

12-30-2017

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Recommended Citation

Ulsperger, Jason, and Kristen Ulsperger. 2017. "Community, Regional Identity, and Civic Agriculture: A Structural Ritualization Analysis of Rural Online Farmers' Market Sellers." *Journal of Rural Social Sciences*, 32(2): Article 5. Available At: <https://egrove.olemiss.edu/jrss/vol32/iss2/5>

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**COMMUNITY, REGIONAL IDENTITY, AND CIVIC AGRICULTURE:
A STRUCTURAL RITUALIZATION ANALYSIS OF RURAL
ONLINE FARMERS' MARKET SELLERS***

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ABSTRACT

Despite the impact of “new agriculture,” a revival of farmers’ markets (FMs) occurred in recent years. Though urban environments have FMs, people often neglect to consider their existence and functions in rural areas. Moreover, a lack of research specifically related to rural, online markets exists. This article is an analysis of rural, online farmers’ market sellers in the Arkansas River Valley. It provides a brief history of FMs and review of literature associated with food, identity, and community. It also uses structural ritualization theory to explore community bonds, regional identity, and civic agriculture themes. Results suggest that online sellers rarely create close bonds with buyers, though they believe doing so is important. They seldom identify their products with their region, though they recognize the benefits. In viewing their FM work as civic agriculture, sellers perceive local food as individually beneficial, but fail to see its ability to alleviate wider social problems. Simultaneously, they contribute to local nonprofit food distribution networks.

Biotechnology companies started pushing a “new agriculture” agenda in the 1980s. Its corner post is genetically modified (GM) food. The homogenization of GM crops allows farmers to grow similar products. Corporate farmers now produce comparable crops, even when they are great distances apart (Eaton 2013). Conclusions regarding the effects of GM plants on non-targeted organisms are nuanced. However, suspected consequences include the damaging natural habitats (Pleasants and Oberhauser 2012) and an increased insect resistance to pesticides (O’Callaghan et al. 2005). An elevation in food allergies (Goodman, Panda, and Ariyaratna 2013) and food contamination due to complex processing (Nerin, Aznar, and Carrizo 2016) may also be occurring. In addition, corporatized farming

*The authors would like to thank Joshua Lockyer, Kayla Cleveland, J. David Knottnerus, and all anonymous reviewers for their help on previous versions of this paper. We also extend our gratitude to Arkansas Tech University’s Office of Academic Affairs for supplying funding through their Interdisciplinary Grant Program. Corresponding Author: Jason S. Ulsperger, Associate Professor of Sociology, Witherspoon Hall 355, Arkansas Tech University, Russellville, AR 72801. Contact by email at julsperger@atu.edu or by telephone at (479) 968-0464.

is breaking down social connections and the cultural uniqueness associated with the food (see Forman 2010; Venugopal, Kumari, and Anthonamma 2013). The civic agriculture movement offers hope.

Civic agriculture involves a commitment to producing, processing, and distributing food locally (Lyson 2004). A good example is a farmers' market (FM). Research shows that traditional FM interaction promotes community bonds (Brown and Miller 2008; Glowacki-Dudka, Murray, and Isaacs 2013; Trauger and Passidomo 2012; Watson 2006). Similar to arguments on regional food around the world (e.g., see Brulotte and Di Giovine 2016), scholars also believe rural cooking traditions and highly identifiable ingredients in the South help to maintain social connectedness and solidify geographic identity (Veteto and Maclin 2011). In turn, rural, Southern FMs may be facilitating valuable community relationships, while also reinforcing local identity through the sale of regionally unique items.

An innovative model for FMs recently emerged. It involves online sales (Gambino 2015). As with research focusing on rural markets, a lack of information exists. Using structural ritualization theory, this article helps to fill the void. It looks into the history of FMs, dynamics in online markets versus traditional markets, why sellers choose online markets, and perceived advantages of selling online. Using qualitative data gathered from interviews of sellers working with a rural, online FM in the Arkansas River Valley, it also explores questions such as: Do sellers engage in significant acts involving community bonds, regional identity, and civic agriculture? How important are these rituals to sellers? Do sellers participate in rituals outside the market sphere associated with community bonds, regional identity, and civic agriculture? What ritual-based resources do sellers see as advantageous for working within an online market?

A BRIEF HISTORY OF FARMERS' MARKETS

A FM is "a common facility or area where several farmers grow/gather on a regular, recurring basis to sell a variety of fresh fruit and vegetables and other farm products directly to consumers" (Johnson and Bragg 1994:2). With this project, considering the history of FMs and addressing how online versions fit into it is important.

