Farm Labor in the Local Food Movement: Opportunities for Justice

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

(Sociology)

at the

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISION

2020

Date of final oral examination: May 6, 2020

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ABSTRACT

Despite the increased attention paid to local food, both as a movement and as an economic sector, the workers who labor on these farms have remained largely invisible. Drawing on farmer survey data, in-depth interviews with farmers and farmworkers, and two years of participant observation, this dissertation makes visible the farm labor relations that undergird the local food system of Southwestern Wisconsin's Driftless Area. The survey data examined in Chapter 1 reveals a food system comprised of small-scale farms employing a predominantly white work force of volunteer and wage labor. In the second chapter, I identify three primary farming ideologies that place farmers along a continuum between high marketness and high social embeddedness, driving decisions of labor systems and farm scale. Chapter 3 draws on labor queue theories to explain the racial hierarchy behind hiring decisions on farms. Without intentional design, a racialized multi-tiered labor system has formed in the local food system providing white farmworkers with a step onto a career ladder while Southeast Asians are confined to jobs without opportunities for advancement and Latinx workers are relegated to the conventional agricultural system.

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Introduction

Late one February, I found myself sitting in an auditorium with almost 3,000 farmers chanting in pep-rally style, "Give me an O…R…G…A...N…I…C…." I was attending the MOSES conference, the annual gathering of the Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service held in La Crosse, Wisconsin and the largest conference of its type in the United States. There was a lot of flannel in the crowd, but since the average age seemed to be around 30, the flannel came with hipster flair. More than half of the conference attendees were women, and children of all ages were present. Especially babies, there were lots and lots of babies. Although predominantly white, farmers at MOSES looked very different in other ways from the average farmer in the United States who is white, male, and approaching 60 years old. While the pep-rally chanting happened only once, energy levels remained high throughout the weekend. People were excited to be there, excited to be farming, and excited to celebrate their participation in alternative agriculture.

Noticeably absent from MOSES were the people who do much of the work on alternative agricultural farms—the farmworkers. There were workshops on machinery, crop production, and legal structures, but only one addressing farm labor – run by farmers. In addition to their absence among workshop topics, I found no farmworkers among the conference attendees, despite asking around. I did encounter several farmers who had once been farmworkers, but now all were owners. It is this dissonance, the heightened energy around socially just alternative forms of agriculture, yet the ongoing absence of farmworker voices that prompted this dissertation.

Within the broader context of alternative agriculture, the local food movement occupies a specific niche where the distance traveled by farm produce from field to fork is short. In a world

that seems increasingly globalized and distant, local is seen as good and familiar. Although some communities have a long history of local food institutions, like a weekly farmers market, it has been only in the past two decades that there has been a widespread re-emergence of local food production and consumption. In 1994, the USDA reported just over 1,700 farmers markets, but by fall of 2019, there were almost 9,000 listed in the USDA's National Farmers Market Directory (US Department of Agriculture 2019). Likewise, the first two Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms in the United States emerged in 1986, and by 2015, there were over 7,000 (US Department of Agriculture 2016). This growth in local food is indicative of the increasing attention consumers are paying to where their food comes from.

Advocates of local food systems argue that this shorter food chain has numerous social, environmental, and economic benefits – supporting the three-legged stool of sustainability. The Buy Fresh, Buy Local campaign highlights the most common claims, contending that food localization is "good for your local economy, good for family farmers, good for your family's health, and good for the environment" (Food Routes Network 2018). They point out that reducing the number of middlemen allows the producer to capture a larger share of each food dollar. Furthermore, when those food dollars stay in the local economy, they circulate multiple times. Additionally, they argue that knowing where food comes from enables consumers to choose foods produced without pesticides, antibiotics and hormones. Finally, Buy Fresh, Buy Local claims that local food tastes better and is fresher than food from the global supply chain. While many of these claims have merit, none of them speak to question of whether a shorter food chain leads to a more socially just or democratic food system. Despite the emphasis on "knowing your farmer," many of the social relations embedded in the local food system remain invisible. In particular, whether or not the farmworkers realize benefits needs exploration. As

Melanie DuPuis and David Goodman (2005) point out, an "unreflexive localism" can simply continue to reproduce existing social inequalities.

While not all of the farmers at MOSES were involved in the local food system, many farmers involved in local food near La Crosse, Wisconsin do attend the conference. La Crosse is situated in the Driftless Area, a region of deep valleys that encompasses much of southwestern Wisconsin. The Wisconsin section of the Driftless Area, with its long and robust history of alternative agriculture, provides the context for this farmworker research. For a scholar seeking farmers concerned with labor justice and trying to implement good labor practices, this region is a promising place to look.

More specifically, this research focused on workers on diversified vegetable farms because of the high labor demands of vegetable production and the fact that these farms need labor throughout the growing season. Additionally, fresh produce continues to be the backbone of farmers markets and CSA boxes, making this an important sector of the local food system. My hope is that this research contributes to an understanding of labor in alternative agriculture, while raising questions about how labor justice and good labor practices can be better supported. Because this is an emergent system, there is additional pressure to "get it right" as it is unfolding rather than ossify labor inequalities into these new structures.

LITERATURE

There are four streams of academic literature that provide the theoretical underpinnings of this research. First, the research on fair trade provides an overarching framework for articulating the tensions between social movements and markets within alternative agriculture. Second, the multidisciplinary literature on local food systems points to the potential promises

and pitfalls of this particular alternative. Third, because research on labor in local food systems is limited, the broader literature on agricultural labor suggests ways that labor issues will be encountered within local food system. Finally, labor queues literature provides a guide to understanding the racial hierarchy in farm labor.

Movements or Markets?

Although principally focused on globally traded commodities, fair trade offers a theoretical framework useful for thinking about local food systems. Like local food systems, fair trade is often hailed as one solution to an unfair and unjust global economic system. But there are divergent understandings of the nature of fair trade. Is fair trade about market access, market reform, or revolution? Is it a social movement or a market?

Dan Jaffee argues that the fundamental paradox of fair trade is that "in its efforts to achieve social justice and alter the unjust terms of trade that hurt small farmers worldwide, fair trade utilizes the mechanisms of the very markets that have generated those injustices" (Jaffee, 2007, p. 1). This makes it both a market and a movement simultaneously, creating ongoing tensions (Murray and Raynolds 2007). This same tension can also be observed within the various manifestations of local food systems.

Long before Jaffee began studying fair trade, Polanyi argued that markets were historically embedded within larger social and cultural structures but that the growth of capitalist markets and institutions had un-embedded them. Fred Block (1990) drew on Polanyi's insight to postulate a "continuum of embeddedness." At one end of this continuum, economic transactions had high marketness and price was the dominant concern. As one moved toward the other end of the continuum, marketness diminished, embeddedness within a complexity of social

relationships increased, and price became one concern among many. Jaffee (2007) tried to locate fair trade on Block's continuum, but ultimately determined that it was a moving target. The fair trade certification process did re-embed some noneconomic factors (e.g. democratic farmer organizations, environmental stewardship, long-term relationships, equitable payment) into market transactions. However, producers were often one node in a long chain where they had very little power to set prices or determine certification requirements. They also remained unknown faces to the consumers at the other end of the chain.

Another factor that made fair trade a moving target was the fact that participants have different visions of the goals for fair trade (Jaffee 2007). For those whose goal was market access, increasing the floor price paid for fair trade commodities by a small amount would correct historic trade injustices. This vision was about improving the access of Southern producers to Northern markets rather than challenging existing political and economic structures. A market reform approach, by contrast, would attempt to redesign the market. By working in the interstices of the capitalist system, these participants tried to create places where the market was more embedded and where risk was more evenly distributed. Finally, fair trade participants envisioning market-breaking believed that education and transparency were key. When people could see the exploitative relations of production and unequal terms of trade in the existing system, there would be widespread social revulsion breaking the system.

The idea of a continuum of embeddedness holds potential for analyzing transactions in alternative agriculture, including labor practices. As with fair trade, the various actors in alternative agriculture, including local food systems, have different visions of its goals and purpose. These initiatives most commonly emerge in the forms of organic agriculture, urban farms, community supported agriculture, farmers markets, food policy councils and other local

food initiatives (Allen and Wilson 2008; Guthman, Morris, and Allen 2006). To understand where local food systems lie on the marketness-social embeddedness continuum requires a careful dissection of the separate elements. On diversified vegetable farms, labor costs are huge, giving farms driven by a high marketness orientation an incentive to tightly control wages, paying workers no more than minimum wage. More socially embedded labor practices would include wages that approach or exceed a living wage and working conditions that allow for worker autonomy and opportunities for professional growth. Traditional worker benefits like health insurance are uncommon on seasonal farms, but I would expect that highly socially embedded farms would find less traditional ways to provide more than simply wages to their workers. Unlike in fair trade where Jaffee noted that social embeddedness was limited by the distances coffee traveled through multiple nodes of the commodity chain, the shorter distances involved in local food systems should allow for greater embeddedness, creating space for concerns such as social justice to exist in addition to price.

Local Food Systems

Early research specifically on local food systems suggested that as sites of contestation against the global agrifood system, they would be highly socially embedded (Wright and Middendorf 2008). The foodshed metaphor (Kloppenburg, Hendrickson, and Stevenson 1996) encouraged producers and consumers to re-embed themselves in a geographic place, rebuilding ecological and social communities. Subsequent research examined the capacity of local food systems to build community and foster participatory democracy (Lacy 2000) and to cultivate food citizenship (Baker 2004). These views reinforced the idea of local food systems as a place of low-marketness and high social embeddedness.

Yet this cursory glance overlooks deep divisions within local food systems. Clare Hinrichs (2000) applied Block's concepts of marketness and social embeddedness to two common types of direct markets in local food systems: farmers markets and community supported agriculture. She argued that farmers markets remained primarily rooted in the commodity relations of the global food system albeit with a shorter distance between producer and consumer. However, community supported agriculture, by attempting to share risk more evenly between producers and consumers, created a market alternative that was closer to the social embeddedness end of the continuum. Labor was not examined in this study, so it is unknown if different degrees of embeddedness affected labor relations. However, it is reasonable to suppose that higher degrees of social embeddedness would create an opening for labor justice to be one of the factors incorporated into economic transactions. My hypothesis going into the research was that CSA farms would be where higher wages, benefits, and better working conditions would be found.

More recently, the local food movement and its various initiatives have come under increased scrutiny and have been criticized for several perceived shortcomings. While not specifically addressing Block's work on embeddedness, these criticisms suggest ways that local food systems are not fully socially embedded and instead reflect the tension between local food as a movement and market. Criticisms tend to fall along three lines of argument: local food is not truly an alternative to the dominant neoliberal paradigm; local food privileges economic benefits to the farmer over food security of consumers; and the local food movement generally fails to pay attention to issues of race, gender, and class. All of these critiques have implications for labor.

The first critique contends that rather than creating an alternative to the global agrifood

system, advocates for local food systems are simply reproducing forms of neoliberalism. Using Slow Food USA and the Buy Local food campaign as examples of the anti-globalization food movement, Allen and Wilson argue that "while these groups are champions of local farmers and closer connections between farmers and consumers, they do not address deep agrifood inequalities or the policies that created them" (2008:537). For example, although it mentions "fair" food as a principle, Slow Food activities primarily center on consumption of "good" food, valuing individual consumption over social change (Allen and Wilson 2008). The Buy Local food campaign, unlike other purchasing campaigns (e.g. Buy Union, Buy Black), fails to address existing inequalities and simply prioritizes geography (Hinrichs and Allen 2008). While both of these initiatives privilege other factors in addition to price, and thus demonstrate some degree of social embeddedness, they represent a view of local food systems that seeks to increase market access rather than fundamentally alter existing economic relations.

A second line of critique is that local food advocates favor economic support for the farmer over food security. Guthman et al (2006) point out that farmers markets were originally intended to provide an outlet for farm products. It has only been more recently that this alternative agriculture institution has been charged with addressing issues of food security. While farmers markets and CSAs allow the farmers to retain more of each food dollar (supporting small-scale and family famers), low-income consumers need cheap food. These critiques are consistent with Hinrich's (2000) finding that farmers markets have high marketness compared to other manifestations of local food systems.

The third critique, which intersects with the first two, is that local food systems pay little attention to structural and cultural issues around race, gender and class. Guthman (2008) illustrated how this oversight was reflected in the views of her white undergraduates who failed

to understand the role white privilege plays in shaping the local food system. She found that the white cultural discourse of her students did not match the interests and priorities of communities of color. Guthman found similar rhetoric among managers of farmers markets and CSA producers when asked about the lack of participation by racial minorities (2011). In the conclusion to *Cultivating Food Justice* (2011), Alkon and Agyeman challenged advocates of alternative forms of agriculture to acknowledge how the food system has been historically shaped by racism, imperialism, and colonialization. They further challenged advocates to recognize the white, middle, and upper-class roots that continue to dominate alternative food movements and seek ways to move beyond them. These and other works call on activists to intentionally incorporate justice into local food systems (DuPuis, Harrison, and Goodman 2011).

The above critiques suggest that while advocates look to local food systems as a way to enact embedded values such as social justice, environmental sustainability, democracy, and improved nutrition, there is little about scale or location that inherently realizes these values. Born and Purcell (2006) refer to this as the "local trap." However, research (Hinrichs 2000) has shown that local food system initiatives *are* socially embedded to varying degrees. It is plausible that where local food initiatives are more socially embedded, space is created to incorporate more labor justice into the food system.

