

**PARALLEL ALTERNATIVES:
CHINESE-CANADIAN FARMERS AND THE
METRO VANCOUVER LOCAL FOOD MOVEMENT**

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores how food system localisation efforts in Metro Vancouver, Canada intersect with one of the tensions in the global agri-food system: racial inequalities. Drawing on archival research, participant observation of local food marketing and policy-making, and interviews with local food movement participants, policy-makers, and Chinese-Canadian farmers, I argue that the history of anti-Chinese racism in Canada is linked to the emergence of a food system comprised of parallel networks. An older network consists of roadside stores and greengrocers supplied by Chinese-Canadian farmers. A newer, rapidly expanding network includes farmers' markets and other institutions publicly supported by the local food movement. Both networks are 'local' in that they link producers, consumers, and place; however, these networks have few points of intentional connection and collaboration. I conclude by considering the implications of the underrepresentation of Chinese-Canadian farmers in some of the local food movement's most publicly visible manifestations.

Keywords: local food movement; alternative food network; food justice; racialisation; Chinese-Canadian

To Grandma, Mom, and Steve,
who taught me about growing vegetables

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1. INTRODUCTION

Under the banner of local food, a growing number of people and organisations in North America and Europe are advocating for changes in how food is produced, processed, packaged, transported, distributed, and consumed. Local food systems are argued to offer an array of benefits, including: making fresher, tastier, nutritious food more readily available; reducing greenhouse gas emissions associated with long-range food distribution; supporting diversified, small-scale, sustainable farms; revitalising and celebrating local and regional cultures; contributing to regional community economic development; cultivating a land ethic and a connection to place; and strengthening community ties (Feenstra, 2002; Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010; Stevenson, Kloppenburg, & Hendrickson, 1996). In brief, for diverse food system actors, food system localisation is seen as a means of resolving social injustices and environmental degradation within the contemporary global agri-food system (see Allen 2004, 2010).

This thesis examines how food system localisation efforts in Metro Vancouver, Canada intersect with racialising processes. Racialising processes – the social processes that define, construct, and constitute different categories of people with the effect of “exalting” some (see Thobani, 2007) while marginalising others (Dei, Karumanchery, & Karumanchery-Luik, 2004; Fleras & Wallis, 2009; Henry, 2000; Satzewich & Liodakis, 2007) – are widely recognised to mark globalised systems of food provisioning but are seldom explored in the context of local food systems (see Guthman, 2008a; Slocum, 2006).

Specifically, this thesis takes up Guthman’s (2008b) invocation for alternative agri-food scholars and activists to move toward an anti-racist “politics of listening and watching... that might allow others to define the spaces and projects of food transformation” (p. 442-3). I investigate the discourses and practices of local food not only from the perspectives of the people – typically white, middle class, and affluent (Allen, 2004; Campigotto, 2010; Guthman, 2008a, 2008b; Slocum, 2006, 2007, 2008) – who identify as participants in alternative agri-food movements, but also from the perspectives of Chinese-Canadian farmers, who have a long and significant history in local food production in Metro Vancouver but are less commonly

represented in alternative agri-food discourses and institutions. Chinese-Canadians have farmed in the area now known as Metro Vancouver since at least the 1880s (Con & Wickberg, 1982), and they currently make up 375 – or nearly 15 per cent – of Metro Vancouver’s 2,520 farmers and farm managers (Statistics Canada, 2006).

Studying the intersections between food system localisation efforts and racialising processes in the urban region of Metro Vancouver is at once an instructive and an idiosyncratic process. Provincially and nationally, Metro Vancouver stands out as a farming region with a high proportion of farmers of colour. In 2006, 38.9 per cent of Metro Vancouver farmers and farm managers reported belonging to a visible minority group¹ – a proportion three times higher than the provincial rate, and 18 times higher than the national rate (Statistics Canada, 2006). In Metro Vancouver, as in British Columbia (BC) and in Canada as a whole, the number one visible minority group among farmers and farm managers is South Asian, followed by Chinese (Statistics Canada, 2006).

Metro Vancouver also stands out as a hotbed for food system localisation efforts. The region was the home base for James McKinnon and Alissa Smith’s 100-Mile Diet experiment – an initiative widely credited with catalysing interest in local food in Canada (see Beers, 2010; Broadway & Broadway, 2011). Polls indicate that the majority of Metro Vancouver residents intentionally look for food grown or produced in BC when grocery shopping and almost nine in ten Metro Vancouver residents believe it is important to buy local food (Metro Vancouver, 2011a). Currently, local food reaches Metro Vancouver consumers through various networks. These networks include: farmers’ markets; community-supported agriculture; local organic delivery services; restaurants showcasing local foods; institutional purchasing of local sustainable foods; agri-tourism; U-Pick farms; and farm gate sales (Chinnakonda & Telford, 2007; VPFC, 2009). Some, but not all, of the actors involved in these networks consider their work to be part of an emergent social movement: the local food movement (see Beers, 2010).

In asking how food system localisation efforts intersect with racialising processes, I do not aim to delegitimise the work of the people and the organisations working to promote local

¹ In Canada, the Employment Equity Act defines visible minorities as “persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour” (Statistics Canada, 2011, n.p.).

food. Rather, I seek to understand of why people of colour are often underrepresented in alternative agri-food projects and institutions *despite* deliberate efforts to make these projects and institutions inclusive (see Allen, 2004; Guthman, 2008a, 2008b; Slocum, 2006; Winne, 2008). Since 2006, I have managed a non-certified organic farm, bought and sold local food at farmers' markets, facilitated dozens of food-themed workshops for high school students and teachers, and had the opportunity to speak with hundreds of local food activists and advocates about justice, sustainability, and food systems. This thesis responds to questions I have heard from many of these passionate and committed local food advocates – questions like “how can we bring ethnic and immigrant communities to the table to talk about local food?” Or, “what more can we do? We translated our materials into Chinese, but the Chinese community still doesn't shop at farmers' markets!”

Below, I review the academic literature relating to these activist questions. This review of the alternative agri-food, food justice, and critical race theory literature serves to situate and to justify the research questions guiding this thesis. I then contextualise the study by providing an overview of the Metro Vancouver agri-food sector, outlining both “conventional” and “local” elements of the food system. Finally, I explain the study methodology and provide an overview of the main arguments in this thesis.

Literature review

Food systems are a shifting and contested terrain. Around the world, the chains of activities involved in feeding people have become increasingly industrialised, consolidated, corporatised, and globalised (Friedmann, 2005; International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science, and Technology for Development [IAASTD], 2009; McMichael & Friedmann, 2007). Since the start of the twentieth century, farms have generally become bigger, fewer in number, more specialised, more industrialised, and more dependent on agricultural suppliers and contractors (Friedmann, 1994; Lyson, 2004). The food networks, or pathways, through which food moves from producers to consumers have become longer, in terms of both *geographic* and *social* distance (Renting, Marden, & Banks, 2003). In North America, for instance, most regions were largely self-sufficient in meeting local food needs at the start of the twentieth century; today, most regions rely on imports to meet local demand for out-of-season foods, foods that cannot be grown in the local climatic region, and foods that can be obtained

more cheaply through trade (Lyson, 2004). Much food, whether or not it is consumed in the region where it was produced, passes through the hands of multiple and increasingly consolidated actors – including not only farmers, but also food inspectors, processors, distributors, wholesalers, retailers, and others – before reaching consumers (Friedmann, 1994). As food networks have lengthened, they have also become more anonymous, obscuring information about what, how, by whom, and under what conditions food is produced (Renting et al., 2003). Yet, recent assessments warn that what are often termed “conventional” farming practices are degrading the soil and water resources on which agriculture depends (IAASTD, 2009). Among the agricultural practices linked with the degradation of soil and water quality are: the use of synthetic pesticides, herbicides, and fertilisers; tillage; monocropping; little use of crop rotation, fallow periods, and cover-cropping; raising livestock in confinement at high density; and others (National Research Council [NRC], 2010). Moreover, world historical analyses indicate the contemporary global agri-food system deepens and relies on racialising, gendering, and other exploitative processes (Friedmann, 1990; Jarosz, 1996; McMichael & Friedmann, 2007; McMichael, 2009).

The agri-food system described above is neither inevitable nor inexorable. Food systems are historically contingent, value-laden, and shifting (Friedmann, 2005; McMichael, 2009). Agri-food system scholars disagree on the extent to which the contemporary global agri-food system is regulated by international food regimes (Friedmann, 2005), heterogeneous at the local level (Ward & Almås, 1997), and shaped by people who respond variously to social and economic changes (Arce & Marsden, 1993). There is, however, broad consensus among agri-food system scholars that deepening social, environmental, and economic tensions in the contemporary global agri-food system are being resisted (Friedmann & McNair, 2008; McMichael, 2009).

Food system localisation has emerged as a particularly galvanising discourse and organising strategy for a variety of actors seeking to create change in the food system (see Allen 2004, 2010). Local food systems are usually defined as food systems in which the chains of activities involved in feeding people occur within a designated area (Metro Vancouver, 2011b). The boundaries of the local area may be defined by geographic distance (Beers, 2010), by temporal distance (Blouin, Lemay, Ashraf, Kausar, & Konforti, 2009), by political jurisdiction (see Metro Vancouver, 2011b), by bioregion (Chinnakonda & Telford, 2007; Kloppenburg, Lezberg,

De Master, Stevenson, & Hendrickson, 2000), or by social distance (e.g. by the number of intermediaries between producers and consumers; see Blouin et al., 2009; Renting, Marsden, & Banks, 2003). The fluidity of the boundaries of “local” reflects the socially constructed nature of local food: like their globalised counterparts, local food systems are constructed by people at a particular time and in particular places seeking to advance particular goals (Allen, 2010; Hinrichs, 2003).

Local food: An alternative food network?

The alternative agri-food literature conceptualises food system localisation in two interrelated ways. The first approach uses food networks – the supply chains that move food from the point of production to the point of consumption – as a unit of analysis. Conventional, globalised systems of food provisioning are associated with long, anonymous supply chains that obscure information about what, how, where, by whom, and under what conditions food is produced (Renting et al., 2003). In contrast, local food systems are associated with short food supply chains, or “alternative food networks” designed to re-socialise and re-spatialise food (Renting et al., 2003). To use the phrase popular among local food advocates, alternative food networks are supposed to “connect people with where their food comes from.” By connecting people with where their food comes from, alternative food networks are argued to enable various social, environmental, and economic objectives, including: cooperation, reciprocity and trust between producers and consumers (Hinrichs, 2000; Jarosz, 2000); food production systems that do not degrade soil, air, and water quality (Follett, 2009); and a reconnection between food and culture (Renting et al., 2003).

Agri-food system researchers have observed the emergence of alternative food networks – mostly in North America and Europe – since the 1990s, and they conceptualise alternative food networks as emerging out of particular historical, political, social, economic, and ecological developments. These developments include: the growing numbers of consumers willing and able to pay for ‘niche’ foods (Goodman & Goodman, 2009); recurrent food scares (such as BSE and listeriosis) that undermine public confidence in the conventional food system (Blay-Palmer, 2008; Goodman & Goodman, 2009); the confluence of environmental, organic agriculture, and civil rights movements, which raised public awareness about the social and

ecological impacts of the conventional food system (Goodman & Goodman, 2009); and rural restructuring and urbanisation (Jarosz, 2008).

While agri-food scholars debate the usefulness of notions such as quality (Goodman, 2004), authenticity (Marsden, Banks, & Bristow, 2000; Smithers, Lamarche, & Joseph, 2008), and embeddedness (Hinrichs, 2000; Renting et al., 2003) in defining alternative food networks, Jarosz (2008) offers a more practical definition for researchers seeking to identify (rather than disentangle the meanings of) alternative food networks. Reviewing the alternative agri-food literature, Jarosz (2008) finds alternative food networks are defined in four main ways: (1) by shorter relationships between producers and consumers; (2) by the existence of food purchasing venues oriented to alternative foods such as local, seasonal, organic products; (3) by farms smaller in size and scale than those associated with industrial agribusiness; and (4) by a commitment to sustainable food systems (p. 232). A cursory examination of alternative food networks around the world reveals an alphabet soup of strategies that meet these four criteria. Artisanal, biodynamic, designated country of origin, direct trade, fair trade, local, organic, sustainable, *terroir*,² and wild harvested foods are among the many products of alternative food networks.

In sum, this literature has helped clarify the goals, emergence, and defining characteristics of the “alternative” supply chains that move food from local producers to local consumers. The alternative food network literature does not account, however, for the observation that many participants in local food projects and institutions understand their activities as a social movement (see Allen, 2004). That is, for many local food producers, consumers, and advocates, local food is not just about changing how food moves from producer to consumer, but also about changing the cultural meanings of food and about changing the way decisions about the food system are made (see Levkoe, 2006).

²Terroir refers to “the combination of natural factors (soil, water, slope, height above sea level, vegetation, microclimate) and human ones (tradition and practice of cultivation) that gives a unique character to each small agricultural locality and the food grown, raised, made, and cooked there” (Petrini, 2001, p. 8, cited in Friedmann & McNair, 2008).

Local food: A social movement?

The second way agri-food system scholars study local food is through the lens of social movements (e.g. Allen, FitzSimmons, Goodman, & Warner, 2003; Allen, 2004; Friedmann & McNair, 2008; Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010; Hassanein, 2003; Starr, 2010). While the definition of social movements has been the subject of much scholarly debate, these phenomena are generally understood as collective, organised, and sustained efforts to challenge the status quo (Kriesi, Snow, & Soule, 2004). Alternative agri-food movements are broadly conceived as “the social activity of sustainable agriculturalists, local food advocates, environmentalists, food security activists, and others who are working to bring about changes at a variety of different levels of the agro-food system” (Hassanein, 2003, p. 80).

Alternative agri-food movements operate under various banners, including slow food (Friedmann & McNair, 2008; Petrini, 2001), sustainable agriculture (Allen, 2004), food democracy (Hassanein, 2003), community food security (Allen, 2004), food sovereignty (Kneen, 2011), food justice (Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010), and local food (Allen, 2010; Starr, 2010). Of these various frames, food system localisation has emerged as a particularly galvanising one for producers, consumers, activists, and community organisations working to create change in the food system. Indeed, Allen (2010) observes that, since food system localisation began to be proposed as an alternative to the global agri-food system in the 1990s, the “value of local food systems has become almost common sense for those working in the alternative agrifood movement” (p. 296).

Local and other alternative agri-food movements draw on diverse organisational strategies. For instance, alternative agri-food movements variously and simultaneously advocate for policy change, promote market-based solutions such as ethical consumption, support alternative food networks, and create media that are challenging the dominant cultural meanings of food (Allen, 2004; Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010; Starr, 2010). The diversity of organisational strategies used by local food advocates further clarifies the logic of examining local food through the broader lens of social movements, rather than simply through the narrower lens of alternative food networks.

In sum, for many actors involved in the alternative food networks and social movements associated with local food, food system localisation is a means of resisting social and

environmental tensions in the global agri-food system. Yet, the agri-food systems literature questions the extent to which food system localisation actually constitutes a *socially transformative* alternative. Critical social scientists caution that assertions about the value of local food systems tend to be based on logic that confuses ends (e.g. social justice and sustainability) with means (e.g. localising systems of food provisioning) and on a reification of local communities (see Allen, 2004; Born & Purcell, 2006; Dupuis & Goodman, 2005). Other scholars argue the small scale (Connelly, 2010; Friedmann & McNair, 2008) and incrementalism (Connelly, Markey and Roseland, 2011) of local food initiatives limit their potential to transform the deep inequities riddling the contemporary global agri-food system. Still others warn that the rapidly growing popularity of local and organic foods places these developments at risk of being co-opted by corporate players with little interest in environmental or social justice goals (Friedmann, 2005; Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010; Guthman, 2004).

The colour of local food

One strand of the literature on the transformative potential of food system localisation efforts critically examines how they variously perpetuate, ignore, and undermine racial inequalities. In reviewing this small, but growing body of literature below, I use the terms “people of colour” and “white.” These terms have been much criticised by sociologists and other critical scholars. As Slocum (2006) observes, “[the] terms ‘people of color’ and ‘white’ are expedient but problematic. White is the somehow colorless norm; people of color, every other hue” (p. 344). These terms also homogenise differences within groups and downplay the ways people may be contesting and redefining these categories. When I use the terms “people of colour” and “white,” I use them because, despite such conceptual difficulties, these terms have been effective in mobilizing anti-racist activism in Canada and the United States.

The literature on racial inequalities and local and alternative foods can roughly be divided into three clusters. The first cluster of studies examines racial differences in local food *consumption*. Studies in the United States (Alkon & McCullen, 2011; Slocum, 2007, 2008) and Canada (Campigotto, 2010) note that people of colour are underrepresented in farmers’ markets, natural food stores, and other spaces of local food consumption. These studies suggest that alternative foods are overwhelmingly eaten by privileged (white and wealthy) consumers *not* because people of colour do not know or care about healthy, sustainable food

systems (see Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010). Instead, the specific ways local and alternative foods are promoted, packaged and sold are argued to cater to a “white” ideal about what constitutes good food (Alkon & McCullen, 2011; Slocum, 2007, 2008).

A second set of studies examines who is *defining* and *delineating* local and alternative foods. These studies note that alternative agri-food organisations, initiatives, and institutions not only are overwhelmingly led and staffed by white people, but also reflect distinctively white ways of thinking about food, health, and sustainability (Guthman, 2008a, 2008b; Slocum, 2006, 2008). For instance, Guthman (2008b) argues that the whiteness of alternative food discourses can be observed in the missionary zeal with which alternative agri-food organisations in California seek to “bring good food to others” and exalt one particular way of eating (2008, p. 433). This observation is recognised by some of Guthman’s students, who through working with alternative agri-food organisations active in communities marginalised by race and/or class, come to understand that current alternative agri-food projects tend to reflect the desires of their (primarily) white leaders and staff more than they reflect the aspirations of the low-income and racialised communities the projects putatively serve.

Finally, a third cluster of studies interrogates racial inequalities in the *production* of local and other “alternative” foods. In the United States (Allen, 2010; Guthman, 2004) and BC (Otero & Preibisch, 2010), people of colour are underrepresented among farm owners, but make up the majority of hired farm workers. In this context, alternative agri-food movements’ emphasis on “supporting your local farmer” may function to foreground the contributions and struggles of white people, while silencing those of people of colour (Alkon & McCullen, 2011; Allen, 2010). Alternative agri-food movements thus seem to elide the hard question of who produces “local” food and under what conditions.

These three sets of studies should not be taken as evidence that all alternative agri-food organisations and social movements everywhere offer only constrained opportunities for people of colour. These studies do, however, shed light on some of the ways food system localisation efforts may be reinscribing racial inequalities *despite the social justice objectives* of the alternative food networks and social movements associated with local food. Certainly, racial inequalities are not unique to alternative agri-food movements and alternative food networks; on the contrary, there is broad consensus that the contemporary global agri-food system

deepens and relies on gendering, racialising, and other exploitative processes (Friedmann, 1990; Jarosz, 1996; McMichael & Friedmann, 2007; McMichael, 2009). Nor can food system localisation be expected to end all racial inequalities. Still, as Allen (2010) reminds us, now that food system localisation has emerged as a “common sense” approach to addressing social, environmental, and economic tensions in the contemporary global agri-food system, “[it] is important to parse to which problems food system localization is a solution, to which it is not and perhaps cannot be, and to examine if there are conditions it reifies or problems it exacerbates” (p. 295).

A food justice framework

In the United States and Canada, agri-food system scholars have begun to explore how embracing *food justice* as a principle and organising strategy might allow alternative agri-food movements to build alliances with low-income people and people of colour (Alkon & Norgaard, 2009), begin rectifying historical and structural inequalities in the distribution of food system benefits and burdens (Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010), and democratise the food system (Levkoe, 2006). In what they claim to be the first comprehensive analysis of food justice in the United States, Gottlieb and Joshi (2010) characterise food justice as “ensuring that the benefits and risks of where, what, and how food is grown and produced, transported and distributed, and accessed and eaten are shared fairly” (p. 6). Gottlieb and Joshi’s (2010) food justice framework significantly advances understandings of social justice within local food systems because it underscores the need for equity in *all* activities in the food system. Most notably, Gottlieb and Joshi’s (2010) food justice framework urges activists and scholars to broaden food justice agendas – which tend to focus on food access and consumption issues – and attend to issues relating to *who* is producing local foods and under what conditions.

