The Marketing Practices of Ontario's Organic Farmers: Local or Global?

By Alan Hall and Veronika Mogyorody

1. Introduction

The post-war model of agriculture has had a profound impact on the social and technical relations of production and their spatial expression. One often-noted consequence is the widespread destruction of direct and localized links between agricultural producers and consumers.[1] Within the conventional industrial paradigm, and enhanced by globalization, producers have become providers of agricultural inputs which are processed, transformed, and shipped great distances to urban consumers who rarely have any direct contact with farmers or food in its original form. By distancing food production from consumption, producers forced consumers to rely on huge supermarket chains to provide them with their daily bread with little understanding of how and why food is produced and processed in certain ways, or what the consequences are of operating in this fashion. While the lack of consumer knowledge and control over the food we eat has become somewhat more visible in recent years with the genetic engineering and other food-related controversies, consumers are largely unaware of the enormous financial costs associated with subsidization, transportation, and processing, the harmful impact on food quality and diet, the environmental pollution and soil degradation, and the continued loss of family farms to bankruptcy.[2]

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[1]David Goodman and Michael Watts, "Reconfiguring the Rural and Fording the Divide? Capitalist Restructuring and the Global Agro-food System," *The Journal of Peasant Studies,* 22, 1, 1994, p. 26.
[2]David Goodman and Michael Redclift *Refashioning Nature: Food, Ecology, and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

While the industrial or "productivist" model remains dominant,[3] the recent growth of organic farming challenges conventional market and production relations. Organic farming, especially within the state or agribusiness discourse, is often defined in a narrow sense as "farming without chemicals,"[4] but many view organic farming as a much broader-based social movement grounded in a holistic alternative paradigm which seeks to alter the social relations of food production and consumption in fundamental ways. Organic farmers, as Hilary Tovey describes them, "are generally concerned not just with using specific farming techniques, but also with who eats their food, and how it reaches the community, and even more broadly, what sort of 'community' is most appropriate to the production and consumption of food."[5] By emphasizing smaller scale family farm production for direct and local markets, adherents contend that organic farming offers a viable alternative to commodification and globalization of food.[6]

Various methods of establishing more direct ties between producer and consumer are integral to the development of organic farming, including a greater reliance on farm site stores and pickup systems, food box deliveries, and "true" farmer markets. One of the more innovative models often linked to the organic movement is "Community Supported Agriculture" (CSA). In CSAs, consumers purchase shares of a farm's total production in advance of the growing season.[7] Members of the CSA split the total production of various crops in accordance with the advance shares they purchased. The precise amount they receive for each share in a given year is dictated by the size of harvest. This substantially reduces financial and market risk for farmers by providing a guaranteed income with at least partial payment in advance. For consumers, there is often an effort to alter the members' understanding

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[3]*Ibid.*

[4]Alan Hall and Veronika Mogyorody, "Organic Farmers in Ontario: An Examination of the Conventionalization Argument," *Sociologia Ruralis,* 42, 1, 2001; H. Tovey, "Food Environmentalism and Rural Sociology: On the Organic Movement in Ireland," *Sociologia Ruralis,* 37, 1, 1997.

[5]Tovey, *ibid.,* p. 24.

[6]M. Grey, "The Industrial Food Stream and its Alternatives in the United States: An Introduction," *Human Organization,* 59, 2, 2000; Joel Kovel, "The Struggle for Use Value: Thoughts about the Transition," *CNS*, 11, 2, 2000; P. Pugliese, "Organic Farming and Sustainable Rural Development: A Multi-Faceted and Promising Convergence," *Sociologia Ruralis,* 41, 1, 2001; Tovey, *op. cit.*

[7]C. Abbott Cone and A. Myhre, "Community-Supported Agriculture: A Sustainable Alternative to Industrial Agriculture?" *Human Organization,* 59, 2, 2000.

of and relationship to food as well. CSA members are usually required or encouraged through incentives to participate directly in production and/or distribution of the food, and in decisions regarding crop selection and production matters. Providing information, education, and two-way communication through newsletters, web pages, farm visits, and regular meetings are often important features of CSAs. CSAs take different specific forms but first and foremost they are locally-oriented organizations devoted to face-to-face and direct interaction in food production and consumption.[8] While most organic farms do not operate as CSAs, broader principles of local and direct marketing are integral to the overall movement's environmental and social goals — that is, reducing pollution and energy consumption, conserving local resources through sustainable local use, keeping people on the land, and challenging corporate control over food and its meaning.[9]

Although many countries including Canada report significant growth in organic production and sales, a number of analysts raise concerns about whether organic farming is developing in ways consistent with its alternative goals and principles.[10] Buck, Getz, and Guthman argue that smaller alternative organic family farm operations in California are being increasingly marginalized or taken over by larger producers who operate like conventional farmers in terms of their production and market relations. They call this process "conventionalization."[11] Some studies in Europe, such as Tovey's work in Ireland and Clunies-Ross and Cox's in Britain, also suggest that as organic farming becomes more institutionalized, it increasingly takes on characteristics of conventional agriculture.[12] Among other things, this means organic farmers are increasingly mass-producing specialized products for global rather than local distribution. For Buck, Getz and Guthman, this emerging focus on global production reflects increasing

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[8]L. DeLind and A. Ferguson, "Is this a Women's Movement: The Relationship of Gender to Community Supported Agriculture in Michigan," *Human Organization*, 58, 2, 1999, p. 191.

[9]Tovey, *op. cit.*

[10]L. DeLind, "Transforming Organic Agriculture into Industrial Organic Products: Reconsidering National Organic Standards," *Human Organization*, 59, 2, 2000; Tovey, *op. cit.*

[11]D. Buck, C. Getz, and J. Guthman, "From Farm to Table: The Organic Vegetable Commodity Chain at Northern California," *Sociologia Ruralis*, 37, 1, 1997.

[12]T. Clunies-Ross, and G. Cox, "Challenging the Productivist Paradigm: Organic Farming and the Politics of Agricultural Change," in P. Lowe, T. Marsden and S. Whatmore, eds., *Regulating Agriculture* (London: David Fulton Publishers, 1994); Tovey, *op. cit.*

involvement of conventional agribusiness capital in the marketing and distribution system which, in their view, will ultimately undermine the movement and its transformative potential. While acknowledging the persistence of local direct marketing arrangements, they insist that these are merely the default choices of farmers with few resources. They expect that these alternative farmers will continue to be marginalized and the social change potential of the movement largely lost as more conventionally-oriented producers, wholesalers, and retailers take control of the major markets.[13]

However, others such as Coombes and Campbell suggest that the emergence of conventionally-oriented organic farm production does not spell the end of an alternative orientation among organic farmers, nor the loss of its transformative potential.[14] Although they also found growth in export-oriented production in New Zealand, they argue that the emerging focus on export markets was a separate development. They call this "bifurcation," which involves shifting large-scale conventional producers encouraged by multinational capital to produce organic fruit specifically for this purpose, while the alternative smaller organic producers continue to expand their local connections and markets within New Zealand. Given the lack of direct competition and the relative autonomy of the local production and marketing systems, Coombes and Campbell (1998) believe the smaller scale locally-oriented organic farms will persist.