Labor in Food Systems

Much of the sociological literature on agricultural labor examines labor relations within the global food system. Researchers working in this area have identified broad patterns of labor relations, but research has also found places where these patterns vary--where the story is more complex or where a different set of relations is occurring. This section of the literature review

briefly sketches the typical narrative of agricultural labor relations before turning to the alternatives to that dominant narrative.

Many of the researchers studying how labor relations change in the face of globalization draw heavily from Michael Burawoy's work (1976, 1985). For farmers operating at the marketness end of Block's continuum, a primary concern of producers is in controlling labor costs. One of the ways this is achieved is through locating agriculture production where labor is cheap. As with manufacturing, this often means setting up export-oriented production in developing countries. Little and Watts (1994) argue that this shift from production for domestic markets to export-oriented production had two primary affects. First, it altered the seasonality of labor requirements. Second, it increased the demand for wage- and contract-labor at the expense of peasant production. An increase of indebtedness among contract farmers often occurs alongside this change in labor relations. This shift in developing countries towards export-oriented production reflects the movement of these economic activities towards high marketness at the expense of factors beyond price.

Another way labor costs are controlled in the global agriculture system is through reliance on migrant labor. Although migrant agriculture labor occurs around the globe, this research project is specifically interested in how this manifests in the United States where the citizenship status of farmworkers plays a significant role in ensuring a cheap and docile labor force. Burawoy's earlier research on migrant labor (1976) demonstrated how physically separating the sites of production (work) and reproduction (labor-force renewal) moves the costs of reproduction away from the employer and onto a distant economic and political system. This system privileges price (in this case labor costs) far above any social factors. To meet the fluctuating demand for labor, political and legal structures brought successive waves of migrant

farmworkers to California while preventing them from permanent integration, thus avoiding the costs associated with labor reproduction. The positions of these various ethnic groups of workers altered across time as shifts occurred in the relations between the state, agribusiness, and labor unions (Majka and Majka 1982).

There are places within the global food system where these labor relations take a more nuanced form and require more complex categorization. Among others, these deviations include contexts where the workers are more skilled, where there is less social distance between producers and workers, and where agricultural production operates under fair trade or organic certification standards.

Through her work on strawberry production in California, Miriam Wells tries to "de-homogenize the processes and outcomes of economic change," (1996:305) demonstrating that important variations exist based on grower ethnicity, ownership structure, and the organization of production. In her research, these variations aligned with different geographical regions. Regions with greater social distance between producers and workers (i.e. whites employing Mexican workers) and high labor demands resulted in a greater prevalence of worker resistance and organizing. Where employers and workers were both Mexican, stronger community ties existed between the two groups and there was less organized labor resistance. While my research held place constant, her observations and all three of her variations (ethnicity, ownership structure, production organization) were of interest in my local food system work.

Agriculture production also occurs under the guidelines of various certifications such as fair trade and organic. Fair trade was previously discussed but there is also emerging conversation around domestic fair trade within the United States. Brown and Getz (2011) examine initiatives underway to develop domestic fair trade; their findings suggest that the

alternative food movement's preoccupation with an agrarian mythos may undermine the ability of a "fair food" movement to establish domestic fair trade. However, Howard and Allen (2008) conducted a nationally representative survey asking about the price of a hypothetical pint of strawberries. They found that respondents would pay 68% more for a pint of strawberries if workers were provided with a living wage and safe working conditions. While it is unclear how this translates into actual consumer behavior, Howard and Allen argue that this points to large untapped potential for "fair food" that incorporates labor standards into its production practices.

Regardless of its origins, organic agriculture in the United States has come to represent a standardized set of technical inputs. Shreck, Getz, and Feenstra (2006) explored whether the "sustainability" commitment of certified organic farmers in California translated into social sustainability as well. Although 63% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that organic agriculture was more socially sustainable than conventional agriculture, more than half of all respondents opposed incorporating social standards into organic certification criteria. "Even if they **believe** that organic agriculture should ensure fair and healthy working conditions for farmworkers, they explain that it is simply not economically viable given the realities of the market" (Shreck et al. 2006:445). When it came to actually providing benefits, larger organic farms were more likely to provide benefits than the smaller ones (Shreck et al. 2006). Guthman (2004) found that higher wages and benefits for farmworkers tended to occur on the larger, more diversified organic farms focused on direct marketing.

Agricultural economists Lohr and Park (2009) report that although organic farms require approximately 15% more labor than conventional farms and while this labor demand is more evenly distributed throughout the season, hired labor is more likely to be seasonal rather than year-round. They found that "employment of both year-round and seasonal workers declines

with increased emphasis on local sales" (p. 329). However, despite the need for fewer workers, the workers they did have were paid at higher wages.

There is one study looking specifically at farm labor in the local food system. In *Labor and the Locavore* (2014), Margaret Gray summarized a decade of fieldwork studying migrant farm labor in the Hudson Valley of New York, a region that supplies a substantial amount of food to New York City. While not all of the farms she studied supplied produce directly to consumers, some did. Gray found that in general the Latinx farmworkers employed in this local food system experienced poor wages and working conditions. Their vulnerable legal status, limited alternative employment options, and long-term plans to return to their home countries created an environment where labor exploitation was frequent and ongoing.

Closer to home, Harrison and Lloyd (2012) examined the relationship between workers, citizenship, and the state in the dairy industry in Wisconsin and reported findings similar to Gray (2014). Unlike seasonal fruit and vegetable farm work, dairying requires year-round labor, and in Wisconsin this labor is now approximately 50% Hispanic (Harrison and Lloyd 2012). They also found that immigration policies that escalate policing away from the borders have created a more vulnerable labor force--with little negative effect on overall dairy productivity. In fact, "migrant dairy workers' palpable sense of 'deportability' articulated with the specific structure of dairy work in ways that create the economically and politically 'ideal' migrant: compliant at work and invisible otherwise" (p. 366). Although dairying is year-round and vegetable production is seasonal, both occur on predominantly small-scale, family owned farms in Wisconsin.

It is unclear to what extent the exploitative relationships described above are representative of labor in local food systems. However, it is clear that labor relations in local

food are more complicated than a simple race to the bottom. As Wells (1996) demonstrated, where social distance between producers and workers is less, as is the case in much of the Driftless Area, labor relations are more socially embedded. Additionally, the shorter chain between producer and consumer maintains the connection to the local community. In the Driftless Area local food system, the possibility exists for socially embedded and socially close labor relations, but also for white farmers to exploit vulnerable populations for cheap labor. Understanding the mechanisms that lead to high road labor practices in this local food system could offer a roadmap for emerging local food systems in other regions of the country.

Ideal Workers and Labor Queues

The final literatures that are helpful to consider when examining farmworkers in the local food system have little to with agriculture. While farms have some features like sensitivity to weather conditions that make them different from other work places, farmers are essentially employers who hire, supervise and fire workers. Thus, the literatures on ideal workers and labor queues provide insight into how farmers think about staffing their labor force.

In addition to having an ideal worker in mind when hiring labor, employers also have a mental ranking system that sorts prospective workers into a hierarchy. Aligning with a high marketness understanding of farm labor, efficiency-driven narratives argue that rank depends on how an employer perceives labor cost in relation to potential productivity (Doeringer and Piore 1971). However, socially-driven narratives, such as queuing theory, see ranking operating out of a structural framework, based more on characteristics ascribed to groups rather than individual qualifications and preferences.

Queuing theory was first articulated by Lester Thurow (1969) who reasoned that black

Americans had higher unemployment rates than whites because blacks ranked lower on an employer's queue. Thurow argued that these rankings were widespread and persistent, based on racial categories rather than on individual merit. In the US, this meant that the category of "white" was the top ranked while "black" was on the bottom. Subsequent research reaffirmed Thurow's findings (Hodge 1973; Lieberson 1980) and broadened them to include internal labor markets, which affected promotion and advancement opportunities (Doeringer and Piore 1971). In addition to governing hirings and promotions, queuing theory posits that groups low in the labor queue will also be the first terminated or laid off (Reskin and Roos 1990).

However, Catanzarite and Strober (1988) and others (Epstein 1988; Heilman 1995) argued that labor queuing is more complex than a simple binary hierarchical ranking. In an earlier work, Lieberson (1980) emphasized "the importance of population dynamics and local labor market structures in determining the shape of the labor queue" (Browne, Tigges, and Press 2001:375). Reskin and Roos (1990) offered an even more nuanced picture of how queues are constructed. They posit that queues are the results of three structural factors: what groups of workers exist (ordering of elements); the size of the worker populations (shape); and the intensity of rankers' preferences.

In a labor market with few desirable workers, there will be more opportunities for those farther down on the labor queue (Hodge, 1973; Lieberson, 1980). "Both the absolute and relative size of each group in the labor queue affects lower-ranked workers' chances of getting desirable jobs. The larger a subordinate group relative to the size of the preferred group, the harder employers find it to deny its members good jobs" (Reskin and Roos 1990:31). The third factor, intensity of rankers' preferences, affects how much weight employers put on a potential worker's qualification versus their group membership. Some employers will always hire from

their preferred group, while others will use preferred group membership to decide between similarly qualified potential workers (Reskin and Roos 1990).

Group sizes can vary over time. During times of war, for example, women and minorities have historically moved into positions previously held by white men, who were off at war. In this way, labor shortages can provide space for groups lower in the labor queue to secure better jobs (Reskin and Roos 1990). However, Strober and Arnold (1987) pointed out that these replacements followed a specific sequence reflecting group labor queue rank – white women, black men, and finally black women. Conversely, if members of the higher ranked group grow in size (e.g. return from war), they can move into jobs held by lower-ranked groups, displacing those workers who in turn displace those lower in the hierarchy (Reskin and Roos 1990). During the economic boom in the 1990s and the tight job market that came with it, employers looking for unskilled workers were more willing to hire less desirable workers (e.g. welfare recipients, high school dropouts, racial minorities) (Holzer, Raphael, and Stoll 2006).

Other research has suggested that labor queues are not always constructed with whites on the top but that labor queues are more job-specific. Moss and Tilly (2001) found that some employers favored immigrants over whites because of their perceived work ethic. One employer in their study said:

> When I was younger…in all restaurants, you always had young, white American boys washing dishes. Now, you know, I almost try to stay away from them in a way because they're so lazy at times…I get Cape Verdean kids in here and they bust their butt. You know, I get these white kids in here, they're young, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen years old, and they think they're just going to hang out and just be lazy all day. (P. 488)

The literature on global outsourcing also suggests that women are preferred when they are perceived to naturally possess more of some sort of skill or dexterity (Collins 2002; Green 1997).

Additionally, groups of minorities are ranked against one another and not just in

comparison to whites. For example, Holzer (1996) found that many employers preferred Latinx immigrant workers to Blacks. The general perception is that Blacks are more troublesome and less compliant than immigrants (Kirschenman and Neckerman 1991). This perception gives Latinx workers more entry into manufacturing and other blue-collar forms of work than Blacks, even if Latinx workers had greater skill and credential deficiencies.

In summary, research suggests that rather than one universal labor queue, there are different labor queues for specific jobs. While all jobs may have an ideal worker, the gender, race, immigrant status, and other attributes of that worker will vary according to the job. Taken all together, labor queuing presents a complex but enduring framework for understanding who gets hired, promoted, and retained.

LIMITATIONS OF EXISTING RESEARCH

> Unlike the UFW's [United Farm Workers'] consumer boycotts, contemporary alternative food movements direct surprisingly little attention to farm labor issues…The resurgence of interest in food and agriculture among academic and popular writers has likewise overlooked the role of hired labor in agrifood production, preferring to celebrate all forms of resistance to the conventional food system and to promote agrarian visions of small-scale family farms. (Brown and Getz 2011:125)

As discussed in the previous section, prior to the publication of *Labor and the Locavore* (after I started field work), there was no research directly examining farmworkers in the local food system. Assumptions could be made drawing from research done on farm workers in conventional agriculture or on organic farms, but it was really just educated guessing. It was unknown if the social and economic goods touted by local food advocates were extended to farmworkers. This research was undertaken to find out.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

My overarching research question asked in broad terms how the shift away from the global agrifood system and towards local food systems changes labor relations. Thinking through the application of Block's embeddedness framework to local food systems, I expected that farms that were more socially embedded would be more likely to incorporate ideas of labor justice into their practices. Conversely, farms that were more focused on expanding market access and securing higher prices (higher marketness) would be more focused on finding ways to minimize labor costs.

In order to conduct this analysis, I needed to collect data on what types of labor relations existed on vegetable farms in the Driftless Area's local food system and how prevalent various types were. I also needed to collect data on wages, benefits (loosely defined), and working conditions.

Prior to my research, there was very limited data on farmworkers in the Driftless local food system. While there was anecdotal evidence that farms utilized a variety of types of labor, it was unclear how prevalent each type was. Since research done in other regions of the United States (Guthman 2004; Shreck et al. 2006) found that larger farms were more likely to offer benefits and higher wages than smaller farms, I expected to have similar findings. Additionally, research on organic farms (Lohr and Park 2009) suggested that farms that were fully oriented toward local markets would hire fewer workers, but offer higher wages than farms of comparable size with less local orientation. I expected that to also be true of farms in this study.

