinguishes *local* food systems (Gottlieb and Fisher, 1996; Kloppenburg et al., 1996; Kneen, 1993; Lyson and Green, in press; Maggos, 1987). Each represents a structured organizational form of larger scale than, say, individual roadside stands or U-pick enterprises, where more sporadic flows of customers patronize a particular farm. Both farmers' markets and CSAs cause people to congregate and associate with one another, at specific times, such as market day or food distribution day, in particular settings. Both are strongly tied to and identified with local places. The famous Dane County Farmers' Market in Madison, Wisconsin, by appellation and charter, cannot relocate to Dallas, Texas. A CSA farm draws its members from a specific local area or nearby cities. Both farmers' markets and CSAs, then, involve personal encounter and mutual knowledge on the part of farmers and consumers, and herein lies the basis for arguments about the embeddedness of these forms. Yet the relations between consumers and producers may be more or less commodified in different types of direct agricultural markets. Furthermore, the implications of the degree of commodification may vary depending on the resources of different producers and consumers.

4. The farmers' market as an alternative market[2]

"There's more to the market than just selling my stuff." Farmers' market vendor, as quoted in Brewster Kneen (1993, p. 200).

Retail farmers' markets in the US are not a new phenomenon. Indeed this was the way farmers marketed most food to consumers before the rise of the modern grocery store and large supermarket (Atkinson and Williams, 1994; Clancy, 1997). In many towns, farmers' markets occurred at street side or sometimes in special buildings, usually on designated days at set times. One could come to market, expecting to see a certain farmer, whose eggs or rhubarb or spring greens one especially fancied. The relationship between producer and consumer was not formal or contractual, but rather the fruit of familiarity, habit and sentiment, seasoned by the perception of value on both sides.

In the US, retail farmers' markets declined after World War II, with the growing expansion of the corporate controlled, long distance based food distribution and supermarket retailing system (Maggos, 1987). But they have experienced a resurgence, from as few as 100 in the 1960s to more than 2500 in the US today (USDA, 1996). In the mid-1970s, stimulated by growing concern about the plight of the family farm, by counterculturalism and by a new wave of environmentalism, US farmers' markets grew rapidly, in number, as well as in sales volume. Retail farmers' markets small and large now exist in every US state, in both urban and rural areas. For small family farms, disadvantaged in conventional commodity markets oriented towards large producers, such markets constitute an increasingly important alternative marketing channel providing much better returns to farmers (Sydney, 1985).

Measured against conventional grocery markets or superstores, farmers' markets are settings for exchanges embedded in social ties, based on proximity, familiarity and mutual appreciation, as suggested in the quote at the beginning of this section[3]. Yet how embedded actually are farmers' markets? Are they most fundamentally social institutions based on community and trust or are they markets like any other, but with the gloss of *gemeinschaft*? In fact, the embeddedness of farmers' markets is significantly tinged by both marketness and instrumentalism. As Kneen (1993) points out, farmers' markets may provide a valuable alternative to the "monoculture market economy (p. 196)", but they do not challenge the fundamental commodification of food.

This tension between embeddedness, marketness and instrumentalism is evident in how farmers view farmers' markets. Many farmers participate in farmers' markets *both* because of the premium they get over wholesale prices and because they enjoy the market experience as a social event (Davis, 1978). In a study of farmers' markets in New York State, vendors identified visiting with other customers and vendors, and enjoying the market experience as their most important motivations for participating in the farmers' market (Lyson et al., 1995). But vendors at farmers' markets only cited as somewhat less important more explicitly economic motivations (i.e., wanting extra income and having limited other sources of income) (Lyson et al., 1995). In light of current pressures on family farmers in a rapidly restructuring agriculture shaped by globalizing forces, farmers selling at farmers' markets, especially those dependent on farming, must be

[2] I am indebted to Steve Stevenson for the characterization of farmers' markets as alternative markets and community supported agriculture as an alternative to the market.

[3] It is no accident that supermarket designers now organize the perimeter of supermarkets, where high margin produce, meat, seafood and deli foods are sold, to evoke the ambiance of the farmers' market (Ingram, 1995).

keenly attuned to "marketness". Precisely because price and income matter so much, many such farmers have turned to the alternative of the farmers' market in an effort to make a living wage and maintain the farm.