Four peaks of FM popularity over the last century exist. The first occurred after WWI (Brown 2001). With it, there may have only been an appearance of an increase in FMs since this is when the government started keeping records on markets. Nevertheless, a post-WWI desire to return to localized relations following a major global conflict did exist, and FMs were a part of it. The second peak

occurred during the Great Depression. Citizens with limited resources turned to self-sufficient agriculture out of necessity. Community members formed markets to elevate consumption variety. Intentional or not, support networks emerged. However, agriculture conglomerates, urbanization, refrigeration, and consumer desire for convenience led to another decline (Stephenson 2008). The third peak, with origins in the late 1960s, involved political activism. Consumer demands for better food led to the Farmer-to-Consumer Direct Marketing Act of 1976. It cultivated a relationship between FMs and the government. State departments of agriculture began receiving federal funds to promote local sellers. FMs were on the rise again. However, momentum slowed. By the early 1980s, new laws primarily promoted large farm interests (Gillespie et al. 2007). Into the next decade, the average farm reached 500 acres. Farms that generate \$500,000 in sales accounted for nearly 60 percent of all farm sales (Lyson 2004).

Growth toward the final peak, which we are still in, started in the 1990s. With new agriculture more specialized than ever, push back occurred. Within the U.S., nearly 70 percent of FMs now in existence emerged (Adam 2016; Brown 2001). By the turn of the century, there were more than 3,000 FMs and the number was continuing to grow (Lyson 2004). Similar factors related to other peaks exist. People are demanding better food, but now it appears they are taking what they eat more seriously because of media. For example, television networks dedicated to food promote the benefits of eating items with local origins. As with the post-WWI peak, there may be a desire to focus on the local in a time characterized by changes in the global landscape (see Guptill and Wilkins 2002; Stephenson 2008). However, there is something different about the current peak. The internet has promoted consumer comfort with electronic commerce. As a result, some FMs have moved online.

With this new version of FMs, managers hired by boards supervise online markets through web sites. Buyers have the capacity to sign up via the site and then gain the ability to purchase fresh foods from local farmers. Similar to traditional FMs, online buyers are not committed long-term. On the FM webpage, consumers can select a product and designate how much of it they want. The buyers then go to a designated pickup station to get their orders. This includes synagogues and churches. Some online FMs also utilize apartment complexes (Gambino 2015). This is clearly different from previous models. If those FM models build bonds between people in the community, are online versions doing the same?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Structural Ritualization Theory

With origins in sociology, structural ritualization theory contends that routine behaviors involving gestures, language, and objects take on symbolic significance for people. They subsequently create a mental map that influences individual behavior and helps to create and reinforce social structure. The aim of the theory is to identify specific routines with meaning, measure them, and rank them to gauge their impact on people considering specific contexts. The theory designates these specific routines as ritualized symbolic practices – RSPs (Knottnerus 1997).

Four factors associated with RSPs are key – repetitiveness, salience, homologousness, and resources. Repetitiveness involves the number of times people perform RSPs. Salience involves whether actors view a RSP as highly important. Homologousness relates to the similarity between RSPs. Resources include any means actors use to participate in RSPs. Rank is also a prominent concept. A RSP ranks high when it is repeated often, visible, similar to other RSPs, and people have the necessary resources to engage in it. In other words, the higher the rank of a RSP, the more likely it will set the tone for behavior (Knottnerus 1997).

With repetitiveness in this study, the researchers considered how often sellers engage in RSPs associated with community bonds, regional identity, and civic agriculture. As for salience, the concern was if sellers see certain online-related FM rituals as having great substance. For homologousness, the goal was to find out if there are any RSPs sellers engage in outside the market space that reflect RSPs related to the themes reviewed. With resources, the researchers explored tangible and intangible things that aid or impede RSPs associated with sellers and FM interactions. Overall, these factors ended up providing an assessment rank.

Several lines of structural ritualization theory research exist (see Edwards and Knottnerus 2007; Knottnerus 2011; Liang, Long, and Knottnerus 2016; Meij et al. 2013; Minton and Knottnerus 2008; Mitra and Knottnerus 2008; Sell et al. 2000; Thornburg, Knottnerus, and Webb 2007; Van de Poel-Knottnerus and Knottnerus 2002; Varner and Knottnerus 2010; Wu and Knottnerus 2007). These studies pertain to this project because they expand our understanding of how RSPs impact people in different environments. However, they do not explicitly focus on aspects of analysis related to this research. Other previous research comes close. Consider Knottnerus and LoConto's (2003) study of Italian communities, which along with Sen and Knottnerus' (2016) review of Asian Indian identity in the southern plains, discovered different forms of ritualization can elevate community ties. Knottnerus et al. (2006) examined the organizational dynamics of a corporation and found that

ritualized cognitive frameworks and hubris streamline logics within economic markets. Guan and Knottnerus (2006) analyzed community protests and found ethnic identity is a powerful resource in overcoming threats to social bonds. Ulsperger and Knottnerus (2011) studied laborers and consumers discovering that bureaucratic, homogenized work rituals impede the development of meaningful social relationships. Regardless, no research related to structural ritualization theory explicitly focuses on community bonds or regional identity, especially concerning civic agriculture.