The literature suggested that when price is the primary concern, more vulnerable workers would be used. Research has clearly demonstrated that the citizenship status of migrant workers creates vulnerability, but other forms of labor such as interns also experience vulnerability, albeit

of a different sort. The research on social embeddedness led me to believe that farmers who participated in more embedded economic relations (for example CSAs) would be more likely to incorporate better labor practices and hire less vulnerable workers than those participating in more high marketness economic relationships (such as farmers markets).

Typical "better" or high road labor practices fall into three broad categories – 1. Providing a living wage; 2. Maintaining a healthy workplace by providing safe working conditions and benefits; 3. Offering opportunities for career advancement. As mentioned above, I expected to find these labor practices more prevalent on larger farms and on farms that were more socially embedded. I was also hoping to identify barriers to implementation of high road labor practices.

Beyond identifying the high road labor practices that exist, this research also sought to examine how farmers and workers conceptualized just working conditions. Shreck et al. (2006) found that organic producers believed their farming was more socially sustainable than conventional farming. However, many of them felt unable to put their beliefs into practice given perceived economic constraints. I expected to find this tension present in local food systems producers as well. I intended to collect data on discourses and practices of just working conditions from both farmers and workers.

There were two other research question topics that were developed during the research proposal stage but I was unable to investigate this sufficiently during the course of field work. The first asked questions regarding the impact that attempts to "scale up" the farm had on labor relations. Knowing that scaling up often resulted in an intensification of labor demands as farmers increased production and/or supply chain relationships became longer and more complex, I hypothesized that either economies of scale would create space for better pay and

benefits or the growth would move the economics of farm operations farther towards high marketness, thus losing some of the values that were embedded in the local food system. There were only one or two farms exploring scaling up when research was conducted. While I will briefly address these findings in later chapters, data were not robust enough to draw definitive conclusions.

The second topic related to the impact that consumer expectations had on shaping farm labor relations. Collins (2002) and Freidberg (2004) demonstrated that consumer expectations of the product do shape labor relations along a global commodity chain, and Howard and Allen (2008) have demonstrated that consumers are hypothetically willing to pay more for food if workers are paid a living wage and provided with safe working conditions. While I had hoped to explore how consumer expectations of labor practices shaped farms' labor relations, it soon become clear that this was beyond the scope of this research.

DATA

In order to answer these research questions, I decided to focus on diversified vegetable farms who are part of the local food system in Southwestern Wisconsin's Driftless Area. The Driftless Area was selected as the field site for several reasons. Unlike many of its flat and black-soiled Midwestern neighbors who have given themselves over to corn and soy, Wisconsin continues to have a robust and diversified agricultural sector. The state is one of the top producers of a variety of products including dairy, cranberry, ginseng, sweet corn, carrots, potatoes, and peas (National Agriculture in the Classroom Organization 2010). Because of the land contours, farmers in the Driftless Area were among the first in the state to incorporate conservation practices into their farming to counteract prior land-use practices, which had

resulted in massive soil erosion (Trout Unlimited 2005). The topography also limited the ability of farmers to "get big, or get out," contributing to the persistence of small-scale family farms with diversified production-- conditions which readily translate into local food systems. This longstanding dominance of small-scale family farms also provides a different historical context to the local food system than that which exists in places such as California.

Farmers in the Driftless Area have a long history of practicing alternative forms of agriculture. Currently, this region has one of the highest concentrations of both organic and CSA farms in the country (Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems 2010). Organic Valley, one of the largest U.S. farmer cooperatives, originated here. The Driftless also has a robust local food system and is in the process of scaling up into a regional food system. There are major population centers nearby - Chicago, Milwaukee, and the Twin Cities – which serve as prime markets for an emerging regional food system. The Driftless Region Food and Farm Project, a coalition of diverse stakeholders, is working to scale up food produced in the area. Various actors are also beginning to highlight a Driftless cultural identity, both as a way of branding products for regional markets, and as a draw for tourists on holiday.

As there is no agreed upon definition of "local", the Driftless Area also offered a way to physically bound the research that overlapped with a distinct regional identity. Although the Driftless Area spans into neighboring states, a majority of it is in Wisconsin. Crossing state lines would have meant expanding the number of variables under consideration to account for differing state laws and wages, so it made sense to restrict the boundaries of the field area to align with the state borders. Additional details on the site selection process is covered in the next chapter.

While not unique in the local food movement, the Driftless Area is nevertheless not a

typical case. The geography, history of alternative agriculture, proximity to urban markets with affluent and progressive-minded consumers, and institutional/organizational support for scaling up create a space where it is easier for concerns around labor justice to make their way into discourse and practice. What this field area offers is a best-case scenario for investigating labor relations in local food systems.

METHOD

The research for this mixed-methods dissertation occurred in multiple stages. In the first phase, I administered a telephone survey of farmers. Then I conducted in-depth interviews with a sample of farmers, farmworkers, and local food experts throughout the Driftless Area. I also engaged in participant-observation fieldwork at a number of local food events at both on- and off-farm sites. Additionally, I participated in three listservs targeting local food producers.

The original plan for the survey was to draw a sample from a master list constructed by combining farm lists maintained by multiple organizations who self-identify as promoters for the local food system (e.g. FairShare, the Wisconsin Farm Fresh Atlases, Local Harvest). Farms participating in local farmers markets and listed as suppliers of produce to local grocery stores were also included. While these lists were not exhaustive, they did represent the farmers who engaged with the public as local food producers. Once the various lists were condensed into a master list, it became clear that there were less than 170 farms. Rather than drawing a random sample, I decided to survey the entire population.

Farmers were mailed a letter of introduction explaining the survey goals and purpose. Letters were followed up by a phone call to conduct the survey. To achieve high response rates, the surveys with farmers needed to be conducted during the winter months when they had fewer

demands on their time. Conducting the survey by phone rather than via mail also contributed to high response rates. Survey questions gathered data on the size of operation, ownership structure, type of products, and market outlets. Data were also collected on use of labor including type and number of workers, wages and benefits, and labor sourcing.

Following survey data collection, the focus shifted to qualitative research. I engaged in participant observation and in-depth, semi-structured interviews with farmers, farmworkers, and local food experts throughout the Driftless Area over a two-year period, although the seasonal nature of farming required breaking up the field research into off-season times. The majority of listserv activity also happened during this time of year.

The original plan was to select 12 farms for in-depth case studies, drawing on a variety of criteria and then to conduct interviews with the farmers and farmworkers. Farms were to be selected based on labor composition, farm size, years of operation, and type of market outlets. Moreover, farms that were in the process of "scaling up," including those serving as pack-out sites, were to be of particular interest. This included farms which had more nodes in their local food chain than direct sales from producer to consumer. In these cases, a multi-sited ethnographic approach would be used to follow the produce from farm to consumer. However, once I began interviewing, I quickly realized that it was very difficult to draw boundaries around a single farm. Instead, the folks involved in producing local food in the Driftless Area formed an interconnected web of labor relationships. The same person may be a worker on a large farm and the owner of a small farm. In the course of interviewing young farmers, I frequently learned they had been workers on one or more farms and thus could provide the workers perspective, too. Rather than a dozen separate farms, I was collecting data on a local food system.

Given this, I continued to conduct in-depth, semi-structured interviews, but using a

snowball technique. When interviewing farmers, I constructed farm histories identifying periods of change in labor relations as well as probable causes of these changes. I also utilized participant-observation, and joined in at farming conferences, on-farm workshops and field days, and various community events around local foods. I took extensive notes as well as audio recording observations and interviews. I transcribed audio data and coded all of the data using Nvivo software. Analysis of the qualitative data was thematic and sought to understand how farmers made decisions about structuring their labor force, how scale affected labor relations, and how workers and farmers understood and defined labor justice. Of particular interest were themes of "fairness" and "justice." Additionally, analysis offers insights into what conditions lead to the incorporation of high road labor practices and where barriers exist.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

The contemporary movement around local foods claims to re-embed environmental, economic, and social sustainability into the food system, but a smaller scale does not inherently mean that values of fair labor practices and social justice are manifest. This dissertation examines the labor relations on farms within a local food system in order to identify how labor justice and high road labor practices get incorporated into these emerging systems.

The first chapter paints a portrait of the farms and farm labor in the Driftless Area local food system. Prior to this research, there was very limited information specifically on these types of farms. Survey data was collected on farm and farmer variables of interest in understanding labor needs - such as farm size, length of farming, product mix and outlets. Additionally, significant data was collected on labor systems. Beyond simply presenting an analysis of the survey data, this chapter also explores the implications of utilizing various labor

systems scrutinizing how issues of social embeddedness, market tensions, and legality come into play.

The second chapter focuses on the different ideologies that motivate farmers who participate in the local food system. While most of these farmers see themselves as participants in an alternative agriculture system, for some, this is an alternative way of life. How farmers understand themselves as "farmers" fundamentally shapes their approach to labor. Particularly for the farmers looking to practice an alternative way of life, an "ideal" worker needs to have more than a set of skills. Ideal workers need to come from a cultural background similar to the farmer and display an ideological alignment with the farmer that is deeply rooted in the local food movement. Workers who are a cultural and ideological mismatch are not even considered regardless of the farming skills they may possess.

The third chapter looks at how the farmer's ideology ultimately shapes labor queues, with a significant section devoted to labor queues through a racial lens. Despite large numbers of Latinx farmworkers on Wisconsin dairy farms and other farming operations throughout the Driftless Area, the vast majority of farmworkers on these local vegetable farms are white. Latinx workers are seen as representative of a farming system that many of these farmers are ideologically opposed to, and thus hiring Latinx workers is seen as corrupting the vision of the farm. A few of the larger farms attempt to control labor costs by hiring Southeast Asian crews who are slotted into jobs that are considered more repetitive and require less skill. Additionally, the labor arrangement changes from one of direct individual hires to a crew labor structure. As a consequence, these racially distinct labor arrangements create job ladders available to white farmworkers that are not open to Southeast Asian or Latinx workers.

Chapter 1

A Portrait of Farm Labor in the Driftless Area's Local Food System

When I started researching farmworkers in the contemporary local food system, there were no similar studies to draw from about farm labor in this manifestation of alternative agriculture. The labor force on these diversified vegetable farms was largely absent from the literature, and while some educated guesses could be made from research on organic farms or non-local diversified vegetable farms, specific data on farms producing for local markets was lacking. Were these farms predominantly using family-labor? Did farmers get the work done by relying on friends and extended family help? How prevalent was hired labor? One of my first tasks was to start filling these gaps in knowledge. To do this, I surveyed farmers in one region where alternative agriculture has a strong presence to collect data on their farms, their labor force composition, and themselves. A copy of the survey is found in Appendix 1. Afterward, I conducted semi-structured interviews with a selection of 38 farmers and farmworkers. These interviews provided a deeper understanding of the experiences of participants in these labor structures. Fieldwork also included two years of participant-observation at local food system conferences, webinars, listservs, and on- and off-farm events throughout the Driftless Area of Wisconsin.

During the course of my fieldwork, Margaret Gray published *Labor and the Locavore* (2014) providing much needed insights into the Hudson Valley agricultural labor force. However, she and I made different choices in how to define our field areas and select participants, which I believe explains the significant differences in our findings with regard to race and working conditions. The farmworkers Gray "sought out and interviewed were almost

all noncitizen immigrants, mostly undocumented Latinos" (p. 6). Her intention was to look for Latinx farmworkers working on farms within six counties along the Hudson River Valley. These counties accounted for 20% of New York state's local agricultural sales (p. 10). While the farms themselves may not have had any direct-to-consumer sales, the counties Gray chose are known for their vibrant local food systems. Because she organized her site selection this way, farms and farmworkers participating in conventional agriculture systems were not excluded. By contrast, I was not specifically focused on Latinx workers. Instead, my focus was on identifying farms that were part of the local food system and then studying the labor force on those farms. Before I move on to a detailed analysis of my findings, it is necessary to explain the decision-making that went into my site selection.

In order to study the local food system, one must decide what is meant by a "local" food system. Unlike "organic," there is no standardized definition of "local," so buying local produce or supporting the local food system can look very different in the details. Commonly used definitions may refer to products grown within the same state—this is the measure used by the Buy Local, Buy Wisconsin campaigns. Other times it means produced within a certain distance – maybe 100, maybe 300 miles of the consumer. This is particularly true when urban areas such as Chicago, Milwaukee, or the Twin Cities advertise local produce. In my research, I began by deciding on the physical and political boundaries of my field area and then searched for farms within that boundary. As discussed previously, the local food system of the Wisconsin Driftless Area was chosen because of its robust history of experimentation with various forms of alternative agriculture. Although the Driftless reaches into neighboring states, I confined my research to Wisconsin to control for state level variables in agriculture laws and regulations. Both the political and physical boundaries were readily identifiable on maps of the region. The

six counties Gray (2014) selected in the Hudson Valley, were not only vibrant local food communities, but they were also regional suppliers to New York City comparable to the Driftless Area supplying Chicago, Milwaukee, and the Twin Cities. In this way, our field areas were similar. However, we chose our farms quite differently.