Instrumentalism is evident in how farmers are encouraged to view farmers' markets. In how-to publications on direct marketing, farmers read articles presenting strategies for "adding value", maximizing the economic benefits of farmers' market sales, and thereby escaping the disadvantageous terms of conventional commodity markets (Mueller, 1988; Sydney, 1985). On the face of it, such instrumentalism simply serves individual gain. But the structural position of different farmers' market vendors may provide clues as to whether instrumentalism is an opportunistic exercise of privilege *or* a response to a relative absence of power. Given a restructuring agricultural economy, the instrumentalism of some farmers selling at farmers' markets may be intimately bound up with trying to ensure survival of the farm itself.

Instrumental impulses may also overlay the very social ties and connections that distinguish farmers' markets from retail grocery chains and supermarkets. In her study of direct selling organizations, such as Amway and Tupperware, Biggart (1989, p. 9) highlights "the melding of personal and pecuniary relations" in a distinctive market context. She observes how the direct selling industry is predicated on sellers building and maintaining family-like social bonds with other sellers and with their customers. According to Biggart, this reliance on social ties in direct selling organizations is not necessarily at odds with the pursuit of purely economic ends, such as sales goals; indeed embedded social ties here also serve highly instrumental ends. Farmers' markets may be embedded in similiar, if less formally organized ways. They can generate genuinely valued social ties, but the familiarity and trust between producer and consumer does not necessarily lead to a situation where price is irrelevant or where instrumental interests are completely set aside (Plattner, 1983). Sometimes what producers are selling to consumers at farmers' markets is, in part, the aura of personal relations and social connection. Embeddedness itself then becomes some of the "value-added" in the farmers' market experience.

The perspective of farmers' market consumers further suggests that embeddedness need not preclude either marketness or instrumentalism. A study of farmers' market consumers in Massachusetts found that while social interactions and good prices compelled some to patronize such markets, the overwhelming majority saw farmers' markets foremost as a good source of fresh, high quality produce (Lockeretz, 1986). Indeed, local provenance of the produce was far less important than its freshness. Instrumental concern with individual and family health, then, motivates many consumers to shop at farmers' markets, as much as any broader concern about the plight of local farmers, the social or environmental impacts of agriculture, and possibly more than price. Furthermore, for consumers, marketness remains relevant and inextricably bound with embeddedness. Precisely *because of* social ties and familiarity with the producer, the consumer "can expect equilibration in future transactions if the value of the present exchange is discovered to be unacceptable" (Plattner, 1983, p. 856). Whatever the embeddedness of particular farmers' markets, then, marketness and instrumentalism also temper the interests and actions of both producers and consumers.

5. Community-supported agriculture as an alternative to the market

> "Make sure not to price too low. Ask enough, but not too much. There has to be a connection between what people are paying, and what they are getting". CSA farmer, as quoted in Groh and McFadden (1997, p. 155).

Community-supported agriculture is a newer type of direct agricultural marketing, which in certain ways defies the standard market model altogether (Kneen, 1993). CSA is based on a direct partnership between the farmer and local consumers, where all agree to share the costs and products of the farm (Fieldhouse, 1996). The model has roots in Switzerland, Germany and Japan (Groh and McFadden, 1997; Suput, 1992). In the US version, prior to the growing season, each member (or "shareholder") purchases a "share" of the harvest for a set price. Members then receive farm products through the season, usually weekly, at the discretion of the farmer. If the season is good, they may enjoy a bumper crop of tomatoes. If it is poor, there may be few carrots or no potatoes at all. The first documented CSA farm in the United States began in 1985 in western Massachusetts. In 1999, there were an estimated 1000 CSA farms in North America (Hendrickson, 1999). The system has been heralded as an innovative model, where consumers share the risks undertaken by farmers, where producers have a ready market for their produce, and where consumers have access to fresh, local produce (usually, but not exclusively organic), while supporting environmentally sound agricultural practices and land use.