Their argument explaining the New Zealand case is in many ways particularistic; indeed, one of their central points is that increasing commodification and conventionalization is neither a universal nor a linear process. As such, while there is no disagreement that a global system of organic food distribution is developing, the debate is whether this is an all-encompassing trend that will transform all of organic farming into a conventional copy. For Campbell and Liepins, and others, the development of organic farming is a contested terrain in which contradictory interests and competing discourses, both create and

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[13]Buck, et al., *op. cit.*

[14]B. Coombes and H. Campbell, "Dependent Production of Alternative Modes of Agriculture: Organic Farming in New Zealand," *Sociologia Ruralis*, 38, 2, 1998; see also H. Campbell and R. Liepins, "Naming Organics: Understanding Organic Standards in New Zealand as a Discursive Field," *Sociologia Ruralis*, 41, 1, 2001; H. Campbell and B. Coombes, "Green Protectionism and Organic Food Exporting from New Zealand: Crisis Experiments in the Breakdown of Fordist Trade and Agricultural Policies," *Rural Sociology*, 64, 2, 1999.

undermine spaces for substantive changes in agriculture.[15] Indeed, while some authors emphasize continued dominance by conventional agriculture in shaping our understanding of sustainable agriculture,[16] others recognize the success of various opposing groups, including organic farmers in challenging that dominance. The resistance of the organic community to the dilution of federal organic regulations in the US is one case in point.[17] The persistence of crises and controversies in conventional agriculture are also seen as critical contradictions which are continuously undermining efforts of agribusiness to sustain the productivist paradigm.[18] For example, Campbell and Coombes argue that it was the breakdown of the Fordist regulatory system in agriculture, the rapid shift to neoliberal policies in New Zealand, and the international failure to institutionalize neoliberal forms of global regulation that were central in creating the particular conditions for the dual pattern of noncompetitive local and export-oriented production in New Zealand.[19] Others stress the persistence of serious food safety, soil degradation, and environmental problems as weakening the capacity of conventional agriculture to marginalize organic farming, especially in the case of Europe.[20] It has also been argued that the reduction of subsidies for conventional agriculture have created more space for the development of organic agriculture in Europe.[21]

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[15]Campbell and Liepins, *op. cit.*; E. Barham, "Social Movements for Sustainable Agriculture in France: A Polanyian Perspective," *Society and Natural Resources*, 10, 1999; Clunies-Ross and Cox, *op. cit.*

[16]Delind, *op. cit.*; Alan Hall, "Sustainable Agriculture and Conservation Tillage: Managing the Contradictions," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology,* 35, 2, 1998a; Alan Hall, "Pesticide Reforms and Globalization: Making the Farmers Responsible," *Canadian Journal of Law and Society*, 13, 1, 1998b; R. MacRae, J. Henning, and S. Hill, "Strategies to Overcome Barriers to the Development of Sustainable Agriculture in Canada," *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics*, 6, 1, 1993; Tovey, *op. cit.*

[17]P. Allen and M. Kovach, "The Capital Composition of Organic: The Potential of Markets in Fulfilling the Promise of Organic Agriculture," *Agriculture and Human Values*, 17, 2, 2000; see also, Clunies-Ross and Cox, *op. cit.*; J. Michelson, "Recent Development and Political Acceptance of Organic Farming in Europe," *Sociologia Ruralis,* 41, 1, 2001a.

[18]These include the continuing problems with prices and oversupply, disputes over subsidies, the GMO controversy, persistent concerns about the environmental and health effects of pesticides and fertilizers, and a whole host of food scares. Clunies-Ross and Cox, *op. cit.*

[19]Campbell and Coombes, *op. cit.*

[20]Michelson, *op cit.*; Pugliese, *op. cit.*

[21]Michelson, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

Another frequent argument in the literature is that organic farming has certain unique characteristics which place limitations on the capacity of capital to control organic farming. From this perspective, the biophysical requirements of organic farming, and the relative productivity of family over corporate farm operations given these particular requirements, makes it difficult for agribusiness to fully dominate organic markets, again leaving some market space for the small locally-oriented producers.[22] This argument is not unique to organic farming since the same basic points are made to explain the persistence of smaller-scale and family farm-based agriculture more generally.[23] The maintenance of alternative spaces for alternative forms of organic farming are not sufficient in themselves to lead to broader-scale changes in agriculture. Yet some analysts argue that the continued survival of alternative agriculture is important in transformative terms simply because it provides a valuable example of what is possible, which they argue is a necessary precondition for a change in paradigm.[24]

As our literature review suggests, much of the debate concerning the future of organic farming revolves around the question of local direct marketing vs. global wholesale distribution. For Buck, Getz, and Guthman, in particular, the shifting emphasis toward wholesale and global markets signals the penetration of conventional agribusiness and the eventual demise of organic farming as a meaningful challenge to the productivist paradigm.[25] But, one of the central questions raised by the work of Coombes and Campbell is whether this shift is happening in the same way in other national and regional contexts, and if not, why not? If the transformative potential of organic farming has any chance of realization, an understanding of these international differences is a crucial step. This article aims to further fuel the commodification debate by considering marketing practices of organic vegetable and fruit farmers in the Canadian province of Ontario.

2. Methodology

Our research involved interviews with 259 organic farmers, intensive case studies of eighteen farm operations, archival research, and observations and interviews with representatives of organic farm

[22]Buck, et al., *op. cit.*, p. 4; see also Coombes and Campbell, *op. cit.*
[23]S. Mann, *Agrarian Capitalism in Theory and Practice* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989).
[24]Campbell and Liepins, *op. cit.*; Clunies-Ross and Cox, *op. cit.*
[25]Buck et al., *op. cit.*, p. 16.

organizations and businesses.[26] The study identifies variations and changes in production and marketing ideologies and practices as a means of assessing whether and to what extent organic farmers operate within an alternative marketing model. While the research looked at a variety of indicators and all types of farmers,[27] this paper focuses specifically on the extent to which vegetable and fruit farmers (N=151) organize their production around local distribution and direct ties to consumers as opposed to selling to wholesale and global markets. Since the commodification debate revolves around the claim that a division between large and small organic farmers is developing, fueled in part by the increasing movement of conventional farmers into organic farming, our analysis begins by examining whether variations in farm size, farm origins, and number of years farming organically are related to each other and to different marketing principles and practices. The analysis then considers the pattern of investment in organic farming and politics of agricultural policy as explanations for the current situation.

3. Vegetable and Fruit Farmers: Diverse and Small

The first important observation that emerges from our survey is that there were very few large vegetable and fruit organic producers close to the size cited in the California or New Zealand studies. There were only four vegetable producing farms which reported farm sizes of 800 acres or more, and more importantly, the largest acreage devoted to fruit and vegetables on these farms was only 125 acres. The mean acreage devoted to vegetable/fruit crops for the province was eight and median acreage a mere 3.25 acres. A majority of the farmers (57 percent) reported less than five acres, and only 12 farmers (8.5 percent) devoted twenty or more acres to vegetable and/or fruit production.[28] Also relevant is the finding that only a minority of the farmers were planning

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[26]An attempt was made to develop a list of all organic farmers in Ontario, certified and non-certified using a variety of sources and methods. A list of 411 operations was compiled and we attempted to contact all 411. While our refusal rate was quite small (15 percent), an additional 22 percent of the original list were no longer farming or farming organically, or were no longer at the same address.

[27]Hall and Mogyorody, *op. cit.*

[28]It is worth noting that the Canadian Organic Growers Association collects data on certified organic growers. Their survey reported 447 producers with a total acreage of 30,000 acres. This included grain farmers which constitute the bulk of the acreage, further supporting our finding that the farm acreage devoted to fruit and vegetable production is relatively small. See A. Macey, "Canadian Organic Statistics Update," *Eco-Farm and Garden*, Winter, 2000, p. 26.

to get any bigger in terms of land size — that is, only 30 percent stated that they intended to purchase or rent additional land for vegetable or fruit production within the next five years. Although close to half of the existing farmers (45 percent) reported at least "some growth" in their organic acreage over the last five years, this increase was usually quite limited, often restricted to the addition of another couple of acres from their existing property. Interviews with major processors and wholesalers (N=10) also suggest relatively limited growth in farm size from the movement of conventional farmers into organic farming in that only one reported perceiving any notable increase in the number or size of larger conventional farmers moving into organic production in the last five years.