Helpful as it is, Gottlieb and Joshi’s (2010) food justice framework is limited in scope. The importance of fair processes to the attainment of equitable outcomes is a point Gottlieb and Joshi (2010) *implicitly* recognise in their book: nearly all of the examples they present not only describe how food justice processes have improved working conditions, access to healthy food, or wages for marginalised people and communities, but also outline the influential roles played by marginalised people and communities in creating change within the food system. However, the food justice framework *explicitly* outlined in their book speaks exclusively to

distributive justice, or the fair distribution of benefits and burdens, within the food system. As philosopher and environmental justice scholar Kristin Shrader-Frechette (2002) argues, efforts to promote distributive justice must be paired with efforts to correct the unjust structures and procedures of decision-making. Otherwise, without addressing structural and procedural issues, the real causes of injustice will not be addressed (p. 27).

The environmental justice literature offers two important insights into how Gottlieb and Joshi's (2010) food justice framework might be expanded. First, understandings of justice and injustice should not be limited to the fair distribution of benefits and burdens. Pulling together the feminist, anti-racist, and environmental justice literatures, Agyeman, Cole, Delay, and O'Reilly (2009) identify three dimensions of environmental justice. *Distributive justice* entails the equitable distribution of environmental benefits, such as clean air and access to healthy and aesthetic natural spaces, and environmental burdens, such as toxic waste dumps, and contaminated water. *Procedural justice* involves equal opportunity to participate in decision-making. Access to information, participatory opportunities, and the power to shape discourses and decision-making are essential components of procedural justice. Finally, the *recognition* dimension of environmental justice speaks to questions of whose knowledge counts. Who is allowed to speak? In whose name? What knowledge is respected? Under which circumstances? Who legitimises this knowledge (Agyeman et al., 2009, pp. 6-8)? The recognition dimension of environmental justice is closely linked to the process philosopher Iris Marion Young calls normalisation. According to Young (2006), normalisation consists of "processes that construct experience and capacities of some social segments into standards against which all are measured and some found wanting, or deviant" (p. 96). Thus, recognition hinges on critical awareness of which experiences, practices, and ways of knowing are normalised, and which are rendered invisible, deprecated, or stigmatised.

This three-pronged approach to understanding environmental justice can be applied to food justice. Food justice, then, can be characterised as: ensuring that food system benefits and burdens are shared fairly; ensuring equal opportunities to participate in food system governance and decision-making; and ensuring that diverse perspectives and ways of knowing about the food system are recognised and respected.

The second key insight that the environmental justice literature offers food justice activists and scholars pertains to when oppression and injustices can be said to occur. Among alternative agri-food food advocates and scholars, oppression – especially racial oppression – is generally framed as a personal rather than structural phenomenon (Slocum, 2006, p. 337). That is to say, oppression is said to occur if a person or an organisation *intended* to discriminate based on race, class, gender, or other axis of oppression. Recent work by environmental justice activists and scholars illuminates why this narrow conceptualisation of oppression is inadequate. Poor and racialised communities are bearing the brunt of air pollution, toxic waste dumping, and other environmental burdens that make consumer lifestyles possible. Current policies and practices – whether or not they have discriminatory intent – operate in a context marked by historical processes of racialisation and other forms of “othering” (Holifield, 2001; Pulido, 1996). Therefore, intent to discriminate cannot be taken as necessary grounds for establishing that an environmental injustice has occurred.

Similarly, injustices can – and do – occur in the food system even in the absence of laws or policies that explicitly discriminate based on race, class, gender, or other axis of oppression. As Alkon and Norgaard (2009) point out, in the United States, access to healthy, fresh, local food is “shaped not only by the economic ability to purchase it, but also by the historical processes through which race has come to affect who lives where and who has access to what kind of services” (p. 300). Moreover, the failure to enforce agricultural pesticide regulations may not be intended to discriminate against migrants, immigrants, and people of colour. Nonetheless, because of labour, immigration, and other policies and the historic reliance of agriculture on low-wage labourers, these people are disproportionately affected by dangerous pesticide use (Guthman, 2004).

Talking about race

In this study, I focus specifically on race as an axis of inequality within the food system. Recognising that race is socially constructed, that is to say, that the meanings attributed to race change over time and from place to place, feminist and critical race scholars propose that examining the processes of racialisation is more productive and emancipatory than studying race as a fixed entity. Racialisation refers to the social processes that define, construct, and constitute different categories of people, with the effect of “exalting” some (see Thobani, 2007)

and marginalising others in society (Dei, Karumanchery, & Karumanchery-Luik, 2004; Fleras & Wallis, 2009; Henry, 2000; Satzewich & Liodakis, 2007). Historically, people have been racialised on the basis of various physical, cultural, and social characteristics – phenotypic characteristics like skin colour being the most common. Although based on false assumptions about the connections between phenotypic, social, and cultural characteristics, racialising processes continue to confer identifiable and tangible privileges to some while denying them to others. As clarified above in the section on food justice, the inequalities produced through racialisation may be *distributive, procedural, and/or* related to the *recognition and respect* of diverse perspectives and ways of knowing.

Racialisation does not operate independently of other processes of discrimination. Transformational work on intersectionality by Patricia Hill Collins (2000a) and others (Choo & Ferree, 2010; Thobani, 2007) has exposed the ways that multiple systems of oppression, such as race, class, gender, sexuality and citizenship status (hereafter referred to as “othering processes”), interact to produce social inequalities. While recognising that multiple forms of oppression intersect, I follow Dei, Karumanchery, and Karumanchery-Luik (2004) in drawing on a “specialised and localised engagement with race and racism” (p. 3) to frame this study.

The decision to foreground race as an axis of inequality was deliberate. One of the most notable features of the agri-food systems literature is its longstanding neglect of questions of racial difference and white privilege in alternative agri-food discourses and practices (cf. Guthman, 2008a; Slocum, 2006). Indeed, recognising racial inequalities and contesting white privilege may be particularly difficult within the spaces and discourses of local food movements. As Alkon and McCullen (2011) observed in their ethnographic study of two Californian farmers’ markets, these spaces often reflect a variant of whiteness that is distinguished by its tendency to maintain a liberal regard for cultural diversity while leaving race and class privileges unexamined.

Local food activists are not alone in their silence on race and racism. In Canada, talking about race has been something of a taboo since multiculturalism was adopted as a state policy in the 1970s. Enacted as official state policy in Canada under Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, multiculturalism was introduced to accomplish four objectives: the cultivation of diversity and ethnic identities; the full involvement of ethnic minorities in Canadian society; national unity

and social harmony; and awareness of and tolerance for ethnic diversity (Little Bear, Boldt, & Long, 1985 cited in Fleras & Elliott, 1992). Though widely understood as indicative of Canadians' tolerance and cosmopolitan sensibility, the shift in national discourse from "race" to "culture," "ethnicity," and "diversity" also serves to limit the spaces available to challenge racial oppression (Dei et al., 2004; Thobani, 2007). Indeed, Thobani (2007) points out that multiculturalism was adopted at a time when post-colonial and anti-racist movements were gaining ground. Adopting multicultural policies that framed discrimination and racial hatred as belonging to "the now disclaimed past" and "a small minority of recalcitrant whites who refused or were unable to mask their racisms" thus served to diffuse some of the tensions building around white privilege and racial inequalities (Thobani, 2007, p. 154). In short, multiculturalism purports to celebrate cultural diversity, while suppressing public discussion of persistent racial inequalities in education, employment, health care, the legal system, and other facets of Canadian society. Critical race scholars Dei, Karumanchery, and Karumanchery-Luik (2004) explain

In reality, multicultural policies and programs tend to promote surface level changes to perception and understanding without critically examining the social, economic, political, and historical factors that frame, construct, and bolster racism. Multiculturalism frames racism as a cultural issue to be combated through education about *other* cultures, customs, and practices. In fact, such policies do little to address power imbalances or issues of equity (p. 68).

In light of this near-total silence on race, foregrounding race while recognising the interconnections between race, class, gender, ethnicity and citizenship (see Dei et al., 2004) is a theoretically rigorous and politically savvy strategy for activists and scholars seeking to understand inequalities in alternative agri-food movements in particular, and in food systems more generally. Foregrounding race is a way of insisting that race matters. As peace and justice activist and scholar Deborah Piatelli (2009) argues, failure to acknowledge racialisation risks reinforcing patterns of power, privilege, and oppression (p. 138).

Recent work by whiteness scholars warns that patterns of power, privilege, and oppression can be reinscribed not only by failing to acknowledge racialising processes, but also by failing to recognise the complexity of whiteness. Treating whiteness as immutably racist and/or as inherent to alternative food networks and local food movements may function to

cement racist practices and limit the spaces available to challenge racial oppression. Recognising this possibility, scholars such as Alkon and McCullen (2011) and Slocum (2006) attend both to the ways racism functions materially and ideologically within alternative agri-food discourses and practices, and to the ways people are transforming, contesting and undermining “othering” processes within these spaces. It is in this way – by tacking between focused attention on historical and contemporary forms of racialisation and a cautious hopefulness that these power relations will be transformed – that I explore food system localisation efforts in Metro Vancouver.

Research problem

This thesis examines the discourses and practices of local food not only from the perspectives of the people – typically white, middle class, and affluent (Allen, 2004; Campigotto, 2010; Guthman, 2008a, 2008b; Slocum, 2006, 2007, 2008) – who identify as participants in alternative agri-food movements, but also from the perspectives of Chinese-Canadian farmers, who have a long and significant history in local food production in Metro Vancouver but are less commonly represented in alternative agri-food discourses and institutions. The objective of this thesis is to explore *how efforts to localise the food system intersect with racialising processes in the urban region of Metro Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada*. This thesis focuses on the historical processes that have constructed “local food” as it is today in Metro Vancouver but also considers how the region’s increasingly vibrant local food movement engages with the concerns and contributions of food system actors belonging to racialised minority groups.

Three questions focused the data gathering and analysis for this study. First, what are the contours of food system localisation efforts in Metro Vancouver? Second, to what extent does the Metro Vancouver local food movement include, and recognise the contributions of, Chinese-Canadian farmers? Third, what are the historical and contemporary roles of Chinese-Canadian farmers in the Metro Vancouver food system? In the remaining pages of this chapter, I situate the study by providing an overview of the Metro Vancouver agri-food sector, showing how the sector is characterised by attributes associated with both “conventional” and “local” food. I then explain the study methodology and, finally, provide an overview of my main arguments.

Finding the “local” in the locale: An overview of the Metro Vancouver agri-food sector

Since the 1990s, public and academic debates over the agri-food sector in North America and Europe have often drawn on dichotomies between “conventional” and “local” or “alternative” food systems (see NRC, 2010). Recently, however, agri-food system scholars have begun insisting that local and conventional food systems are interrelated and more productively understood as a continuum (see Hinrichs, 2003; Sonnino & Marsden, 2006; Ward & Almås, 1997). Empirical research indicates that, in practice, there is considerable diversity within – and considerable overlap between – “conventional” and “local” food. For instance, even on small farms that market their produce directly to local consumers, monocropping, exploitative labour practices, and other socially and environmentally harmful practices can, and sometimes do, occur (see Allen, 2004; Guthman, 2004; Jarosz, 2008).

In Metro Vancouver, the urban region where I conducted this study, the agri-food sector is characterised by attributes associated with both conventional and local food systems. Below, I describe the structure of the Metro Vancouver agri-food sector, drawing on the conventional/local dichotomy to illustrate the context in which producers, consumers, policy-makers, and other food system actors are working toward food system localisation efforts, but recognising that the line between conventional and local food systems is blurred.

How is the Metro Vancouver agri-food sector conventional?

Metro Vancouver is a highly productive agricultural region. With 41,035 hectares of farmland, Metro Vancouver makes up less than 1.5 per cent of the BC agricultural land base, yet, 28 per cent of the province’s farm gate receipts are generated in this metropolitan area (Metro Vancouver, 2006). The high productivity (in terms of farm gate receipts per hectare of farmland) of the Metro Vancouver agricultural sector reflects the regionalisation of agriculture in BC: the production of many high-value commodities, including berries, field vegetables, greenhouse products, and, to a lesser extent, dairy products, is concentrated in this region (Metro Vancouver, 2006; see also Wittman & Barbolet, 2011).

Metro Vancouver’s farms numbered 2,618 in 2006; down from 2,854 in 2001 and 3,464 in 1996 (Metro Vancouver, 2006). Although the number of certified organic farms in Metro

Vancouver *increased* from 26 in 2001 to 44 in 2006 (Metro Vancouver, 2008), agricultural production in the region can generally be characterised as reliant on synthetic agricultural inputs and fossil fuels (Metro Vancouver, 2011b). In Metro Vancouver, as in many parts of the world, farm operating and input costs are increasing while the relative prices paid to farmers in the global market are dropping (Metro Vancouver, 2011b). This “price squeeze” is linked to an ageing farm population, as few young people are starting to farm (Metro Vancouver, 2011b) and to the agricultural sector’s continued reliance on low-wage labour provided by mostly migrant and immigrant workers (see Otero & Preibisch, 2010). In 2008, the approximately 10,000 workers in BC’s horticultural industry included at least 6,000 Punjabi-speaking immigrant workers and 3,000 Mexican migrant workers (Otero & Preibisch, 2010, p. 4).

The Metro Vancouver agri-food sector is characterised by attributes associated with conventional food systems in not only the production, but also the *distribution* and the *consumption* realms. Much of the food produced in Metro Vancouver is distributed through socially and geographically long food supply chains. In terms of volume, sales to wholesalers and processors – for export or local markets – accounted for 91 per cent of field vegetable sales and 98 per cent of all berry, fruit, and nut sales in Metro Vancouver in 2004 (British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, 2005). This global picture of farm produce marketing masks important variations among crops. For instance, in 2004, virtually no potatoes were marketed through short food supply chains, while 100 per cent of locally grown asparagus, garlic, and melons were marketed through roadside stand sales and direct farm sales to consumers and retail outlets (British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, 2004).

Because of trading patterns, the relative pricing of food, and the seasonality and specialisation of agricultural production in Metro Vancouver, food is both imported to, and exported from Metro Vancouver. Domestic and international imports play an important role in meeting local food needs, as local food production is estimated to supply only 27 per cent of food needs in Metro Vancouver (VPFC, 2009). Metro Vancouver is largely self-sufficient in dairy, eggs, and poultry, as ninety per cent or more of the supply of these products comes from the region. In contrast, Metro Vancouver is relatively non-self-sufficient in fruits, vegetables, pork, lamb, and grains (VPFC, 2009). While data on food exports specifically for the *region* of Metro Vancouver are not available, a 2009 *provincial* study indicates that roughly 23 per cent of the food produced in British Columbia is exported, both domestically and internationally (Vancouver

Food Policy Council [VFPC], 2009). This total figure masks important variation between food groups (see Table 1). For instance, while virtually none of the milk and only 2.5 per cent of the eggs, produced in BC were exported, 42 per cent of vegetables, and 47.5 per cent of pigs were exported.

Table 1: Food production and exports in BC

	BC production (tonnes)	Domestic exports (tonnes)	International exports (tonnes)	Total BC production exported (per cent)
Milk	639,647	-	4,645	0.7%
Beef	69,321	-	1,540	2.2%
Eggs	49,473	-	1,264	2.5%
Chicken	216,712	25,000	13,510	15.1%
Coarse grains	192,024	-	46,396	19.5%
Fruit	222,172	25,000	84,129	32.9%
Fish	148,294	50,000	51,667	40.7%
Vegetables	339,071	50,000	195,169	42.0%
Pig	17,900	-	16,198	47.5%
Total	1,894,614	150,000	414,518	23.0%

Source: Data from VFPC (2009)

How is the Metro Vancouver agri-food sector local?

The prevalence of socially and geographically long supply chains in the Metro Vancouver agri-food sector, along with the sector's reliance on synthetic inputs, fossil fuels, and low-wage labour provided by mostly immigrant and migrant workers, characterise the Metro Vancouver food system as a whole as tending towards the conventional end of the spectrum. Some particular attributes within the Metro Vancouver food system, however, are ones that are tend to be associated with local food systems and reveal a strong potential for food system localisation in the region.

First, small farms predominate in Metro Vancouver: average farm size is 15.7 hectares and 94 per cent of farms are smaller than 52 hectares (Metro Vancouver, 2006). In comparison, BC average farm size is 143 hectares; Canadian average farm size is 295 hectares (Statistics Canada, 2008a). Urbanisation pressures, the relatively high cost of farmland, the prevalence of greenhouse and other intensive farming operations, and the availability of cheaper grain from

the Prairies may explain why farms in Metro Vancouver are significantly smaller than the Canadian average (British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Fisheries, n.d).

Second, despite the sector’s specialisation – in terms of gross farm sales, greenhouse, nursery, and floriculture production accounted for more than half of Metro Vancouver’s agricultural output in 2005, and horticultural production accounted for a further 16 per cent (Statistics Canada, 2009) – Metro Vancouver farms continue to produce a wide range of agricultural products. Farm products available from Metro Vancouver farms include: poultry, beef cattle, and other livestock; dairy products; eggs; berries and tree fruit; vegetables; wheat, oats, and other field crops; and mushrooms (Metro Vancouver, 2011b; see Table 1 above).

Third, Metro Vancouver is home to diverse organisations, in the non-profit, private, and public sectors, that support local foods. Some of the more prominent of these organisations are listed in Table 2. Together, these organisations are creating, promoting, and in some cases, funding new and emerging food networks that link local production with local consumption.

Table 2: Diverse organisations that publicly support local food in Metro Vancouver

Non-profit & community groups	Restaurants	Grocery & delivery businesses	Distribution & marketing groups	Government agencies and bodies
100 Mile Diet Society	Bishop's Restaurant	Capers Community Market/Whole Foods	Biovia	Fraser Health Authority
City Farmer	C Restaurant	Choices Market	Discovery Organics	Metro Vancouver Agricultural Advisory Committee
Farm Folk City Folk	Green Table Network	Drive Organics	Fraser Valley Farm Direct Marketing Association	Vancouver Coastal Health Authority
Local Food First	Nu Restaurant	Donald’s Market		Vancouver Food Policy Council
Richmond Food Security Society	Raincity Grill	NOWBC Co-op		
Simon Fraser	Vij's Restaurant	Organics at Home		
University Local Food Project	Wild Rice	Overwaitea Foods		
Slow Food Vancouver		Small Potatoes		
University of British Columbia Farm		Urban Delivery		
Vancouver Farmers' Markets		Safeway		

Note: All organisations listed in this table express support for local food on their websites and/or in their promotional materials. See also Metro Vancouver (2011b) for a list of organisations supporting local food.

In sum, diverse food system actors are working to shift the Metro Vancouver food system toward the “local” end of the local/conventional continuum. As outlined at the outset of this chapter, farmers of colour play an important role in local food production, with 38.9 per cent of Metro Vancouver farmers and farm managers reporting belonging to a visible minority group in 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2006). Together, the significant interest in local food and the important role farmers of colour in local food production suggest that the intersections between food system localisation efforts and racialising processes will be more visible in Metro Vancouver than in other parts of Canada. At the same time, because of the ways in which the agri-food sector in Metro Vancouver differs from that of other regions in Canada, findings from this study cannot be treated as representative of food system localisation efforts in Canada more generally.

Methods

This research was grounded in the extended case method, a politically engaged methodology integrating ethnographic methods with social theory (Burawoy, 1998; Eliasoph & Lichterman, 1999). In the extended case method, the partial, situated knowledge that emerges from ethnographic research is situated “in the necessary context for explanation, to find out how to put the part in the relevant larger whole” (Sullivan, 2002, p. 280). By insisting on the importance of locating the particular case in relation to broader social structures and processes, the extended case method responds not only to a methodological question about how theory is built, but also to an ethical imperative. Cuadráz and Uttal (1999) argue that synthesising individual accounts with historical and structural analyses produces studies that “more accurately reflect the social realities of inequality and power in society” (p. 181). Similarly, Fine, Weis, Weseen, and Wong (2000) suggest that connecting “the ‘voices’ and ‘stories’ of individuals back to the set of historic, structural, and economic relations in which they are situated” (p. 126) is a means of destabilising the notion of race theoretically while acknowledging the lived reality of racial oppression. Thus, the extended case method is well suited to research conducted with an aim of understanding racialising processes.

Putting the extended case method into practice involved using multiple research methods and data sources. Table 3 summarises the research methods and data sources used in

this study and links them to each of the questions guiding my research. The next paragraphs provide a detailed explanation of how these methods were used.