Including this study, research not involving the theory's originator is growing. It is applying ideas of structural ritualization in different substantive areas and also extending the theory. Bhandari, Yamori, and Okada (2010) analyzed RSPs that improve urbanites' coping abilities. Bakker (2011) discussed the theory's value as a modernist approach for studying self and environment in his piece on the semiotic self. Bartholomew (2011) analyzed the importance of structural ritualization in web branding communities, such as Facebook. More recently, Ulsperger et al. (2015) used the theory and discovered that elderly volunteers often choose to engage in community-based activities to fight loneliness, while Ulsperger, Ulsperger, and Partin (2015) explored the disruption of rituals in families with young children diagnosed with sight disorders. In addition, Ricciardelli and Memarpour (2016) demonstrated how rituals help prisoners adapt to stresses of incarceration.

Food, Identity, and Community

Several works exist that provide a general groundwork of information on food, identity, and community (e.g., Adams and Shriver 2010; Anderson 2005; Brown and Mussell 1984; Glowacki-Dudka et al. 2013; Trauger and Passidomo 2012). Some of it relates specifically to online FM dynamics. For example, Beoku-Betts' (1995) research on identity-driven food preparation and Kittler, Sucher, and Nahikian-Nelms's (2012) work on dietary habits and racial variables prompted the researchers to consider local immigration patterns. Dougherty, Brown, and Green's (2013) review of rural communities, food tourism, and identity argues local seller involvement elevates social capital and expands selling opportunities (see also Bessière 1998). It left the researchers wondering if similar themes exist with a rural, online market. Edwards' (2004) research on rural trailer parks shows how important food is to community identity (see also Nelson 1999). On a larger scale, could it be the same with rural, online markets? If it is not, is there something preventing themes like these that are associated with civic agriculture from taking root? Barham's (2003) classic piece "Translating Terroir" provides insight. She

describes terroir as farming practices, unique environmental factors, and other geographic dynamics that make regional foods unique. Her research argues small, local farmers want to label their products to identify with their region. However, new agriculture political and corporate entities stifle the process (see also Belasco 2016; Bingen 2012; Trubeck and Bowen 2008). Is this happening with rural, online FMs?

Considering traditional FMs, Holloway and Kneafsey's (2000) work shows local food transactions convey ideas of quality and health. They also produce economic diversity. Is it possible that rural, online FMs do the same? Hinrichs' (2000) research focuses on face-to-face ties between sellers and buyers. It argues traditional FMs facilitate a context with the potential to create close social bonds despite social class divisions. Owens and Donly's (2015) work finds that federally funded programs, such as WIC's Farmers' Market Nutrition Program, create a situation where low income families can use government allotments to purchase FM goods. This decreases the likelihood of middle class buyer dominance. Do rural, Southern online FMs build bonds between classes? Examining FM buyer attitudes along lines of income, ethnicity, and civic engagement, Adams and Adams' (2011) study contends access to locally grown food and the attitude toward it are more relevant to buyers than cost (for more see Adams and Shriver 2010). Do rural, online FM sellers believe a desire to buy local food trumps cost concerns?

METHODS

This research was part of an interdisciplinary grant on sustainable food systems funded by Arkansas Tech University. The project director was a faculty member in anthropology. Other participants came from fields associated with history, sociology, geography, and agriculture. The goal was to explore the development of a regional food system in Arkansas. This included the rural, Ozark-Ouachita area, which surrounds the Arkansas River Valley. The final report provided details on food associated with native populations, colonization, and industrialization. It also presented data from interviews with participants at food and farming gatherings, mapping related to local food initiatives, survey responses on consumer food preferences, and an analysis of cooperative extension agents' engagement with sustainable agriculture practices (see Lockyer 2015).

Market Selection

Though other grant participants planned to examine areas related to FMs, none planned to investigate people who sold their products at FMs. To help create

holistic results related to the investigation of sustainable food systems in the area, the project director asked for researchers interested in gathering information on local FM sellers. The researchers found a void in the literature related to internet-based markets, so they selected a local, rural online FM. At the time of selection, the market studied had been in operation for approximately three years. Its current stated goal is to connect community members with the local food system. It has approximately 24 sellers and 50 regular buyers. However, based on their membership mailings, around 100 buyers are official members. It does not take orders before a season. Acting as more of a traditional FM hybrid, it operates on a week-by-week buyer/seller basis allowing buyers to purchase exactly what they want. Through the market's website, buyers sign up for an account. The buyers then receive an email each Sunday notifying them that order placing occurs until the subsequent Tuesday at 10:00 p.m. The market's web page provides information on weekly offerings and allows buyers to place orders online. On Thursdays, "Market Day," buyers come to a local church, and sellers distribute purchases within a two-hour period. The market bills buyers and sellers a 6 percent surcharge on orders to cover organizational costs.

Snowball Sampling

To establish an initial relationship, the researchers contacted the market manager. This provided a guide who could facilitate access to sellers. The researchers maximized the manager's expertise using snowballing techniques. Initial recommendations from the manager led to new recommendations from the first wave of interviewees. This made reliance on the manager less critical as the project progressed (see Berg and Lune 2012). The researchers collected thick descriptions of market dynamics from six sellers. Interviewing took place at the market distribution point and at seller farms.