Within the Driftless Area, I searched for farms that sold at least some of their products directly to consumers through outlets such as farmers markets, CSAs, and farm stands. These face-to-face outlets inherently limit the distance that fresh vegetables travel from farm to consumer. While many of these farms supplied consumers within the Driftless Area or just outside it in Madison, Wisconsin, some did transports produce as far as Chicago, Milwaukee, or the Twin Cities. I then sought out the farmers and workers connected to these farms. Gray (2014) instead focused on finding and interviewing noncitizen immigrant farmworkers, close to 80% of whom were Latino. The fruit and vegetable farms they worked on did not need to sell directly to consumers; they simply needed to be located within those six Hudson Valley counties. The farms in Gray's study were deeply shaped by conventional agricultural markets. In contrast, I intentionally sought out those attempting to farm at the "movement end" of the embeddedness continuum. Had I centered my research design on finding immigrant farmworkers, I certainly could have done so in the Driftless Area. In that scenario, I suspect my findings on the Driftless farm labor force would look more like Gray's.

For this study, however, I felt it was necessary to focus on farms that were publicly recognized as part of the local food system because I was interested in how the tension between local food as a movement or an emerging market affected farm labor. Clearly, there is no realistic way to identify the very small farmers and market gardeners who simply set up a stand at the end of their lane. I could have spent years driving up and down winding country lanes

looking for all the locally produced vegetables! To build my list, I used a variety of publications, websites and organizations that promote local food in the region. I started with the Farm Fresh Atlases which are published by the REAP Food Group. I combined the lists from appropriate regions and then combed through them to find vegetable producers. There are more than two dozen farmers markets in the Driftless Area and nearby cities such as Madison; many of which make lists of vendors publicly available. I cross referenced these lists with my existing population and spent a lot of time googling farms to confirm that they still existed. Local grocery stores such as Willy Street Co-op in Madison, the Viroqua Food Co-op, and Driftless Market in Platteville also identify the farms that supply their produce so that provided another source of farm names. Finally, I used Local Harvest, a website that allows users to search for direct-to-consumer farms in their area, to complete my list.

Table 2.1. Farms Included in the Study

	Number of farms
Initial Population	167
Farms no longer meet criteria	35
Initial letters undeliverable	9
Remaining Population	= 123
Farms who participated in survey	65

My initial list was comprised of 167 farms. When I began contacting them, 35 of the farms no longer met the study criteria. Some of this was due to incorrect information listed on publicly available websites, but other farms had undergone changes.

Seventeen of them had stopped growing vegetables for market. The reasons for this were varied but my conversation with one woman highlighted several of the factors. This farmer, who had been running an eight-acre vegetable operation, spoke with me at length about their decision to switch to raising animals. “We did a lot of produce, but there are a lot of people doing

produce and so the competition is pretty fierce…and we just really enjoy raising the animals more and there weren't too many people doing animals. So that was one of the reasons why we switched." Labor challenges also played a role in their decision.

> Another issue why we switched from produce to animals is that it was hard to find labor. We had machinery as far as cultivators and stuff like that, but you still had to do hand weeding. And you know, it's hot and buggy and all that good stuff. Even though we live in a rural area, it was still really hard to find teenagers or somebody who was in college to do that work.

Several other farmers on my initial list had stopped farming altogether. Some like the farmer quoted above cited labor challenges or lack of viable markets. One ex-farmer talked at length about her inability to make it financially. Another farm couple had divorced and was in the process of selling the farm. When you are a family farm, changes in family structure significantly impact the operation. These were some tough, tough phone calls as quite a few were open about their struggles and the pain caused by leaving farming. I was definitely wearing my clinical social worker hat for some of those interactions.

Initial letters to nine of the remaining 132 farms were returned as undeliverable. I also could not reach anyone by phone at those farms despite multiple attempts. Although I could not prove that the nine farms were no longer in operation, that was likely the explanation. Thus, I omitted them from my data pool. This left 123 farms; farmers at 65 of those farms participated in the phone survey, giving me a response rate of 53%.

What explains the high response rate of this telephone survey? I believe that intentionally calling in the off-season was highly beneficial. After several months of solitude, farmers may have been predisposed to chat. Quite a few of them did talk to me at length after the conclusion of the survey. As a clinical social worker, I was trained to quickly establish rapport with diverse clients; this proved a useful skill when I had at best a few seconds to

convince a stranger to participate in my phone survey. With the exception of one person who was hard of hearing and easily confused, everyone who I was able to reach by the phone agreed to be surveyed. I did not feel that the confused woman was able to fully consent to be surveyed but she ended the call before I was able to politely extract myself from the interaction. When comparing my population list to the list of respondents, I see participation from most of the prominent farms in the local food system. Perhaps their comfort with public visibility contributed to their willingness to participate in a survey. Farming was also likely to be their full-time job, so in the winter, they were home rather than working a second job. For the small operations where the farmer also worked at an off-farm job, reaching someone by phone was likely just a matter of lucky timing. It is these farms, both large and small, that are the central focus of this chapter.

What follows is a portrait of the Driftless Area's local vegetable producers and their farmworkers.

THE FARMS

To make sense of the labor systems used in the Driftless Area's local food system, it helps to understand the farms themselves. Compared to neighboring farms in Illinois, Iowa, or Minnesota, farms in Wisconsin's Driftless Area are quite small in overall size. The amount of land that each farm devotes to vegetable production for local markets is even smaller. Diversified and minimally mechanized would be two appropriate adjectives to describe these farms. These characteristics have contradictory impacts on labor needs. While the small scale limits the amount of labor needed on each farm, less mechanization and a wide variety of vegetable crops have the opposite effect, increasing labor demand. Considering the interplay of these variables is critical for understanding why farmers choose to operate particular labor

systems.

Farm Scale

Scale has clear implications for labor. In general, the larger the farm, the more labor is required to run it. The survey found that the mean farm size was 53 acres, but this number is skewed by several farms of 200 or more acres. While 200 acres is not a large farm for commodity crops of corn or soybeans, it is extremely large for a diversified vegetable farm in the Driftless Area local food system. A better way to understand farm size is categorically. The acreage of the 65 survey respondents are distributed as follows:

Table 2.2. Total Acreage of Farms

Farm size	Number of farms
0-9 acres	17
10-49 acres	30
50-99 acres	9
100+ acres	9

As you can see, 26% of the farms are less than 10 acres in total size; 72% were less than 50 acres. While a 50-acre diversified vegetable farm would require a tremendous amount of labor, when it comes to actual acreage in vegetable production, these farms operate on an even smaller scale.

Table 2.3. Vegetable Acreage of Farms

Acres in vegetables	Number of farms
0-4 acres	39
5-9 acres	13
10-14 acres	1
15+ acres	12

Of the farms surveyed, 60% are growing less than five acres of vegetables; 80% of farms

grow less than 10 acres. The smallest of those farms rely almost entirely on hand labor, making them very labor-intensive operations. Once a farm reaches a couple of acres in size, they have more options for mechanization. As one beginning farmer from Chicago told me, "A lot of the 'wisdom' that's out there on farms and scaling right now is that above three acres, you can't rely on hand labor. You need to get some kind of tractor."

While most of the farms larger than three acres do have a tractor, they also display a wide range of mechanization strategies, making scale alone insufficient to determine the labor needs of a diversified vegetable farm (although 1 acre = 1 full-time position works as a rough guide). Farms in the largest category ranged from 15-50 acres of vegetables with one outlier who reported 100 acres though it was largely of sweet corn. These farms tend to be mature farms, in operation for at least a decade, although there is no linear relationship between age of farm and size of vegetable acreage. Most mature farms still grow less that ten acres of vegetables. However, these large mature farms have had time to experiment with various types of labor and settle into a labor system that works for them.

Land Tenure

Land tenure is another important factor to consider. Renting land allows beginning farmers a financial pathway to enter farming, freeing up money for seeds, equipment, and labor costs. But renting does not allow farmers to build equity, potentially limiting their ability to borrow money as they seek to scale up or make capital investments to improve the farm.

Farm land in Wisconsin is relatively affordable compared to neighboring states. Depending on the particular region of the Driftless, average cost per acre was roughly between $3,800-$5,900 in 2017 (Brannstrom 2018).

The small size of most of these farms likely contributes to the high rates of farm land ownership. Forty-nine farms, or 75%, own all of their land. Of the remaining farms, nine own the majority of their land, renting a small amount of additional acreage. Two farms rent approximately half their land, while four rent the majority. It is important to note that at least two of the farms that rent the majority of their land are renting from a family member, in both cases a parent. One of these is a long-established farm, while the other has been in operation less than five years.

Table 2.4. Land Tenure of Farms

	Number of farms
Own all of their land	49
Rent	
Less than half	0
Approximately half	2
More than half	4

Sales Outlets

Where a farm sells produce can significantly impact crop mix, which in turn affects labor needs. CSA farms in particular grow a tremendous variety of vegetables to pack into their boxes of shares. Farms that supply more of their produce to retail outlets like local grocery stores or institutions such as schools may be able to specialize in fewer crops, allowing for more mechanization and reduced labor needs.

Most farms in the Driftless local food system depend on a mix of sales outlets for their production, but 16 farms reported selling 100% of their produce through only one outlet. Farmers markets, CSA subscriptions and on-farm sales were the outlets of choice for farms declining to diversify their sales outlets.

Table 2.5. Farms with One Sales Outlet

Type of outlet	Number of farms
Farmers Markets	6
CSA	5
On Farm	4
Restaurant	1

Other than having one sales outlet, these farms had only one other factor in common. Although the size of their vegetable production ranged from .1-40 acres, they were mostly very, very small. Several farmers were growing vegetables on less than an acre. I initially thought that these were probably beginning vegetable farmers starting out on a tiny piece of land, but that was not the case. There was actually little else that these farms had in common. These 16 farms varied widely in total size of the farm, years of operation, and whether or not the vegetable production was their farm's main product.

When looking at all farms, including the 16 with one sales outlet, there were five most commonly used outlets - farmers markets, retail (e.g. restaurants, groceries), community supported agriculture (CSA), direct sales on farm, and wholesale. The table that follows shows the percentage of farms that report using each.

Table 2.6. Most Common Sales Outlets

	Percent of Farms
Farmers Markets	71%
Retail	48%
CSA	46%
On Farm	31%
Wholesale	17%

Farmers markets were the most common outlet, with 71% of farms selling at at least one market. With over 60 farmers markets in and around the Driftless Area, including eight in

Madison, farms of all sizes and maturity could gain access to a market. Farms reported that farmers markets accounted for from less than 10% to 100% of sales. The vendor fees for space at the larger markets are cost prohibitive for many of the smallest farms or those without a customer base or niche product. The smaller markets are cheaper to access, but they don't always provide the farm with sufficient revenue to justify the costs. One farmer reported that after two years of trying, she quit selling produce at their local farmers market because the $50 she spent on a stall was not financially worth it.

Sales to retail outlets were also common; 48% of farms reported selling products to a local retailer. While the survey did not ask farms to specify which retailer they sold vegetables to, 13 farms indicated they sold to a restaurant. Seven farms indicated a grocery store, most often the Willy Street Co-op in Madison, Driftless Market in Platteville, or the Viroqua Food Co-op. One of the eastern-most farms sold to Outpost Natural Foods in Milwaukee, but most farms focused on hyper-local grocery stores. Two farms indicated that they sold to institutions such as a local school or hospital and a few others expressed a desire to explore institutional outlets in the future.

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) models are found on a similar percent of farms (46%). Interestingly, one farm indicated that although they did not operate a CSA themselves, they did sell some of their produce to fill in another farm's CSA shares. Several other farms offered add-in shares of fruits, cheeses, or value-added products that they purchased from another farm, but this was the only farm surveyed that was contracted to provide their vegetables to another CSA operation. The CSA model is incredibly production intense. In order to pack a share of produce each week for a typical 20-week season, farms need to grow a tremendous variety of vegetables. Because of the intensity involved with this model, farms with a CSA sales

outlet tend to be deeply committed to this model. Although CSAs ranged from 30-100% of a farm's sales, most reported that greater than 67% or 2/3 of their sales were through their CSAs. The intensity of production also has implications for labor needs. Because of the small scale and high diversity of products, mechanization remains limited, leaving much of the work to be done by hand. Conventional wisdom says that these highly diversified vegetable farms require one full-time worker for each acre of produce. As will be discussed more thoroughly in the subsequent section on labor in this chapter, almost all farms with CSAs also had paid workers.

On-farm sales were another significant outlet for farms, with almost 1/3 reporting some sales revenue generated this way. On-farm sales ranged from 2-100% of sales, and not surprisingly, these farms had little in common among them. Some farms set up a stand at the end of their driveway and relied on customers paying on the honor system for any produce they took. Other farms had a network of loyal customers who would arrive on the farm at scheduled times. One farm was entirely a U-pick operation. Some were market gardens where retirees earned a little spending money through casual sales. Four of these farms relied on internet sales to reach their consumers. Typically, online consumers would come to the farm to pick-up their produce, but some farms would make deliveries. One farm held regular farm-to-table dinners on site where produce grown on their farm made up the bulk of the menu. Their goal was to eventually produce enough variety of fruits, vegetables, and animal products to source all but a few oils and seasonings on their farm.