Table 3: Linking research questions, methods, and data sources

Research questions	Data sources and methods
How do efforts to localise the food system intersect with racialising processes in Metro Vancouver?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All methods and data sources used in the study
What are the contours of food system localisation efforts in Metro Vancouver?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interviews with local food movement participants Document analysis of policy, educational, and promotional materials produced by organisations associated with the local food movement Participant observation at farmers' markets and events associated with the local food movement
To what extent does the local food movement include, and recognise the contributions of, Chinese-Canadian farmers?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document analysis of policy, educational, and promotional materials produced by organisations associated with the local food movement Participant observation at farmers' markets and events associated with the local food movement
What are the historical and contemporary roles of Chinese-Canadian farmers in the Metro Vancouver food system?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Archival research into the history of local food production Interviews with Chinese-Canadian farmers Cycling tour observation in agricultural areas of Metro Vancouver Observation at food retailers Key informant interviews with civil servants responsible for food and agriculture

The first phase of my research consisted of locating the particular case of food system localisation efforts in Metro Vancouver in the relevant larger whole. This process involved three chains of inquiry. I inquired into 1) the historical circumstances under which Chinese-Canadians came to Canada and started farming, 2) the meanings that various British Columbians have ascribed to being Chinese-Canadian over time and 3) the social circumstances in which the local food movement emerged. My principal sources for these inquiries were primary documents and secondary literature housed in the City of Vancouver archives, the City of Richmond archives and the Simon Fraser University library. While numerous accounts of the emergence of alternative agri-food movements in the United States and Europe have been published (e.g. Allen, 2004; Goodman & Goodman, 2009; Winne, 2008) published research on this topic in a Canadian context is limited (but see Kneen, 2011; MacRae, Koc, & Desjardins, 2008; Wittman & Barbolet, 2011). Therefore, to learn about the genealogy of the Metro Vancouver local food

movement, I attended food-focused public lectures and panel discussions and conducted a key informant interview with a food policy expert who has been engaged in food activism in Metro Vancouver for over 40 years.

Additional field-based research for this study took place from August 2010 to March 2011 and involved observation, participant observation, document analysis, and semi-structured interviews. I began by observing, and to a lesser extent participating in, local food production, marketing, and advocacy. Biweekly “cycling tours” through agricultural areas of Burnaby, Richmond, and Delta served as opportunities to observe farm characteristics such as crop diversity, approximate field size, and farm machinery use on various farms, including nearly two dozen operated by Chinese-Canadian farmers. I also attended food-focused panel discussions, exhibits, conferences, and public consultations held in Metro Vancouver during an eight-month period in 2010-2011. During these events, I took note not only of what was being said about local food, but also of who was speaking, whose perspectives were privileged, and who was in the audience. Finally, I shopped for locally grown vegetables at farmers’ markets, greengrocers, and large-format grocery stores catering to Chinese-Canadian and multiethnic clientele. These shopping expeditions offered an opportunity to observe the variety of locally grown vegetables available – as well as what and how information about these vegetables was communicated – at each establishment.

Along the way, I collected web addresses and promotional and educational materials created by the farmers and organisations whose work I observed. Implicitly or explicitly, these websites and publications reveal which issues are prioritised, and which solutions are preferred, by different actors in the Metro Vancouver food system. I read these print and online documents to see which perspectives and practices are promoted, and which are downplayed, ignored, or criticised. These websites and publications also indicate how connected farms and organisations are to one other. By browsing the links pages on websites and looking for repetitions of wording and messaging, I learned which farms and organisations are situated at the core of the local food movement, and which operate at the periphery or outside.

I conducted 23 semi-structured interviews with farmers, food wholesalers and retailers, civil servants responsible for food and agriculture, food activists, and representatives from food-related organisations (see Table 4). During the interviews, I asked participants to describe their

experiences, successes, and challenges working within the local food system and to reflect on their understandings of “local food.” The specific focus of the interviews varied depending on the participant’s role in the food system; for instance, while farmers were asked to outline their production and marketing practices, food activists were asked to describe their projects, programs and campaigns. At no point during my interviews did I ask participants to state their racial or ethnic identity or citizenship status; however, when participants volunteered this information, I did ask how this identity shapes their food-related work. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes and three hours. All but a few interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed. To protect interview participants’ confidentiality, all participants have been given pseudonyms.

Table 4: Overview of interview participants, broken down by role in the food system and stated racial or ethnic identity or citizenship status.

	Chinese or Chinese-Canadian	Indigenous	Immigrant from Latin American or African country	White or European settler	Did not identify
Farmer	2				3
Farmer/store owner	3				
Retailer	1				
Wholesaler	2				
Community organisation representative	1	1	2	3	2
Civil servant					2
Researcher				1	

Note: The participants who did not refer to their ethnic origin or the colour of their skin are people who, I imagine, generally pass as white in Metro Vancouver. As many authors have pointed out, because whiteness is normalised in mainstream North American society, many whites do not consider their whiteness to be a *racial* identity (Dyer, 2008; McIntosh, 2008).

Throughout the research, I wrote descriptive, analytic, and autobiographical notes about my observations and the research process (see Glesne, 2006). Writing these field notes not only served as a means of recording events, but also as a means of learning to recognise questions and to create opportunities for learning. In this way, field notes were used to “make stories” and to nuance my research questions (see Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). All data (archival material, field notes, photographs, and audio recordings) were digitalised and anonymised.

Following the non-linear process of line-by-line, analytic coding, and memo-writing described by Emerson et al. (1995), I identified emergent themes in the data. My next step was to invite participants to comment on, contribute to, or challenge the preliminary analysis. This step was done by emailing interview participants an eight-page summary of my initial research findings written in language aimed at a general audience. Of 23 participants, seven responded. Six participants enthusiastically supported the analysis; one agreed with my observations but challenged the anti-racist framework I used in the analysis. This latter participant suggested that cultural differences, but not the historical experience of racism, influence Chinese-Canadian farmers' participation in local food initiatives. Finally, I held a focus group with several participants, including the latter participant mentioned, to further discuss the analysis. Participants offered suggestions of clarifications they would like to see in the final report, and I have tried to address these here.

Thesis overview

In the next chapters, I show that food moves from Metro Vancouver farms to local consumers through (at least) two *parallel* sets of alternative food networks. There may be more alternative food networks operating in Metro Vancouver, but an exploration of this possibility was beyond the scope of this research project. The first set of networks explored in this thesis consists of the farmers' markets, community-supported agriculture and other networks recently developed and made popular by the Metro Vancouver local food movement. This set of networks informs – and is informed by – what mainstream local food activists, policy-makers, and academics understand as “local food.” The second, and older, set of networks is supplied primarily by Chinese-Canadian farmers, and it connects producers and consumers in roadside produce stores and greengrocers.

The structure of this report reflects my attempt to understand why parallel alternative food networks exist in Metro Vancouver. In Chapter 2, I review the origins, priorities, major institutions, and strategies of the Metro Vancouver local food movement. This review shows that, despite the local food movement's expressed commitment to food justice, and despite various efforts to include communities of colour, Chinese-Canadian farmers – and communities of colour more generally – are underrepresented in some of the movement's most publicly visible manifestations.

Next, I examine the historical and contemporary roles of Chinese-Canadian farmers in the Metro Vancouver food system. Chapter 3 begins with an account of the historical circumstances in which some Chinese people came to Canada and started farming. I then show that contemporary Chinese-Canadian farmers in Metro Vancouver use diverse farming practices and market their products through various food networks, including wholesalers, greengrocers, roadside farm stores, and, to a small extent, farmers' markets. To illustrate how Chinese-Canadian farmers operate within the local food system, I profile three contemporary Chinese-Canadian farmers.

In Chapter 4, I consider the relationship between Chinese-Canadian farmers, the Metro Vancouver food system, and the local food movement. I show that some Chinese-Canadian farmers are involved in alternative food networks that shorten geographical and social distance between producers and consumers while linking food production to place through ecological farming practices and invocations of cultural proximity. The alternative food networks supplied by Chinese-Canadian farmers operate *parallel* to those associated with the local food movement, and they emerged at different times and in response to different sets of circumstances and concerns. I conclude by reflecting on the practical and ethical implications of a food system characterised by parallel alternative food networks.

2. LOCAL FOOD, FOOD JUSTICE, AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN METRO VANCOUVER

Contemporary efforts to support food system localisation extend, and are rooted in, a history of social movements around food and agriculture. Examining the origins of the Metro Vancouver local food movement is important to understanding why certain food practices are considered “local” in Metro Vancouver, while others are ignored or dismissed by some members of the local food movement. This chapter begins, therefore, with a review of the issues and problems that gave rise to the Metro Vancouver local food movement. This review shows that the local food movement represents a coalescence of efforts to promote resiliency, environmental sustainability, health, community economic development, cultural vibrancy and social justice, and that farmers’ markets are the most publicly visible manifestation of these efforts.

With respect to the movement’s social justice goals, different sets of ideas about racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity establish different understandings of what counts as a legitimate issue, priority action, or justifiable strategy. In the second part of this chapter, I examine the ideologies and strategies some movement participants draw on to foster food justice, and I assess the outcomes of these efforts. This review yields a mixed record. While anti-racist organising strategies have enabled some movement participants to build alliances with indigenous food sovereignty groups, communities of colour in general, and Chinese-Canadian farmers in particular, remain underrepresented in the Metro Vancouver local food movement.

The Metro Vancouver local food movement: origins, issues, and strategies

As the home base for James Mackinnon and Alissa Smith’s 100-Mile Diet experiment, Metro Vancouver enjoys a certain degree of renown among local food advocates in North America. The 100-Mile Diet experiment, carried out in 2005-6, involved eating only foods produced within 100 miles of McKinnon and Smith’s Vancouver apartment, all the while reflecting on implications of eating locally for the climate, the environment, local farmers,

health, and community economic development (Smith & MacKinnon, 2007). In the months following the experiment, the story of the 100-Mile Diet was covered by nearly every major news source in North America, inspired a reality television show, and instigated the establishment of a non-profit organisation, the 100-Mile Diet Society (Beers, 2010). Mackinnon and Smith's book took off not only because their experiment reframed food consumption within contemporary urban contexts, but also because decades of activism and organising had generated significant and widespread interest in an alternative approach to food.

As early as the 1970s, food activists in Canada had articulated and adopted a food systems framework linking production and consumption issues. In 1978, a group of individuals and over 125 organisations created the People's Food Commission to explore why farmers were being squeezed out of business at the same time as food prices were increasing for consumers. The Commission solicited written submissions and conducted public hearings in 75 communities across the country; the Commission's report, *The Land of Milk and Money*, outlines how Canadians experienced the food system, how their concerns fit together, and how the food system was politically organised. The People's Food Policy Commission was instrumental in starting a national conversation about "who made [the food system] the way it is; who and what holds it together now; who benefits; who suffers; who could change it; what would have to be done to change it" (People's Food Commission, 1980, p. 7).

In BC, activism and policy-making in support of local agriculture also date back at least to the 1970s. Urban residents began to voice their concerns about the continued erosion of the agricultural landscape in and around Vancouver (Garrish, 2003). These concerns, along with concerns about food security, heavy dependency on imports, and global food shortages, influenced the development of the BC's Agricultural Land Reserve (Smith, 2004). Created between 1974 and 1976, BC's Agricultural Land Reserve is widely recognised as one of strongest and most progressive land use planning policies in North America (Smart Growth BC, 2005).

Around this time, Canada's nascent organic agriculture movement began to clarify the links between food, farming, ecological integrity, and human health (Hill & MacRae, 1992). Farmers' markets reappeared in Vancouver during the 1990s, resulting from the efforts of a coalition of nutritionists, food activists, and community members seeking to increase food security, to connect consumers with fresh local produce, and to enable BC farmers to market

their products directly to consumers (Vancouver Farmers Markets, 1999). At the same time, increasing concern about climate change, signalled by the signing of the Kyoto Protocol aimed to stabilise greenhouse gases at a level that would prevent dangerous climate change, led food advocates and researchers to examine the impacts of conventional food production methods and distribution networks on the global climate.

By the early 2000s, alternative food advocates had begun to insist on the relationship between hunger, healthy food, and sustainable food systems. In September 1999, diverse groups with food and agriculture-related mandates from across British Columbia united under the umbrella of the BC Food Systems Network. The Network recognises that food is a human right and has a mission that integrates food security, living wages, the elimination of hunger, ecological integrity, animal welfare, healthy food, community and cultural integrity, and food self-reliance (BC Food Systems Network, n.d.). Five years later, the municipally sanctioned Vancouver Food Policy Council was inaugurated with a mandate to develop a work plan *integrating* and building on the five action areas that had been approved by the City of Vancouver and developed with input from diverse groups, including nutritionists, farmers, researchers, media, and citizens. The five action areas were: a city-wide food system assessment; rooftop gardens; community gardens; farmers' markets; and coordinated food processing and distribution facility for low income citizens (City of Vancouver, 2009).

Thus, when *The 100-Mile Diet* was published, the book provided an effective metaphor for the integrative understanding of food that had been constructed over several decades of activism, organising, policy-making, innovation, and research. The Metro Vancouver local food movement represents a coalescence of efforts to promote resiliency, environmental sustainability, health, community economic development, cultural vibrancy and social justice. Food system localisation has emerged as a particularly galvanising strategy among food advocates and organisations seeking to achieve these objectives. Most notably, in February 2011, after more than two years of public consultation, Metro Vancouver released a Regional Food System Strategy outlining five goals to build a sustainable, resilient, and healthy *regional* food system. As shown in Table 5, the first three goals relate directly to increasing the production, distribution, and consumption of local foods. Goal two focuses specifically on promoting new and emerging alternative food networks.

Table 5: Overarching goals and strategies of the Metro Vancouver Regional Food System Strategy

Goal	Strategies
1 Increased capacity to produce food close to home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect agricultural land for food production • Restore fish habitat and protect sustainable sources of seafood • Enable expansion of agricultural production • Invest in a new generation of food producers • Expand commercial food production in urban areas
2 Improve the financial viability of the food sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the capacity to process, warehouse and distribute local foods • Include local foods in the purchasing policies of large public institutions • Increase direct marketing opportunities for local foods • Further develop value chains within the food sector • Review government policies and programs and ensure they enable the expansion of the local food sector
3 People make healthy and sustainable food choices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable residents to make healthy food choices • Communicate how food choices support sustainability • Enhance food literacy and skills in schools • Celebrate the taste of local foods and the diversity of cuisines
4 Access to healthy, culturally diverse and affordable foods for everybody	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve access to nutritious food among vulnerable groups • Encourage urban agriculture • Enable non-profit organisations to rescue nutritious food
5 A food system consistent with ecological health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect and enhance ecosystem goods and services • Reduce waste in the food system • Facilitate the adoption of environmentally sustainable practices • Prepare for the impacts of climate change

Source: Metro Vancouver (2011b)

Among the alternative food networks that currently move food from Metro Vancouver farms to local consumers are: farmers’ markets; community-supported agriculture; local organic delivery services; restaurants showcasing local foods; institutional purchasing of local sustainable foods; agri-tourism; U-Pick farms; and farm gate sales (Chinnakonda & Telford, 2007; VPFC, 2009). Advocates and organisations associated with the Metro Vancouver local food movement promote these networks in print and online local food guides, endorse them in policy documents, and reference them at public events. The development and support of alternative food networks thus constitutes an important part of the Metro Vancouver local food movement.

Farmers’ markets: The public face of the Metro Vancouver local food movement

While the Metro Vancouver supports diverse alternative food networks, one form of alternative food network stands out as the most publically visible manifestation of local food in Metro Vancouver: farmers’ markets. In 2010, Metro Vancouver was home to 20 farmers’

markets (BC Association of Farmers' Markets, 2011), and over 20 Metro Vancouver organisations had programs to create, support, and promote farmers' markets. The Overwaitea Food Group, one of the province's major grocery retailing businesses, advertises its pride in being Western Canada's "number 1 supporter of local suppliers" through its sponsorship of the BC Association of Farmers' Markets (Overwaitea Foods, 2011). Farmers' markets are featured in virtually every report on the Metro Vancouver local food system, reaching potential consumers even on bus shelters showcasing advertisements for Your Local Farmers' Market as part of the City's Transit Shelter Advertising Program that "provides opportunities for non-profit arts, culture, and community service organizations to access transit shelter advertising space without charge" (City of Vancouver, 2010a, n.p.). For the past two years, Vancouver Farmers Markets (formerly known as Your Local Farmers' Market) has been named a Metro Vancouver "food hero" (Edible Vancouver, 2011). In some ways, policy documents treat farmers' markets as a proxy for the local food system. For instance, in the Metro Vancouver Regional Food System Strategy, the only performance indicators related to alternative food networks are the number of farmers' markets and the gross receipts at farmers markets (Metro Vancouver, 2011b).

Local food advocates' and organisations' emphasis on farmers' markets may over-estimate the importance of farmers' markets as a sales outlet for BC farmers. Of 19,844 BC farms, only approximately 1,000 sell their produce at farmers' markets (British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture, 2011; Metro Vancouver, 2006). Still, since Metro Vancouver's first farmers' market was opened in 1995, farmers' markets have created measurable change in how food moves from producer to consumer in Metro Vancouver. Every week, farmers' markets in Vancouver receive over 10,000 visitors (Hild, 2009, p. 9), and since 1995, the number of farmers' markets in Metro Vancouver increased from one to at least 20 (see BC Association of Farmers' Markets, 2010).

Cultivating food justice

The Metro Vancouver local food movement is not simply working to support new and emerging alternative food networks, but also seeking to do so through democratic processes that engage local community members in making decisions about the local food system. Two recent documents, the City of Vancouver's Food Charter and the Metro Vancouver Regional Food System Strategy, clearly indicate the importance local food movement participants place

on including and engaging local community members. As documents endorsed by local governments and created through extensive consultation with local food advocates, activists, and organisations, the Vancouver Food Charter and the Metro Vancouver Regional Food System Strategy provide a window on the understandings of inclusion that prevail among movement participants. Consultations around the Metro Vancouver Regional Food System Strategy took place over two years and involved soliciting written responses as well as holding 11 meetings and webinars with both the public and the private sectors (Metro Vancouver, 2011c). For its part, the Vancouver Food Charter was created with input from about 200 individuals at seven community workshops and events held over the course of a year (VPFC, 2007). The process of developing the Charter was led by the Vancouver Food Policy Council, a municipally-empowered, multidisciplinary body charged with examining how the Vancouver food system works, and how it might be improved (City of Vancouver, 2010b).

Both the Metro Vancouver Regional Food System Strategy and the Vancouver Food Charter emphasise the importance of *social justice* and *collaboration* in the local food system. For instance, on the Metro Vancouver Regional Food System Strategy website, the Strategy is described as:

a new initiative for Metro Vancouver that encourages a more *collaborative* approach to addressing food issues in the region. The aim is to *work with other* [sic] to create a sustainable, resilient and healthy food system that will contribute to the well-being of *all* residents and the economic prosperity of the region while conserving our ecological legacy (Metro Vancouver, 2011d, emphasis added).

In Chapter 1, I outlined a three-pronged food justice framework, where food justice involves distributive justice, procedural justice, and recognition. The approach to food system change described in the Metro Vancouver Regional Food System Strategy touches on two of these three elements of food justice. First, by setting out the aim of creating a food system that will “contribute to the well-being of all residents,” the Strategy responds to the food justice imperative of ensuring food system benefits are shared (although it does not go as far as specifying that food system benefits *and* burdens are shared *equally*). Second, by foregrounding collaboration in addressing food system issues, the Strategy is not only outlining a pragmatic approach to food system change that emphasises engaging with the talents, knowledge, and

resources of diverse food system actors, but also taking up the food justice imperative of involving people affected by food system change in decision-making and implementation processes.

The Vancouver Food Charter is even more explicit regarding food justice. The Charter identifies five principles meant to guide the local food system: 1) community economic development; 2) ecological health; 3) social justice; 4) collaboration and participation; and 5) celebration (City of Vancouver, 2007). Three of the five principles in the Vancouver Food Charter relate directly to food justice. Specifically, the principles of social justice, collaboration and participation, and celebration set out a commitment to a food system that “recognizes access to safe, sufficient, culturally appropriate and nutritious food as a basic human right for all Vancouver residents; reflects the dialogue between the community, government, and all sectors of the food system; [and] celebrates Vancouver’s multicultural food traditions” (City of Vancouver, 2007). It bears noting that in the Vancouver Food Charter, as in the Metro Vancouver Regional Food System Strategy, food justice is conceptualised primarily in terms of issues of *access* to local food, and less in terms of who *produces* local food and under what conditions.

Still, this commitment to engaging with the perspectives, traditions, challenges, and priorities of diverse local community members stands in contrast to traditional approaches to food system decision-making. As Allen (2004) has observed, alternative agri-food movements are in the position of needing to correct imbalances in the demographic profile of who has participated in, who has led, and whose interests have been served by, the conventional global food system (p. 147). In Canada, for instance, traditional agricultural policy and research has marginalised the perspectives and unique needs of women (Roppel, Desmarais, & Martz, 2006), and women of colour in particular (Preibisch & Grez, 2010). Some groups, most notably the temporary migrant farm workers who provide an increasing share of labour on Canadian farms,³ have virtually no representation in the structures and processes of decision-making related to Canadian agricultural policy (Fairey et al., 2008).