Question Development

The first phase of questions concerned demographics and infrastructure. The researchers asked about the type of product sold, the size of the seller's farm, and how many years the seller had been in operation. As indicated in Table 1, responses varied. All sellers distributed edible items through the market. The average farm size was 122 acres, though one seller's 640 acres skewed the average considerably. The average number of years selling, not exclusive to the online market, was 13. One seller had only been involved in FMs for one year, while another had been selling via markets for more than 40 years.

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TABLE 1. CHARACTERISTICS OF SELLER OPERATIONS

RESPONDENT	PRIMARY PRODUCTION	SIZE OF FARM	YRS. IN OPERATION
1	Vegetables	.001 acres	3
2	Herbs/Kale/Tomatoes	.25 acres	3
3	Vegetables/Goat Products	15 acres	1
4	Eggs/Baked Goods	40 acres	3
5	Honey/Peaches/Vegetables	50 acres	30
6	Eggs/Herbs/Goat Products	640 acres	41

The researchers wanted to find out why sellers engage with online markets, so they asked them how they became involved with the specific market studied. The researchers also wanted to know what keeps sellers involved in online selling, so they asked about perceived advantages of using online FMs. Again, the primary goal of the research was to unearth RSPs sellers engage in, with a focus on rituals that support themes of community bonds, regional identity, and civic agriculture – see Table 2. Therefore, the second phase of questions focused on structural ritualization factors of repetitiveness, salience, homologousness, and resources with the three themes noted. The researchers wanted to see if online market rituals rank high in promoting deep social ties, like traditional markets. They also wanted to discover if seller-based RSPs related to localized distinctiveness existed. Finally, the researchers wanted to know if sellers engage in RSPs that show FM participation is a serious aspect of producing and distributing food locally.

FINDINGS

Our findings give information on market participation and provide seller perceptions of the advantages of online selling. They also review structural ritualization as to repetitiveness, salience, homologousness, and resources. The specific emphasis is on seller RSPs involving community bonds, regional identity, and civic agriculture. The findings show that respondents in this study do not have a high level of social bonds with buyers, do not associate their products with the South, but do engage in a variety of other RSPs associated with civic agriculture aside from FM participation.

TABLE 2. SUMMARY OF QUESTION THEMES RELATED TO RSPs OF SELLERS

RITUALIZATION ASPECT	THEMES
Repetitiveness	
Community Bonds	rate of personal connections with buyers and buyer recognition
Regional Identity	selling of products using regional identity
Civic Agriculture	participation rates of selling and donation of items produced
Salience	
Community Bonds	importance of personal connections and community involvement
Regional Identity	importance of regional identity and upholding Southern culture
Civic Agriculture	importance of farmers' markets to community and food security
Homologousness	
Community Bonds	community involvement outside the farmers' market
Regional Identity	displays of regional pride aside from market activity
Civic Agriculture	functions of markets aside from providing food
Resources	
Tangible.....	financial capital and equipment
Intangible	emotional matters and family traditions

Participation and Online Market Advantages

Varieties of reasons exist for sellers working with the market studied. They include local university connections, alternative distribution, and network building. Noting that motivations attached to higher education might be specific to this study is important. It is located in an area with a university. That institution has programs that promote aspects of civic agriculture. Moreover, most sellers became involved in the market through higher education ties. One respondent stated, "Let's

see I had taken [a] Anthropology of Food course, and I had been interested in this kind of thing before, but that really kind of cemented my interest.” A second, less prominent theme, involved selling alternatives. One seller contended membership with an online market is important as a new alternative to traditional markets. The respondent stated that membership is beneficial because it gives local farmers “another avenue for people to have local grown produce [sold]” and it aids the economy while “securing a good venue to open conversations [between] farmers.”

With online selling advantages, the central theme was convenience. One respondent noted, “There’s just one day you can just take your stuff down there and you don’t have to stay.” Respondents discussed convenience for buyers as well. One explained:

There’s kind of a convenience factor of being able to get on your computer during the ordering period to look at all the stuff. You don’t feel rushed to make a decision necessarily like you would if you were in person [so it] really gives you a chance to I guess study the food you are getting if that’s the kind of thing you are cognizant of and . . . want to do.

Convenience has drawbacks. The main disadvantage involved a lack of personal connections. Most sellers wish they could know more about buyers. One interviewee stated:

The disadvantage is [that] at a regular farmers market it’s [a lot about] conversation. Um, people are really curious about where their food comes from, about the farm, and the history of those who have the farm. I do a lot of stuff online. I’m very comfortable online . . . but I really like the face-to-face human contact, because I think it’s an experience too. I think [buyers] like the physical part.

Some sellers have concerns about financial advantages. They do not find the online FM as lucrative as traditional markets. One stated, “A couple of times we only sold enough things to barely pay for the gas to get [here] and back, I didn’t really want to [deliver] it.”