Sixty-nine percent of the farmers grow field crops and/or raising livestock for sale — that is, only 31 percent were specialized in the vegetable or fruit area alone. Moreover, very few of the farmers specialize in their vegetables or fruit either, with most growing and selling a diverse range of crops. While 18 percent reported the production of a single vegetable or fruit, usually potatoes or garlic, 55 percent of the farms grew 10 or more different types of vegetables and/or fruit. In terms of business plans, only 11 percent of the farmers report their intention to reduce diversity in their farm and to specialize, and almost 2/3rds (65 percent) claimed that they were planning to diversify further. Unlike California,[29] very few Ontario farmers specialize in high value mixed greens. Moreover, those who did, produced mainly for local consumption through local retailers and were operating on a very small scale. We came across only one example of an effort to produce mixed greens specifically for export but this effort failed after one year because the producer was unable to provide sufficient volume.

4. Marketing Practices: The Emphasis is on Local

The data on marketing practices further support the argument that very few Ontario farms fit the export-oriented scenarios outlined for either California or New Zealand. The vast majority of the farms market directly to local, generally urban consumers — 86 percent reported selling at least some of their fruit and vegetables directly to consumers through consumer pickups, deliveries, on-farm stalls or outlets, or CSAs, while 52 percent were selling directly to restaurants or small retail health food stores. On the other hand, 32 percent of the farmers also sold at least some of their production to wholesalers or processors for national or international distribution, and an additional 3 percent

[29]Buck, et al., *op. cit.*

sold their production through a farmers coop rather than the traditional wholesaler or processor. However, only seven farms (or about 5 percent of the total vegetable farmers) specialized solely in wholesale or coop production. While most of their output was likely for provincial or national consumption, the farmers often had no way of knowing the final destination of their production in these cases. Only four farmers report selling directly to wholesale buyers or processors from either the U.S or Europe.

It was interesting to find that 23 percent of the vegetable and fruit farms (N=32) were operating CSAs.[30] Given that CSAs represent a fairly major shift from conventional producer/consumer relations,[31] this suggests that a good proportion of the Ontario organic movement attempts to do much more than simply "farm without chemicals." Indeed, our case studies and observations suggest that CSA farmers often see themselves engaging in a political and educational project reestablishing close ties between the producer and the consumer of food, and accordingly, consciously work toward that end using various media.[32]

5. Bifurcation?

In light of the findings in California and New Zealand, is there evidence of bifurcation between larger more specialized and more export-oriented farms and smaller more locally-oriented farms?[33] As noted above, we found a few farmers specializing in wholesale production. Keeping in mind that farm sizes are generally much smaller in Ontario than in California, we asked if there was any relationship between marketing practices and farm size (see Table 1).

While larger farmers (understood here as only 20 acres or more) were far more likely to sell wholesale (91 percent) than the smallest farmers (23 percent; <5 acres), suggesting support for a difference in practices based on size, the largest farmers (82 percent) were also just as likely to market directly and locally to consumers as the smallest farms (78 percent).

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[30]While some of these CSAs were also selling wholesale (28 percent of the majority were involved in direct local marketing relations only — that is, 71 percent of the CSAs were only selling their produce in other direct ways to consumers.

[31] Abbott, Cone, and Myhre, *op. cit.*; DeLind and Ferguson, *op. cit.*

[32]This may include the production of newsletters, webpages, recipes, and organized farm visits.

[33]Buck, et al., *op. cit.*; Coombes and Campbell, *op. cit.*

Table 1: Marketing Practices by Farm Size

Farm Size (Acres)	0-4.9	5 - 9.9	10-19.9	20+
Marketing Practices				
Wholesale	23%	41%	38%	91%
Direct Sales	78%	94%	69%	82%
CSA	20.0%	28%	13%	46%
Number of Farms	80	32	16	12

Moreover, larger Ontario farms are more likely to operate as a CSA: almost half of the largest farms (45 percent) had a CSA, while the three smaller categories of farm sizes had lower rates of CSA usage, ranging from 13 percent to 28 percent.[34]

One part of the bifurcation argument is that the split reflects a more recent movement of conventional farmers into organic farming, lured by the promise of better profits through specialized organic export markets.[35] Although we observed the movement of a couple of larger (100 acres +) vegetable farmers into organic farming during the course of the two-year study, we found little indication of any large-scale movement of large conventional farmers into organic farming, at least not in the vegetable and fruit area. Indeed, it is worth noting that most farmers specializing in vegetables and fruits began farming as organic farmers (70 percent), in contrast to the field crop or livestock farmers where the majority (71 percent/64 percent respectively) began as conventional farmers and then made the shift to organic farming.[36] This is not so surprising given the land base required for livestock and field crop farming, but nevertheless, this suggests that fruit and vegetable farming largely attracts new first time farmers rather than converting conventional farmers, at least in Ontario.

Moreover, most conventional operations making the shift to organic production are relatively small operations. None of the larger-sized vegetable farms were among the most recent organic producers (farming organically for three years or less) and only four in the 20-acre or more group began producing in the last four to six years. More significant areas of growth in numbers of organic growers occurred in

[34]These numbers did not change substantially when we tried different categorizations (e.g., splitting the 20 acres or more into two categories — 20-39 and 40+).
[35]Buck, et al., *op cit.*; Coombes and Campbell, *op. cit.*
[36]For more on this, see Hall and Mogyorody, *op. cit.*

smaller farm size categories where eighteen of twenty newer farmers (3 years or less) had less than 10 acres. No substantial relationship exists between marketing practices and the length of time farming organically (see Table 2). For example, among the most recent group of farmers (3 years or less), 78 percent marketed directly to consumers; while among the longest standing group of farmers (10+ years), 80 percent also marketed directly. Indeed, most recent farmers were less likely to be selling wholesale (17 percent) than veteran farmers (37 percent).

Asked about their views on marketing, seventy-five percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that agricultural products should be marketed locally. We also asked whether they thought organic farms should become larger in size to meet increasing demand.

Table 2:
Marketing Practices by Years Farming Organically

Years Farming Organically	1- 3	3+ - 6	6+ - 9	Over 9
Marketing Practices				
Wholesale	17%	31%	40%	36%
Direct	78%	86%	76%	80%
CSA	17%	19%	32%	26%
Number of Farms	20	34	25	62

Again, most farmers (74 percent) disagreed that organic farms needed to be larger in size. Most commented that there is a need for more small-scale farmers. There was again no significant relationship between these beliefs and farm size or length of time farming. In Ontario, these beliefs are not related to farm size or length of time, nor was there a difference between vegetable farmers and other types of farmers (e.g., livestock and/or field crop farmers).

The conventionalization argument also suggests that smaller producers are under increasing financial and competitive pressures to either sell out to a larger producer or to compromise their principles by getting larger themselves, selling wholesale, becoming more specialized, and so on.[37] As such, we also wanted to know if farmers experience substantial pressures to compromise their beliefs and whether they believe they must get bigger to progress financially. When asked directly in the survey about this, a strong majority (93

[37]Buck, et al., *op cit.*

percent) stated they felt no substantial pressure.[38] Farmers involved in forward contracts for produce report no additional production requirements imposed by the buyers over and above the formal certification of the produce. We also asked if they experience significant price competition, and whether they are satisfied with prices they receive and their profits. Again, we found a clear majority are experiencing increasing demand and growth in sales (82 percent) and are satisfied with their prices (89 percent). Ninety-three percent stated they are optimistic or very optimistic about their operation's future. However, we also asked if farmers are experiencing any "problems" with prices and profit levels, and here a greater proportion of farmers acknowledge some concerns. Forty percent of the farmers said that prices are at least "somewhat of a problem" and 69 percent stated that profitability is at least "somewhat of a problem" for their operation.[39] Asked to characterize the financial success of their farm, 38 percent say the operation is "unsuccessful." A similar proportion (33 percent) state that the operation is or has recently been in danger of bankruptcy. Forty-seven percent state they have long-term debt owing on the operation. Our case studies suggest these kinds of farms are struggling to survive, and that at least some live on the edge earning little or no farm income for personal or family needs. Although the majority (73 percent) defined their main occupations as "farmers," most (61 percent) were relying on off-farm income to sustain the family, and often the farm as well. Still, there is no indications that these financial problems reflect competition from larger growers within or outside Canada. A clear majority (75 percent)) do not believe that they must get bigger in order to succeed. And, very few farmers (5 percent) report that they feel under pressure from current markets to compromise their principles in either production or marketing.