³ This increase is particularly stark in BC, where the federal government-authorized Seasonal Agricultural Workers’ Program was first adopted in 2004. In 2004, 50 Mexican migrant farm workers came to work on BC farms; by 2008, almost 3,000 Mexican migrant farm workers were employed on BC farms (Otero & Preibisch, 2010).

Among participants in the Metro Vancouver local food movement, there is strong consensus that conventional approaches to food system decision-making are inadequate because they lack holistic analyses and marginalise the perspectives of small farmers, consumers (especially low-income consumers), and many other groups affected by food system decisions. There is also strong consensus that the food system benefits should be shared, and that the local food system should be collaboratively defined and created. Consensus is weaker, however, on *how* to achieve these objectives. In the following pages, I examine the various strategies local food movement participants are pursuing to cultivate food justice. This examination focuses specifically on how these strategies take racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity into account and establishes the parameters by which I assess the extent to which the local food movement meets the food justice criteria of *involving* diverse community members and *recognising* and *respecting* diverse ways of knowing.

The practical solutions local food advocates and activists are implementing to foster food justice can roughly be grouped into three categories of approach: economic, multicultural, and anti-racist. Of these three, economic and multicultural approaches are dominant. By *dominant* approach, I mean approaches to food justice that often appear as “best practices” or “sample actions” in local food policy documents created by prominent organisations and with public input. I also understand as *dominant* the strategies voiced *by* those local food activists who are often featured in the local media *during* public events sponsored by relatively powerful organisations, such as the City of Vancouver and Metro Vancouver. In contrast, I classify as *subordinate* the food justice approaches that local food advocates described during confidential interviews, but either were not voiced at public events, or resulted in visible discomfort from most other participants when voiced at public events. Within the Metro Vancouver local food movement, anti-racist approaches are a subordinate approach to food justice.

Economic strategies

The first, and predominant, approach local food advocates and activists in Metro Vancouver use to foster food justice consists of strategies designed to redress economic marginalisation. The following excerpt from the field notes I took during a panel discussion co-sponsored by the Museum of Vancouver, Farm Folk City Folk, and the Tides Canada Foundation illustrates what types of justice problems are prioritised, and what types of solutions are

considered legitimate, within the Metro Vancouver local food movement. Charged with developing a “recipe” for a successful local food system, the four-person panel

Used phrases like “In general, we’re not willing to pay what food is worth” and “We need to learn the true cost of food,” to argue that, in a localised food system, food is going to be more expensive. Later, when the audience was invited to put questions to the panel, a white man who looked to be about thirty stood up and explained that, even in the affluent neighbourhood where he works, seniors living on a fixed income can’t afford to buy food at farmers’ markets. “What about the poor?” responded L---, one of the four panellists that evening, “We need a good social safety net. We need a fair minimum wage, we need a proper old age pension, so that people can afford to buy food at the price that it is worth, not on the backs of farmers.” With this, the audience broke into applause (field notes, October 14, 2010).

The applause that followed the panellist’s response is indicative of movement participants’ widespread support for the idea that food justice should not be achieved by lowering the cost of food, but by rebuilding the social safety net so everyone can afford to pay the “true cost” of food. The economic lens participants in the Metro Vancouver local food movement use to craft strategies to promote food justice is consistent with Dei, Karumanchery, and Karumanchery-Luik’s (2004) argument that, in North America, social justice and inclusion are predominantly understood in economic terms. The main fissures in society are understood to be based on class (rather than race or other axes of inequality); therefore, identifying and redressing economic marginalisation is seen as the most productive – and, indeed, the most reasonable – approach to enhancing food justice.

The Farmer’s Market Nutrition and Coupon Project illustrates how local food advocates and organisations put this economic-focused understanding of food justice into practice. Funded by the provincial government and led by the BC Association of Farmers’ Markets, this project provided low-income pregnant women and low-income families with children with fifteen dollars per week in coupons to purchase fresh foods at BC farmers’ markets. From its inception in 2007 until its cancellation due to lack of funding in 2010, this project assisted close to 3,000 families in accessing healthy, local foods (BC Association of Farmers’ Markets, 2010). Within the local food movement, this project is widely regarded as a successful food justice

project, and it was repeatedly referenced when, during interviews, I asked local food movement participants to describe how food justice “fit in” with their work.

Although the primary focus of the Farmers’ Market Nutrition and Coupon Project was on the economic inequalities that constrain access to healthy local foods, farmers’ market managers and vendors experienced the project as increasing cultural diversity at farmers’ markets. For instance, Brianne Talbot, a young white farmer who markets her vegetables through a CSA and at farmers’ markets, explained in an interview

There used to be this great program that they stopped last year, a government-subsidised program going on at farmers' markets, where low-income families would get to go spend at the farmers' market. They could only buy fresh product with it, they couldn't buy baked stuff. So that was a really cool experience because you'd come and you'd have all sorts of diverse folks shopping at the farmers' market. And it really livened up the market (interview, October 4, 2010).

That a project geared to low-income families brought “all sorts of diverse folks,” including new immigrant and Aboriginal families, to farmers’ markets reflects the racialisation of poverty in Canadian cities. In Vancouver, for instance, the poverty rate among all residents in 2000 was 27 per cent. In contrast, 59.5 per cent of Aboriginal people, 54.6 percent of non-permanent residents (including refugee claimants, foreign students, and foreign workers), 31.4 per cent of visible minorities, and 30.2 per cent of immigrants⁴ lived below the poverty line (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2007).

Although economic strategies can have – and indeed have had – an impact on racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity within the spaces and institutions of local food, they do not require an explicit analysis of the racialisation of the food system and the local food movement. On the contrary, the predominance of economic approaches within the Metro Vancouver local food movement is accompanied by a collective silence around race; as one local farmer and food activist jokingly described the local food movement, “mention the word race and they’ll look at you like somebody farted” (field notes, July 14, 2010). This silence around race translates to a “colour-blind” commitment to food justice that does not make reference to existing racial inequalities in the ability to access the local food system. For instance, the Metro Vancouver

⁴In Canada, three out of four recent immigrants belong to a visible minority group (Palameta, 2004).

Regional Food System Strategy incorporates many food justice goals, most notably ensuring access to healthy, culturally diverse, and affordable food for everybody (Metro Vancouver, 2011b; see Table 5 above). However, none of the 25 proposed indicators designed to measure the success of the Strategy relate to racial and ethnic diversity and/or inequalities. The general silence around race, and the omission of indicators related to racial, ethnic, or cultural diversity and inequalities in particular, stifles discussion about, and corrective measures for addressing, the persistence of racial inequalities (see Dei et al., 2004; Thobani, 2007).

Multicultural strategies

A second set of strategies local food advocates and activists in Metro Vancouver are implementing to promote food justice is informed by multiculturalism. Nearly every definition of food security cited in local policy documents includes a reference to “culturally appropriate” or “culturally diverse” foods. By emphasising cultural diversity and cultural appropriateness, these definitions of food security publicly express awareness and appreciation of cultural diversity, contribute to the multicultural project of cultivating ethnic identities, and constitute the local food movement as open and inclusive. Some local food organisations also seek to foster food justice by translating their written materials. For instance, the website home page and various educational documents created for *Get Local*, a collaborative initiative to teach consumers why, where, and how to access and eat local food, have been translated from English into Chinese and Punjabi (Farm Folk City Folk, 2011). The Metro Vancouver Regional Food System Strategy clarifies the significance of making these materials available in multiple languages: “Making it easier to identify the healthy food options from labels and menus is critical especially in a region where English is not everyone’s first language” (Metro Vancouver, 2011b, p. 32). This statement in the Strategy shows a recognition that the benefits of improvements in the availability of healthy, local foods are not evenly distributed and links these disparities to lack of knowledge.

Multicultural strategies such as these can serve as a resource to cultivate diverse food traditions and eliminate some of the barriers to accessing food system benefits. However, as critics point out, multiculturalism functions to blame “ethnic” people for social inequalities and further exoticises non-dominant cultures rather than addressing systemic forms of discrimination (Dei et al., 2004; Thobani, 2007; see also Jafri, 2009). Multiculturalism enables

the local food movement to publicly demonstrate its appreciation of diversity without actually confronting systemic discrimination in the food system. In particular, and as will be discussed at the end of this chapter, multiculturalism celebrates cultural diversity without questioning the normalisation of the forms of local food practice in which white people tend to engage.

Anti-racist strategies

A third approach used by some local food advocates and activists in Metro Vancouver to foster food justice involves anti-racist strategies. From an anti-racist perspective, the exclusion or underrepresentation of people of colour in Canadian society reflects structural inequalities in the distribution of political, cultural, social, and economic power. Anti-racist policies and practices are constructed to acknowledge that social significance continues to be attributed to race even in an ostensibly race-neutral society (Fleras & Wallis, 2009). The anti-racist strategies local food activists are using to food justice can roughly be grouped into three categories of action: learning about oppression, nurturing relationships with those who can champion food issues in diverse communities, and creating space at the centre of the movement for the contributions and perspectives of all.

Learn about oppression

Within the Metro Vancouver local food movement, some activists are actively working to raise awareness of racial discrimination and its corollary, white privilege. That is to say, these activists are working to expose the power systems that create privileges for some and disadvantages for others (see Wildman & Davis, 2008). For instance, Sam Rojas, who coordinates a local food project with a specific focus on integrating immigrants, explained in an interview that project participants were required to participate in an intercultural communication workshop, an anti-homophobia workshop, and an anti-racism workshop. In Sam's words, the theme of the anti-racism workshop was "we're all racist, even though we don't recognise it" (interview, October 5, 2010). In the workshop, racism was presented not as specific, discriminatory, actions but as a power system that bestows privileges on some people and imposes disadvantages on others.

Some local food activists not only recognise the need to confront racism and white privilege, but also that this needs to be an ongoing process. Fiona Dale, a white grassroots

activist, explained that even though the organisation in which she is involved has already offered anti-oppression trainings, more are needed before attempts are made to reach out to communities of colour. She explained, “when the dominant majority of [our organisation] is the dominant majority of society, I feel like there's work that needs to be done. Always. Always we need to be working on that stuff, thinking about it, learning about it” (interview, September 25, 2010). When I asked her what she thought the organisation needed to learn from this process of anti-oppression training, she recounted a story of a meeting that had been organised to discuss bioregional food systems. Although a diverse group of people, including some from the local First Nations and several people of colour, had been assembled, Fiona explained that:

conversation pingponged between three white people who were all professional food organisers, so they all were funded to organise food networks in the region, through organisations and through health stuff. And the conversation pingponged between the three of them... I don't think they did it consciously. And I don't think they meant anything disrespectful. I just don't think they were thinking. What I would be nervous about is that something like that might influence the relationships that we try to develop with other communities (interview, September 25, 2010).

After pausing to reflect on the issue, Fiona concluded that

From an anti-oppression training, I guess I would like us to start into it with humility and just keeping the concept of oppression really in the forefront of our brains, really, as we enter into a relationship... To make sure that we don't forget. And just keep [the concept of oppression] really present in the conversation, and not just go into it and stumble around and possibly burn bridges before we've even built them (interview, September 25, 2010).

To Fiona, the local food movement has a responsibility to learn about how oppression works, within the broader context of Canadian society and within a progressive social movement. In particular, she highlights the need for greater awareness of whose voices dominate in the places where local food issues are being identified, defined, and addressed. This awareness is necessary because “differences in power constrain our ability to connect with one another even when we think we are engaged in dialogue across differences” (Collins, 2000b, p. 458). These power differences exist whether or not those local food movement participants who are privileged wish to benefit from them.

Nurture relationships with people who can champion food issues in diverse communities

A second set of actions some activists are employing to undermine foster food justice consists of nurturing relationships with people who can champion food issues and build relationships in diverse communities. By nurturing these relationships, activists aim to create a movement that better reflects demographic diversity in the region and thus contribute to the movement's commitment to creating change through inclusive processes.

On the issue of demographics, the Coalition for Just and Sustainable Food (CJSF)⁵ stands out among progressive food organisations in the province. Although the majority of coalition members denominate themselves as members of "European settler society," the CJSF benefits from significant participation of indigenous food activists and organisers. Building this unique alliance involved cultivating interpersonal relationships between leaders in white- and indigenous-dominated organisations, as well as a process of listening and learning. In an interview, Denise Lamarre, a white activist and ex-board member, explained that several years ago, she recognised that indigenous elders were being invited to deliver the opening prayer, but never the keynote, at alternative agri-food activists' conferences. This observation led her to commit her time and energy toward building relationships with indigenous food activists that better recognised the value of their knowledge and contributions (interview, December 17, 2010). When Denise met Michelle Grant, an indigenous activist actively working to communicate indigenous perspectives on food sovereignty within and beyond Aboriginal communities, the two women cultivated a relationship that supported Michelle's work. Charismatic, extremely skilled in cross-cultural communication, and extensively networked, Michelle and a widening network of indigenous food sovereignty activists are bringing issues of food sovereignty to the local food movement and successfully bridging the predominantly white CJSF and diverse Aboriginal communities across the province.

Create space at the centre of the movement

Some food activists have found that identifying shared values and concerns is an effective way to begin building alliances across racial difference. Oliver George, who self-identifies as indigenous and as a food and language activist, explained that recognising that "the groups shared a lot of the same values and interests" was key to why he and other members of

⁵ To protect participants' confidentiality, I have designated the organisation with a pseudonym.

his community became involved with the Coalition for Just and Sustainable Food. However, he stressed that the respect of indigenous autonomy was as important as the shared work. His group still organises – and receives support from the CJSF for – gatherings where “we could just focus on our issues” and where meals include “all our traditional foods.” He reflected on what lessons might be learned from the relationship between indigenous food activists and the CJSF:

I think that's another aspect: the autonomy of whatever group you invite in... I think that's just the structure of the [CJSF], you know, every member organisation or group that is part of it, they maintain their autonomy, they kind of do their own thing as well. I think that's a powerful model of the [CJSF], you know... we just be supportive of each other, and not try to really control what other people are doing, you know, a table to come around and talk...” (interview, September 25, 2010).

Oliver points out that, while commonalities can bring individuals, communities, and organisations together, there must be respect for multiple ways of engaging food work and multiple perspectives on what counts as valid and priority food issues. Fiona Dale, a CJSF board member who identifies as a member of “European settler society,” shares Oliver’s perspective. To Fiona, building alliances between communities of colour and local food movements involves “facilitating the information transfer and the learning to make sure that those values become integrated into our collective values” (interview, September 25, 2010). In other words, local food activists must make space at the centre of the movement for the values, issues, and concerns prioritised within communities of colour.

I observed efforts to open up the centre of the movement to the values, issues, and concerns prioritised within communities of colour at the CJSF’s annual conference September 2010. The event featured three keynote presentations: in the first, a Sinixt elder explained the links between colonialism and neo-colonialism, the loss of traditional foods, and environmental destruction; in the second, a Mexican-Canadian activist described the challenges facing migrant farm workers; and in the third, an Indo-Canadian civil servant outlined the water and climate-change related challenges facing BC’s agriculture sector (field notes, September 24, 2010). By inviting indigenous people and people of colour not only to attend the gathering, but also to facilitate workshops and lead plenary sessions, the CJSF is supporting the leadership of indigenous people and people of colour. Moreover, the CJSF is implicitly troubling the idea that the traditional foci of the local food movement are the “right” or “only” ones and directing

cultural and political resources towards issues that are prioritised by indigenous communities and communities of colour.

An inclusive local food movement? Testing for food justice in Metro Vancouver

The Metro Vancouver local food movement is not homogeneous. Movement participants implement a variety of strategies to foster food justice. These strategies are informed by divergent perspectives on how race, ethnicity, and culture should be taken into account in efforts to localise the food system. While most of the movement's work appears to be informed by ideologies that focus on economic and cultural differences, some draw on anti-racist ideologies that acknowledge the persistence of racial inequalities in ostensibly race-neutral societies.

In the next section, I examine the outcomes of the local food movement's food justice strategies. In particular, I explore the extent to which the local food movement meets the food justice criteria of *involving* diverse community members and *recognising* and *respecting* diverse ways of knowing. While this examination considers the relationship between the local food movement and diverse communities of colour, it focuses specifically on how the movement engages with Chinese-Canadian farmers. As outlined in Chapter 1, since the 1880s, Chinese-Canadian farmers in the region now known as Metro Vancouver have played an important role in local food production (Con & Wickberg, 1982); today Chinese-Canadian farmers make up 15 per cent of the region's farmers and farm managers (Statistics Canada, 2006). Yet, within the local food movement, there is little knowledge about Chinese-Canadian farmers in Metro Vancouver. During interviews, at various public events, and on listservs, I observed local food advocates discussing Chinese-Canadian farmers and the role of "Chinese" people in the local food system in diverse, and often conflicting, ways.

Some local food advocates question whether the Chinese-Canadian community "has a big mandate to purchase locally" (Tamara Toor, interview, October 14, 2010), while others describe Chinese-Canadian farmers as "the original local farmers," having continued to produce vegetables for the local market throughout the 1970s and 1980s, when the rest of the agricultural sector turned to export markets (Bill Schell, interview, March 2, 2011). A debate on the listserv of a large organisation shows that local food advocates variously associate the

greengrocers where some Chinese-Canadian farmers market their vegetables with “scores of vegetables that could be grown here” and with unsafe products like “dried lizards or toads or whatever [with] no labels with expiry dates or nutritional information” (field notes, July 22, 2010). Finally, with respect to the sustainability of the farming systems operated by Chinese-Canadian farmers in Metro Vancouver, some local food advocates suggest Chinese-Canadian farmers “come from a culture that is 10,000 years old” (Ivan Cobb, interview, March 2, 2011) and may draw on a worldview more oriented to sustainability than most Euro-Canadians (Larry Nolan, interview, September 21, 2010). Other local food advocates suggested Chinese-Canadian farmers either do not want, or do not know how, to conform to pesticide regulations (field notes, September 23, 2010).

In outlining examples of a range of statements made by several local food movement participants about Chinese-Canadian farmers and the local food system, I am not inferring that these statements are true or necessarily representative of the views of the local food movement as a whole. Rather, I list them here to provide context for the following examination of the relationship between the local food movement and Chinese-Canadian farmers in Metro Vancouver. Although many local food movement participants are *aware* that Chinese-Canadian farmers play an important role in local food production, local food movement participants’ collective knowledge about Chinese-Canadian farmers is limited, and often contradictory.

The colour of local food in Metro Vancouver

The local food movement’s food justice strategies are yielding mixed results. As a result of collaboration between participants in the local food movement and indigenous activists and organisations, indigenous perspectives are being integrated into the movement’s priorities and practices, and social, political and economic resources have been directed to enhancing food security and agricultural capacity within local First Nations communities. The links between the local food movement and indigenous perspectives, priorities, and concerns are evident in collaborative projects, such as the Urban Aboriginal Community Garden Project, that provide resources to support traditional indigenous food knowledge (see Dietitians of Canada, 2010). These links are also evident in policy documents, including the provincial Ministry of Agriculture and Lands’ British Columbia Agriculture Plan. The Plan identifies building First Nations’ agriculture capacity as one of five key themes in the Plan’s vision for “continued development

and growth of an economically viable and resilient agriculture and food sector which contributes significantly to: the health of British Columbians; climate change mitigation; environmental sustainability; and a growing B.C. economy” (British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, 2008a, p. 5).⁶

The inclusion strategies employed by local food advocates and organisations have not, however, translated into movement demographics reflective of racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity in Metro Vancouver, an urban region where, in 2006, more than 40 per cent of the region’s 2,097,965 residents were “visible minorities” (Statistics Canada, 2007a). As has been observed in alternative agri-food movements elsewhere (see Allen, 2004; Winne, 2008), the demographics of the Metro Vancouver local food movement are disproportionately white and affluent. During my interviews with local food activists and advocates, many expressed awareness that participation in local food movement does not reflect the “cultural” diversity in Metro Vancouver. Tamara Toor, a grassroots community activist who works primarily on food security issues, expressed this observation most succinctly:

At least in BC, it's still tending to be a topic that is primarily white middle-class... I mean, the poverty side of things does bring in certain low-income families and you know, we talk about availability and affordability. But on the cultural, I don't see many other cultures involved” (interview, October 14, 2010).