Wholesale was the smallest reported outlet with 17% of farms including some amount in their mix. While I expected a few farms to include wholesale in their sales outlet mix, I was surprised to find the percentage as high as it was in an area that so strongly emphasized the local food system. Wholesale accounts ranged from less than 1% to 60% of a farm's sales. If and

how wholesale fits into a farm's sales outlets touches on the differing ideologies present in the Driftless local food system and will be discussed in depth in the following chapter. For now, it is sufficient to simply describe the handful of farms who sell wholesale. Farms with the highest wholesale percentages were mature farms; all had been in operation since at least 1999. Three of these farms mixed wholesale and farmers market outlets while another was evenly split between wholesale and online sales. All but one of these mature farms were on a large amount of land with total acreage of 40-190 acres. The youngest farms utilizing wholesale outlets were all less than eight years old, and all operated on less than 20 acres in total. None of these younger farms had wholesale percentages above 20%. Three were primarily CSA operations with some of their sales also coming through farmers markets. In each of these cases, wholesale was 5% or less of their sales and used as a way to offload extra produce. The two other young farms had sales mixes of approximately 60% farmers market, 20% retails, and 20% wholesale. Rather than a way to dispose of extra produce, these farms sought a diverse portfolio of sales outlets and saw wholesale as an important part of that mix.

Product Mix

These diversified vegetable farms grow a tremendous variety of produce, even on a small amount of land. For example, farms with a CSA operation typically report growing 40 or more types of produce, often with several varieties of each vegetable. This produce assortment, combined with the small size of farms, contributes to less mechanization and greater labor needs than larger more specialized operations.

Many of these farms, 46% of those surveyed, also raise animals.

Table 2.7. Farms with Animals or Animal Products

Type of Animals Raised	Number of Farms
Eggs	10
Chickens	7
Other Poultry	3
Pigs	8
Beef cattle	7
Lambs	3
Sheep (wool)	3
Llamas	2
Dairy (goats)	4
Dairy (cows)	1

Almost the same number of farms – 28 – indicated that they sold some value-added products. Jams, jellies, and pickled things are the most common, but maple and sorghum syrups can be found, too. Farms with fiber-producing animals may sell products ranging from raw wool to yarns and finished knits. Goat's milk soaps, various flours, and baked goods are also sold. Several farms indicated that although they did not currently have value-added products, they were considering adding them in the future.

A handful of farmers were considering ways to provide services in addition to agricultural products. "We've been toying with this bed-and-breakfast thing…" several of them shared. For most, agritourism was just an idea they were mulling over, but one farmer was in the process of implementing farm stays. "So we're diving into the bed-and-breakfast thing in the fall. This summer, we'll get all the rooms set and we'll start advertising. And that will be a bigger part of our offering." Since this farm also had animals, this farmer was envisioning a host of classes to complement the B&B. Her goal was "having like two or three big groups of guests a year who would take wool classes or whatever…I'll be teaching beginning gardening, using market garden techniques in a small setting. And I've done that now for a couple of years at different conferences and stuff. I'll also be doing a soaps and scrubs class using herbs and things."

Organic Certification

While different in definition, locally produced food and organic food have significant overlap. For example, FairShare, a Madison-based coalition of 50 CSA farms, requires that participating farms be certified organic. This should have implications for labor as agricultural economists Lohr and Park (2009) found that organic farms require approximately 15% more labor than conventional farms. When organic and local overlap, they found that "employment of both year-round and seasonal workers declines with increased emphasis on local sales" (p. 329) but the workers that remained employed were paid at higher wages. However, their work focused on California organic farms and their findings do not seem to apply at the small scale of farms in the Driftless Area. They also found that hired labor on organic farms is more likely to be seasonal, which is pretty much the nature of all farm work in Wisconsin, whether organic or not.

The demand for organic produce is felt among Driftless farmers, even among those who were not FairShare members. Just under half, or 43%, of the surveyed farms were certified organic, and another 17% reported using organic practices. Some of these "organic practice" farms were in the process of transitioning their land in order to become certified organic. Others found the cost of becoming certified too prohibitive for the size of their farming operation or the perceived value of the certificate. One farmer shared, "it's too expensive. I know my customers and they trust me." Another farmer said that he had found a workaround. He got his organic certification when he started farming, but after developing relationships with his customers, he dropped the certification, saving himself money and time on paperwork while still reaping the price premiums of being organic.

THE FARMERS

Farmers are the decision makers for the farm and the original source of labor. They determine farm scale, product mix, and the organization of their labor force. They also bring their own ideologies, previous experiences, and visions for their farm. This section provides a portrait of the farmers in the Driftless local food system and examines how they compare to US farmers as a whole. In brief, farmers in the Driftless local food system are white, relatively young, and early in their farming career. Most of them also did not grow up on a farm. According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, these Driftless farmers are not representative of U.S. farmers in any way but in race.

It is important to note that the 2017 Agricultural Census questionnaire had some significant changes from the previous census in 2012. For example, in 2017, there were 3.4 million producers in the United States, which includes persons who identify as farmers and/or ranchers (U.S. Department of Agriculture 2017). This was a 6.9% increase from the 2012 census, which would be a surprising amount of growth not matched by anecdotal evidence. However, the 2017 Census had more broadly defined a producer as "someone involved in making decisions for the farm," which resulted in some farms reporting more producers than they had in a previous census. Because of these changes, I focused on comparing my farmer data to just the 2017 Census.

Years of Operation

The local food system in Southwestern Wisconsin has a long history. This was reflected in the survey data showing that one-fourth of the farms had been in existence for 20 years or

longer. Six farmers had been operating since the 1970s. Given the farm crisis experienced in the 1980s, it was not surprising to find that less than 1 in 10 farmers started during that decade, and only a few more started in the 1990s, While not all young farms are operated by young farmers, it is true that the farmers on these oldest farms are themselves aging, raising questions of farm succession and most important to this research, changing labor needs as bodies age.

Across the United States, 73% of farmers have been operating for 11+ years, leaving only 27% as beginning farmers (U. S. Department of Agriculture 2017). The average is 21.3 years of farming. Despite a sizeable number of mature farms, my findings are the inverse of what is found in national level data. Among vegetable producers in the Driftless local food system, 33% of farmers had been in operation 11+ years, meaning 67% were beginning farmers. Looking specifically at beginning farmers, almost one-fourth had started in the last five years with two farmers in their very first year of operation. Like any new business in its first few years, these farmers are in the process of juggling multiple variables, only some of which are within their control. Farmers are honing their skills at farming and learning to know the microclimates and soils of their properties. Additionally, many of these beginning farmers are scaling up or at least experimenting with their product mixes and the amount of land under vegetable cultivation. This has implications for labor.

Changing size alone is enough to make predicting labor needs challenging. One of the farmers I interviewed--I'll call her Beverly--shared her observations on this dynamic. Beverly and her husband run one of the largest CSA focused farms in the Driftless. By all outward signs, it is a highly successful, mature farm that provides them with a satisfactory livelihood and employs several full-time workers. But Beverly shared that this stability was a fairly recent achievement. Because of that, she empathized with beginning farmers struggling with labor.

> If the farm is going to be a different size each year, then it's really hard to understand where your labor is. It's really hard to understand how long it's going to take to get everything done. And it was really hard for us to get a handle on it until we actually got someplace and stayed there for a while.

Beverly added that it was only after 15 years of farming that they stabilized at their current size and settled into fairly predictable labor arrangements using a mix of worker shares, full-time workers, and hired crew. Most farms studied have not yet hit a 15-year mark.

Principal Decision Maker

At the national level, approximately 930,000 farms reported either one or two producers (U.S. Department of Agriculture 2017). A slight majority of farms in the 2012 Census (56%) reported only one producer, but with the expanded definition of producer in 2017, now only 46% of farms reported only one producer.

Within the Driftless local food system, I found an even higher percentage of farms reporting multiple principal decision makers.

Table 2.8. Principal Decision Makers

Number of principal decision makers	Number of farms
1	23
2	36
3	7
4	1

One third of farms reported only one principal decision maker. Some of these farmers were single; others were married but their spouse did not participate in the farming operation. When a farm had two principal decision makers as was the case in 55% of farms, almost all were a husband and wife team. Farms run by spouses deeply entwine work and home life with stresses in one area bleeding over into the other. One farmer caught me off guard when I asked about the number of principal decision makers on her farm. "It's just me now. He ran off and

left me for a 20-year-old." This woman chose to continue farming, but several farms that were in my initial population to survey had gone out of business due to divorce by the time I contacted them.

A much smaller number of farms reported three principal decision makers. This was usually some combination of parents and children. The one farm reporting four principal decision makers, parents and two children, was in the process of an intergenerational transfer of the farm. I just happened to survey them in the middle of this transition when all four took an active role in high-level decision making on the farm. The plan was for the children to completely take over the farm within a few years. A handful of farms with two primary operators were in similar transition periods but still considered the older generation the "farmers."

Farm Background

Of the 114 principal operators in the survey, only 40 of them, or 35%, grew up on farms. Looking at the number of farms rather than individual operators, 57% of farms were being run by people not from farming families. This is significant because without a farming background, people need to learn how to farm from scratch.

There are a few farms in the Driftless Area whose operators come from a different kind of farming background. They are Amish, and one of these farms participated in the survey. Clearly that did not occur by phone. In the survey process, after three attempts to reach a farm by phone, I sent a follow-up letter, a paper copy of the survey, and a self-addressed stamped envelope for return. Judging from the family name and the lack of phone number, I suspected they were Amish and simply moved to sending them a survey. Their farming experience relies

largely on animal power and family labor. While some non-Amish families also aspire to farm with animal power, no one else reported growing up on this type of farm.

Race and Gender

Across the United States, 95.4% of farmers identify as white (U.S. Department of Agriculture 2017). Of the 114 principal operators identified in my survey, every single person was white. There are some Hmong farmers who operate within the Driftless Area, but I was unable to reach any of them by phone to conduct the survey. I was, however, able to talk informally with several of their teenage and adult children at local farmers markets. None of the Hmong farmers, who were typically older, were willing to participate in the formal survey.

At the national level, 64% of farmers identify as male and 36% female (U.S. Department of Agriculture 2017). Among vegetable farmers in the Driftless area, the numbers were closer to an even split. I found 52 of the 114 principal operators (or 46%) were female. While over half of the farms surveyed were operated by a husband and wife team, this high number of female principal operators means that a sizeable number of women were also farming solo. The motivations and farming ideologies of several of these women will be explored in subsequent chapters.

The prevalence of women in farming is not just limited to vegetable farmers in the Driftless Area. Recognizing the growing number of women in agriculture, MOSES started a Rural Women's Project to provide networking and other supports. When I started my fieldwork, the Green County Women in Sustainable Agriculture was the only local network. Now, MOSES sponsors six different local Wisconsin networks for women, three of which are in the Driftless Area.

Aging

The average US farmer in 2017 is 57.5 years old, but just 8% of them are under 35 (U.S. Department of Agriculture 2017). While I did not ask specifically about age, it was clear from glancing at the vendors at the big farmers markets, the FairShare farms, and the attendees at the MOSES conference that farmers in the Driftless local food system are younger than the US average. At one of the keynote sessions at MOSES, it looked like half the crowd was approximately 35 or younger.

Despite not knowing the exact ages of the surveyed farmers, it is clear that a farmer's age and where they are in their life course do play important roles in determining farm labor structures. Age impacts how much labor a farmer can provide themselves based on how hard they can work their bodies. While there are many healthy and hale farmers in late middle age, several farmers mentioned diminished physical capacity due to aging.

Age is particularly salient when it comes to beginning farmers. As will be discussed in greater detail below, one way to manage labor costs in the early years is for the farmer(s) to bear all or the vast majority of the labor. Younger farmers are generally better able to do this than new farmers who have made a later-in-life career shift. One new middle-aged farmer shared, "I'm not sure I can really make this work. If I were twenty, I could pound out a lot more labor from myself in order to grow it to a point that I could hire labor. But I can't." New middle-aged farmers who come in with "Chicago money" face the same physical challenges as other new farmers in their age cohort, but they arrive with substantial financial resources to immediately begin paying for hired labor.

FARM LABOR

Now we get to the big question. Who is doing the work on these diversified vegetable farms in the local food system? Within the Driftless, several different types of labor are commonly used – family labor, volunteers ranging from casual help to more formalized internships, and finally wage labor both as crew and as individual hires. It is typical to see multiple types of labor used on a farm to create the overall labor structure. One of the most important variables in determining the type of labor used is the age of the farm.

Most beginning farmers rely heavily or entirely on their own labor as they lack the financial liquidity and scale for hired workers. They are truly "family farms" in the Chayanovian sense (1966). The self-exploitation that Chayanov described is an important labor story, particularly for beginning farmers in the local food system, but it is beyond the scope of this research project.

Friends and family often also provide a source of cheap and occasional labor on new farms. Over time, these initial labor systems evolve, moving from cheap or free sources of labor to use of more regularized and formalized hired workers. Farming ideologies, legal realities, and the personality and age of a farmer also shape the type of labor structure that farms mature into.

Table 2.9. Type of Labor Used on Farm

	Number of farms
Farmer(s) only	13
Farmer plus	
Family (unpaid)	16
Volunteers	24
Interns	4
Wage labor	37

The numbers above add up to more than 65 farms because once a farm expands to more than farmer-only labor, they most often use a combination of labor types. There are a few farms

that are farmer plus one additional type of labor, but those are the exception. Each type of labor will be examined in turn.