6. What Does this Mean?

Data from the Ontario farmer survey and case studies seem to suggest that the export and wholesale model is a marginal aspect of the

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[38]While our case studies (N=18) revealed more conflicts and conflicting actions in terms of principles, especially in regards to their commitment to direct and local over export marketing (usually arising from financial concerns or opportunities and usually concerning the production of soybeans), there were relatively few major market pressures evident among vegetable or fruit farmers.

[39]It is important to point out here that many vegetable and fruit farmers were not selling their produce at premium prices, either because they believed that the food needed to be accessible to the poor or because they had found that people were not willing to pay premium prices.

Ontario situation. Most organic producers actively establish alternative kinds of direct relations with urban consumers, smaller producers were not marginalized, and indeed are growing in numbers and in relative importance, and relatively few large conventional farmers were drawn into organic production for either local or export production. The substantial proportion of CSAs also suggests that the Ontario organic community is providing and sustaining a strong alternative to conventional marketing models. Consistent with these practices, the clear majority of vegetable and fruit farmers express alternative values and beliefs regarding the importance of local and direct marketing arrangements. Moreover, limited differences in marketing practices between the larger and smaller producers and newer and older organic farmers did not provide a strong confirmation of the conventionalization or bifurcation theses.

While these findings may encourage those concerned about "delocalization," the term that Coombes and Campbell use to refer to the overall shift from local to export oriented production,[40] there are some important qualifications which need to be considered. To begin with, one third of Ontario farmers in our survey sell at least some of their produce to wholesalers. Although few of them specialize in wholesale production as in New Zealand and California, one-quarter did not believe in direct or local marketing as a principle of organic farming. As one of our case study informants put it, "I don't care where it goes, as long as I can sell it at the right price, that's where it will go" (Case Study 10, Field Notes). As well, close to 20 percent of the farmers who were not actually selling wholesale disagreed with the principles of local and direct marketing. Their small size and lack of export or wholesale opportunities pushes them into direct marketing strategies largely by "default,"[41] but these farmers will not hesitate to market wholesale if opportunities are there for them to do so.

Most Ontario organic farmers who *were* engaged in some wholesale production also stated that they believed in the principle of direct local marketing (71 percent). Our observations and case studies further reveal the limitations and contradictions of these general beliefs. Even where export and wholesale market opportunities are relatively undeveloped, many if not most organic farmers compromised some of their local marketing principles. For example, while ten of our eighteen case studies stated in the survey they believe in local production, only four case studies could claim they never sold to export markets and most of

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[40]Coombes and Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 130.
[41]Buck, et al., *op cit.*, p. 14.

those who were selling wholesale did so on an annual basis. Many compromises took place in the sale of field crops, where vegetable farmers produced field crops where export-oriented markets were more developed.[42] There is no reason to expect that these farmers would not do the same thing if export market opportunities increased in the vegetable or fruit area. Even among those expressing stronger beliefs in local market practices, there were clearly some doubts and/or contingencies influencing whether export markets were considered legitimate. As one case study stated:

> We've been approached by Agriculture Canada to see whether we would be interested in exporting internationally. Of course, they had no idea how small we were but there's two schools of thought. On the one hand, I'm saying we shouldn't import everything and on the other hand I'm thinking well we could grow a field of organic soybeans and export them to England, some of our friends do this. Where possible, it's best to sell locally. You don't have to increase the price dramatically because of transportation, stuff doesn't suffer, dried beans are an exception but if I'm going to be concerned about bringing say coffee beans in from wherever – I should be concerned about sending soybeans out. We shouldn't do it because we've got diseases that we can send to other countries that might thrive in other countries because they don't have the long winter that we have. Ah, we'll see. Nice to stay local if you can.[43]

Or as another put it:

> Well our preference would be to sell locally so anywhere we're talking to people we're looking for local markets. But you have to balance that against the amount of time it takes to actually produce the crop. So at the moment we sell mostly to [the name of wholesaler].[44]

As this latter quote suggests, farmers often balance their beliefs in local production with the time and cost demands of production and marketing

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[42]Hall and Mogyorody, *op. cit.*
[43]Interview, Case Study, 16.
[44]Interview, Case Study, 17.

activities. For many, as long as local prices and demand remain relatively strong, there is no question of what they prefer to do — that is, sell their produce locally and directly. But few organic farms were stable enough financially to ignore export opportunities if there were substantial financial advantages, particularly for those farm households dependent on farm income.[45]

Despite the small size and local market orientation of most farms, close to over three-fifths (61 percent) of the vegetable and fruit farmers had certified at least some of their land. While we didn't ask in the survey why they had decided to certify, our case studies suggest that market access was the major motivation. While some access issues center on demands of small local retailers and restaurants, the larger concern is with potential to sell to wholesalers and exporters. Although some non-certified farmers consciously operate in this fashion as a clear statement of their commitment to local direct market relations, others were non-certified simply because of cost. These latter farmers would certify if market opportunities justified the cost. By certifying or planning to certify, the majority of the farmers appear to concede that direct relations of trust between themselves and their customers are insufficient to sustain their operation.

Ambiguities and inconsistencies in ideas and practices are also evident within organic organizations. Although most of the leadership of the major organizations in Ontario, Canada Organic Growers (COG), and Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario (EFAO) support the idea of local marketing, the extent of their support varies. For some, it is an important idea which needs to be central to the movement but many believe that this is a "soft" principle which cannot dictate the actions of farmers. As such, they think it is inappropriate to promote direct marketing principles. Others believe that the idea will not survive demands of the marketplace. As such, local marketing ideas are frequently recognized but there is no active effort to discourage or criticize wholesale or export options.

At the level of the farmer, direct marketing also introduces some significant labor and organizational problems which discourage continued growth in this direction. Many farmers, including those running CSAs, complain about extraordinary time challenges of direct marketing approaches. As one put it, "there are too many interruptions, we can never get any farming done."[46] There were also problems involved in developing local relations with consumers:

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[45]Hall and Mogyorody, *op. cit.*
[46]Case Study, 8, Field Notes.

> So for the first year when we first came up here, we thought 'oh we'll get all our members and from around this area — no problem'. People are going to drive half an hour to get their food — like we really thought, you know, 'what else are they going to eat?' (laughter) So we put out, we had six hundred flyers — I think like it may have even been more — a lot of brochures printed up. We put the brochures in health food stores in every town within like a fifteen-mile radius. Anywhere where we saw a health food store or a massage clinic...And we found that we got very little response from the brochures and then we thought 'well maybe we should set up you know a few information evenings' and we put flyers all over ...saying if you're interested in organic food da-ta-da-ta-da come to this place at this time for the meeting [Two people came and] neither of them wanted a share. So then we realized okay, we're not really going to get that many people from up here and that's when we decided to go [further away].[47]

CSAs in general, are seen by many as too challenging. At one meeting of a farmers' group which we followed over a two year period, there was discussion on how they could make more direct connections with the urban consumers in the area. At other meetings, CSAs were dismissed out of hand as impractical. One leader stated at this particular meeting, "we need to figure out what can we do to make the links to the city, to get them to buy [our] produce, but not a CSA, that's too much work."[48] Other farmers in the room simply shook their heads in agreement as if this was self-evident. While most farmers understood the value of of direct marketing, many did not believe that organic farming could remain local and direct as it grew — that is, they see it as inevitable that conventional marketing relations would eventually dominate. As such, for them the important struggle was to ensure that organic production principles were maintained such as a commitment to diversity over specialization. Among our cases studies, relatively few seemed to see connections between specialization and the development of export markets. When asked about why they supported the idea of local production, most emphasized environmental concerns such as the use of fossil fuels for transportation.