Tamara’s observation that there are not “many other cultures involved” holds among farm vendors at the Metro Vancouver local food movement’s preeminent institution, farmers’ markets. In Metro Vancouver, many farmers from groups that tend to be marginalised in the conventional food system, including women, small farmers, and young farmers use farmers’ markets as primary sales outlets (see Stolhandske, 2011; Tove Jacobsen, 2006; VPFC, 2009). However, farmers of colour are underrepresented in Metro Vancouver farmers’ markets. The farm vendor counts I did while shopping at farmers’ markets in Vancouver and Burnaby in summer and fall 2010 suggest that people of colour make up fewer than 15 per cent of farm vendors at farmers’ markets, while farmers of colour made up 39 per cent of Metro Vancouver’s total farmers and farm managers in 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2006). Simone O’Donnell, who

⁶The four other key themes in the BC Agriculture Plan are: producing local food in a changing world; meeting environmental and climate challenges; building innovative and profitable farm businesses; and bridging the urban/agriculture divide (British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, 2008b).

coordinates a number of farmers' markets in Metro Vancouver, explained in an interview that only one of the approximately 20 farm vendors who sell at her markets is Chinese-Canadian (interview, October 12, 2010). As described in Chapter 1, about one in seven Metro Vancouver farmers and farm managers identified as Chinese-Canadian in the 2006 Census (see Statistics Canada, 2006).

If the Metro Vancouver local food movement's record on *involving* Chinese-Canadian farmers is mixed, the movement's record on *recognising* the contributions of these farmers is also at stake. In partnership with Farm Folk City Folk, one of the more prominent local food organisations in Metro Vancouver, the Museum of Vancouver featured an exhibit exploring local food in the fall of 2010. Of the exhibit's 39 photographs, 13 were of local farmers and their farms. All of the farmers featured in this exhibit appear white (field notes, October 14, 2010). Although Chinese-Canadians make up nearly 20 per cent of the population in Metro Vancouver (Statistics Canada, 2007a) and are active participants in the local culture, economy, and food system, the only photograph in the exhibit featuring people who appear to be Chinese-Canadian was of three elderly women "binners" – people who search urban alleyways and dumpsters for refundable bottles and cans. The emphasis on the contributions of white people to the local food system is not unique to the Museum of Vancouver exhibit. *Shared Harvest*, a book professing to offer a history of the local food movement in Metro Vancouver, does not mention the contributions of Chinese-Canadian farmers to the local food system (Beers, 2010). Similarly, searching the archives of *Edible Vancouver*, a magazine that claims to offer "the story on local food," I found only one article featuring a farmer who appears to be of East Asian background (Fall 2010 issue), although each of the 16 issues published since the magazine's inception in 2008 include stories celebrating local farmers (Edible Vancouver, 2011).

The underrepresentation and under-recognition of Chinese-Canadian farmers – and of communities of colour more generally – is not a characteristic unique to Metro Vancouver local food movement. It does, however, pose unique challenges for the movement's expressed commitment to food justice. As outlined in Chapter 1, food justice involves not only the *equitable distribution* of food system benefits and burdens, but also *equal opportunities* to participate in food system governance and decision-making and *recognition and respect* for diverse experiences and understandings of the food system.

Feminist scholarship emphasises that our knowledge of the social world is mediated by our social location, that is, by where we are situated in the matrix of racialising, gendering, and other “othering” processes (Collins, 2000a; Smith, 1990). For the Metro Vancouver local food movement, this means the discourses, practices, and institutions that have come to define “local food” necessarily reflect the perspectives and experiences of movement leaders and participants (cf. Piatelli, 2009; see also Allen, 2004; Born & Purcell, 2006). In the next chapter, I question mainstream definitions of what counts as legitimate local food work by exploring the historical and contemporary roles of Chinese-Canadian farmers – a group that is variously stereotyped by local food movement participants and underrepresented in the institutions, policy documents and educational materials associated with the local food movement.

3. CHINESE-CANADIAN FARMERS AND THE METRO VANCOUVER FOOD SYSTEM

Chinese-Canadian farmers make up nearly 15 per cent of Metro Vancouver farmers, yet they are underrepresented in the region's burgeoning local food movement. Why this disconnect? Answering this question requires an understanding of *how* diverse Chinese-Canadian farmers relate to the Metro Vancouver food system and *why* they produce and market food in the specific ways they do. This chapter begins, therefore, with a description of the historical context in which Chinese people came to Canada and started farming. I outline the social and economic developments that have influenced Chinese-Canadian farmers and explain some of the creative ways Chinese-Canadian farmers have responded to these developments. Three contemporary local Chinese-Canadian farmers are then profiled: I outline their production, marketing and labour practices and these link three particular farmers to broader social and economic processes operating within the food system.

From rice to potatoes: A history of Chinese farms in BC

Immigration from China to Canada began as early as 1858. The first Chinese immigrants to Canada were peasant farmers from the Cantonese-speaking southeastern Chinese provinces of Guangdong and Fujian, and nearly all Chinese immigrants were men. Li (1998) insists that Chinese immigration to Canada must be understood in its broader historical context. Railroad construction and the discovery of gold were the immediate drivers of Chinese immigration to Canada. The deeper forces driving migration, however, were a series of natural hazards in the mid-nineteenth century, political instability in China, lack of access to land, and the penetration of foreign capitalism – all of which undermined the viability of peasant agriculture.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, the majority of Chinese in Canada⁷ worked either as labourers in the mines and on the railroads or in service occupations. In BC, vegetable gardening was another important occupation for many Chinese. Chinese immigrants began farming in BC in the 1860s; by 1941, 20 per cent of the Chinese in BC were involved in agriculture, either as farmers or as farm workers (Con & Wickberg, 1982, p. 310). Chinese farms were often located in suburban areas and were widely recognized as highly productive. In 1885, Sir Matthew Begbie, the Chief Justice of BC, noted that “Chinamen... are the model market gardeners in the province, and [they] produce the greater part of the vegetables grown here” (Royal Commission, 1885, p. 75, cited in Li, 1998, p. 29). In 1912, the *British Columbian*, a conservative local newspaper, recognised that Chinese farmers in Burnaby had turned “what was little better than a cranberry marsh into a richly productive area which is one of the most valuable assets to the municipality” (cited in Wolf, 1995).

The Chinese in BC were both pulled and pushed into agriculture. The demand for farmers spurred by the rapidly growing BC population in the late 19th and early 20th centuries pulled early Chinese immigrants into farming. In the words that several Chinese-Canadian farmers I interviewed used to describe their parents’ or grandparents’ arrival in Canada, working in agriculture allowed early Chinese immigrants to “do what they knew.” Once established, Chinese immigrant farmers were able to offer jobs to relatives, thus growing the importance of agriculture as an occupation for the Chinese in BC. By 1921, 90 per cent of BC’s vegetables, and 55 per cent of the province’s potatoes, were produced and distributed by Chinese immigrants (Anderson, 1991, p. 111).

⁷I use the term “Chinese in Canada” instead of “Chinese-Canadians” as a reminder of the second-class status that white Canadians granted to people born in China or of Chinese ancestry (see Li, 1998). Especially in British Columbia, Canadian citizenship was rarely granted to people born in China or of Chinese ancestry in the early years of Chinese immigration to Canada. Furthermore, up until the repeal of the Chinese Immigration Act in 1947, Canadian-Canadians were denied the right to vote. I reserve the term “Chinese-Canadian” for people who lived after 1947, when Canadians born in China or of Chinese ancestry obtained *de jure*, if not always *de facto*, access to Canadian citizenship and its benefits.

For the most part, farming systems⁸ operated by Chinese immigrants in Canada in the early 20th century did not resemble those they worked in China. Most early Chinese immigrants to Canada were peasant farmers who farmed mainly for subsistence purposes. In China, they tilled the soil with wooden ploughs pulled by oxen, and fertilised their crops with compost and “night soil” – human excrement collected from latrines (Charlie Sang, interview, October 7, 2010; Elaine Wong, interview, November 11, 2010). In Canada, they became commercial producers and learned to farm with diesel-powered tractors and chemical fertilisers (Charlie Sang, interview, October 7, 2010; Elaine Wong, interview, November 11, 2010). While the knowledge and skill sets required for peasant and commercial-scale agricultural systems overlap to a small extent, they are not interchangeable. That Chinese peasant farmers were able to succeed in commercial agriculture in Canada suggests that this success can be attributed at least as much to their adaptability and resourcefulness in carving out a living in a new social, political, and economic environment as to the agricultural knowledge and skills they brought from China.

Not only farm scale, technologies, and resources, but also the types of crops Chinese farmers grew in Canada were different from what they had known in China. Peasant farmers in southeastern China grew rice, sweet potatoes, peanuts, and Chinese vegetables (Charlie Sang, interview, October 7, 2010; see also Chu Fung, 1972). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Chinese farmers in BC produced European staples such as potatoes, carrots, onions, corn, tomatoes, pickling cucumbers, cabbage, and pigs (Con & Wickberg, 1982; Chu Fung, 1972; Yee, 2006).⁹ It was not until the 1970s that many Chinese-Canadian farmers started commercial production of bok choy, gai lan, and other vegetables associated with Chinese culture and cuisine (Elaine Wong, interview, November 11, 2010; see also Wang and Cerkauskas, 1999). Significantly, all the Chinese-Canadian farmers I interviewed described their decision to grow Chinese vegetables not in terms of their cultural proximity to these vegetables, but as a business

⁸The National Research Council’s Committee on Twenty-First Century Systems Agriculture [NRC] (2010) defines farming systems as “the mix of crops or animal components, or some combination thereof in a farm, their arrangement over space and time, the resources and technologies used in their management, and the nature and effectiveness of hierarchical relationships both within the farm and with the ecological, social, economic, and political environments within which it operates. The farming system thus includes community linkages, market integration, labour relationships, and interaction with a wide variety of other influencing factors” (p. 18).

⁹Not all of these crops originated in Europe. However, it was European settlers brought these crops to BC, where the diet had previously consisted of fish, seafood and game along with berries, roots, and other wild-harvested foods (McDonald, 1992).

decision. For some of these farmers, growing Chinese vegetables was a way of tapping into an emerging market for these vegetables – a market that opened both as a result of the growing Chinese population made possible by the liberalisation of immigration policy and as a result of rising interest in “ethnic” foods in Canada. Because many Chinese vegetables need very little time in the soil before they can be harvested, growing these vegetables allows farmers to achieve the intensive production levels required to operate an economically viable farm. For other farmers, particularly for immigrant farmers with few economic resources, growing Chinese vegetables is an attractive option because these vegetables cannot, for the most part, be mechanically harvested and as such have lower start-up costs.

Thus, a number of factors pulled the Chinese in BC into agriculture. BC’s growing population in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries needed to be fed. Chinese farmers in BC applied both the agricultural knowledge and skills they acquired as peasant farmers in China and their adaptability and resourcefulness to create opportunities for themselves and their relatives to work in agriculture. However, the Chinese in BC were also pushed into farming because anti-Chinese racism excluded them from many forms of waged employment (Con & Wickberg, 1982). Unlike many of their European counterparts, Chinese immigrants were not warmly welcomed in Canada. White business owners appreciated Chinese workers’ industriousness and were happy to hire Chinese workers, who accepted menial work and low wages. However, many white Canadians, and white British Columbians in particular, held racist ideas about the Chinese: they believed the Chinese were immoral, unclean, unsanitary, and a threat to “white Canada.” This racist fear, combined with difficult economic conditions during the 1930s, led many white Canadians to demand that people born in China or of Chinese ancestry be denied jobs in mines, canneries, and mills (Con & Wickberg, 1982; Li, 1998).

Even in agriculture, however, the Chinese in Canada were not free from racial discrimination. Initially, Chinese farms in BC were small, and Chinese farmers leased the land they worked. As Chinese farmers became more numerous and began to purchase their land, operate greenhouses, and produce larger quantities of vegetables, some white Canadians started to perceive Chinese farmers as a threat (Yee, 2006). The vegetables produced by Chinese farmers were said to be too cheap, and the greengrocers where these vegetables were sold were labelled as crowded and unsanitary (Anderson, 1991). These stereotypes about

Chinese farmers and the networks through which they marketed their food reveal something about the constraints experienced by Chinese people living in a racist society. Discrimination by whites forced Chinese farmers to sell their labour and their produce cheaply if they were to survive at all in a competitive market. Similarly, living and business quarters became crowded because Chinese people were discouraged from establishing homes and businesses outside of Chinese neighbourhoods (Con & Wickberg, 1982).

Anti-Chinese racism linked to agriculture was not only present in the meanings white British Columbians attributed to Chinese-Canadian farmers and the vegetables they produced, but also took root in the provincial government. In 1927, the Province of British Columbia released its *Report on Oriental Activities within the Province*. One item of particular concern to the authors of this report was “That in the four years from 1921 to 1925 the acreage of land owned by Orientals increased by approximately 5,000 acres and the land leased by approximately 1,500 acres” (British Columbia Bureau of Provincial Information & British Columbia Department of Agriculture, 1927, p. 4). These data were provided as context for Members of the Legislative Assembly charged with studying “whether legislation can be enacted to prevent Chinese and Japanese from owning, selling, leasing, or renting land in British Columbia, or, in the alternative, imposing conditions on their rights of ownership” (British Columbia Bureau of Provincial Information & British Columbia Department of Agriculture, 1927, p. 1). The quantification of the “Oriental *penetration* of British Columbia” (British Columbia Bureau of Provincial Information & British Columbia Department of Agriculture, 1927, p. 1, emphasis in original) was driven by white fears that the province would no longer be controlled by whites.

These racial fears had tangible ramifications. Con and Wickberg (1982) note that white Canadians used the growth of Chinese agricultural operations as a justification for the Chinese Immigration Act of 1923 (p. 145). This exclusionary act abolished the head tax that the Chinese community in Canada has long been protesting, but limited immigration from China to university students, merchants, ministers, teachers, and diplomatic personnel. Because nearly all Chinese immigrants in the early twentieth century were peasant farmers, the Chinese Immigration Act effectively stopped Chinese immigration to Canada until the Act was repealed in 1947 (Con & Wickberg, 1982; Li, 1998).

The Chinese in Canada were not passive in the face of white racism and exclusion. Chinese farmers' and vegetable retailers' response to their social and economic segregation in Canada is evident in the number of trade associations they created between 1920 and 1962 (Con & Wickberg, 1982; see Table 6). Some of these organisations functioned to advance the social status of Chinese people in Canada. For instance, in the 1930s, the Overseas Chinese Produce Merchants Association and the Overseas Chinese Farmers Association supported a boycott of all commercial dealings with Japan or with Japanese-Canadians. By supporting the boycott, Chinese farmers were not only showing their support for China during the Sino-Japanese War, but also participating in a project that Con and Wickberg (1982) describe as "solidarity" with Canada's war efforts. This solidarity "helped improve white Canadian attitudes towards Chinese Canadians and that, in turn, made possible, by 1947, enfranchisement of the Chinese in British Columbia and Saskatchewan, and major improvements for the Chinese in immigration policy" (p. 188). In short, these organisations helped advance the social status of the Chinese in Canada – even if these gains came at the expense of established commercial relationships with Japanese-Canadians and, more significantly, the dignity and well-being of Japanese-Canadians.

Other organisations functioned to address the economic marginalisation of Chinese farmers. The BC Lower Mainland Farmers Cooperative Association, for example, was created in 1962 to enable Chinese-Canadian farmers to obtain higher prices from the wholesalers at a time when it was common for wholesalers, most of whom were white, to discriminate against Chinese-Canadian farmers. With a full-time manager authorised to threaten wholesalers with a boycott unless higher prices were offered to its members, the BC Lower Mainland Farmers Cooperative Association gave Chinese-Canadian farmers a degree of economic security that had been impossible before (Con & Wickberg, 1982, p. 233).

Agriculture employs proportionately fewer Chinese-Canadians today than it did historically. In 1941, 20 per cent of the Chinese in BC worked in agriculture (Con & Wickberg, 1982); in 2006, less than 0.4 per cent of Chinese-Canadians in BC worked in agriculture (Statistics Canada, 2006). This trend is not unique to Chinese-Canadians: from 1941 to 2006, the percentage of British Columbians working in agriculture declined from 27 per cent to 1.5 per cent (Statistics Canada, 2001; Statistics Canada, 2008b). Farming is employing fewer and fewer people in Canada as a result of increased farm labour productivity facilitated by the

capitalisation and industrialisation of agriculture, lack of profit growth in the agricultural sector, an ageing farm population, and increasing opportunities for off-farm employment (Bowlby, 2002). Further research is needed to determine why the decline in the percentage of the Chinese-Canadians involved in agriculture in BC is an order of magnitude higher than the decline among the total population.

Table 6: Chinese farming and produce retailing associations

<i>Organisation</i>	<i>Founded</i>	<i>Dissolved</i>
Vegetable Retailers Association	Late 1910s	1940s – 1950s
Federation of Overseas Chinese Agricultural Producers and Merchants	Mid 1920s	1940s – 1950s
Chinese Produce Wholesalers Association	1928	1940s – 1950s
Overseas Chinese Farmers Association	1930s	1940s – 1950s
Overseas Chinese Produce Merchants Association	1930s	1940s – 1950s
Vancouver Mainland Growers Cooperative Association	1937	1940s – 1950s
BC Lower Mainland Farmers Cooperative Association	1962	1980s

Source: Data from Con & Wickberg (1982, pp. 318-329) and from interviews with two Chinese-Canadian farmers conducted in fall 2010.

From field to table: Contemporary Chinese-Canadian farms and food networks

As early as the late 19th century, British Columbians recognised Chinese farmers as some of this province’s most skilled vegetable producers; today, Chinese-Canadian farmers in Metro Vancouver are reputed to operate some of the most productive vegetable farms in Canada (British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Fisheries, n.d.; Burnaby Director of Planning and Building Inspection, 1986; Levenston, 2010). According to regional agrologist Bill Schell, Chinese-Canadian vegetable growers in this region are operating highly intensive farms that, on a per acre basis, achieve farm gate sales up to three times higher than other vegetable farms in the area (interview, September 13, 2010).

It is difficult to generalise about the types of farming systems operated by Chinese-Canadian farmers in Metro Vancouver because farm data from the Canadian Census of Agriculture are not linked to “immigration” or “visible minority” data. Anecdotally, Indo-Canadian farmers in Metro Vancouver are widely associated with berry production, while

Chinese-Canadian farmers are associated with intensive vegetable production. Civil servants, community organisers, and farmers regularly speak of this pattern. In addition, various government and trade publications suggest that BC's "Asian" farmers tend to grow fruits, vegetables, and greenhouse products. One report estimates that about 42 per cent of Asian-born farmers in BC operate tree fruit, berry, and nut farms, and another 30 percent run field vegetable and greenhouse operations (Norman, 2004). This report states "Asian immigrant farmers tend to gravitate to particular types of farming based on their experiences in their country of birth" (Norman, 2004, p. 32). Because the report provides no evidence for this assertion, and because all of the Chinese-Canadian farmers I interviewed told me the farming systems they operate in Canada are very different from the ones they (or their parents and grandparents) operated in China, I treat the data provided in this report with caution.

Two reports suggest that most Chinese vegetables in Canada are grown by "Chinese" or "Asian" farmers (British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture and Food, 2008; Wang & Cerkauskas, 1999). Among the more popular Chinese vegetables grown in BC are bok choy, choy sum, gai choy, sui choy, gai lan, Napa cabbage, daikon radish and lotus root (British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture, n.d.). In BC, the commercial production of Chinese vegetables is concentrated in Metro Vancouver: of 114 harvested hectares, 105 hectare (or 92 per cent) were in this urban region (Statistics Canada, 2007b). Thus, it is likely that Chinese-Canadian farmers in Metro Vancouver play a dominant role in Chinese vegetable production, although further research is needed to confirm this fact and to establish which, if any, other crops Chinese-Canadian farmers play a dominant role in producing.

Of 1510.5 kilograms of Chinese vegetables grown in Metro Vancouver and the neighbouring Fraser Valley region in 2004, 626.0 kilograms – or 41 per cent – were sold at roadside farm stands or through direct farm sales to retail outlets and consumers (BC Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, 2004). The remainder is sold fresh to wholesalers. In the next sections, I describe how, and the extent to which, Chinese-Canadian farmers in Metro Vancouver market their produce through four food networks: sales to wholesalers; direct sales to greengrocers; roadside farm stores; and farmers' markets.

Wholesalers

In Metro Vancouver, Chinese-Canadian entrepreneurs and business people play an important role in the fresh produce wholesaling sector. A recent study of the economy of local food produced for the Vancouver Economic Development Commission (VEDC) reports that

Alongside the mainstream distribution and wholesale network, a parallel ethnic supply chain thrives in Metro Vancouver, which reinforces the system's rigid design. Dominated by Asian wholesalers, the system is characterized by strong business relationships between inclusive members. Many producers lack the ability to speak English that provides language savvy wholesalers with a constant pipeline of supply - to be distributed to buyers that demand niche or specialty crop products (Hild, 2009, p. 9)

My observations on Malkin Avenue, where Metro Vancouver's produce wholesalers are concentrated, and my interviews with representatives from two produce wholesalers suggest that most of the "Asian" wholesalers referred to in the VEDC study are, in fact, Chinese-Canadian. In this context, selling to wholesalers offers Chinese-Canadian farmers the option to conduct transactions in a Chinese language.