Farmer-Labor Only

The three main factors that determine whether or not a farm is structured solely around farmer labor are scale, age of farm, and farming ideology. These farmer-labor only operations ranged in size from 0.1-4 acres of vegetables, although 2/3 were one acre or less. Again, the general rule of thumb is that one acre of diversified vegetables is full-time work for one person. With most of these farms one acre or less, the amount of labor needed could easily be met by one or two farmers. With one exception, these farms had all started in the past decade, thus the operators were considered beginning farmers.

Table 2.10. Decision Makers on Farmer-Labor Only Farms

Number of principal decision makers	Number of farms
1	3
2	10

Of the thirteen farms surveyed who were farmer(s)-labor only, three were operated by a single person. Two were women and one was a man. The remaining ten farms reported two principal operators. Six were husband and wife teams, and two were romantically partnered straight couples. I am aware of farms in the Driftless Area that are run by same-sex couples, but not that focus on vegetable productions. Thus, all of the farming couples studied were opposite-sex couples. One farm was run by two siblings and the remaining farm was operated by two business partners.

Table 2.11. Farming Background

Did farmer(s) grow up on farm?	
No	8
Split response, one yes/one no	2
Yes, operator(s) did	3

Of the three solo farmers, none of them had grown up on a farm. One of the women remarked that she had always wanted to farm but had no farming background. While they may have worked for a season on a farm as adults, they were largely learning on the job as they went. The ten farms with two principal operators came from a range of backgrounds. On four of the farms operated by couples/business partners, neither person had grown up on a farm. Like the solo farmers, these partners were learning as they went. There were three farms where both of the farmers had grown up on farms. While the type of farm they grew up on may have been different than the farming they were currently practicing, these farmers were at least familiar with farming as an occupation. On the remaining two farms, one of the operators had grown up on a farm while their partner had not.

When asked why they had no additional labor, farmers offered a variety of responses. One solo farmer reported that she did not want to "step into all that paperwork." When pressed, she confessed that she also worked two other jobs so her hours on the farm were somewhat random, and really she did not want another person around at inconvenient times. The paperwork burden was just her excuse.

According to another farmer, he and his wife were "quality control freaks. We can't trust that to anyone else." He went on to say that they had "experimented with hired workers in the early years, but they proved unreliable so we committed to avoiding [hired] labor." He speculated that if their farm was located closer to Madison, they might be able to find reliable workers but did not feel it was possible in their location.

Five farmers said they were simply too small; one of these farmers indicated that this was because they had temporarily scaled back their size to take a much-needed break. The small scale of most of these operations meant that additional labor needs would be occasional or very part-time. According to one farmer this made it difficult to find labor as most people wanted to work more hours than he could offer. Another farmer had hoped for an intern but was unable to find one. As discussed in depth in a later section, intern labor is commonly used as a cheap way to get work done on beginning or financially struggling farms. Two other farmers echoed these financial realities as both reported insufficient income to afford hired help despite aspiring to do so in the future.

Table 2.12. Changes in Labor Needs of Farmer-Labor Only Farms

	Number of Farms
Labor changes in past 5 years?	
Yes	1
No	5
Have not been farming that long	7
Anticipate labor changes in next 5 years?	
Yes	6
No	6
Unsure	1

As noted above, all but one of these farms were in their first decade. When asked about their labor changes over the past five years, several had not been in operation long enough to even answer the question. Aside from the one farmer who had reported downsizing (from 6-10 acres of vegetables) to take a break, none of the other farmers reported that their labor needs had changed. When asked to project several years into the future, six farmers reported no anticipated changes.

While these are young farms, they're not all young farmers. Most of the farms planning

to continue with farmer-only labor were run by older folks who were retired or semi-retired. While farm transition was not the focus of this research, at times it was impossible to ignore. One older female who was farming solo shared:

> I was recently diagnosed with lung cancer. I've had to make the difficult decision to downsize and eventually sell the farm. This area has a lot of older people with deceased spouses. There's a whole group of us who are no longer farming, but it's hard to admit that you can't do it anymore. The old way is to pass the farm on to family, but no one has kids who want to farm. Several have sold. Others are renting out large portions of land. I'll be selling.

The other solo female farmer also did not anticipate any changes in her labor needs although she was planning to grow her farm. Rather than increasing her scale, she was going to extend her growing season by building an earth sheltered greenhouse. This would allow her to expand into winter production and tap into what she believed were more lucrative winter markets. Her goal was for her farm to support her full time, unlike many other farms in her area where the farmers provided all their own labor but still needed to work a second job to have sufficient income.

One farmer was unable to predict future labor needs because he was unsure whether or not to continue with diversified vegetable production.

> The weather was so bad last year that I didn't plant anything. So, I didn't need anyone last year. I could have up to 30 acres in vegetables so I would need lots of labor. But I don't know. I hope to plant something this year, but I'm still waiting on the weather. The big farms are going to greenhouses to account for the weather issue. That's too expensive. Many others are calling it quits after the past years of drought, flood, drought, flood.

The other six farms are all planning to grow in ways that increase their labor needs. The farmer who had hoped for an intern already knew that he was going to need additional help and was planning to add 1-3 seasonal workers over the next few years. He was undecided about whether these would be interns or wage workers.

The farmer who had scaled back to take a break was already planning to expand again. When their farm was producing vegetables on 6-10 acres, she "got by with help from my in-laws and daughter, who was old enough to transplant." This time, she envisioned scaling up to three acres of CSA produce and eight acres for wholesale. She hoped that by keeping the intensively diverse CSA section to three acres, she would keep labor needs manageable. This farm relies heavily on mechanization and uses plastic as much as possible for weed control. For the upcoming season, she had one worker-share (CSA member who works on the farm in return for produce) signed up and her in-laws were planning to help again, but "come fall, I'm going to have to hire." This concerned her as she believed that her farm's location and her limited financial resources were going to make finding workers a challenge.

> Way out in the middle of nowhere, it's so very hard to find people, especially people who want to work hard. Unless you have the means to pay them above minimum wage, you're competing with McDonalds. Farming is hot, hard work and although people may have romantic notions of it, when they get up close, they don't want to do it.

One of the other farms, run by a straight unmarried couple, was slowly growing. The farmer I spoke with reported that they both worked part-time off-farm. Currently they derived about 1/3 of their income from the farm and were hoping to increase production and income enough to allow one of them to be a full-time farmer. This desire to provide increased work for the nuclear family was echoed by the last two farms. One husband and wife team also anticipated growing but only as much as "mom and pop" labor could sustain. The other farm was operated by a woman who described herself as a stay-at-home mom. "I like staying small and having more money for me! But we would like to increase gradually. We have three kids that will be helping, and do help but right now they're 6, 4, and 2 months." Her current goal was to build a hoop house to start growing a spring CSA share. None of the farmers currently

providing their own labor aspired to manage a large operation with numerous workers. Their goals were more modest: a pragmatic vision of a farm that provided full-time work to one or both spouses; a way of life for a young family.

While none of these farmers spoke in ideological terms about farmer-only labor, when I was conducting in-depth interviews, I spoke with two couples, all former farmworkers, who were now beginning farmers elsewhere in Wisconsin. Devin and Miriam have been farming less than five years, while Tess and Kevin have been working their land closer to ten years. Both of their farms are primarily diversified vegetables sold to local markets, but they're also experimenting with animals and some value-added products. Their time spent as interns and regular paid labor on several Driftless Area farms helped shape their own beliefs regarding farm size. For all of them, an ideology of family-labor was clearly a driving force in their decision making. These ideologies will be explored more in the next chapter, but I want to introduce you to their views on farmer-only labor.

I asked Devin how his farmworker experiences shaped his vision of labor for his farm. He started by explaining that it depends if you are a worker or a farmer.

> I think the answer's a little unorthodox. All the farms we've worked at have been a very traditional employer-employee relationship partly because it's been larger farm crews, and there are 10-20 people working on any given day. That's satisfying as a worker. There's a lot of community and camaraderie in that. As an employer, I'm not interested in being an employer first and a farmer second. And that has kind of been the reality that a lot of folks found themselves in as they've grown. A lot of farmers I know who have been in this 20, 30+ years will wake up one day and say, 'This is not what I got into farming for…all I do is drive the tractor, repair the tractor, or manage payroll.' For some people, that's a great space to be in...but in the course of chasing profitability, I feel like I've seen a lot of people make compromises without realizing that they're making compromises until after the fact. So that said, my most succinct description of what I'm looking for in this farm is a small, primarily or exclusively owner-operated farm that at least provides a basic livelihood.

Rather than scaling up their vegetable production, Devin and his spouse were hoping to find

someone with a complementary vision, perhaps diversified livestock, to share the farmland while remaining independent businesses.

Kevin, who tends to be blunt, recounted a heated conversation he'd had with the farmer of a very large farm in their local food system.

> It became about scale because we have an ideology around what size farm we should have. He [farmer from large farm] said, 'You don't think I should exist, do you?' And I said to him because I wanted to have a productive conversation, I said, 'I think you're just realizing the opportunity that's being presented in terms of the growth of organic food, and you're fulfilling a market in a way that I can't. I can't fill a Whole Foods by myself, but you can do that.' But yeah, he was defensive. It became partly about scale because we want to be a family farm, meaning we provide the majority of the labor.

Tess, who is equally outspoken, chimed in:

> But we…we can't go beyond 200 [CSA] members because we can't actually…that's the breaking point for being family-majority. So because we make ideological claims about that a lot, we are tied to it. We can't say that our family farm is a farm where we provide the majority of the labor if we don't provide the majority of the labor. That's totally not acceptable.

While Kevin and Tess's farm now employs a paid worker, this was a recent development the family was still wrestling with. These ideological issues will be explored in greater detail in a subsequent chapter, but for these beginning farmers, their understanding of a family farm was intricately tied to farmer labor.

Family Labor

An extension of farmer-only labor structures is one that includes the labor of a farmer's children and/or extended family members as unpaid volunteers. Twenty-five percent of the farmers surveyed indicated that a family member helped out for free at least occasionally. The actual percentage is likely higher as farmers tended to underreport irregular extended family labor and would often circle back to it later in the survey when subsequent questions jogged their

memories. They were also uncertain when assistance from their young children was significant enough to qualify.

While four farms mentioned help from children or grandchildren, extended family assistance was more likely to be from an older generation, parents or aunts and uncles. This older generation was also likely to have had some farming experience and pitched in during seasonal periods of peak labor needs. All of these family members identified as white but were a mix of men and women.

Unpaid family labor does raise some legal issues. Perhaps because of legal concerns or out of a desire to provide income to family members, most farmers who reported labor from their children, whether they were children or adults, pay them. A lawyer specializing in agricultural law, I'll call her Rebecca, shared the following about family workers.

> This is very common in some [farming] communities. The extended family will all get together and all work on the farm operation - maybe after school, maybe we have grandparents helping. This is great for the community and helps to keep the traditions alive that are present in these communities. But some folks also take that to mean that because everyone is related and the farm is a family venture that employment laws like minimum wage and workers compensation don't apply. Now that's not necessarily the truth. In Wisconsin, that is not the case. Everyone has to have minimum wage. The recommendation here is not to assume that extended family gets any exemption from employment laws. So here we're talking about in-laws, grandparents, siblings, cousins, extended family.

Recognizing that this was somewhat shocking information to relay, Rebecca hastily added:

> Honestly, I haven't taken this issue terribly seriously because…when is an enforcement agency going to show up at the farm and get a family in trouble? But it actually does happen. I've seen this go on in some states, so we can't make the assumption that folks will just be looking the other way.

So in her judgment, although some of the farms I surveyed may be breaking the letter of the law when it comes to extended family employment laws, at least so far in Wisconsin, the regulatory agencies have not been interested in enforcing it on these small scale vegetable farms.

Like the self-exploitation of the farmer, the unpaid involvement of extended family is seen as par for the course on family farms.

When farmers have labor needs beyond what they or their families can provide, they often turn to cheap or free sources of labor. Volunteers and interns can help farms scale up without amassing significant labor costs that farmers accrue with regular wage labor.

Volunteers

The social movement aspect of local foods can be seen most strongly in regard to volunteer labor. One local food system activist shared:

> I think the volunteers are a really wonderful example of why the direct-to-consumer farms are all that they are and why they are so important to our community. Yes, we have people that would like to work with us. They would like to come [volunteer] on our farm. Can you imagine somebody going down to the local gas station and being like, 'Hey, I would like to just volunteer.' That doesn't happen. It is truly because farming is so special and so important to our communities that we actually have this. So that's really awesome. People want that connection with their food system and they want to understand the life of the farmer.

Within the Driftless Area, 37% of the farms surveyed report using some form of non-family volunteer labor. Volunteer labor most commonly took the form of worker shares, work parties including school groups, casual and occasional help from friends, and off-farm volunteers at CSA delivery sites.

Off-farm volunteers. At the time I was administering the survey, I was so focused on farm labor on the farm that I had not even considered off-farm volunteers until months later. Off-farm volunteers first came up when I was interviewing Emily, a local food system expert who worked primarily with CSA farms in south central Wisconsin. I asked her to describe the types

of volunteer labor she has seen, and Emily immediately thought of the people who offer their homes or businesses as CSA delivery drop sites.