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[47]Case Study, 12, Interview.
[48]Farm Group Observations, Winter, 2000, Field Notes.

On the other hand, it was clear that many farmers value the small size of their operations from a lifestyle perspective and recognize that certain kinds of production changes would be needed to meet demands of wholesale and export production. Whether or not they believe in marketing locally for environmental or economic reasons, direct marketing is seen as the only viable option for them if they were to avoid becoming entangled in the demands of wholesale production. For others, keeping direct connections with at least some of their consumers is an important survival strategy because it provides a hedge against the kinds of market and price shifts which occur in wholesale relations. This may well explain why even larger farms involved in wholesale also sell some of their production locally, and why most farms rely on mixed sales practices. We also stress again that many organic farmers do not have the financial or land resources to develop a large-scale operation even if they so desired.

In sum, while a proportion of the farming community were firmly committed to sustaining direct marketing practices and relations, often for different reasons, there are clearly contradictory ideas and pressures operating within the community suggesting that many if not most organic farmers would produce for export and wholesale if "market opportunities" were there. As such, the lack of any clear bifurcation in marketing practices in Ontario may be more a function of the lack of corporate capital investment as occurred in New Zealand, California and Europe than a reflection of the farmer's ideological and political resistance to export and wholesale relations. This brings us to the structure of the organic food market in Ontario.

7. The Organic Vegetable Market in Ontario

While export, grocer and processor market opportunities may be growing for Ontario organic farmers, they are at a preliminary stage relative to Europe and the US. Unlike New Zealand and California,[49] there are no sustained efforts by export-oriented capital to lure conventional producers into organic vegetable or fruit farming, at least not in Ontario,[50] nor have existing farmers been recruited in this

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[49]Buck, et al., *op. cit.*; Coombes and Campbell, *op. cit.*

[50]As a further indication that there are important regional as well as national variations, there are signs that a vegetable and fruit export orientation is developing at a faster pace in the western province of British Columbia, perhaps because of its proximity to California, but also likely because of efforts by the provincial government to develop certification standards. See Michelson, 2001a, *op. cit.*; J. Michelson, "Organic Farming

manner. As this suggests, multinational and export-oriented investments are marginal to date. Heinz Ltd. is one multi-national processor planning to shift some of its organic baby food production to Ontario early in 2002 but it remains an exception among the major processors.[51] Processing operations in Ontario are all small independent operations largely selling within Ontario and the rest of Canada. On the other hand, there is considerable growth in the number of processors. According to the COG, there has been a 154 percent increase in processors and handlers operating in Ontario.[52] These estimates may overstate the increase since they rely on data from certification bodies which may be double-counting, but nevertheless, they suggest changes in the processing sector. Although many of these are in grains and cereals, there is also growth in the vegetable and fruit area.

Although slow relative to some European countries, the demand for organic food in Ontario is growing at a pace similar to many other western countries, about 15 to 25 percent yearly for the last several years.[53] The current estimate is that organic sales represent about 1.5 percent of total farm cash receipts and just under 1 percent of the total retail food market in Canada.[54] Canada's largest grocer chain recently introduced a line of over fifty generic processed organic products for its stores, along with an expanded offering of fresh organic produce. Other large grocers are creating and expanding food sections devoted exclusively to organic food. A couple of larger organic supermarkets opened recently in major cities including Toronto, which offer a wide range of fresh and processed products, although there are still no major organic grocer chains as in the US.

While these developments may open market opportunities for wholesale and processor sales, currently the vast majority of these

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in a Regulatory Perspective: The Danish Case," *Sociologia Ruralis,* 41, 1, 2001b.

[51]Phone Interview, Heinz Ltd. representative, September 26, 2001.

[52]A. Macey, "Canadian Organic Statistics Update," *Eco Farm and Garden,* Winter, 3, 1, 2000, p. 26; A. Macey, "Canadian Organic Statistics Update," *Eco Farm and Garden,* 4, 1, Winter, 2001, p. 38; A. Macey, "Statistics 2000: Organic Farming in Canada," *Eco Farm and Garden,* 5, 1, Winter, 2002, pp. 50-51.

[53]H. Willer and M. Yussefi, "*Organic Agriculture Worldwide 2001: Statistics and Future Prospects* (BioFach and IFOAM, 2001); Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, "All about Canada's Organic Industry, Government Web Page," www.agr.ca/cb/factsheets/2industry_e.html (Ottawa: September 27, 2001).

[54]*Ibid.*

products are grown and processed in the United States.[55] The situation is the same across all the major grocers and other retail outlets — almost all the processing and much of the production is still from outside Ontario and Canada.

Some livestock and dairy producers tie into this developing market system through the major organic production co-op in Ontario called Ontar-Bio, which sells milk, cheese, and eggs on a national scale to large grocers and health food stores. This co-op is also beginning to serve vegetable farmers through the processing of frozen vegetables and an effort to wholesale garlic. Some farmers and other Ontario processors have also developed processing capacities for other products such as the production of ice cream, yogurt, jams, and juices which require organic fruit.[56] Recent growth in the number of processors may change this situation quickly, but the lion's share of the processed food sold in Ontario is still from outside Ontario. When our survey was done in 1999, the links we found were limited between the majority of vegetable and fruit producers and large-scale wholesalers, processors and large retailers. In interviews, the lack of certified processing facilities in Canada was often cited by producers and wholesalers as limiting development in this area, although recent growth of processors may make a difference.[57]

There are stronger indications of export-oriented market development in Ontario organic agriculture in the field crop area.[58] For example, a number of farmers recently organized a new marketing company for field crops primarily focused on exports.[59] A growing number of export-oriented brokers also operate in the field crop area, and actively approach and solicit farmers. The province of British Columbia also shows strong signs of processing and export development in fruits and vegetables, including development of a state-of-the-art organic fruit tree packing operation, frozen vegetables, and juicing and jam operations.[60]

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[55]Interviews with Retail Grocer representatives and an ongoing check of products on the grocery shelves.
[56]Although some of these processors reported in interviews that they were buying all their fruit from the US.
[57]Interviews with Ontario organic processors, wholesalers, and grocers in the grains and vegetable fruit area (N=10).
[58]Hall and Mogyorody, *op. cit.*
[59]This goes by the name "Great Lakes Organics Ltd."
[60]Macey, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

8. The Politics of Sustainable Agriculture

If relatively slow development of capitalist investment in Ontario organic vegetable and fruit farming explains the lack of bifurcation and conventionalization among organic farmers, how do we explain the lack of investment? Rural sociologists argue that one potentially important factor is the role of the state in establishing the conditions for investment and accumulation such as enacting government regulations and standards.[61] At the same time, rural sociologists also suggest that the persistence of an alternative marketing orientation among organic farmers is their political strength as a social movement. Clearly, this also speaks to their capacity to contest any efforts by the state or agribusiness to redefine organic farming to fit the productivist model.[62] This brings us to the role of conventional agribusiness capital — in particular, what has conventional agriculture done politically to influence state policy and support regarding organic farming?

Until recently, the industry approach to organic farming is to render organic farming as invisible as possible.[63] Although major pressures to address environmental and soil problems emerged in the 1980s, agribusiness and the state largely exclude the organic option from the government, industry, and media discourse on "sustainable farming." This discourse, never meaningfully challenged by the organic movement, took it as a given that organic farming is too expensive and unproductive to feed the world or provide the necessary livelihood for farmers.