Repetitiveness

Online market RSPs related to repetitiveness and community bonds involve personal connections with buyers, buyer recognition, sellers acting as buyers, and

building relationships outside the market. Interviewees rarely ask buyers anything about their personal lives. One respondent noted, “Beyond kinda, ‘hey how are you doing today?’ I don’t think [I] get more personal than that.” Another explained with the online market it is typically “just general pleasantries” with sellers. However, all respondents indicated that they would definitely recognize many buyers if they saw them outside the market context. As reflected in a local university’s development of programs with the Mexican Consulate, the River Valley has experienced considerable growth in its Hispanic population (Strasner 2016). However, respondents could not indicate whether any buyers were minorities. Interestingly such awareness, and adjustment of products based on it, can improve seller success. Gillespie et al. (2007) discuss a rural Iowa farmers’ market that started making and selling foods geared toward a growing Mexican immigrant population. Selling foods that cater to new populations brings new economic benefits, but also ritualized interaction through transactions advances the integration of new groups and builds a higher sense of community (see also Kittler et al. 2012).

A theme involving sellers buying from other sellers emerged. It resulted in mixed data. Some sellers buy from other sellers, but clearly others do not. One person implied such a RSP depends on the situation. The respondent explained that if you have extra food after market day, “You give some away or trade [with other buyers] . . . instead of bringing it all home.” Considering relationships outside the market, only one respondent discussed building personal relationships with people from the community. The respondent talked about volunteer work, specifically detailing how it elevated her ability to meet new people. All other respondents noted that outside the market, sellers are too busy to build personal relationships.

Research shows if farmers tie regional identity into what they sell, buyers feel closer to what they are consuming. Moreover, sellers have a stronger connection to what they are producing (Owens and Donley 2015). Interestingly, only one respondent discussed using regionally associated themes with selling noting, “Well, when we did the potatoes that was the whole description . . . grown with the secret knowledge of an Ozark mountain man.” The respondent also stated that Southern themes surrounded some family cakes once sold. All other respondents claimed they never use regional identity. However, sellers did comment on the benefits of it. One stated that if he tied in Southern identity to his products, buyers would probably, “feel more of a connection to it [especially] if they knew or if they could relate to something they had had in their lives before.” Others argued that marketing products with a regional identity is useless. Dismissing the importance of

geographic indicators, one seller argued using themes associated with holidays is more beneficial. One person said that buyers “already know where we are at.” One respondent did mention regional identity themes in relation to Arkansas produce. However, the interviewee questioned the benefits of government regional identity programs, such as the state agriculture department’s “Arkansas Grown” initiative (Arkansas Grown 2013). Following the insinuation that the program could be a manipulative part of the new agriculture movement, the seller stated:

We are a member of the “Arkansas Grown.” That’s a stamp. That’s a label. It’s not as important to me as it was. [The organization is] kind of separating away from the local . . . Politics are being used. [The organization] changes about every four or eight years, and sometimes they help [farmers] and sometimes they don’t. Right now, they are hurting us more than they are helping us.

There is clearly a relationship to this comment and Barham’s (2003) previously discussed work. It appears rural, online market sellers may have an interest in regional labeling, but political-economic factors are working against them. Unfortunately, the interviewer working with this respondent did not explore exactly what the seller was referencing in terms of “hurting” and “helping” (for more see Bingen 2012).

RSPs related to repetitiveness and civic agriculture deal with how much time sellers dedicate to online market activities, how often sellers distribute through the market, and how often they distribute free goods to the community. Most sellers see FM participation as only worthy of being a part-time endeavor. One respondent noted that working with the market was just “a hobby.” However, all sellers but one discussed selling through the market every week. Most sellers ritualistically show a high level of community concern by regularly donating products to local organizations. The church that provides space for the market aides this process through a program that operates much like a food pantry, providing for food insecure community members. Even those who never donate commented that they were considering it.

Saliency

Online market RSPs linked to saliency and community bonds involve how important sellers perceive personal connections with buyers to be, whether sellers know anything personal about buyers, and how important sellers believe market

rituals are to the wider community. No matter how frequent sellers have personal contact with buyers, most respondents argued that bonds with sellers are critical. One farmer contended:

I think it's very important [to make personal connections] . . . especially if [sellers] are interested in a particular product . . . I think knowing the people you are selling to is an important thing in any sort of business type of deal. It's important in food too because it's kind of a special [connection] that sustains us all. I think having that kind of bond over something we can provide someone else is a neat thing.

Another stated:

I think [personal connections with a buyer are] really important . . . If it were a brick and mortar store, people are coming there because they want that experience, that friendly person. I think it's important that when they order [sellers] thank them for their order and maybe put in a sample of something [other than what they ordered] . . . to make them feel like wow I got special treatment, especially because it is online.

One respondent said that taking time off from selling hurts personal relationships and business suffers. He pointed out, "On the weeks we take off, [buyers] automatically buy from others." He believes that buyers will replace absent farmers with others because they often buy from the person they have most recently become familiar. Sellers who argued personal connections are important only commented on such connections in ways that reflected business logic. For the two respondents who made the case against personal connections, one stated, "I don't get personal with [buyers]." The other commented that since transactions are not face-to-face like a traditional market, personal connections are "not too important."