> Those people are volunteers. They might get a free share or a discount on their share as a benefit of doing that. I think that's one way that most of the farms have something like that where they're utilizing a member who is opening up their home or office or whatever to be the pickup site. And that doesn't necessarily involve a lot of time. Usually, you have to be there, but you don't necessarily have to greet people. One of the farms I was a member of, it was in somebody's garage. They may or may not have been home when you'd go, but you'd just walk up. And if somebody doesn't pick up their share, they have to figure out what to do with it, so there might be a little bit of work with that or following up with people on occasion.

Interestingly, none of the farmers I talked to when administering the survey had thought to mention these drop-site volunteers. Given that 46% of farms surveyed had CSA shares and almost all of those farms dropped off their shares in multiple locations, there exists a large number of essentially invisible volunteers. Serving as a drop-site host does not require a lot of time or effort on the part of the volunteer, but it does provide a vital link in the local food system. One of the arguments for viewing CSA farms as part of a social movement rather than simply participants in the market is the way they invite the consumer to become a co-creator in bringing food to the table, sharing in the challenges of farming. These drop-site volunteers literally create space for those relationships.

A few beginning farmers, primarily those who were in their first year or two of operations, did recognize another type of off-farm volunteer. Renting vendor space at a smaller farmers market is one of the cheapest ways for new farms to create a sales outlet. It was not uncommon for new farmers to mention having a friend or two who would volunteer to help staff a farmers market stall. Again, this was the only off-farm volunteer labor that was recognized. Larger, more established farms typically staff their farmers markets with paid workers.

Occasional non-family volunteers. Just as a few farmers had a friend help out at the market, seven farmers mentioned having a friend or neighbor occasionally volunteer some time on the farm. Several of these volunteers get sent home with a car full of produce but others simply like spending time on a farm. One volunteer reportedly trades his labor for access to tools and materials.

Another common way that non-family members volunteer on farms is through work parties. Work parties organized by the farm most commonly occur on CSA farms. In those cases, volunteers are usually recruited through the same channels (e.g. newsletter and email) that information about produce shares are communicated. When work parties are organized by groups or organizations, they often serve to prepare the farm(s) for events like FairShare's Bike the Barns or Green County's Soil Sisters Tour. There, the event organizers handle recruiting volunteers. Finally, some farms have developed relationships with local school or community groups and invite them to the farm for a work party.

I asked Emily, the local food expert, to share her thoughts on this type of volunteer.

> I think work parties at the farms is pretty common. I would say success is limited. It depends on what the farm is looking for out of those days. If they're looking for a huge group, sometimes they work with a targeted group – so like a student group can come out and do volunteer work days or big construction projects or things like that. One of the farms, they did a gleaning party, so at the end of the season they had people come out to pick everything. You get some to take home and then we have some to donate to the food pantry or stuff like that. Probably those are the most common volunteer type roles.

I myself experienced first-hand the limited success of a work party labor model. Trying to gain access to a farm couple I was hoping to interview, I saw they were having a work party to prepare the farm to host the local Bike the Barns event, and so I signed up. Despite this being the biggest annual fundraiser for FairShare, a powerhouse CSA coalition based in Madison, I was the only volunteer who showed up. The farmers were clearly disappointed by the abysmal

turnout because they had a long list of tasks to complete in preparation for the fundraising event. Having grown up in the country, I was no stranger to hard outdoor physical labor and quickly chewed through many of the tasks. In fact, I had only been working 45 minutes when one of the farmers inquired, "You're not from the city, are you?" After half a day working for them, they were very agreeable to being interviewed at a subsequent date. My experience highlights two common problems that farmers have with irregular volunteers – reliability and efficiency. This points to what Emily saw as the biggest challenge for farmers, the need to find appropriate tasks for this type of labor.

> One example of how I think this worked well with [a farm she volunteers with] this year is we had a packing party. It was in an evening. It was a time when people could come after work. It was at the farm so there was not a lot of people that lived nearby but...We packed shares for the delivery the next day. That was a really good way of utilizing people who may just be able to come for an hour or two. It wasn't super dirty or hardcore and you kind of got to socialize. I think that was a really good example of utilizing appropriate tasks with appropriate type of labor. I think one of the people was a worker share and so he would also come in the day before and start bundling things so that everything was ready to go. I think that was kind of fun…Yeah, I think finding ways of appropriately using people.

In this case, the farmers did a good job of matching the enthusiasm of the volunteers to be on the farm and socialize with other local food supporters with a task that was appropriate for their skill level. It was also a necessary task in the life of a CSA farm.

While work parties and reliance on occasional volunteer help is one way that farmers in the Driftless local food system get work done, issues with inefficiency and unreliability of labor push farms toward more regularized forms of volunteer labor such as worker shares.

Worker shares. The primary way that ongoing non-family volunteer labor appears on these farms is in the form of worker shares. Utilized by CSA farms, the worker share

arrangement is essentially a contract to provide approximately four hours of labor once a week and receive a box of vegetables in payment. Almost one-fourth of farms surveyed (22%) reported having a worker share program. These programs varied in both the number of workers (one or two to several dozen) and the degree of formalization. On some farms, particularly small farms in their first few years of operation, the worker share arrangement was very informal. Mature farms who utilized worker share labor had much more formalized work agreements with clear expectations of work schedule and amount of vegetable compensation.

Farmers have three primary motivations for using worker shares. First, at a pragmatic level, farmers see worker shares as a way to get cash-free labor done, paid for in vegetables. The cash-free labor aspect is particularly important for beginning farmers who are trying to develop financially sustainable operations. It also helps farmers control labor costs by assigning worker shares the low-skilled, high labor demand tasks that it would not be to their advantage to pay regular workers to do. As one worker share participant I interviewed remarked, "You're not going to get to do the exciting stuff." Second, according to the literature, CSA farms are expected to be more socially embedded than market oriented. Trading labor for a vegetable share is in line with these values. Finally, several mature farms that continue to utilize CSA shares do so because those farmers have found that they like working with lots of people. They enjoy being people managers and want their labor structures to reflect this. This vision of farming will be explored more fully in the next chapter.

Legal Issues with Volunteers. During my interview with Rebecca, the agricultural law lawyer, she tried to break down the complexities and nuances of the law into some overarching principles, manageable for a layperson. Rebecca summarized the problem for volunteers on these

farms as stemming from the legal organization of farms.

> That's the crux of the issue...employment law--the law doesn't allow a for-profit business to have volunteers. And the policy behind not having volunteers is the concern that employees will be pressured into volunteering their time... Nonprofits though, because society has recognized that these folks are doing good works and are charitable and all that stuff, we allow nonprofits to have volunteers.

None of the farms participating in the survey were structured as non-profits. In addition to legal concerns around exerting undue influence over their paid workers to "volunteer," there is also the broader labor market concern that reliance on volunteer labor can depress the value of work and depress the wages of employees on that farm and other farms in the local area. This is deeply problematic from a labor justice perspective.

When it comes specifically to worker share arrangements, the lawyer went on to argue:

> [Worker shares] are wonderful opportunities for farmers and community members to connect, and they are very important to many farm businesses. But when you think about it, when farms start to professionalize worker share arrangement and take applications for volunteer positions, or require volunteers to make up missed time or do other things to look more like employment, we are increasing the chances that a court will find that this is in fact employment.

However, in this study, the majority of worker share programs were on certified organic farms where the value of a share of produce was equal to or more than four hours working at minimum wage.

Internships

Like utilizing volunteer labor, creating farm labor structures around internships are another way that farmers can meet labor needs while minimizing labor costs. One of many similarities between Driftless farmers and farmworkers that data collection revealed was that very few of either group had grown up on a farm. Farmers gained their farming knowledge on the job. Without a farming background, how do the workers learn the skills needed to be

productive employees and potentially future farmers? By hiring interns, farmers are able to pass on their knowledge to unskilled workers while not bearing the same financial costs they would have if these were regular paid employees. In return, interns gain practical experience, a small stipend, and occasionally, free housing. While this sounds positive, the realities of intern labor are fraught with inefficient workers and damaged equipment, non-existent educational opportunities, and labor exploitation. Because of this, while many farmers indicated using interns in the past, at the time of the survey, only four farms were currently using intern labor.

Before diving deeper into the problems of intern labor systems in the Driftless Area, it is important to sketch out what a functional model of an intern labor system looks like. Just outside the boundaries of this study in northeastern Madison is Community Ground Works, a non-profit working to make the food system more resilient and just. Their mission is "to work toward an equitable food system by ensuring access to garden space and healthy food, and by educating beginning farmers and gardeners of all ages." Within the larger non-profit is Troy Gardens, a 26-acre urban site that includes a diversified vegetable farm, community gardens, and a children's garden, among numerous other features. There is also a youth farm on a separate site in east Madison. The majority of labor needed for the farm and gardens is provided by interns, and some of those interns go on to become farmworkers or farmers in the Driftless Area. During the course of my research, I interviewed people who had interned there, farmers who had hired former interns, and others connected to Troy Gardens through friends or significant others. Universally, they regarded it as a well-run, effective internship program.

Devin, the spouse of a former Troy intern told me:

> Troy is really interesting because almost all of their labor is interns, and only half of them are paid a really tiny stipend. But what they do is they actually fulfill that internship idea. [Spouse] interned for them for a year and was a worker share the year after. She learned so much. They are incredibly dedicated to the educational

> component. Every week they have an hour or so long class. They have field walks. At the end of the year, they have intern week where all of the staff took a weeklong vacation and the interns took over the farm for a week and delivered the last CSA share. So, they do a really, really great job at that part.

Devin went on to add that after two years working at Troy Gardens, his spouse felt prepared to make the transition from worker to farmer in a way that he did not, despite being a regular wage worker on another local vegetable farm.

What makes Troy Gardens a success from a worker perspective is a combination of mission, non-profit status, easily accessible location, and day-to-day work structure. Their decision to organize as a non-profit came up when I interviewed Chris, another farmworker who had worked on numerous farms in the area and was now a farm manager. Although he had not worked at Troy Gardens, Chris was very familiar with their operation, and he approached it through the eyes of someone in management. Chris believed that the non-profit status was key to the farm's financial sustainability, enabling it to spend so much time focused on education rather than maximizing production profits. As a non-profit, Troy Gardens is able to fundraise and apply for grants, providing them with multiple streams of income beyond simple vegetable sales.

Chris explained:

> They do a very, very good job of farming set up because they're working on very different goals. It's like a for-profit farm underneath a non-profit shell…same thing with [an urban farm he had worked on in Chicago] which is really bizarre. Certain budgetary constraints around work didn't exist. And that's why they have the educational component. But their labor was so cheap.

One of the advantages of an abundance of labor at Troy Gardens is that less mechanization is needed and tasks not essential to production, such as farm beautification, can get accomplished. And according to Chris, that's something he's heard other farms complain about.

> Some of the farmers will say stuff like, 'Oh yeah Troy Gardens, whatever.

> Because you have 16 little minions running around on your farm weeding, of course you don't need any large equipment or anything.'" He added reflexively, "They have a tractor that they sparingly use, but their fields are immaculate. It's just because when you have 16 people, you can do so much work.

Sam, a third farmer worker I interviewed, mentioned that his girlfriend had also been an intern at Troy Gardens. Her internship was during the same period that he had been a wage worker on another nearby farm. I asked him to reflect on their different experiences.

> What was really interesting for us is [other local vegetable farm] and Troy are the same size, at least the years we worked. They're just under five acres. I was the only full-time employee at [other farm] and Troy had, I think, 15 interns, another nine worker shares, and three paid, mostly full-time staff. And they were all making much more money than we were at [other farm] but it was on the same size farm and we grossed about the same amount of money. Totally radically different farms…at the end of the day, our days at the farms would be so different even though the general farm output was the same.

Interns at Troy Gardens are paid $10/hour and work 35 hours/week throughout the growing season, roughly April through late October. This exceeds minimum wage requirements for Wisconsin and is on par with the starting wages for farm labor on the for-profit diversified vegetable farms in the area.

Education is embedded into the work. According to their internship application, "Interns will begin each week together with an educational field walk, a crew-based work project, and a professional development class (with topics ranging from Greenhouse Management to Funding Your Project). Interns will also have the opportunity to work on an individual interest-based project. During the remainder of the week, each intern will work in one of two focus areas: Urban Farming or Garden Education" (Community Ground Works 2017). When educational opportunities are built into the structure of the work week, interns believe that their education is important and valued rather than being ancillary to the farming operation. The expectation of growth in skill and responsibility is also central to the work at Troy Gardens. "Interns will

gradually take on responsibility for supervising a variety of farm tasks, in which interns work together to manage all aspects of the farm. Urban Farming Interns can expect to gain experience in every aspect of small-scale vegetable production, from planning to implementation" (Community Ground Works 2017). From mission and values to the weekly task structure, Troy Gardens is designed to provide interns with a rich and deep educational experience.

But most interns working in the Driftless Area do not get an experience like Troy Gardens. These interns are working on farms that operate in a for-profit world where even when farmers use socially-embedded language about growing beginning farmers and providing educational opportunities, the reality is these internship programs are structured to provide cheap labor. And the reported experiences of the interns on these farms suggests they are not getting the educational experience they were expecting or sometimes even the living conditions they were promised. And they're certainly not getting a significant pay.