At the same time, an aggressive campaign by conventional farm organizations, supported by the state and agri-chemical companies, sought to convince both farmers and the public that conventional agriculture was changing to meet the environmental, work hazard and food safety concerns associated with chemical-based farming. Other kinds of alternatives such as conservation tillage, pesticide certification

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[61]For example, the faster development of fruit and vegetable processing and export in British Columbia may partly reflect the B.C. provincial government move to establish government organic standards during the early 1990s. See also Michelson, 2001a, 2001b, *op. cit.*; Tovey, *op. cit.*
[62]Buck, et al., *op. cit.*; Coombes and Campbell, *op. cit.*; J. Guthman, "Regulating Meaning, Appropriating Nature: The Codification of California Organic Agriculture," *Antipode,* 30, 2, 1998.
[63]Hall, 1998a, 1998b, *op. cit.*; Alan Hall, "Canadian Agricultural Policy: Liberal, Global and Sustainable," in Jane Adams, ed., *Power and Politics in the Transition of Rural America* (University of Pennsylvania Press, forthcoming, 2002); MacRae, Henning, and Hill, *op. cit.*

regulations, environmental farm planning programs, and Integrated Pest Management (IPM) are promoted as solutions to both the environmental and economic problems of conventional agriculture, all of which are consistent with the productivist model.[64] Considerable state funding was directed to various conventional farmer organizations such as soil conservation clubs for conversion and demonstration programs, none of which had anything to do with organic farming. The research funding at the university level was almost entirely confined to conventionally-oriented solutions. Although a couple of provincial governments such as Quebec and British Columbia moved to develop government standards in the early 1990s,[65] the federal and Ontario provincial governments did virtually nothing until the late 1990s. Until then, there were no special funding programs, no research programs, and no explicit acknowledgments of organic farming in sustainable agricultural policy. It was *as if* organic farming did not exist.

Both agribusiness, especially the powerful agri-chemical industry, and the state have been quite content to marginalize organic farming within a limited political, economic and geographic space — a space allowing for slow growth of local direct market relations, while doing virtually nothing to aid development of larger-scale organic agriculture. While this may limit capitalist development of organic farming for some time, the Canadian federal government is finally beginning to acknowledge organic farming. In particular, the government established a federal program of organic accreditation in 1999, and more recently announced funding for a National Centre for Education and Research in Organic Agriculture along with an accreditation assistance program.[66] There have also been staffing and policy changes related to organic export-promotion.

These are very small steps relative to the kinds of state policies and supports in many European countries.[67] These are also small efforts compared to the policies and government funding which support the

[64]Hall, 1998a; 1998b; and 2002, *op. cit.*

[65]For example, see "Quebec Moves to Develop Organic Farming," *Sustainable Farming,* Fall, 1994, p. 14.

[66]Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, News Release, "Centre Set to Bolster Canada's Organic Expertise," Baddeck, Nova Scotia, July 12, 2001; Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, News Release, "Vanclief Announces Funding to Help Organic Growers Seize New Market Opportunities," Vancouver, B.C., June 8, 2001.

[67]Willer and Yussefi, *op. cit.*; see also Michelson, 2001a and 2001b, *op. cit.*

conventional forms of "sustainable farming" in Canada.[68] As yet, Canada's government does little to integrate organic farming as a major component of its sustainable agriculture policy and discourse. The federal government's policy statements and funding programs remain focused on sustaining the farmers' commitment to conventional agriculture rather than encouraging a major shift to organic farming. While the government does not hesitate to promote environmental benefits of no till or IPM, very little attention is drawn to environmental or other advantages of organic farming. Instead, it is largely presented as an emerging market opportunity.

There are even fewer indications of any new change in provincial Ontario policy. For example, current agricultural research and producer grants on sustainable agriculture in Ontario continue to virtually ignore organic farming.[69] One glaring conflict in both federal and Ontario provincial policy is the enthusiasm for genetically-modified organism (GMO) crops as major new technology which can solve both financial and environmental challenges of conventional farming.

The Ontario government's reluctance to acknowledge and support organic farm production may reflect the significant power of the agri-chemical industry in Ontario, but increased visibility of organic food products among the larger grocers also suggests a change occurring in the food industry more broadly, despite the absence of large-scale agribusiness investment. This raises the specter of an enhanced struggle over the definition of organic farming and its production and marketing principles across lines of industrial inputs to organic agriculture. For example, the federal government's early efforts to institutionalize organic farming are grounded in a negative definition of organic farming — that is, one which narrows the definition to the technical differences in production methods.[70] As Hilary Tovey suggests in the case of Ireland, within this kind of definition, organic farming can be

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[68]Hall, 1998a and 2002, *op. cit.*

[69]Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, News Release, "Vanclief Announces $10 million to Farm Environmental Program," Leamington, Ontario, June 9, 2000; Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food, "Contributing to Canada's Sustainable Development Strategy — 1992-1997," Canada-Ontario Green Plan, Ottawa, 2000.

[70]H. Archibald, "Organic Farming is Growing," in *Canadian Agriculture at a Glance* (Ottawa: Agricultural Division, Statistics Canada, 1999); Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, "All about Canada's Organic Industry," Government Web Page: www.agr.ca/cb/factsheets/2industry_e.html (Ottawa, September 27, 2001).

restructured and integrated into the conventional industrial model in many ways.[71]

State emphasis on export opportunities over local marketing, especially for grains and oilseeds, also points to pressures to redefine organic farming in other areas. For example, as new commercial inputs are produced and approved as "natural" fertilizer and pest control products, organic production can be recast in the commercially dependent productivist mold. This is one limitation of the argument that the biophysical requirements of organic farming limit the capacity of conventionalization that can be introduced. As Buck, Getz, and Guthman demonstrated in California, and as illustrated in a few of our field crop and dairy case studies, certified organic farmers can operate successfully in a fairly conventional manner *within* current rules and current range of commercial inputs. Large operations are highly mechanized, fairly specialized, dependent on outside inputs, and use and organize wage labor in much the same way as bigger conventional farmers.[72] As commercialization of allowable products increases, actual production differences between many organic and conventional farms may become less evident.

In the United States and elsewhere, controversies arose over the Canadian national organic production and processing standards which were introduced in 1999 — including the use of certified seeds and feed, controls on manure use and soil additives, rotation requirements, animal health care, slaughterhouse, processing, and transportation requirements. However, export-oriented processors or agribusiness capital made little effort to dilute existing certification standards. The conventional agricultural science community also played a very limited role. As a consequence, organic organizations are fairly satisfied with outcomes of the standard-setting process. However, this is not a reflection of the political strength or activism of the organic community. Unlike the US situation, there was no major mobilization of the Canadian organic community during the standard setting process. Whether organic organizations could have mounted a similar level of political response is unknown, but in any case, it was not necessary. Government and organic exporter recognition that the standards had to meet the European

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[71]Tovey, *op. cit.*
[72]This is critical to Joel Kovel's argument regarding the eco-socialist potential of organic farming since he stressed the importance of the social relations of labor within organic farming. From the Marxist perspective, the promise of organic farming is founded on the distinct nature of the labor process. See Kovel, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

and Japanese requirements for export had probably as much to do with maintenance of organic standards. In the current environment of food safety and Genetically Modified Organism (GMO) concerns, the organic industry could not afford substantial public controversy surrounding the meaning and labeling of certified organic food.