This option is very important for June Lee, a first generation Chinese-Canadian farmer. When June and her husband first started their farm in the early 2000s, they sold most of their produce to T & T Supermarket, a supermarket chain whose mission is "to enrich the lifestyle of Asian families in Canada by offering them choice food and household items in a comfortable shopping environment [and] to introduce the colourful Asian food culture to the Canadian multicultural society" (T & T Supermarket, n.d.). T & T carries a wide selection of Chinese vegetables, and thus offers an outlet for the large quantities of diverse varieties of Chinese vegetables grown on the Lee's farm. June explained to me that she no longer sells to T & T because the supermarket has decentralised its purchasing, making sales less convenient. She continues, however, to sell exclusively to wholesalers where she can speak Chinese (interview, October 28, 2010).

Various factors limit Chinese-Canadian farmers' sales to wholesalers. First, stagnating prices at the wholesalers have pushed many farmers (no matter how they are racialised) to seek out direct marketing opportunities that allow them to retain a higher share of the food dollar. Second, unless their customers specifically request local produce, wholesalers will buy produce

from places where produce is cheap, uniform in size, and long-lasting. Often, this means buying produce from California, Mexico, and South America. According to Charles Zhang, vice president of one of the largest fresh produce wholesalers in BC, California is especially important as a source for Chinese vegetables because harvesting techniques are more “advanced” there. In California, refrigeration trucks cool the vegetables as soon as they are harvested, thus extending the vegetables’ shelf life. In contrast, Chinese vegetable production in BC is not highly mechanised, and Chinese vegetables produced in BC do not tend to remain fresh very long (interview, November 8, 2011). Third, the extent to which Chinese-Canadian farmers in Metro Vancouver sell to wholesalers is influenced also by payment options. According to Charles Zhang, many Chinese-Canadian farmers in Metro Vancouver prefer to sell directly to greengrocers because they tend to offer payment upon delivery, whereas payment from wholesalers is often delayed for two or three weeks (interview, November 8, 2011).

Greengrocers

Greengrocers constitute an important part of Metro Vancouver’s fresh produce retail environment. A recent assessment of Vancouver’s food system found, for instance, that “small markets often specialising in the cuisine of a particular population” make up 34 per cent of the Vancouver’s approximately 361 grocery stores (FORC, 2006, p. 55). Although, as has been observed elsewhere (see McMichael & Friedmann, 2007), large supermarket chains have come to play an increasing role in Metro Vancouver’s food system, greengrocers and “smaller specialty markets” continue to operate – and, indeed, even grow in number – in this urban region. A City of Vancouver report found that

In 1980 there were a large number (47) of very similar small and medium-sized conventional supermarkets, at more or less regular intervals throughout the city. In 1998, there were fewer supermarkets (40) overall, but with some new types: smaller specialty supermarkets and large/mega supermarkets (French & Buckham, 1998).

In 1935, 125 of Vancouver’s 158 greengrocers were owned by Chinese immigrants (Yee, 2006, p. 87). Today, ownership of greengrocers is more diverse, but Chinese-Canadian greengrocers remain ubiquitous in Metro Vancouver and are widely recognised as a source of affordable fresh produce (VPFC, 2009). Wholesalers, greengrocer staff, farmers, and a regional

agrologist working for the provincial government told me that direct sales to greengrocers are an important marketing outlet for Chinese-Canadian farmers in Metro Vancouver (see also VPFC, 2009, p. 62). It is significant that all of the greengrocers I visited in Vancouver and Burnaby carry local produce grown by Chinese-Canadian farmers during the growing season (see Table 7). Even in early November, one of these greengrocers offered more than ten varieties of produce grown by local Chinese-Canadian farmers.

Table 7: Greengrocers selling local Chinese-Canadian farmers' produce

Date	Greengrocer	Location	Sells produce grown by local Chinese-Canadian farmers?
September 29, 2010	1	Burnaby – Big Bend	yes
November 1, 2010	2	Vancouver – Hastings Sunrise	yes
November 1, 2010	3	Vancouver – Hastings Sunrise	yes
November 16, 2010	4	Vancouver – Downtown Eastside	yes
November 16, 2010	5	Vancouver – Downtown Eastside	yes
November 16, 2010	6	Vancouver – Downtown Eastside	yes
November 16, 2010	7	Vancouver – Downtown Eastside	yes

Note: Sometimes, a sign or a product label communicated where and by whom the produce was grown; more often, I learned this information by asking a clerk in the produce aisle. To protect participants' confidentiality, greengrocers have been assigned numbers and are identified only by their location.

Some of these greengrocers use only English-language signs and carry a range of produce varieties similar to that available at major grocery chains such as Safeway and Superstore. Other greengrocers cater to first and subsequent generation Chinese-Canadians by employing staff fluent in Cantonese or other Chinese language, labelling food products in Chinese, and offering a wide range of Chinese vegetables. One greengrocer I visited offered not only the widely available bok choy and Napa cabbage, but as many as 22 varieties of leafy Chinese greens.

Roadside farm stores

A third way some Chinese-Canadian farmers in Metro Vancouver market their produce is through roadside farm stores. In an interview, Charlie Sang, a second generation Chinese-Canadian farmer/store owner, explained that, to his knowledge, the first roadside farm store owned and operated by a Chinese-Canadian farmer in Metro Vancouver was opened in the 1970s. When other Chinese-Canadian farmers, including his parents, saw how successful the store was, as compared to selling to wholesalers, they began opening their own roadside farm stores (interview, October 7, 2010). As shown in Table 8, average farm and roadside sale prices for crops grown on intensive field vegetable farms in Metro Vancouver are up to four times higher than wholesale prices for these vegetables.

Table 8: Average prices in for select vegetables in BC in 2004

Vegetable	Fresh wholesale (\$/pound)	Farm & roadside sales (\$/pound)	Farm & roadside sales prices relative to fresh wholesale prices
Bunch beets	0.33	1.16	3.5
Bunch carrots	0.35	0.99	2.8
Chinese vegetables	0.36	0.5	1.4
Lettuce, head	0.23	0.86	3.7
Lettuce, leaf	0.18	0.72	4
Onions, bunched	0.44	1.27	2.9
Parsley	1.20	1.75	1.5
Radishes	0.27	0.59	2.2
Spinach	0.63	0.99	1.6

Source: Data from British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture and Lands (2004). All vegetables listed in this table are ones I observed being produced on farms operated by Chinese-Canadian farmers in Metro Vancouver.

I visited two roadside farm stores owned and operated by Chinese-Canadian farmers in Metro Vancouver. Although each one carries some imported fruits and vegetables, these stores feature primarily local, seasonal, and, sometimes, pesticide-free produce. Produce stickers and handwritten signs above the produce bins distinguish “local,” “BC,” and “Okanagan” produce from imported produce. At both farms, vegetables are “cut,” or harvested every morning in order to ensure produce is fresh. Both of these stores are closed during the late fall and winter months when their farms are not producing fresh vegetables (Elaine Wong, interview, September 19, 2010; Ron Chang, November 8, 2010).

One Chinese-Canadian-owned roadside farm store made local news headlines in the summer of 2010 when it closed permanently. Known among some local residents as a source of affordable and very fresh produce, Richmond's Tai On Farm shut down when the farm owners retired and their children, who have pursued off-farm careers, chose not to continue the family business (Richmond Review, 2010). Chinese-Canadian-owned roadside farm stores have closed elsewhere in Metro Vancouver. Charlie Sang reported that, in Burnaby, the number of on-farm produce stores declined from four to two as the farmers operating these stores either retired or transitioned to nursery production (interview, October 7, 2010).

Farmers' markets

As explained in Chapter 2, farmers' markets are one of the most publicly visible manifestations of the local food movement in Metro Vancouver. Farmers' markets are not, however, a major marketing outlet for Chinese-Canadian farmers in Metro Vancouver. Shopping at farmers' markets in Vancouver and Burnaby in summer and fall 2010, I encountered only one Chinese-Canadian farm vendor – a wife and husband team. Simone O'Donnell, who coordinates a few farmers' markets in Metro Vancouver, explained why having this Chinese-Canadian farm vendor at her markets was important to her:

It's interesting because they bring Chinese vegetables, and we notice at our farmers market, I mean, farmers' markets stereotypically are middle class white people that come and shop at them. But when [the Chinese-Canadian farmers] come with their Chinese vegetables and stuff like that, you'll see – and this is merely observation, nothing scientific has ever been done to study this – but you'll see an increase in like, culture diversities that are coming then to shop because they've heard that they can find fresh gai lan, or some sort of fresh Chinese vegetable at the markets. So it's really good to incorporate farmers that grow culturally traditional produce, because that's a whole other segment of the population that you then can tap into and get starting to come to the market (interview, October 12, 2010)

I heard many local food advocates express similar desire for “other ethnicities” and “other cultures” to be brought into farmers' markets. However, it is less clear that Chinese-Canadian farmers *want* to sell their produce at farmers' markets. There are both push and pull factors that lead Chinese-Canadian farmers to prefer to sell their vegetables to greengrocers and wholesalers, and at on-farm produce stores.

First, for some farmers, the benefits of wholesaling outweigh the benefits of marketing through the farmers' markets. As described above, selling to wholesalers offers Chinese-Canadian farmers the option to conduct transactions in a Chinese language. For some Chinese immigrant farmers, this is a significant advantage over trying to sell vegetables at farmers' markets, where English is the dominant language, and where the atmosphere can be crowded and noisy. Moreover, regardless of how they are racialised, some farmers prefer selling to wholesalers because it allows them to spend more time doing what they like: farming. Farmers' markets are especially labour-intensive for farmers: selling small quantities to many customers is much more time-consuming than selling large quantities in one place and often requires a more diversified operation (Barbolet et al., 2005). Additionally, farmers' success with, and enjoyment of, farmers' markets and other marketing institutions that require face-to-face interaction, vary depending on individual personality traits (NRC, 2010).

Even for Chinese-Canadian farmers who do direct market their produce, farmers' markets may not be considered desirable. In conversation with two Chinese-Canadian farmers, I was told, "you have to be careful" when shopping at farmers' markets because vendors at farmers' markets are not always honest about their products (Elaine Wong, interview, September 19, 2010; Ron Chang, November 8, 2010). For both of these farmers, their distrust in farmers' markets was grounded in the experience of seeing another farmer buy vegetables from their roadside farm stores and re-sell it at a farmers' market, claiming that he had grown it himself and that the produce was organic. While regulations and enforcement to prevent this type of occurrence at farmers' markets have become stricter in the 15 years since farmers' markets re-appeared in Metro Vancouver, the lived experience of dishonesty continues to fuel these two farmers' distrust in towards farmers' markets.

Beyond distrust in farmers' markets, some Chinese-Canadian farmers do not consider farmers' markets to be a good place to market their produce. Perhaps due to the pest damage that can occur in organic farming systems, several Chinese-Canadian farmers I interviewed associated farmers' markets, where there is an emphasis on organic produce, with flawed, dirty, and imperfect produce. This sentiment was most succinctly expressed by Ron Chang, a third generation Chinese-Canadian farmer who explained that he has noticed that, in contrast to his own customers, customers at farmers' markets "look for, um, flawed stuff. They don't want perfect... Tell them that it's organic, and it looks kind of dirty, and it's just, yeah [that's what

they want]” (interview, November 8, 2010). This perception of the produce at farmers’ markets stands in stark contrast with how Chinese-Canadian farmers describe their own produce. All of the Chinese-Canadian farmers I interviewed explained that they harvest every day to ensure their vegetables are always fresh, and several Chinese-Canadian farmers emphasised that the quality of their products secures loyalty from their customers. It is not surprising that Chinese-Canadian farmers who, as a group, have historically been racialised as unsanitary and cheap, are not attracted to an institution that they associate with substandard produce, especially when the quality and freshness of their produce is such a point of pride.

Finally, for some Chinese-Canadian farmers, farmers’ markets are not only not considered *desirable*, but also not *needed*. In the 1970s and 1980s, some Chinese-Canadian farmers began opening produce stores where they sold their own vegetables, and vegetables grown on neighbouring farms. When farmers’ markets re-appeared in Vancouver in the 1990s, and were promoted as a sales outlet where farmers could obtain a higher share of the food dollar and build relationships with their customers, these farmers were not interested. They had already created and invested in on-farm produce stores that allowed them to achieve these objectives.

Why did some Chinese-Canadian farmers already own and operate on-farm produce stores decades before the local food movement started promoting direct marketing institutions like farmers’ markets and community supported agriculture? My interviews with three Chinese-Canadian farmer/store owners suggest that the lived experience of racism is part of the explanation. Here is how Elaine Wong, a second-generation farmer and produce store owner, describes her parents’ struggle as they started their farm in the 1950s and 1960s, when most wholesalers were owned by white British Columbians:

When my parents came, there were not a lot of options. We had a big family, there were seven of us kids, and it wasn't always fair – because of the racial thing. My dad would go down to the wholesaler's in his truck, with a truck full of vegetables, and they would just take it from him, because they could. They would just take the vegetables and then not pay him. They could do that. I'm not saying it's right; it's just the way things were then. It was a different time (interview, September 19, 2010).

Although Elaine is no longer confronted with racial discrimination in her day-to-day work marketing vegetables, the lived experience of “the racial thing” continues to shape what the Wongs produce on their farm, and how they market their agricultural products. Partially in response to discrimination by white wholesalers, the Wongs branched out from a vegetable-only business into the nursery business. In the 1970s, they opened an on-farm nursery and produce store allowing them to bypass the wholesalers and sell their produce directly to consumers. This farm business model turned out to be “a lot better than selling to wholesalers,” and to this day, Elaine and her family continue to operate their combined nursery/vegetable farm and roadside farm store. Certainly, the experience of racism is not the only influence on how the Wongs farm; rather, these experiences intersect with the broader context of stagnating farm gate prices, increasing uncertainty in the global food system, and labour shortages (see Metro Vancouver, 2011b) that farmers face regardless of how they are racialised.

Three farm profiles

Chinese-Canadian farmers in Metro Vancouver use diverse farming practices and market their products through various food networks, including wholesalers, greengrocers, roadside farm stores, and, to a small extent, farmers’ markets. To illustrate how Chinese-Canadian farmers operate within the local food system, in this next section, I profile three local Chinese-Canadian farmers: Elaine Wong, June Lee, and Ron Chang. These three farms were selected not because they are representative of all Chinese-Canadian farmers in Metro Vancouver, but because they illustrate some of the ways in which agricultural, labour, and marketing practices are integrated on the farms supplying the food networks described above. Table 9 summarises some key characteristics of the Wong, Lee, and Chang farms.

Elaine Wong

With her siblings and in-laws, Elaine Wong co-owns a small farm on the fertile alluvial soils adjacent to the Fraser River. Her parents, who emigrated from China, started the farm in the 1950s. On less than four hectares, the Wongs grow more than 10 varieties of vegetables, including Chinese vegetables, carrots, beets, green onions, radishes, culinary herbs, spinach, and fancy lettuces. Elaine calls these “turnover crops” because they grow quickly, allowing them to operate an intensive system in which each field yields three or four crops per year. In addition,

the Wongs grow flowers and bedding out plants in a dozen greenhouses. To maintain soil fertility in such an intensive system, the Wongs use a combination of compost – made from farm residues and spoiled food from the roadside farm store – and synthetic fertilisers.

The Wongs' weed and pest control strategy involves both the use of synthetic pesticides and the application of various principles of integrated pest management. Based on the recognition that diverse farm practices have direct effects on weed populations, disease incidence and pest populations, integrated pest management "involves the strategic use of complementary practices – including cultural, mechanical, biological, ecological, and chemical control methods – to keep pest levels below critical economic thresholds" (NRC, 2010, p. 21). The Wongs apply integrated pest management by using mechanical controls, such as hand weeding, and preventative cultural practices, such as crop rotations, growing diverse crops, and setting out transplants rather than direct seeding. Ongoing, informal monitoring of weed and pest populations is also critical to the Wongs' weed and pest control strategy. Monitoring is facilitated by virtue of the Wongs' human-intensive farming system. On the Wong farm, all seeding, transplanting, weeding, and harvesting are done by hand. Most labour is provided by family members, but the Wongs do hire "a few" seasonal workers, usually recruited from English Second Language classes.

The Wongs market their agricultural and nursery products through three channels: fresh herbs are sold in bulk to produce wholesalers; fresh flowers are sold at a twice-weekly flower auction; vegetables, along with some herbs and nursery products, are sold at their on-farm produce store. Depending on the time of year, 50 to 90 per cent of their business is in produce sold at the on-farm produce store. First opened in 1973, the Wongs' busy produce store now has two cash registers and offers customers a wide selection of fruits and vegetables. As indicated on hand-written signs next to the produce bins, all fruits are brought in from other "local," "Okanagan" or "California" farms. Elaine estimates that 85 per cent of the vegetables sold in the store were grown on their farm, or, if they run out, on their neighbours' farms. Long-season crops such as tomatoes, squash, beans and cauliflower, make up the remaining 15 per cent; these are brought in from elsewhere in BC. The store closes at the end of October when their farm is no longer producing fresh vegetables.

According to Elaine, it is thanks to the store that her family has been able to stay in the farming business. Elaine stresses, however, that the store represents more than just a profitable marketing outlet. For her customers, the store has been a source of quality, fresh, local vegetables for nearly 40 years. For her nieces, the store provides employment during university semester breaks. For her, the store provides an enjoyable work environment where, as a single mother, she can balance wage-earning activities with caring for her young daughter.

June Lee

Before immigrating to Canada in the 1970s, June Lee's farming experience was limited to the little she had learned in elementary school, working in the school garden. In China, June had trained as a nurse. Shortly after graduating, she joined her husband in Canada, where she had to give up nursing, as she was fluent in Cantonese and Mandarin, but not in English. For almost twenty-five years, June and her husband worked on a relative's farm, growing field vegetables such as carrots, potatoes and beans. In the early 2000s, the Lees began their own farm on a 32-hectare property. Although, as farm workers, the Lees had gained experience growing field vegetables brought to BC by Euro-Canadian settlers, they transitioned to growing Chinese vegetables when they started their own farm because the production of Chinese vegetables is not highly mechanised. As June explained to me, she and her husband are growing Chinese vegetables because they could not afford the large-scale equipment needed to grow the potatoes, carrots, and other field vegetables they had learned to grow while working on their relative's farm.

The Lees begin each farming season by tilling chicken manure into the soil. For fast-growing Chinese vegetables such as bok choy, chicken manure is the only fertiliser used; slower growing plants like gai lan are top-dressed with synthetic fertilisers every 15 days. The Lees operate a less intensive agricultural system than do other Chinese vegetable growers in Metro Vancouver, producing only one or two crops per year on each field. The Lees chose a less intensive agricultural system because they are not farming on a fertile floodplain, and because they want to avoid club root, a soil-borne disease affecting Chinese vegetables and other members of the Brassica family.

The Lees recently transitioned from routinely applying synthetic pesticides and herbicides to integrating some principles of integrated pest management, including tolerating

acceptable pest levels, using mechanical controls, and engaging in ongoing monitoring. As on the Wong farm, ongoing monitoring on the Lee farm is a by-product of operating a human-intensive farming system. To show me how much work is involved in growing Chinese vegetables, June crouched down, as if to harvest a head of choy with a sickle, and asked me to listen to her knees crack. All of the Lees' crops are direct seeded and harvested by hand. Every season, the Lees hire 10 farm workers – some Chinese immigrants and some Mexican migrant farm workers – to help them on the farm. Small tractors, used in preparing the soil for planting and for weeding, are an essential part of their operation. June's husband recently designed and built a tractor-powered furrow that has allowed them to considerably reduce their herbicide use.

The Lees market their produce exclusively through wholesalers and the Safeway and Superstore supermarket chains. The Lees prefer selling to wholesalers and supermarket chains because it is quick and efficient: it requires only a telephone call to obtain a purchasing order, and delivering the vegetables in one of their three 9,000 kilogram farm trucks. The Lees also prefer to do their transactions in Cantonese or Mandarin, languages spoken by the wholesalers with whom they do business.