The researchers asked interviewees if they could discuss, without identifying the buyer, one personal thing about a regular buyer. A couple of farmers spoke in some general way, but the comments only related to buyer purchasing patterns. The closest thing to a personal specific involved a farmer who detailed the egg purchases made by one buyer to support the food needs of her daughter's family. One seller knew a buyer worked at a local daycare. As a follow up, the researchers asked how important it is for people to be involved in their communities. All respondents

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believed community involvement is important, though only one gave a concrete example not related to the market. The interviewee discussed volunteering on community boards.

When asked how important the market was to the community, respondents gave a variety of opinions. Some discussed the importance of providing quality food as an alternative to “bad and contaminated” grocery store items. A couple indicated that it is not important, but has potential. Supporting new agricultural frameworks, one interviewee implied the market is not important at all and that it is just “cheaper and more convenient to go to Wal-Mart.” Research indicates people connected to FMs believe locally grown food is important even if the cost is higher (Adams and Shriver 2010). Interestingly, when specifically considering seller attitudes, that is not a prevalent theme with this study.

RSPs involving salience and regional identity concern regional-based self-identification and product related regional association. All interviewees live and farm in the South, but a majority said they do not view themselves as Southerners. When asked if the person identified as a Southerner, one respondent stated, “No, not so much as I see myself as a farmer. I don’t think you can regionalize the United States anymore. You’re just American.” The follow up question asked interviewees if selling their product was important in reinforcing Southern culture. Though many grow Southern staples, such as collard greens and tomatoes, only one respondent said yes. The person supported the answer with the statement, “Well I sell a lot of okra, and I think okra holds a Southern tradition.” With two respondents, a no answer followed itself with contradictory statements about specific varieties of plants common to the region. Oddly, many respondents believe things routinely sold by others reinforce Southern culture, specifically mentioning purple hull peas, peaches, watermelons, squash, and sweet potatoes.

RSPs related to repetitiveness and civic agriculture deal with the significance of the market to the community, educating buyers about market benefits, and the market’s importance in connection to public problems. The researchers asked interviewees why selling through the market is important, compared to chain stores. All discussed money coming back to the community or quality of food. One respondent noted that the online market just provides people another alternative for shopping. Reflecting the importance of civic agriculture, another stated:

Well, first of all it goes back to how food is produced . . . Like with honey, there’s health benefits . . . But also it goes back to the community, because if you go to the chain store it goes to that corporate store, but if you

buy it here it stays in the community, which is really important . . . People need to know if they “buy here the money goes here.”

One interviewee backed this up stating, “People buy from [us] the money stays local, and it not only helps [sellers] out but helps the community.” Another commented, “I think you’re getting a lot fresher produce [through the farmers’ market] and people now want to know where their food comes from and a lot of people don’t want stuff that’s sprayed with chemicals.” Another said:

Well, you’re going to get a more nutritious product from a local market than the store. Travel period is one thing and the minor elements in the soil. When the minor elements in the soil are gone, you’re not going to get the nutrition that you need. So, a small farm like us can do a soil sample they can fix it pretty easily but a large farm it would cost them, so they usually don’t. It’s hard to understand how important the minor elements are, if they aren’t in the soil you’re not going to get it in you.

The follow up question concerned how critical farmers think it is to educate consumers on the benefits of market food. Most said education is valuable. One argued:

I think it’s really important. You know, I mean unfortunately as we have fallen in to the trap of industrial agriculture over the last [several decades] people have lost their connection with their food. Not a whole lot of people know the process of, say how an apple from the tree is grown [and gets] to their grocery bag in the store.

Another indicated:

I think it’s really important. I have had people ask what is this? They need to understand. We have always supported local agriculture because people need to know it’s better for you, better for the community. It’s healthy all around and education is important. [People need to] think about how far the food travels, and what kind of person packed the food.

Of the two that did not state educating consumers is imperative, one ambivalently stated that it is a “Catch 22” situation because, “It’s important to educate folks, but

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most aren't going to listen [because] they've already made their mind up." The other said attempting to educate consumers is "overselling." Providing too much information comes off as pushy and turns off buyers.

The final line of questioning in this area focused on FMs and the ability to help alleviate food insecurity. One respondent stated that FMs could be a "sustainable way" avenue for giving low income people access to good food. He did not provide details on. However, he did mention one of his concerns is how new agriculture foods are elevating health problems, such as diabetes. As noted previously, some policies like those related to the WIC's Farmer' Market Nutrition program, do exist. They can reduce the dominance of middle class FM buyers (Owens and Donly 2015). However, as two respondents noted they could help people who are food insecure, but WIC and Electronic Benefit Transfers are not applicable to FMs in Arkansas. The remaining respondents said that FMs do not have the potential to help with food insecurity. One farmer indicated that FMs are not big enough to help the community at large. Another said that he could not afford to give food away, even to those in need. One interviewee explained that giving items to the food insecure is a waste of time. She said, "[A] local food bank was asking for donations . . . My dad said 'no.' [Hungry people wanting food] can come out here and pick and weed and get what they want. And, not a single person showed up. You're not starving if you don't want to work for it."