Government discourse on organic farming suggests that emerging export opportunities, again especially in grains and oilseeds, drive much of the recent state recognition of organic farming.[73] Concern about export markets may also be linked to continuing instability and crises in conventional farm markets.[74] In Canada, this crisis is most acute in the Western provinces such as Saskatchewan where trade disputes with the U.S. and Europe continue to rock export-oriented grain markets. Independent of the government's efforts, and perhaps in spite of them, this encourages some conventional farmers and farm organizations such as the National Farmers Union (NFU) to look for more radical alternatives. Unlike the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, the dominant farmer organization in Ontario, NFU, which is very strong in Saskatchewan, actively promotes organic farming.[75] In this context, the number of organic farmers in Saskatchewan saw a 48 percent increase in the number conventional grain farmers moving into organic farming from 1998-1999. From 1999-2000, the numbers again jumped, this time by 64 percent.[76]

Lack of government action in Ontario suggests that the Ontario organic community still exercises little political influence in agricultural and environmental policy arenas. While not entirely unusual for an organic movement,[77] the main organic farmer organizations operating in Ontario, the Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario (EFAO), Demeter (Bio-dynamic), and the Ontario chapters of

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[73]Agriculture Canada, June 8, 2001 and July 12, 2001, *op. cit.*
[74]Campbell and Coombes, *op. cit.*
[75]National Farmers Union, *National Farmers Union*: *A Sustainable Canadian Agriculture Policy*. Proposal resulting from a Conference sponsored by the Catholic Rural Life Conference and the NFU, Stratford, Ontario, 1990; National Farmers Union, *Food and Farming in the National Economy: Who are the Real Beneficiaries?* (Saskatoon, Sask: Pamphlet, 1992).
[76]Although a dominant farm organization in Saskatchewan, the NFU has very few members in Ontario. Interestingly, Ontario has not seen the same kind of increase in conventional farmers moving to organic farming even in the grain and oilseed sector. See Hall and Mogyorody, *op. cit.*;. Macey, 2000, 2001, and 2002, *op. cit.*
[77]Tovey, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

the Canadian Organic Growers (COG) focus most of their limited resources and energies on farmer education and certification programs with very little being devoted to political lobbying or public advocacy. Although there are signs that this is changing with the recent hiring of political staff in organizations such as COG and allocations of other resources to lobbying activities, the organic farm lobby is extremely weak, certainly relative to the conventional farm lobby in Ontario.[78]

There are also no indications as yet of any linkages or collaborations developing between the organic organizations and the conventional farm organizations in Ontario, again with the exception of the NFU. But this organization is very weak in terms of membership and political influence in Ontario. Connections and collaborations between the organic community and the environmental movement have also been limited. This was particularly evident in recent controversies regarding genetically modified plants GMOs. Although COG reportedly allied with environmental organizations, they largely remained in the background and failed to mount a significant public presence or political campaign of their own despite considerable organic farm interests involved. Conventional farmer organizations, such as the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, took strong public positions in favor of GMO crops and, as a country, Canada remains one of the major national promoters of GMO production. A few organic consumer support groups and events such as the Association for Agricultural Self-Reliance and the Canadian Health Food Association play a role in generating increasing urban awareness of organic farming, but these groups have been unable or unwilling to generate any substantial political pressure for more state recognition of organic farming.

As this suggests, the organic community is not politically ready to resist the effects of increasing market pressures should they develop along the lines of California, Ireland, or New Zealand.[79] The government move toward acknowledging organic farming and assisting organic farmers may also have the effect of drawing more conventional farmers into organic farming. Still, continuing contradictions in government policy in sustainable agriculture and the strong opposition of agribusiness and conventional farm organizations may well moderate the speed with which these changes develop, ironically preserving the space that organic farmers and their urban supporters need to develop and sustain smaller scale direct production/consumer relations.

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[78]As observed at the COG Annual Membership Meeting, Guelph, Ontario, January 29, 2000.
[79]Buck et al., *op. cit.*; Coombes and Campbell, *op. cit.*; Tovey, *op. cit.*

It is interesting to again note that within Ontario at least, conventional farmers have not moved in great numbers to organic farming despite the continuing crisis in conventional farm prices. Indeed, unlike Saskatchewan, the rate of increase of new Ontario organic farmers actually dropped over the last couple of years as compared to 1997-98 when it hit a high of 30 percent.[80] There have been no major corporate or government efforts to recruit and promote the transition from conventional farming within Ontario, but it also likely reflects the continued exclusion of organic farming from the discourse on, and funding of, sustainable agriculture by the conventional farmer and farm commodity organizations.[81] Funded through various state and industry environmental and soil conservation programs, activities of conventional groups such as Agricultural Groups Concerned About Resources and Environment (AGCare) and the Ontario Soil Conservation Societies and Clubs continue to convince conventional farmers they can meet environmental and financial challenges of agriculture by changing *within* the current productivist paradigm. Simultaneously, conventional farmers are offered yet another technological solution to their financial and environmental problems, in the form of GMO crops.

The future ideological development of organic farming hinges on the entry of conventional farmers into organic farming, and depends on the approach that these farmers take once they become organic farmers. As such, how they get their knowledge and their understanding of organic farming is crucial. Currently, major organic organizations such as COG and EFAO provide most of the education, training, and information available to new organic farmers. While much of the education is technical in nature, these programs often encourage alternative thinking and ideas.

Many conventional farmers may be uninfluenced by these programs. As we've documented elsewhere, large-scale grain farmers who come from a conventional background are more likely to be motivated by profit and they often retain this as their primary motivation for farming organically.[82] On the other hand, our case studies and observations suggest that some of these farmers change their

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[80]More recent increases have been limited to 10-17 percent. On the other hand, there has been a 50 percent acreage increase in fruit and vegetables from 1999-2000. Macey, 2000, 2001, and 2002, *op. cit.*
[81]For example, see AGCare, *Our Farm Environmental Agenda.* Canada-Ontario Agriculture Green Plan, Guelph, Ontario, 2001.
[82]Hall and Mogyorody, *op. cit.*

views and motivations substantially over time through exposure to movement seminars, books, and informal discussions. It is also important to keep in mind that many conventional farmers make the shift because the productivist model did not work for them. All this may help explain the relative uniformity in production and marketing ideas that we found in our survey, even among those who came from a conventional farming background. However, the movement's control over information and knowledge may also change as the government becomes more directly involved in supporting organic farming.[83] This implies that the amount of control which organic organizations can maintain over farm research and farmer education may be an important aspect of the struggle over the meaning of organic farming.

9. Conclusion

Our study lead to the broad theoretical conclusion that the process of commodification in organic agriculture in Ontario, Canada, is not proceeding in a straightforward or unilinear fashion, nor is the outcome in terms of overall conventionalization, predetermined by any overarching logic of capital accumulation. Our research recognizes there are common pressures towards commodification and globalization, but according to our literature survey the pace, manner and outcome of that process are by no means fixed or invariant across different national and regional contexts.[84] As Coombes and Campbell show, New Zealand is different from California and, as this study suggests, Ontario is different still from California and New Zealand. As the literature suggests, there are also clearly substantial differences between various European countries in the pace of commodification and globalization.[85]

We suggest that the relative lack of capital intensification, commodification, and globalization of organic vegetable and fruit farming in Ontario is primarily a reflection of active resistance of the conventional agribusiness complex in Canada to organic farming,[86] and more specifically, its efforts to create a sustainable agriculture which excludes organic farming as a viable alternative. Political weakness of the organic movement and its supporters, including the environmental movement, are evident in their failure to challenge the farm industry's

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[83]Agriculture Canada, July 12, 2001, *op. cit.*

[84]Buck, et al., *op. cit.*; Clunies-Ross and Cox, *op. cit.*; Coombes and Campbell, *op. cit.*; Tovey, *op. cit.*

[85]Michelson, 2001a and 2001b, *op. cit.*

[86]The term complex is used here to refer to conventional agri-business, conventional farmer organizations and marketing boards, the agricultural research establishment, and the government ministries of agriculture.

discourse on food and environmental sustainability and to gain meaningful state support.