Ron Chang

Ron Chang is a third generation farmer. In the 1930s, during the era of the Chinese Exclusion Act, his grandfather started a small farm. Ron's grandfather grew squash, lettuce and a small variety of other vegetables, and he brought them into Vancouver on his horse and wagon. Today, on this one-hectare property, Ron, his wife Cathy, and three long-time employees grow Chinese vegetables, bunch carrots, bunch beets, green onions, radishes, culinary herbs, salad greens, and a variety of nursery products. As Ron explained to me, the Changs now grow higher value products, and a wider range of products, than Ron's grandfather did 80 years ago. The production system, however, remains very similar. The Chang farm is human-intensive: all planting, weeding, spraying, and harvesting is done manually because the farm is too small, and the rows too short, for tractors to be useful.

Ron is interested in organic agriculture, but he has chosen not to farm organically. Organic certification is not seen as feasible because, surrounded by non-organic farms, his farm is too small to allow for the required buffer zone. Furthermore, most of the Changs' customers

are more interested in fresh, unblemished produce than in organic produce. Nevertheless, the Changs do grow some of their produce without synthetic pesticides: they watch the weather and their crops and only spray if pests or diseases begin to be a problem. Some years, they do not spray synthetic pesticides at all. The Changs also apply other principles of integrated pest management, including mechanical controls and preventative cultural practices such as growing diverse crops, and transplanting. The Changs fertilise all of their crops with synthetic, granular fertilisers.

The Changs sell 95 per cent of the vegetables, herbs, and nursery products they grow at their on-farm produce store; the remaining five per cent is sold to wholesalers. To provide their customers with the freshest possible produce, the Changs harvest vegetables every morning. Economic concerns drove the Changs to open the produce store. During my interview with Ron, he explained that when his dad opened the produce store in the 1980s, they were getting the same prices from the wholesalers as they had in the early 1970s. In the meantime, costs for fertilisers, pesticides, seeds and all other farm inputs had increased. Opening the store enabled the Changs to “eliminate the middleman” and thus obtain the prices they needed to stay in business.

Table 9: Diversity in the agricultural, labour, and marketing practices of Chinese-Canadian farmers in Metro Vancouver

	Elaine Wong	June Lee	Ron Chang
Start of farm	1950s	Early 2000s	1930s
Farm size	4 hectares	32 hectares	1 hectare
Vegetables grown	10+ types of quick-growing vegetables, including Chinese vegetables, carrots, beets, green onions, radishes, herbs, spinach, and lettuces. In addition, bedding out plants grown in greenhouses.	Chinese vegetables, including bok choy, baby bok choy, gai lan, siu choy, and others. All are members of the Brassica family.	10+ types of vegetables, including Chinese vegetables, carrots, beets, green onions, radishes, herbs, and lettuces. In addition, bedding out plants grown in greenhouses.
Intensity	One field yields 3 – 4 crops per year	One field yields 1 – 2 crops per year	One field yields 3 – 4 crops per year

	Elaine Wong	June Lee	Ron Chang
Planting, weeding and harvesting	Very human-intensive: all seeding, transplanting, weeding, and harvesting done by hand.	Human-intensive: all crops direct-seeded. Most weeding done with a tractor-powered furrow. Harvesting done by hand.	Very human-intensive: all seeding, transplanting, weeding and harvesting done by hand.
Labour	Family members plus temporary farm workers.	Husband and wife farm owners/operators plus 10 temporary farm workers.	Family members plus 3 farm workers who have been working at the farm for many years.
Fertilisation	Combination of compost (from farm residues and spoiled food from the on-farm produce store) and synthetic fertilisers.	Chicken manure rototilled in before planting. Generally, this is all that is given to quick-growing crops. Slower-growing are periodically given synthetic fertilisers.	Granular chemical fertilisers. Organic farming is not seen as feasible because the farm is small and too close to neighbouring, non-organic farms.
Pest management	Use synthetic pesticides, but integrate principles of integrated pest management, including: monitoring, mechanical controls, and preventative cultural practices such as crop rotations, growing diverse crops, and transplanting.	Recently transitioned from routine use of synthetic pesticides and herbicides to integrating some principles of integrated pest management, including: acceptable pest levels; monitoring and mechanical controls.	Use synthetic pesticides, but integrate principles of integrated pest management, including: monitoring, mechanical controls, and preventative cultural practices such as growing diverse crops, and transplanting.
Marketing	Vegetables sold at family-owned, on-farm produce store. Herbs sold in bulk to wholesalers. Flowers sold at auction.	Produce mostly sold to Cantonese-speaking wholesalers; some sold directly to local supermarkets.	95% of produce sold at family-owned, on-farm produce store. Surplus sold to wholesalers.

Note: All data from interviews and observations conducted in fall 2010. This table is intended to illustrate diversity among Chinese-Canadian farms. This table does not capture the full complexity of these three farms, nor is this table representative all Chinese-Canadian farmers.

Extending out from the field

In the previous section, I profiled the agricultural, labour, and marketing practices used by three Chinese-Canadian farmers in Metro Vancouver. In the next section, I explore commonalities between these three particular farmers and link them to broader social and economic processes operating within the food system. I reflect first on these farmers' level of political organisation, then on the economic viability of their operations, and finally on their concerns about the food system.

Independent farmers

None of the Chinese-Canadian farmers interviewed for this project are a member of an agricultural organisation. These farmers' independence is significant in light of the historical importance of ethnic organisations for Chinese-Canadian farmers in BC. As explained in this chapter, these organisations enabled Chinese-Canadian farmers to obtain fair prices from wholesalers and secure a broad range of civil rights, including the right to own farmland (Anderson, 1991; Con & Wickberg, 1982; Yee, 2006). However, the various Chinese farmers' associations formed in the early part of the 20th century disappeared by the 1940s and 1950s (Con & Wickberg, 1982, p. 232). The only Chinese farmers' association founded after this period, the BC Lower Mainland Farmers Cooperative Association, was dissolved in the 1980s when the Chinese-Canadian farmers who had been members of this association either no longer needed an association to "get a foot in the door with the wholesalers," or established marketing outlets, such as roadside farm stores, that allowed them to bypass the wholesalers all together (Charlie Sang, interview, October 7, 2010).

Not only were none of the Chinese-Canadian farmers I interviewed not involved in *ethnic* agricultural organisations, they were not involved in *any* agricultural organisations. Over the past 20 years, as the agri-food system came to be organised by supply chains, commodity-based organisations displaced local farmers' institutes as the primary agricultural organisations (Bill Schell, interview, September 13, 2010). Because Elaine, June, and Ron are not growing crops regulated the BC Vegetable Marketing Commission's supply management system,¹⁰ they

¹⁰ The BC Vegetable Marketing Commission regulates the marketing of greenhouse vegetables, potatoes, bush beans, cole crops such as cabbage and turnips, peas and strawberries (BC Vegetable Marketing Commission, 2008).

are not involved in this organisation or with any of its member associations. Moreover, none of these farmers operate certified organic farms or sell their produce at farmers' markets. Consequently, they are not involved with, or represented by, organic certification bodies or farmers' market associations.

Economically viable livelihoods

The Wongs', the Lees', and the Changs' independence may be facilitated by the economic viability of their farms. Although Elaine, June, and Ron lamented the hard work and low returns associated with farming during my interviews with them, none of them relies on off-farm work to support their families. Their businesses do not depend on unpaid labour to remain viable. Moreover, these farmers have maintained farming as a livelihood in a highly urbanised region for long periods: 10 years in the case of the June Lee, and an entire working career in the case of Ron Chang. These three indicators of economic viability are significant in light of the priority local food advocates, researchers, and policy-makers place on identifying and supporting the types of food networks and farming systems that can be economically sustained in urban regions. The Regional Food System Strategy Metro Vancouver released in February 2011, for instance, incorporates several strategies linked to the economic viability of agriculture in the region. These strategies include: protecting agricultural land for food production; investing in a new generation of food producers; addressing the capacity of processing, warehousing, and distributing of local foods; securing markets for local foods through institutional purchasing decisions; increasing opportunities for direct marketing of local foods; and developing value chains within the food sector (see Table 5: Overarching goals and strategies of the Metro Vancouver Regional Food System Strategy, in Chapter 2).

Farming as sole employment income

The economic viability of local agriculture hinges – at least partially – on fair and adequate compensation for farmers. Across Canada, various indicators point to the difficulties farmers face in obtaining fair and adequate compensation for their work. These indicators include the mushrooming of direct marketing schemes, on-farm processing, and other institutions and practices designed to enable farmers to retain a higher and fairer share of the food dollar, as well as the increasing role of off-farm employment among farm operators. In both the 2001 and 2006 censuses, 49.9 per cent of Metro Vancouver farm operators reported

having an off-farm job (Statistics Canada, 2007c; Statistics Canada, 2007d). By comparison, 48.4 per cent of Canadian farm operators had an off-farm job in 2005, up from 44.5 per cent in 2000 (Statistics Canada, 2009).

In this context, it is noteworthy that Elaine, June and Ron derive all their employment income from their farms. What is more, none of these farmers relies on a spouse's off-farm employment income. Even for Elaine and Ron, who farm very small acreages, farming is not a hobby or a secondary source of income, but a livelihood. The reasons Elaine and Ron gave for not farming organically – even if they generally support “environmentally friendly” agriculture – are particularly revealing. When I asked Elaine to respond to the statement “running a profitable business is my top concern for my farm and farm store,” she replied:

Elaine: Of course it should be profitable. Otherwise, we would have gone into organic farming!

Natalie: Otherwise, you would have gone into organic farming?

Elaine: Yeah, organic farming is less profitable because there's so much loss. It's very hard to turn a profit in the farming business. Did you hear about the potatoes? [*referring to the very wet fall, when many local farmers lost their root vegetables because tractors couldn't get in to harvest them*] Lost 90% of the crop, all your work for one year is gone. That's why you have to turn as big a profit as you can this year, because you don't know what will happen the next year (interview, November 11, 2010).

This exchange should not be interpreted as evidence that organic farming is not profitable; on the contrary, numerous studies have confirmed the profitability of organic farming (for a review of these studies, see NRC, 2010, pp. 229ff). What this exchange does indicate is that, for Elaine, fear of losing her only source of employment income explains why she does not perceive organic farming as an option. With only “about three percent” of her customers asking for organic produce, Elaine perceives organic farming as too great of a risk given that she depends on farm yields to sustain her livelihood.

Paid labour

Many local food advocates espouse a contradictory position on farm labour. On the one hand, local food advocates champion human-intensive agricultural systems that rely on human observation and labour in order to reduce dependence on pesticides, herbicides, fossil fuels, and other environmentally harmful substances. On the other, and drawing on an agrarian ideology, local food advocates celebrate the independent family farmer (Allen, 2004). It is difficult to imagine how independent family farmers can operate labour-intensive farming systems without some reliance on outside labour. As several authors have observed, this tension between labour-intensive farming systems on the one hand, and independent family farms on the other, has led to a harmful silence on labour issues within the spaces and discourses of local food (for important exceptions, see Alkon & McCullen, 2011; Allen, 2004; Fairey et al., 2008; Jarosz, 2008). In particular, there is little discussion about the food justice implications of engaging unpaid or stipended interns – a practice that has been normalised on organic and other sustainability-oriented farms.¹¹

On the Wong, Lee and Chang farms, all farm workers are paid at least minimum wage.¹² I make this point not to argue that the wages paid to farm workers are sufficient. In 2008, the minimum hourly wage in BC was \$8.00 for Canadian workers and \$8.90 for foreign workers employed through the Seasonal Agricultural Workers' Program (Otero & Preibisch, 2010). The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives calculates that earning the minimum wage in BC means living on an income that is at least \$4,000 below the poverty line for a single person (Murray & Mackenzie, 2007). Rather, I make this point to argue that the Wongs, the Lees, and the Changs do not rely on unpaid labour to remain economically viable. Farm workers on Wong, Lee, and Chang farms are paid wages in line with the average hourly wage (\$9.64) paid to general farm workers in the Lower Mainland (see Government of Canada, 2011).

Long-term commitment to agriculture

The question of whether local food and urban agriculture are “just a fad” or whether these phenomena can be sustained in the long term was a recurrent theme in the workshops,

¹¹ WWOOFing (Willing Workers on Organic Farms) is perhaps the best known of many programs designed to link organic farms with volunteer or stipended labour.

¹² None of the farmers I interviewed grows crops for which farm workers can be employed on a piece work basis.

panel discussions and other public events relating to local food I attended in Metro Vancouver in the fall of 2010. Usually, presenters and participants concluded that local food and urban agriculture could be sustained. However, this answer tended to be based on optimism about the future or on an assessment of the social, economic, and environmental tensions in the contemporary global agri-food system rather than on empirical evidence that farming can be sustained as a livelihood in a highly urbanised region for long periods.

Elaine, June and Ron have operated farms producing vegetables for local consumers in Metro Vancouver for extended periods: June for 10 years, and Ron for his entire working career. Elaine has also spent most of her working career on the farm.¹³ The Wongs', the Lees', and the Changs' long-term commitment to agriculture is evident not only in the number of years they have been farming, but also in their investment in farm business infrastructure such as greenhouses, small tractors, farm trucks, and farm stores. That Elaine, June and Ron are committed to agriculture in the long term – and, in Elaine and Ron's case, committed to growing vegetables for local consumers 20 to 30 years before local food was popularised by the local food movement – indicates that their farming systems offer clues as to how agriculture can be sustained as a livelihood in the highly urbanised region of Metro Vancouver.

Farm succession and other challenges

This is not to say that the Wongs, the Lees, and the Changs do not face any challenges. All of the Chinese-Canadian farmers interviewed for this project expressed concern with the current state of the local food system. They worried about stagnating prices at the wholesalers, cheap food imports from California, Mexico, and China undercutting local food production, the effects of pesticides on farm worker and consumer health, the difficulty of finding and retaining good farm workers, and food regulations that do not ensure food safety or food quality. One concern, however, was emphasised over all others: Elaine, June, and Ron worried about finding “the next generation” of farmers. The Lees' adult children have already entered non-farming careers, and the Wongs' and the Changs' children, while still in school, are not expected to take over the family farm. The following excerpts from my interview with Ron Chang show his expectations for the future of farming in his family, and in Metro Vancouver more generally:

¹³ When I asked how long they had been farming, Elaine and Ron did not answer with a number of years, but by explaining that, even as children, they worked on the farm. I estimate that Elaine is in her forties and Ron in his fifties.

My kids won't come here [to the farm]. They'll be working outside, in an office [laughs]. So after us, I don't know what'll happen.

Later, when I asked Ron if he would encourage his children to take over the family business if they showed signs of wanting to farm, he replied

Um, no, I don't think so. The hours are too long. And the return is not as good as it could be outside. And you always want them to have it easier. But I mean, my oldest, if he *really* wants to do it, then I would back him up and support him. But I would always tell him that if there's something outside that he likes better, he could probably make more money. So that's why he's going to school [laughs] (interview, November 8, 2010).

Although he is encouraging his children to pursue off-farm work so they “have it easier,” Ron is saddened that the family farm, which has been around for three generations, will close. He is also worried because he expects other Metro Vancouver farms to close when their current operators retire:

Those [intensive Chinese vegetable] farms have been there forever... Before, the new immigrants coming over here were willing to work on the farm. And they would work on the farms, they would rent, or they would buy, when they could. But now, the new immigrants coming over here are all super educated. They're just overqualified to farm, and they are all looking for office work. You know, all those farms are going to go soon. You know, once this generation passes, I think it'll be harder and harder.

Ron continued,

California is in trouble. They're running out of water. And they grow a lot of food. So what happens when that finishes? Food is going to go up in price. But there won't be anyone farming up here (interview, November 8, 2010).

All of the Chinese-Canadian farmers interviewed for this project expressed similar expectations for future of agriculture in their families, and in Metro Vancouver more generally. These Chinese-Canadian farmers are not unique in their concerns about farm succession and food self-reliance; indeed, these issues are among those the Metro Vancouver local food movement is working to address. In particular, actors involved in the local food movement are leading a variety of initiatives designed to support what is often termed the “new generation” of

aspiring farmers – many of whom are young, urban-dwelling, university-educated, and ideologically committed to sustainable agriculture (field notes, October 14, 2010). Among these initiatives are: farmer training programs (e.g. the Richmond Farm School); peer-to-peer networks for young farmers (e.g. FarmStart BC); research and extension related to land trusts, farm cooperatives, and other “alternative” farm business models (e.g. Farm Folk City Folk’s Community Farms Program); and initiatives by local governments to make municipally-owned agricultural land available to new farmers (see Metro Vancouver, 2011b). In addition, the local food movement is addressing farm succession issues by working to create a culture in which people pay the “true cost” of food and farmers receive fair and adequate compensation for their work.

These initiatives may well be relevant for Chinese-Canadian farmers in Metro Vancouver, but, as shown in Chapter 2, there are few points of intentional connection between Chinese-Canadian farmers and the local food movement in terms of working together to support the local food system. Moreover, despite various efforts to include and engage communities of colour, Chinese-Canadian farmers are underrepresented in the institutions and policy documents associated with the local food movement.

In this chapter, I questioned Chinese-Canadian farmers’ underrepresentation in the local food movement by exploring the historical and contemporary contributions of Chinese-Canadian farmers to the Metro Vancouver food system. This review showed that the roles played by Chinese-Canadian farmers in local food production have been shaped by anti-Chinese racism; stagnating prices at fresh produce wholesalers; and adaptability and resourcefulness on the part of Chinese-Canadian farmers.

Today, food produced by local Chinese-Canadian farmers reaches consumers through wholesalers, greengrocers, roadside farm stores, and, to only a minor extent, farmers’ markets. In the second part of this chapter, I described how Chinese-Canadian farmers engage with these four networks and profiled three Chinese-Canadian farmers to illustrate how agricultural, labour, and marketing practices are integrated in two of these networks: wholesalers and roadside farm stores. In the next chapter, I compare some of the food networks supplied by Chinese-Canadian farmers with those promoted by the local food movement in order to explore how food system localisation intersects with racialising processes in Metro Vancouver.

4. PARALLEL ALTERNATIVES

Food systems – the chains of activities involved in feeding people – are historically contingent, value-laden, and shifting (Friedmann, 2005; McMichael, 2009). In Metro Vancouver and elsewhere, emergent local food movements are supporting a variety of alternative food networks as a means of resisting deepening social, environmental, and economic tensions in the contemporary global agri-food system (Friedmann & McNair, 2008; McMichael, 2009). Alternative food networks are designed to re-socialise and re-spatialise food (Renting et al., 2003) – or, to use the phrase popular among local food advocates, to “connect people with where their food comes from.”

Foremost among the alternative food networks supported by the Metro Vancouver local food movement are farmers’ markets. Despite various efforts to include and engage communities of colour, Chinese-Canadian farmers are underrepresented in at farmers’ markets and in the policy, educational, and promotional documents produced by the local food movement. This does not mean, however, that Chinese-Canadian farmers do not know or care about local food. In this chapter, I draw on the description of Chinese-Canadian farmers’ role in the Metro Vancouver system provided in Chapter 3 to show that some Chinese-Canadian farmers *are* involved in alternative food networks. These networks are parallel to, rather than integrated with, the farmers’ markets and other networks promoted by the local food movement. I conclude by reflecting on the reasons for, and implications of, the existence of *parallel* sets of alternative food networks in Metro Vancouver.

Are Chinese-Canadian farmers involved in alternative food networks?

Recent scholarship has broadened and nuanced conceptualisations of alternative food networks by underscoring that the boundaries between alternative and conventional food networks are blurred and shifting (Goodman & Goodman, 2009; Guthman, 2004; Sonnino & Marsden, 2006). However, as summarised in Chapter 1, alternative food networks continue to be framed as a relatively recent phenomenon associated with alternative agri-food movements

and/or niche markets for elite consumers and consumers concerned with food safety. The alternative food networks literature largely ignores the work of farmers of colour and the food networks in which they are involved (but see Alkon & Norgaard, 2009; Alkon, 2007; Imbruce, 2007).

Not all of the networks supplied by Chinese-Canadian farmers in Metro Vancouver can be classified as alternative food networks. In particular, the wholesaling networks in which some Chinese-Canadian farmers are involved tend to be characterised by more distant and fragmented relationships between food production, consumption, and place. Biking around Malkin Avenue, where Metro Vancouver's fresh produce wholesalers are concentrated, I experienced some of the "distancing" associated with the long, anonymous supply chains of the contemporary global agri-food system:

On the north side of Malkin Avenue, a tangle of bushes shelters Cottonwood Community Gardens from the rumble of three-ton trucks transporting crates of fresh produce and other food items. On the south side of Malkin, there is a row of large, flat-roofed, concrete buildings: one food wholesaler after the next. Some of the buildings stretch across whole city blocks. A 12-foot high chain-link fence topped with barbed wire separates these wholesalers from the street. Between the large, impersonal buildings, the trucks that make me feel a little unsafe on my bike, and the barbed wire barriers, I don't feel very welcome, and I definitely don't feel "connected" to the food passing through here! (field notes, November 8, 2010).