Homologousness

Seller RSPs related to homologousness and community bonds involve activities outside the market that reflect wider community involvement, including political participation, awareness of local news, and religious involvement. The researchers asked sellers if they did anything beyond FM activities for "community involvement." Two said they did nothing, the four others said they did. The respondent with the most detailed reply stated:

I always vote. I help out the 4-H club, and I'm in the Arkansas Naturalists [a group that promotes natural resource education and outreach] . . . We do things with the State Parks. I do data collection for [birds and butterflies]. And, we do streaming with Arkansas Naturalists where we monitor the river down here . . . I am also the president of [a statewide livestock association], so [I] do a lot of education in helping people . . . so that's a lot of stuff.

Every respondent discussed voting as a way of bonding with the community. However, two said they just vote in national elections and do not concern themselves with local politics. With the idea that local news interest reflects some level of connection with the community, the researchers asked respondents if they read newspapers or web sites dedicated to local issues. Only two respondents discussed an interest in local news, and both commented on receiving the local newspaper. Literature indicates a connection between community bonds and religious participation (see Wuthnow 1999), but only one seller discussed church involvement.

RSPs involving homologousness and regional identity concern sellers doing anything outside the market associated with regional pride. When asked if they had pride as someone from the South, everyone said yes. A few did so with ambivalence. One noted, "Yeah, no matter what anyone else says" and another said, "Yeah, I guess there are drawbacks, but yeah." A follow up question asked about drawbacks. The respondent noted, "Um, just kind of perception or people's perception of [people who] live here." Another question dealt with what sellers do in everyday life that reflects being Southern. The major theme involved food. One respondent stated, "There are plenty of Southern items I enjoy eating." One person brought up barbeque, but did not specify whether eating barbequed food or the practice of barbequing is important. The barbeque references are not surprising. It is a highly important food in Southern culture (Veteto and Maclin 2011). Another relevant theme was outdoor sports – specifically hunting and fishing.

RSPs related to homologousness and civic agriculture relate to non-food related FM activities to alleviate wider community problems. No sellers reported doing anything FM related to address broader public challenges. Most respondents did not think FMs could lessen any non-food related social issue. One did note that successful markets increase the ability of farmers to hire workers and lower unemployment. Another said that sellers are role models. She argued they set a good example for instable families in the community.

Resources

With resources, this research involved exploring tangible and intangible factors that aid or impede seller RSPs. With tangible resources, all but one respondent said the most important resource for FM participation is land, followed by equipment and seeds. A follow up question asked about resources other people do not have that keep them from participating in the FM. Respondents discussed time, noting that if you are a part-time grower you have an inability to focus on farming. They also

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discussed lack of land. Two respondents said that even if you do not have enough land, you still can sell. One stated, “Even people in an apartment can do baked goods.” One person discussed lack of internet access as a problem for potential sellers. He stated, “There are a couple of, I believe, Amish families around the area that don’t participate because of the technological barrier.” Another question asked about market rivalry with big food stores. It inquired about resources sellers are lacking to compete with larger outlets. The dominant theme was advertising. One seller argued that in some instances food might be more expensive when purchased at a large store, but people do not understand the social, health, and community benefits of buying from local sellers. Sellers need people to know the market is there, but also they need buyers to know how beneficial it is. Other issues involved government programs that only help big farmers and lack of quality packaging. One respondent argued that the line of questioning was irrelevant. FMs are not really battling with large retailers. He stated, “[Market sellers] don’t really want to compete with the big stores. They got to have the market niche. That’s what a local farm is.”

Inquiry about intangible resources concerned emotions involved in selling. The main theme involved positive self-evaluation. Reflecting Lyson’s (2004) work, the words “pride” and “proud” reoccurred. One respondent said, “Pride, you have pride in your products,” while another said, “Well you know when a customer comes up to you like she did just a minute ago, it makes you feel good and makes you proud.” Another theme involved competitive-based emotions. Responses reflected that sellers are sometimes jealous or angry with other sellers. One person said, “No matter what the others say you’re still competitive about how much you bring to the market each time.” Regardless, maybe even because of competition, an emotional bond forms between sellers, especially when they ritualistically engage in activities outside the market. One interviewee stated, the “bonding” with others increases significantly when they go to common “dinners” and “events.”