While crises in farm prices, ongoing subsidy disputes, and GMO controversies push the Canadian Federal government and some provincial governments to acknowledge the potential market value of organic farming, a central question is whether the organic movement has the ideological and political capacity to influence the emerging struggle over the meaning of organic farming. Arguably, the organic movement has succeeded in dealing with early controversies over new national organic standards without any major changes in production and processing standards, but whether this reflects the political strength of the movement is doubtful. Certainly, the state's emphasis in new regulations, policy statements, human resource staffing, and funding activities is on exports. To this point, the governments' and exporters' concerns about continued access to European and Japanese markets restrain the impulse to move aggressively to weaken the certification regulations. But if large-scale agribusiness capital investment begins to emerge, it may bring with it increasing pressures to modify production, processing, and shipping standards.[87]

The objective of local and direct marketing is one of "softer" principles in the organic community. While many if not most organic farmers and leaders see it as a laudable ideal, it is rarely defended as a principle pivotal to the survival of organic farming as an alternative paradigm. It is often seen as unrealistic to expect organic farming to follow the model of local production-consumer relations as it develops more popularity. Indeed, by placing so much emphasis on certification and the development of a national organic standard-setting process, organic organizations, in effect, concedes that consumers of organic food are often separated and distant from producers. This often means that the politics of organic farming are less about attacking the commercialization of organic food than establishing the conditions for penetrating and expanding those commercial markets. One thing seems particularly evident. More organic farmers will move in the export and wholesale direction if opportunities develop.

Nevertheless, as Campbell, Coombes, and others argue, we expect that local and direct marketing will survive over the long-term as an idea and practice within the Ontario organic community.[88] A proportion of the current organic community is committed to local direct

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[87]Guthman, *op. cit.*, p. 137.
[88]Campbell and Coombes, *op. cit.*; Campbell and Liepins, *op. cit.*; Clunies-Ross and Cox, *op. cit.*; Coombes and Campbell, *op. cit.*

marketing, either for ideological or lifestyle reasons, and it seems likely that they will continue to contest any emerging state or capital efforts towards overall conventionalization, if only by their very persistence. While some growth in numbers of organic farmers means an increase in conventionally-oriented farmers, there has also been a steady renewal of new organic farmers with an ideological or lifestyle commitment to direct market relations. Some farms may not survive but our data indicates that these farmers are not a dying breed within the community. Of course, their capacity to operate in an alternative fashion depends in large part on their ability to find consumers interested in direct producer/consumer relations. Whether Ontario consumer interest in alternative producer relations will continue to *grow* in popularity is more difficult to predict. Certainly, to date, farmers have no difficulty in finding local consumers. Some CSAs have long waiting lists. However, the recent appearance of large retail outlets and large organic sections in the major grocery stores, and the availability of highly processed organic foods are particularly worrisome trends which may draw people away from the alternative producer-consumer relations. Research on CSAs, confirmed by our observations and informal discussions with CSA shareholders, suggests CSAs are under significant strain with weak participation and substantial turnover in membership, in large part because the majority of the CSA shareholders do not understand or are not committed to the ideals of the CSA.[89]

Nevertheless, as in the farming community, there are urban organic consumers dedicated and committed to maintaining direct connections with farmers. For some, this commitment is driven by environmental or anti-globalization concerns, but the lack of trust in agribusiness and the state to provide safe and nutritious food is also a powerful force. The major controversies surrounding use and labeling of GMO in food production is an excellent illustration of this potential. Persistent food safety scares and resurgent concerns about the environment can all play potentially critical roles in fuelling the search among urban citizens for alternatives to conventional food production and distribution.

We can also expect continued restraint on the part of agribusiness and the state to dilute the meaning of organic farming as these concerns influence the global market. Persistent crises in conventional farm prices, continued subsidy demands and trade disputes, and increasing environmental and input costs, all play a role in weakening the capacity of conventional agribusiness to promote an uncontested productivist vision of the future which fully marginalizes organic farming or

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[89]Abbott, Cone, and Myhre, *op. cit.*

redefines it in the productivist mold. This may also explain the apparent reluctance of both state and agribusiness capital to move more aggressively and consistently to appropriate organic farming within a conventional framework Certainly, there are signs of change at least as far as the federal government is concerned, and the increase in the number of processors is suggestive of increasing capital investment and commodification, but the lack of large-scale state and capitalist investment in Ontario to date means that there is still considerable space for the persistence and perhaps even the growth of alternative ideas and practices within the community.

If market and political conditions continue to change in this direction, an increased degree of bifurcation along the lines reported in many other countries is likely, including an enhanced movement of conventional farmers into organic farming. While this bifurcation does not mean the demise of organic farming as an alternative paradigm, there is still the question of whether the alternative orientation will grow sufficiently enough to represent a meaningful challenge to conventional agriculture. Bifurcation itself presents a number of potential threats to the alternative movement. In particular, it increases the likelihood of internal community conflicts over the goals, meaning, and designation of organic farming and food, this in turn may translate into political weakness over time, especially if more conventional elements of the organic community begin to ally with the state and conventional agribusiness interests to marginalize and appropriate the smaller alternative operations, as has happened in California.[90] On the other hand, such conflict may serve to mobilize alternative elements of the community, encouraging them to build alliances as they realize the need to defend their viewpoints and practices. The more explicit attention to political discourse and lobbying among the organic organizations in Ontario may partly reflect this influence.

Realizing the transformative potential of organic farming is difficult, but the outcome is not just a function of what the organic farm community does or does not do. As a number of our case study farmers would stress over and over again in our discussions with them, "farmers are few and can only do so much." Urban consumers, and in particular urban social movements, are crucial to the long-term development of organic agriculture and agriculture more generally. Unless there are more concerted efforts by various movements including the organic movement to draw together questions and alternative visions of food production and marketing with environmental, democratization

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[90]Buck, et al., *op cit.*

and other anti-globalization and anti-capitalist issues, the potential offered by the organic paradigm will not be realized.[91]

This points to the importance of political dynamics and discourses, and the role of both rural and urban social movements in shaping the commodification process. However, there is another political economic aspect to the analysis which is also crucial. We need to pay closer attention to the contradictions, limitations, and actions of internationalist productivist agriculture and its supporting state apparatus. While recognizing the concentration of enormous political-economic power held by transnational agri-business, we have also highlighted the limitations of their control over public and state discourses, and the subsequent resistance to corporate actions. Food scares, the GMO and labeling controversies, the frequent breakdown of neo-liberal policies and trade negotiations, the endless farm financing crises and subsidy problems, and continued concerns about pesticides and fertilizers are all indications of the vulnerability of conventional capitalist agriculture. In the final analysis, the continued growth of organic agriculture in its alternative form, despite conventional community efforts to resist and marginalize it, is a sign of weakness, as is the apparent reluctance of agribusiness to move more definitively to integrate and appropriate organic farming along productivist lines.

While the growth of an alternative orientation is clearly contingent on a number of complex developments, we suggest, as a final point, that the transformative potential of organic farming is at least partly contained in its very existence. Even if its growth continues to be limited, at least relative to its more conventionalized form, the persistence of alternative practices and ideas in the community are important in themselves because these operations provide concrete illustrations of what is possible, not only in terms of food production and distribution, but also of social relations and production more generally.[92] Organic farming, especially within the context of the CSA model, demonstrates an alternative vision in which producers and consumers consciously work together at the local level to meet mutual needs in ways which are not exploitive. These examples, as tenuous as they often are, may sustain the kind of unifying counter-hegemonic discourse essential to long-term development and integration of

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[91]L. Adkin "Environmental Politics, Political Economy, and Social Democracy in Canada," *Studies in Political Economy*, 45, Fall, 1994, p. 154.

[92]Campbell and Liepins, *op. cit.*; Kovel, *op. cit.*

environmental, health, and food safety movements, and most important in the current context, the anti-globalization movements.[93]

The idea of local direct producer/consumer relations is so important in the current context, because it speaks directly to the central challenges being made by the anti-globalization movements. To sustain the appeal of those challenges, the movements must develop and promote positive alternatives to globalization which they can construct as viable options at the same time that they encourage us to think about social, natural and economic relations in fundamentally different ways. Those options must also be grounded in a broader conceptual and ideological framework which integrates a variety of other concerns including environmental, food safety, gender, labor, and international equity. Despite its limitations, when viewed as a holistic alternative paradigm, organic farming offers the beginnings of this kind of framework.

[93]A. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971).