What distinguishes CSA from other types of direct agricultural markets is its special emphasis on creating and building community around the interwoven issues of food, land and nature (Cone and Kakaliouras, 1995; Groh and McFadden, 1997; Kneen, 1993). Indeed, the focus on community, reciprocity and education makes CSA appear a highly embedded direct agricultural market. Aside from the economic benefits to CSA farmers in

having assured markets and to CSA members in having an abundant supply of nutritious food, CSA is seen as a way of promoting individual and community development (DeLind and Ferguson, 1999). Accordingly, the CSA model, as developed in the US, usually incorporates seasonal farm festivals, field days, on-farm work or educational experiences, and often children's activities. Through such interactions, farmers and consumers learn more of each other's circumstances, interests and needs, and create a more integrated community centered on food and a common identity as eaters. CSA advocates themselves see the creation of "a new associative economy that is fundamentally different from the ruling market economy" (Groh and McFadden 1997, p. 34). Such a vision underscores the embeddedness of CSA. Under such circumstances, are marketness and instrumentalism likely to be in evidence?

Formal aspects of the exchange relation, notably the CSA share, point forcefully to the embeddedness of CSA. As sociologist Viviana Zelizer (1997) observes, forms of payment are not socially neutral or universal. How money is earmarked and used directly shapes the social content of economic experience. The CSA share expresses the potential for decommodified relations in the CSA and stands in marked contrast to the usual way of purchasing food, in spot exchanges, whether at farmers' markets or supermarkets. Redetermined every year and purchased prior to receipt of goods, the share symbolizes members' *shared* acceptance of the risks farmers assume in farming and their willingness to subordinate their own economic interests, if need be, to support the CSA farmer. Although the language echoes the realm of stocks and mutual funds, purchase of a CSA share differs from more conventional financial investments because the CSA shareholder personally knows (or can know) the actual producer at the "firm" and receives, not cold cash dividends or capital gains, but vital, nourishing food. While conventional financial investments are pursued chiefly to grow more money, a CSA share is purchased primarily to obtain high quality, locally produced food, and also to "grow" a system of agriculture that produces that food in a more environmentally and socially beneficial way. The CSA share then is an economic transaction suffused with trust.

Yet as suggested in the quote at the beginning of this section, the share is not and cannot be completely devoid of marketness or instrumentalism. Usually arrived at through shared calculations and negotiations on the part of the farmer and some representatives of the CSA membership, the share price relative to the total number of members must support the total budget of the farm (Suput, 1992). Although it departs from the usual tenets of supply and demand pricing for individual goods, the share does have market referents. Farmers know (or quickly learn) what is necessary to cover their costs, pay themselves a living wage, and also make the capital improvements that will ensure the farm can survive over the long term. CSA members, for their part, expect good value for their purchase of a share. Balanced against commitment to the CSA farmer, many CSA members remain sharply attuned to the going price for produce at farmers' markets or local grocery stores. If the share price is too high, current members will not return the following season and new ones will be difficult to recruit (Kane and Lohr, 1997; Kolodinsky and Pelch, 1997). Yet if it is too low, CSA farmers subsidize the CSA through their own self-exploitation.

Other recent research on CSAs suggests additional caution in making sweeping assertions about the embeddedness of this type of direct agricultural market. In her study of four Minnesota CSAs, anthropologist Cynthia Cone discovered a tension between the ideal of "building moral community" and members' overwhelming desire for consumer choice (Cone and Kakaliouras, 1995). She observes that "from the average member's perspective, the demands of membership may begin and end with the bag of vegetables" (Cone and Kakaliouras, 1995, p. 30). In the US, although some CSAs have small, active "core groups", which coordinate and facilitate social and educational activities, in many CSAs a large proportion of the members participate relatively little in the "community" side of CSA (Hinrichs and Kremer, 1998). Most CSAs have contended with members who chafe at receiving bags of produce they may not be familiar with in quantities they didn't request. Indeed, addressing "consumer demands" for predictable quantities of diverse and desired produce is a significant operational challenge for many CSA farms (Groh and McFadden, 1997), and potentially at odds with CSA ideals about communities cooperatively supporting local agriculture. More troublingly, in her study of CSAs in the upper midwest US, Ostrom (1997) found not so much that members subordinated the community aspects of CSA to the consumer experience, but rather that the burden for maintaining the valued community dimension which distinguishes CSA fell largely to already overworked CSA farmers. This raises the question of social ties that are unbalanced, absent of the reciprocity implicit in the community ideal. Given the considerable gap between the income levels of CSA farmers and most of the CSA members they feed (Ostrom, 1997), the edifice of "shared community" may, in some cases, rest on somewhat shaky ground.