Wholesalers around Malkin Avenue ship produce and other food items to grocers and restaurants: some as close as one kilometre away; others as far as Toronto, thousands of kilometres away (Charles Zhang, interview, November 8, 2010). While both of the wholesalers I visited purchase produce from local farmers when it is available, I was told that price, quality, freshness, and shelf life factor more strongly into their purchasing decisions than geographically proximate production, ecological production practices, fair and adequate compensation for farmers, and other goals associated with alternative food networks (Alan Ma, interview, November 1, 2010; Charles Zhang, interview, November 8, 2010).

Connecting producers and consumers

Yet, in different ways and to different degrees, some Chinese-Canadian farmers in Metro Vancouver are involved in alternative food networks. As outlined in Chapter 1, shorter relationships between producers and consumers and the existence of food purchasing venues oriented to alternative foods (such as local, seasonal, organic products) are two of the defining characteristics of alternative food networks (Jarosz, 2008, p. 232). The roadside farm stores owned by the Wongs and the Changs meet both of these criteria. Although they carry some imported fruits and vegetables, their roadside farm stores feature primarily local, seasonal, and, sometimes, pesticide-free produce. Elaine and Ron have known some of their customers for over 30 years, and their customers have told them that the quality and freshness of their vegetables, as well as the level of service at their stores, keeps them coming back year after year, sometimes even after moving to communities over 100 kilometres away. Both Ron and Elaine describe their relationships with their customers as very important to them. For Ron, relationships with his customers are what make him keep farming even though farming is “a lotta work, a lotta time, and you can make more money working [off farm].” When I asked him why he still farms, even though farming is “really hard” he replied:

Well, actually, I enjoy my customers. The good customers anyway, you always get some bad customers, but most of them are really nice. You know, they come and buy [produce], but you talk to them about other things too, right? Sometimes about their personal life and things like that. It's sort of like a neighbourhood type thing. Yeah, so that's what I like (interview, November 8, 2010).

Ron's description of his motivation to keep farming exemplifies how “bonds of community” can be nurtured by direct contact between farmers and consumers (Lyson, 2004, p. 85). The roadside farm stores allow consumers to meet the farmers who grew their food and build relationships not just around food, but also around “other things.” Recalling the critical analyses of the meaning of “community” in the sites of local food practice by Alkon and McCullen (2010), Allen (2004), and Born and Purcell (2006), it is important to inquire into how racialising, gendering, and other “othering” processes bear on *who* feels a sense of community in these produce stores. An examination of consumers in these stores was, however, beyond the scope of this project. The relatively lower prices and the absence of local food educational and promotional materials suggest that these stores may be places where people who feel

overwhelmed or alienated in “mainstream” alternative food networks, such as farmers’ markets, can feel a sense of community.

Not only the roadside farm stores, but also the greengrocers where some Chinese-Canadian farmers market their vegetables shorten relationships between producers and consumers. Although not all of the greengrocers I visited post signs or labels indicating where the produce was grown, all offer a variety of locally grown vegetables during Metro Vancouver’s growing season. When I asked for information, a clerk at each of these greengrocers was able to tell me their produce was from, and whether their produce was purchased from a wholesaler or directly from the farmer who brought it to the store. Often, I also received advice on how best to prepare Chinese vegetables. Language barriers limited the amount and type of information I was able to learn at some of Metro Vancouver’s greengrocers; were I fluent in a Chinese language, I would undoubtedly have learned more about the produce sold at these locations.

It is difficult to know whether marketing produce through greengrocers and roadside farm stores are common or anomalous practices among Chinese-Canadian farmers because Canadian census data do not link farm marketing practices to “visible minority” data. However, if we accept that most Chinese vegetables in Canada are grown by Chinese-Canadian farmers (see British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture and Food, 2008; Wang & Cerkauskas, 1999), short relationships between producers and consumers should be seen as marketing practice that has been embraced by many Chinese-Canadian farmers in Metro Vancouver. As outlined in Chapter 3, in 2004, 41 per cent of Chinese vegetables grown in Metro Vancouver and the neighbouring Fraser Valley region in 2004 were sold at roadside farm stands or through direct farm sales to retail outlets and consumers (BC Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, 2004). By comparison, only nine per cent of all field vegetables grown in the region were sold at roadside farm stands or through direct farm sales to retail outlets and consumers (BC Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, 2004).

Connecting food production and place

In addition to being associated with shorter relationships between producers and consumers and the existence of food purchasing venues oriented to alternative foods, alternative food networks tend to be associated with small farms (Jarosz, 2008). For many alternative food advocates, supporting small, family farms is an end in itself. Small farms are

also understood as the building blocks of a safe, secure, just, and sustainable food system (Follett, 2009; Kloppenburg et al., 2000). In Metro Vancouver, small farms predominate: average farm size in is 15.7 hectares and 94 per cent of farms are smaller than 52 hectares (British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, 2008b). Small farm size does not, however, imply a sustainable farming system. Monocropping, exploitative labour practices, and other socially and environmentally harmful practices can – and do – occur on both small and large farms (Guthman, 2004; Jarosz, 2008). Farm size must, then, be understood as an imperfect proxy for sustainable farming systems connected to local place. This connection between food production and place has both ecological and socio-cultural dimensions.

By linking food production with bioprocesses, ecological farming systems are argued to embed food production in place (Renting et al., 2003).¹⁴ Thus, in theory if not always in practice, ecological farming systems are the building blocks of alternative food networks. I observed various ecological agricultural practices being used on farms operated by Chinese-Canadian farmers, including composting, some forms of integrated pest management, and, most notably, human-intensive, rather than fossil fuel intensive, production. Arguably, however, the Lees' practice of employing temporary Mexican migrant farm workers who must travel thousands of kilometres to work is a fossil fuel-intensive labour practice. As a recent report by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives explains,

An increasing number of farm workers in recent years have come into [BC] as temporary migrants, leading to the bizarre outcome that the aspirational 100-mile diet could be made possible by importing workers from as far as 3,000 miles away (2010, p. 19).

However, for the most part, the Chinese-Canadian-operated farms I observed in this study were very human-intensive. As I cycled through agricultural areas of Burnaby, Richmond, and Delta, the intensive vegetable farms operated by Chinese-Canadian farmers were the only farms where I consistently observed people working in the field. Production on the Wong and

¹⁴Ecological farming systems emphasise “the use of natural processes within the farming system... which build efficiency (and ideally resilience) through complementarities and synergies within the field, the farm, and at larger scales across the landscape and community” (NRC, 2010, p. 20). Examples of ecological agricultural practices include: conservation tillage, cover cropping, crop diversity and rotations, genetic improvements, efficient water use technologies, precision agriculture, use of manure, compost and green manure, reduced reliance on off-farm inputs, and integrated pest management.

Chang farms was certainly human-intensive. All seeding, transplanting, weeding and harvesting are done by hand on these farms.

While these examples should not be used as evidence that all Chinese-Canadian farmers practice or are committed to ecological agriculture, they do indicate that, in some ways, some Chinese-Canadian farmers do apply ecological farming practices. Indeed, these examples reinforce the importance of understanding farming systems as falling along a continuum between conventional and sustainable (NRC, 2010).

Alternative food networks may also connect food production to place on the basis of what Renting, Marsden, and Banks (2003) call “cultural proximity.” Alternative food networks operating on the basis of cultural proximity invoke the socio-cultural traditions of a particular place to construct their products as quality foods worthy of consumer trust. Thus, cottage, artisanal, and designated place of origin foods invoke the cultural heritage and local traditions of a particular region and thereby contest the anonymity and placelessness of the contemporary global agri-food system. These types of alternative food networks are common in Southern Europe, where government policy and gastronomic traditions have supported markets for culturally proximate foods (Goodman & Goodman, 2009; Marsden et al., 2000).

In North America, where colonialism and neo-colonialism have seriously eroded indigenous food systems, where government policy has largely favoured industrialised farming systems, and where numerous food traditions intersect as a result of massive immigration, it is harder to conceptualise what types of food production and processing methods can meaningfully represent “local” socio-cultural traditions (Hinrichs, 2000). Among the ways culturally proximate alternative food networks have been theorised in North America are efforts to revitalise indigenous food systems, to facilitate sales of specialty foods to immigrant populations, and to develop “hybrid” foods that resemble the traditional foods of people from all over the world but are made with foods that grow well in the local biophysical region (Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010, p. 192-3; Hinrichs, 2000).

The supply chains through which some Chinese-Canadian farmers in Metro Vancouver market their vegetables provide another clue as to how culturally proximate alternative food networks might be conceptualised in places marked by colonialism, neo-colonialism, and mass immigration. As explained in Chapter 3, many Chinese-Canadian farmers in Metro Vancouver

sell their produce directly to greengrocers, which constitute an important part of Metro Vancouver's fresh produce retail environment. Some of the greengrocers selling produce grown by local Chinese-Canadian farmers cater to first and subsequent generation Chinese-Canadians by employing staff fluent in Cantonese or other Chinese language, labelling food products in Chinese, and offering a wide range of Chinese vegetables. One greengrocer I visited offered not only the widely available bok choy and Napa cabbage, but as many as 22 varieties of leafy Chinese greens (field notes, November 1, 2010). Offering an array of food products – some local, some imported – associated with Chinese cuisine, these greengrocers are part of a short food supply chain that connects local producers with local consumers through culturally desirable foods sold in a comfortable shopping environment.

It would be insufficient, however, to understand the role of Chinese-Canadian farmers in Metro Vancouver simply as catering to an “ethnic” or “immigrant” population. Chinese-Canadians have shaped all facets of economic, political, and social life in Metro Vancouver, and have played a role in agriculture for over 130 years – almost as long as commercial agriculture has existed in this region (see British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Fisheries, n.d.). Some, but not all, Chinese-Canadian farmers are involved in alternative food networks based on cultural proximity. Chinese-Canadian farmers produce diverse products and market their produce through diverse channels, including, but not limited to wholesalers, large supermarket chains, roadside farm stores like those owned by the Wongs and the Changs, and greengrocers catering to Chinese-Canadian consumers. In different ways and to different degrees, some Chinese-Canadian farmers in Metro Vancouver are involved in the food networks that shorten relationships between producers and consumers and connect food production and place through ecological farming practices and invocations of cultural proximity.

Local food in Metro Vancouver: Common ground, different roots

This analysis of contemporary Chinese-Canadian farmers' contributions to the Metro Vancouver food system reveals that the contours of “local food” are broader than what was presented in the earlier chapters of this thesis. The new and emerging alternative food networks promoted by the local food movement are but one of pathways through which food moves from Metro Vancouver farms to local consumers. The roadside farm stores and

greengrocers supplied by some Chinese-Canadian farmers constitute a second set of alternative food networks operating in Metro Vancouver.

Although the Metro Vancouver local food movement and Chinese-Canadian farmers tend to be involved in different alternative food networks, there is much common ground to be found between actors in each of these groups. All of the Chinese-Canadian farmers interviewed for this project emphasised the value of buying local. For Charlie Sang, a second-generation Chinese-Canadian farmer, the importance of buying local food was based on the need to “support your local grower” because “you have a better and stronger economy if you support your local growers” (interview, October 7, 2010). Other Chinese-Canadian farmers understand the importance of local food in an even broader sense. For instance, for Elaine Wong, local food is important because

it's environmentally right, it just takes less energy to buy locally as opposed to shipping something from who knows where. The majority of people don't care where their food comes from, you know, they shop at Safeway every week, once a week, they go buy all their groceries, they don't care where their food is from... Food should be local because there's less energy used, because of the freshness, and to support the local region (interview, November 11, 2010).

The language the Chinese-Canadian farmers interviewed for this project use in their arguments in favour of local food closely resembles that used by activists, advocates, and organisations involved in the local food movement. Observing this common ground between Chinese-Canadian farmers and the local food movement, I asked several Chinese-Canadian farmers if they were involved in any of the organisations working to promote local food in Metro Vancouver. All of them responded in the same way: they were not involved because they were too busy farming! One Chinese-Canadian farmer added that he thought his operation was too small to be of interest to organisations promoting local food in Metro Vancouver (Charlie Sang, interview, September 15, 2010).

Local food movement participants and the Chinese-Canadian farmers interviewed for this project share not only an appreciation of local food, but also a number of concerns about the state of the Metro Vancouver food system. As described in Chapter 3, farm succession and food self-reliance appear to be issues of particular concern to Chinese-Canadian farmers in Metro Vancouver. Within the Metro Vancouver local food movement, these issues have also

garnered much attention, especially since a report released by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada showed that BC has the lowest incidence of farms with at least one young farmer (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2011).¹⁵ Where the Chinese-Canadian farmers interviewed for this project and the Metro Vancouver local food movement diverge on farm succession and local self-reliance issues is in their assessment of the likelihood of a “new generation” of farmers emerging. While none of the Chinese-Canadian farmers I interviewed expect their farm businesses to remain operational after their retirement, many local food movement participants point to a growing number of new farmers, many of whom are young, university educated, and ideologically committed to sustainable agriculture, as a beacon of hope.

While there is much common ground between the values and concerns expressed by the Chinese-Canadian farmers interviewed for this project and those associated with the Metro Vancouver local food movement, the issues and processes that motivate the local food movement to support food system localisation are different from those that led Chinese-Canadian farmers to begin marketing their produce through networks linking local food production and consumption. As outlined in Chapter 2, the local food movement emerged in response to a broad set of social and environmental tensions in the contemporary globalised agri-food system. The movement’s support for alternative food networks is motivated by concerns about resiliency, environmental sustainability, health, community economic development, cultural vibrancy and social justice. Decades before this heterogeneous group of environmentalists, nutritionists, farmers, health-conscious consumers, and others began advocating for food system localisation, some Chinese-Canadian farmers in Metro Vancouver began selling their produce to local consumers at roadside farm stores and greengrocers. As explained in Chapter 3, the issues and conditions that led Chinese-Canadian farmers in Metro Vancouver to market their produce through these alternative food networks include stagnating prices paid to farmers by wholesalers (affecting farmers no matter how they are racialised) and racial discrimination (affecting Chinese-Canadian farmers in particular).

¹⁵ Young farmers are defined as farmers under age forty. In 2006, 15 per cent of all BC farms had at least one young farmer; nationally, 19 per cent of farms had at least one young farmer (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2011).

Conclusions: Toward resilience and food justice

This thesis set out to explore how food system localisation efforts intersect with racialising processes in Metro Vancouver, Canada. I found that the history of anti-Chinese racism in Canada, together with Chinese-Canadian farmers' creativity and entrepreneurialism in responding to social and economic challenges, is linked to the emergence of a food system comprised of *parallel* alternative food networks. The first set of networks explored in this thesis consists of farmers' markets, community-supported agriculture and other institutions recently developed and made popular by the Metro Vancouver local food movement. This new and rapidly expanding set of networks informs – and is informed by – what mainstream local food activists, policy-makers, and academics understand as “local food.” The second, and older, set of networks explored in this thesis is supplied primarily by Chinese-Canadian farmers. This set of networks connects producers and consumers in roadside farm stores and greengrocers, while connecting food production and place through ecological farming practices and invocations of cultural proximity.

Both sets of networks are “alternative” in that they link producers, consumers, and place; however, these networks have few points of intentional connection and collaboration. In particular, few websites, educational materials, and policy documents created by local food movement participants feature Chinese-Canadian farmers and the networks in which they are involved. For their part – and perhaps because they have found greater economic viability in selling at roadside farm stores, to greengrocers, and to wholesalers – few Chinese-Canadian farmers sell at the local food movement's preeminent institution, farmers' markets. In the final pages of this thesis, I explore the practical and ethical implications of a food system comprised of *parallel* alternative food networks.

Practical implications of parallel networks

The existence of parallel alternative food networks means the Metro Vancouver local food system is home to a wider diversity of local food institutions. As research in fields such as economics, planning, agroecology, and biology has shown, a more diverse system is a more resilient system, that is, a system better able to withstand disturbances (Folke, 2006; NRC, 2010, pp. 26-7). In Metro Vancouver, one of the major changes the food system is expected to need to address is the demographic changes occurring because of immigration, mostly from Asia

(Metro Vancouver, 2011b). The greengrocers supplied by some Chinese-Canadian farmers in Metro Vancouver may prove particularly important to the local food system's resilience in the face of these demographic changes because these greengrocers provide access to a wide variety of foods associated with Chinese cuisine in a multilingual shopping environment.

Although some local food movement participants are *aware* of the role Chinese-Canadian farmers play in growing food for local consumers, the local food movement does not tend to *involve* or *recognise* Chinese-Canadian farmers in its programs, policy-making processes, and educational campaigns. In particular, there are few points of intentional connection and collaboration between Chinese-Canadian farmers and the local food movement in Metro Vancouver. This disconnect between the local food movement and Chinese-Canadian farmers may be leading to missed opportunities for both groups.

All of the Chinese-Canadian farmers I interviewed expressed concerns about the future of agriculture in the region, especially with respect to farm succession. The local food movement is working to address this challenge both by offering programs designed to support new and aspiring farmers and by working to create a culture in which people pay the "true cost" of food. By allying themselves with a social movement working to address farm succession and other food system issues, Chinese-Canadian farmers could gain an opportunity to shape how local food system issues are defined, and how solutions to these issues are developed and implemented.

For its part, by building alliances with Chinese-Canadian farmers, the mainstream local food movement could not only support a more diverse and resilient local food system, but also gain insights into how food system localisation might be achieved in Metro Vancouver. The Chinese-Canadian farmers interviewed for this study have been operating small-scale, human-intensive farming systems and marketing their produce through alternative food networks for decades. Policy-makers, new farmers, and activists intent on connecting consumers with "where their food comes from" could learn from the knowledge and experiences of Chinese-Canadian farmers such as Elaine, Ron, and June.

Racialisation and food justice

Examining the disconnect between Chinese-Canadian farmers and the local food movement through the lens of critical race theory exposes a more sinister dimension to Metro Vancouver's parallel alternative food networks. By emphasising the stories, faces, and practices of white farmers in its public outreach initiatives, the local food movement – in effect if not in intent – valorises the role of white people in the local food system while rendering invisible the contributions of farmers of colour. To borrow the phrase coined by anti-racist scholars Dei, Karumanchery, and Karumanchery-Luik (2004), the local food movement is creating a local food “norm” against which all other models of local food are measured and judged as somehow “less than” (p. 83). For instance, by stressing – and using as an indicator of the local food system – the types of alternative food network in which white farmers tend to participate (farmers' markets), the local food movement is channelling financial resources and institutional support toward white farmers. Valorisation is not a zero-sum game: it is possible – and indeed desirable – for everyone's contributions to be recognised (see McIntosh, 2008). Yet, the local food movement is not channelling resources and support toward Chinese-Canadian farmers who participate in parallel (non farmers' market) alternative food networks.

This is not to say that the local food movement should not support farmers' markets. Neither is it to say that the local food movement should necessarily aim to include more Chinese-Canadian farmers at farmers' markets. Learning more about the local food movement might convince some Chinese-Canadian farmers to participate in the alternative food networks the movement currently promotes. However, attempts to bring Chinese-Canadian farmers into a *predefined* set of alternative food networks risk ignoring the historical processes that have led some Chinese-Canadian farmers to prefer parallel networks. For instance, the legacy of anti-Chinese racism in BC, which is linked to Chinese-Canadian farmers' investments in alternative food networks predating those promoted by the local food movement, is key to why some Chinese-Canadian farmers are not interested in participating in farmers' markets.

Rather, I wish to highlight that constituting white forms of local food practice as the norm, while rendering invisible the ways some farmers of colour are engaging in local food practice, is inconsistent with the local food movement's self-proclaimed commitments to food justice. As environmental justice scholars have clarified, justice entails not only the equitable

distribution of food system benefits and burdens, but also equal opportunities to participate in governance and respect and recognition of diverse perspectives and ways of knowing (see Agyeman et al., 2009). Thus, for the local food movement, learning from, and recognising the contributions of, Chinese-Canadian farmers may constitute a means of rectifying the racialisation of who can ask questions, be heard, and be treated as an authority on the subject of the food system.

With a diverse farming population, multiple alternative food networks, and a vibrant local food movement already acting in support of food justice, Metro Vancouver has strong potential for a resilient local food system that addresses the concerns and celebrates the contributions of all of society's members. How might this possibility be actualised? Developing a resilient and just local food system will surely require that diverse people and communities join forces in engaging in *actions* informed by coherent theories about food, justice, and sustainability. As American cartoonist Walt Kelly playfully reminds us, "food for thought is no substitute for the real thing."

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