This area of questioning also addressed the transmission of knowledge. The researchers asked if elders passed down wisdom on farming and/or selling. A common theme was that grandparents played an essential role. One person noted, “My grandpa had a farm in Kansas when he lived out there for 30–35 years . . . grandpa showed me how to set up a garden.” A different seller confirmed the theme saying, “My grandmother taught me how to make soap. My grandparents taught me how to make a garden.” Only one respondent extensively discussed learning how to sell through elders. The respondent said, “Dad’s uncle and his wife have a tractor farm and produce, that’s how they made their living by selling it on roadside

stands in Oklahoma . . . My grandmother's father owned a peach orchard that was their main source of money. Everything else was done through swap and trade." The researchers asked interviewees if they had children, and if those children are engaged in civic agriculture. Half have no children. For the other half, handing down farming knowledge split three ways. One respondent said that he had passed on any farming knowledge to his kids, but they were not interested. Another said she was successfully passing on her knowledge and work ethic, stating:

They may not like it, but all of our children even the six-year-old knows how to [farm]. Six, fourteen, and eighteen and every one of them have had a lifetime of experience . . . The six-year-old he will go out there and tell you, "Them chickens are money. Them pigs are money. That land is money." The 14-year-old has a lamb she's raising . . . The children have responsibility of their own property . . . If they want their spending money then they are going to work.

One respondent noted that his children tried to carry on the family tradition of farming and selling, but they were not successful. His justification involved weather factors. He stated:

My daughter has tried [farming], when she got out of high school she graduated beauty college and that was kind of a dead end. So, she tried it and she tried it in a year that was absolutely devastating to farm. She picked a bad year and she ended up losing all of her grant money . . . That was her first year of farming and her last.

Though family knowledge seems important, having it is not a necessity. Some sellers are self-taught. One interviewee said, "My parents worked in construction or factories, [so] most of what I learned I did it the hard way, read books, and tried it."

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Research shows that traditional FMs create an environment where buyers and sellers have close, intimate bonds (Brown and Miller 2008). The RSPs of the rural, online market in this study do not reflect this. They do reveal the importance of personal bonds with the community, but they do not necessarily display the importance of the relationships in terms of emotional connections. With the market

studied, it is more about business. Aside from FM participation, sellers appear to engage in a variety of other community-based ritualized interactions – church attendance, political involvement, and volunteer work. It does not appear that market selling reflects personal connections in other areas. Community bond ritualized practices appear to rank low for sellers in this study.

With regional identity, sellers do not associate the products they sell with the South. They do not seem to find importance in ever associating their products with the South, nor do they believe there is much uniquely Southern about what they sell. Various sellers are proud of being Southern, but for some, it is an indecisive pride. Therefore, it appears regional identity ritualized practices rank low for sellers. Perhaps the respondents have an embedded conceptualization following what others perceive to be true about the South (see Tindall 1976). It is possible that some interviewees are aware of this and felt uncomfortable when questioned about their Southern character. Whether the resistance to identifying the products they sell as Southern is an intentional impression management tactic to avoid regional identity stigma, or truly just unimportant to sellers, is a question for future research (for elaboration see Thompson 1997).

Sellers do appear to engage in high-ranking civic agriculture related ritualized practices. Most sellers in this study, despite perceptions indicating otherwise, frequently vend through the market. Though some sellers think fighting food insecurity by providing items to those less off is pointless, a variety provide portions of their products to local nonprofit food banks and pantries. They hint at the importance of civic agriculture as a form of resistance to new agriculture and an outlet of community education. They also seem to believe in the importance of market selling and buying because it keeps money within the community and can create local jobs. With resources, money, land, and equipment are important resources to engage in RSPs associated with FM seller participation. However, anyone with some land and farming knowledge can produce items to sell when motivated.

This work adds to structural ritualization literature. It provides another analysis of the impact of RSPs in a specific setting. The findings confirm the theory's proposition that high-ranking RSPs set a cognitive tone. Overall, pointing out the original formulation of structural ritualization theory focuses on small environments embedded in a larger milieu is relevant. Rituals in smaller contexts often mimic and help reproduce themes from the larger environment (Knottnerus 1997). You could view a local FM as an embedded environment within the larger economic landscape. Ironically, it is possible sellers in rural, online FMs

unintentionally reinforce wider themes associated with new agriculture. Is an online farmers' market a way to bring local buyers and sellers together in a meaningful way, or just an extension of wider trends related to online purchasing and convenience? In this project, the sellers who create community-based personal bonds contend they do so to maintain buyer networks, and think of the previously discussed sellers' homogenized views of food. Research reveals FMs elevate social cohesion and strengthen communities (e.g., Glowacki-Dudka et al. 2013; Trauger and Passidomo 2012; Watson 2006). Despite this work's findings on high ranking RSPs associated with civic agriculture, the researchers question the effectiveness of online FMs contributing in such a way.

This is not to say rural, online markets do not have the potential to resist new agriculture trends. Structural ritualization theory discusses ritual sponsors (see Knottnerus and LoConto 2003; Ulsperger, Knottnerus, and Ulsperger 2014). Sponsors provide people information on the negative impact of currently engaged in RSPs and the positive impact of alternatives. Developing an alternative set of RSPs for online markets that promote a higher level of community bonds might be possible, the use of regional identification, and actions associated with wider components of civic agriculture. As a leader within the market context, the manager could act as a sponsor and openly promote alternative RSPs. Future studies are clearly necessary. They should consider a more in-depth focus on seller barriers, selling opportunities, and a deeper investigation into the contrast between online markets and traditional markets. They should also explore the promotion of alternative RSPs in online, rural FMs.

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