Despite these challenges, CSA — in its vision, and possibly also in its evolving practice — suggests more readily than farmers' markets an economic form where marketness and instrumentalism might be creatively reconciled with social embeddedness. CSA moves toward decommodifying food through the special transaction of the share and through its explicit emphasis on community. Farmers' markets involve less deliberate proximate ties and personal connections. They remain firmly rooted

in conventional exchange relations, where asparagus and sweet corn can be purchased when available for the going price that day. With CSA, in contrast, the precise correspondence of the share fee to the produce one will actually receive cannot be known until the growing season is over. Entering a relationship based on such indeterminancy requires some measure of trust.

6. Conclusion

Fieldhouse (1996, p. 4) suggests that CSA "is ultimately based on economic exchange, but the incorporation of wider shared values acts to 'soften' the impersonal characteristic of this sort of transaction and moves it closer to the realm of customary hospitality." Less dramatically than CSA, farmers' markets also represent a "softened" form of exchange. Both types of direct agricultural markets demonstrate that the social and the economic are difficult to separate (Hinrichs, 1998). Illuminating the social context of the economy is a worthy, quite necessary enterprise to which the concept of social embeddedness can be recruited. However, social embeddedness becomes a far more useful and nuanced concept, when it is joined by notions of marketness and instrumentalism. Together, they offer important correctives to simplistic or overly sanguine readings of social embeddedness. In most market settings, whatever the level of embeddedness, price may be relevant in some way and self-interest may be at work. Indeed, state and global level processes of restructuring, as well as demographic and cultural change, make this all the more likely. Local-level ties and connections do not, after all, occur in some social vacuum, untouched by the larger workings of the world.

However, the assumption persists that certain economic forms —because they are locally bound and involve face-to-face interactions —automatically demonstrate all the putative benefits of social embeddedness (Portes and Landholt, 1996). This view conflates spatial relations with social relations. In fact, social inequalities can exist in direct agricultural markets, just as they can in sustainable agriculture (Allen and Sachs, 1991). Many direct agricultural markets focus on "exclusive products and exclusive customers" (DeLind, 1993, p. 8). Some farmers' markets and CSAs in the US have targeted or ended up serving largely educated, middle-class consumers. While more recent attention to community food security has prompted the organization of farmers' markets in low-income communities and CSAs run by and for homeless people (Fisher, 1999; Groh and McFadden, 1997), many direct agricultural markets involve social relations where the balance of power and privilege ultimately rests with well-to-do consumers. Struggling farmers and poor consumers, in contrast, must weigh concerns with income and price against the supposed benefits of direct, social ties.

The examples of farmers' markets and community supported agriculture remind us that marketness and instrumentalism are not necessarily morally negative. They should be assessed based on the structural positions, relative resources and intentions of actors in such markets. Vendors at farmers' markets may give customers "good weight", and this provides an indication of the embeddedness of the market. But vendors depend to differing degrees on the revenue from farmers' markets. Farmers who have turned to direct marketing in order to continue farming must pay much closer attention to costs and prices than hobby farmers or market gardeners, supported by other employment.

Community supported agriculture also blends embeddedness, marketness and instrumentalism, but in different ways. While the CSA share, on one level, represents a significant step towards decommodifying food, on another level, it still must "get the prices right", if CSA is to persist and thrive. CSA attempts to support farmers and farming more completely than conventional market arrangements often allow. Costs must be covered, farmers deserve a living wage (as well as benefits), and the physical and natural infrastructures need to be stewarded. And CSA must also "get the prices right" in another respect, if the promising alternative it represents is to be accessible and affordable to people of limited means.

Recognizing how social embeddedness is qualified by marketness and instrumentalism is critical for understanding the viability, development and outcomes of local food systems. If direct agricultural markets are to become sound, transformative alternatives, sentimental assumptions about face-to-face ties must be tempered. Social ties, personal connections, and community good will are often appropriately seasoned by self-interest and a clear view of prices. It is true that too much instrumentalism and marketness can sour the embedded market. But a dash of instrumentalism and marketness might well ensure a more substantial, nourishing meal.

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