Intern labor is also very much a concern from a legal perspective. Rebecca, the agricultural lawyer I interviewed shared,

> An intern at a for-profit business is likely just an employee. The same employment laws apply. [There is] one exception, but the bottom line is that an intern is an employee. They are working for the business and doing your work. So regardless of the job title assigned to them or regardless of any signed agreements to the contrary, you can't overrule minimum wage laws with contracts.

Rebecca directed me to the Department of Labor Fact Sheet 71: Internship Programs Under the Fair Labor Standards Act for further details (U.S. Department of Labor 2018). The purpose of the fact sheet is to establish who is the primary beneficiary from the internship arrangement at a for-profit business, such as a local farm. There are seven dimensions to evaluate when determining the primary beneficiary, but the overarching message is that if the intern is doing the same work that a paid employee would be doing (effectively displacing hired

workers) and not getting the same sort of training they would receive in an educational environment, the intern is entitled to minimum wage and the other employee protections.

While internships are one way that farmers can try to reduce labor costs, very few farms provide an actual educational internship. They overestimate the value of the knowledge they are sharing in an attempt to save money. This leads to labor exploitation and runs afoul of labor laws. However, farmers have discovered significant costs in efficiency, reliability, and equipment maintenance or repair that greatly diminish or eliminate the financial benefits to intern labor. Cheap interns, it turns out, aren't actually that cheap when all the costs are tallied. For this reason, farmers are doing away with interns and moving into labor systems based on paid labor and/or worker shares. At the time of the survey, only four farms were currently utilizing intern labor. Had I been surveying farms 5-10 years earlier, labor systems based on interns would have been much more prevalent.

By and large farmers are not making this shift for ideological reasons. No one I spoke to mentioned a recognition of internships as labor exploitation. They still hold fast to an ideological progressive, and misguided, narrative of providing valuable educational experiences to the next generation of farmers in order to grow the local food system. It was this ideological narrative that justified poor working conditions, but ironically the ineffectiveness of this labor system led to pragmatic changes, which actually created better working conditions.

Regular Wage Labor

The final category of labor used in the Driftless Area local food system is wage labor. Whether seasonal or year-round, part-time or full-time, there are comparatively straightforward expectations around this form of regularized paid labor. Get hired to do farm work. Show up

and work for the assigned hours. Get paid. It's also a very common labor system with 57% of surveyed farms reporting hired wage workers. While that sounds like a lot of farmworkers, the most common response when asked how many paid workers were employed by a farm was one. Put another way, approximately one-fourth of the farms who have paid farmworkers, have a "hired hand" to provide additional labor.

The hired hand. For family-scale farms, the ideal hired hand is elusive. He or she, though it's often "he" when described by farmers, is dependable, hard-working, and knowledgeable about farming, yet is content to be a worker on somebody else's farm. Kevin, the farmworker turned beginning farmer from earlier in this chapter, and his spouse, Tess, envision this model for their farm. Committed to primarily farmer-based labor, they see a need for an additional worker until their children are old enough to meaningfully contribute. Tess described it as follows.

> A hired hand model is what we want, but it's really hard to find someone. For the most part, what we've figured out is even if we could pay somebody $15/hour…even if we could do that, who would want it? Who would be confident, awesome, productive, learn everything, and wouldn't want their own farm? That's not a normal person. That person basically doesn't exist. Maybe the person exists. But for the most part, somebody who just wants to do their job and go home is probably not somebody you would want to retain as your hired hand.

Despite this challenge, nine farms reported one paid farmworker. Not surprisingly, all of these farms were small scale vegetable producers. Regardless of the overall size of the farm, they were growing five acres or less of vegetables. One farmworker was a son working part-time on his parents' farm where he also received room and board, and the other eight were non-family employees. All of the workers were white and four were female. No one was hired full-time; most of them worked about 20 hours per week for the growing season. Two were described as

neighborhood kids who were hired for the occasional job during periods of peak labor demand. While one farm paid the minimum wage of $7.25 per hour and another had started their worker at $12 per hour, the rest paid $10 per hour.

Table 2.13. The Hired Hand

Number of farms with a hired hand	9
% female	44%
% white	100%
Wage range	$7.25-$12.00

A Portrait of Wage Labor. Looking at wage labor as a whole on Driftless local vegetable farms, several characteristics are clear. First and most noticeably, the vast majority of farmworkers are white, with 91% of farms reporting an entirely white workforce. Southeast Asian immigrants, most commonly Hmong, make up a part of the labor force on four of the larger farms. These workers tend to be older and arrived in the United States decades ago as refugees. On all of the farms surveyed, the Asian farmworkers are employed as a crew with a crew leader. This has racial implications that will be explored in greater detail in the following chapter.

Two of the farms with Asian crews also reported a single Latinx employee, as did a third farm. The fourth farm reporting Latinx employees had a labor force comprised entirely of Latinx workers. It is important to note that none of these Latinx workers are migrants. They are permanent residents of these rural communities. There is one farm in the Driftless that relies largely on H2A temporary workers from Mexico, but they did not participate in this study. Because that farm relies on a labor system distinct from the other farms, they did come up periodically in interviews with other farmers who were wrestling with how to align their farming ideology with their labor structure. Farming ideologies are explored in greater detail in the next

chapter. There are large numbers of Latinx workers on dairy farms throughout the Driftless Area, but they are very rarely found on diversified vegetable farms in the local food system.

Table 2.14. Farms with Hired Labor

	Number of farms
1 worker	9
2-5 workers	14
6-10 workers	7
10+ workers	7

Table 2.15. Race of Hired Labor

Farms with	
Only white workers	59 (91%)
ANY Latinx workers	4
ANY Southeast Asian workers	4

Unlike worker shares, which tend to be more female dominated, paid workers on these farms were a fairly even mix of men and women. Farms that were located within reasonable driving distance of Madison, Beloit, and Platteville often reported college students commuting in for seasonal employment. Small farms that were farther from college towns made do with local labor, often local teenagers. When a farm employed four or fewer workers, the positions were almost always part-time, typically described as around three days or 20 hours per week.

Table 2.16. Reported Starting Wages

Lowest wage, under 18	$5.00
Lowest wage	$7.00
Highest wage	$15.00

At the time of this research, the minimum wage in Wisconsin was $7.25 per hour; this included agricultural workers. However, minors could be paid an Opportunity Wage of $5.90 per

hour for the first 90 days of employment before receiving a raise to the minimum wage. The farm with a starting wage of $5.00/hour did indeed employ minors but was still practicing wage theft. The principal farmer was a woman not from a farming background and still in her first few years of farming. Her CSA farm was located near a village in a rural area of the Driftless. She felt strongly that one of the goals of her farm was to help support the local economy, so she intentionally employed local teens to give them a source of income and some job experience. She started the youngest workers at $5-6 per hour and worked them up to $10. While aware of the Opportunity Wage, she did not realize that $5 was too low nor did she understand that she needed to begin paying minimum wage on the 91st day of employment. This was a case of good intentions regarding community support and social embeddedness mixed with some key gaps in labor law knowledge, resulting in wage theft.

The lowest starting regular wage of $7.00 (below minimum wage) was a different story. "We start them at $7/hour. It increases every year." This wage theft occurred on the only farm surveyed that reported a predominantly Latinx labor force. While there was one white worker employed for 11 months of the year, the remaining seasonal workforce was entirely comprised of adult Latinx workers. This was a very large, non-organic farm specializing in sweet corn, tomatoes, and pumpkins and selling primarily through farmers markets and farm stand outlets. It was also one of the oldest farms surveyed. Three of their workers had been with them over ten years. "Our workers grew with the farm and their wages increased as they gained more responsibilities." However, this farm's wages topped out at $10/hour, which is more typical of a starting wage on local farms in their area. These are not unexpected findings. As Clare Hinrichs (2000) contended, farmers markets are still largely rooted in the commodity relations of the global food system. This farm – large, non-organic, farmers market outlet based, and established

in the time period between the Back-to-the-Landers and more recent lifestyle influenced farmers – has few indicators of being a socially embedded farm. Their choice of an underpaid Latinx labor force is not surprising.

The highest starting wage that I encountered was $15/hour, and this was for a specialty crop on a farm that needs part-time help during harvest time. Otherwise that same farm pays workers $8/hour for farm labor. Starting wages of $7-$15 is a very wide range for relatively unskilled labor, but there are some observable trends.

First, $10/hour seems to be the "floor wage" in the Madison area. While farms near Madison benefit from a nearby supply of labor deeply interested in local foods, they also compete with non-farm jobs. Farms in more rural areas of the Driftless are more likely to start workers between $8-$9. When asked how they determined base wages, most farmers said they asked around to see what other farmers in their area paid. Wage increases occur most commonly when the same worker returns for the following season. A few farmers said they would increase wages during the season if they had a worker who was highly productive or who went above and beyond what was expected. Several farms also offer end-of-year bonuses of a few hundred dollars if they have a good year.

Second and conversely, one of the major factors keeping wages stagnant is that many farms are struggling financially and see labor as one area in which to control costs. One farmer retorted that he would raise wages, "when locals see the value of paying higher prices." Another farmer shared that he himself only made $10/hour "so it's hard to justify paying my employees more – especially if they don't know what they're doing."

Third, higher wages tend to be couched in either pragmatic or ideological terms, not both. From a practical perspective, farmers tend to be focused on paying enough to lower turnover,

which can be very high. One farmer in a very rural part of the Driftless Area proudly shared that she paid her workers $10/hour. "I pay a pretty good wage, and I'd pay more an hour to keep them on." Another farmer, who employed a large number of workers explained, "I'm not a hobby farm. I need to make a living, but I want to minimize turnover. This work is [relatively] low-paying and not culturally valued. I want a professional workforce, not CSA customers or volunteers or interns – for legal reasons but also productivity reasons." This farmer was also one of the two discussed below who had moved some of his farmworkers into salaried positions.

The prevalence of nonconventional discourses in agriculture and economics is widespread in the Driftless Area. For some farmers, ideas of fair trade and living wages clearly underlie their decision to pay or at least strive for paying higher wages. Six farmers immediately commented on this when I asked how they decided base wages.

> I have ideological beliefs about paying fair wages, a living wage.
>
> We pay as much as we can afford. We want to create good jobs, not just jobs. We want to pay a living wage.
>
> I just thought about what seemed fair since he [the farmworker] has to drive here.
>
> A lot of people are looking for full-time work. Since I only needed someone for three days a week, I wanted to pay what I felt was a decent wage. I also talked with the owner of Driftless Market for wage advice.
>
> I used to work as an unemployment adjudicator and saw what people went through. I'm a social liberal and as a matter of principle I want to pay fairly. I don't feel okay not paying people a living wage. I actually pay above wages for the area.
>
> About 6-9 years ago folks started at $9. I decided to increase it to be in the middle or upper level of wages. I'm trying to raise it again because I want them to be happy to be here.

I find the last comment quite interesting. Here was a farmer who already was paying people $10.40/hour, which was higher than other jobs in the area. Providing relatively good

wages in a community with limited job opportunities should be sufficient to reduce turnover. But it wasn't enough for him to retain employees; this farmer wanted his workers to be happy to work for him, and he saw wages as one way to do that. He was also one of the farmers who paid bonuses every time the farm had a good quarter.

The unemployment adjudicator's farm has a less happy ending. She and her husband were beginning farmers committed to a CSA model. But they couldn't figure out how to align their values with the practical needs of their farm in a way that was financially sustainable. "The first year, we had six [CSA] members, and [her husband] and I did it ourselves. Then we had ten members. [Paid employee] helped and it was okay. This year, we had 26 members and needed more labor than we have now, but we can't afford it." These beginning farmers were at a crossroads, and their ages became the deciding factor.

> So, we're closing it [the CSA] down. We could double next year [based on demand]. If I was a younger woman, we could really grow this. I'm 55. My husband is 58. This was an exciting experiment, but we're not going to do it next year. The CSA stuff is too hard, too much work.

Those of us interested in seeing good labor practices in farming would like to believe that farms that pay a living wage are able to be successful financially, but farming of any type is a delicate balancing act. For a beginning farmer without deep pockets or the ability to self-exploit her own labor, realizing her socially embedded labor ideology was not compatible with financially viable farming.

Seasonality. The seasonality of farm work in Wisconsin makes assessment of living wages or other measures of "good" farmworker jobs complicated. While seasonal wages approach or meet living wage dollar amounts on many of the surveyed farms, the short outdoor growing season hurts a farmworker's annual income. Very few diversified vegetable farms are

able to provide year-round employment.

Table 2.17. Extended-Season Workers

	Number of farms
Year-round workers	2
Spring/Fall extensions	10

I encountered two farmers who were able to provide year-round jobs. One of these farmers shared at length how her farm was able to do this. They were a mature farm with predictable labor needs and existing season-extending infrastructure. First, they shifted several of their full-time seasonal workers to salaried positions. Then they adapted a teacher pay model to fit a farming calendar. For teachers, their total income was divided up across 12 months of paychecks even if teachers were on summer vacation. Farmworkers were paid similarly with their vacation coming in the winter months. This model worked well in providing farmworkers with an ongoing paycheck but required a farm with a great deal of stability to make it work.

Many other farms found ways to extend employment for at least some of their workers beyond the growing season. Ten farms, or 27% of the farms with paid workers, were able to do this. Investment in high tunnels and storage crops were the two most common ways farms extended their need for workers.

Benefits. When it comes to traditional employee benefits, very few farms offer anything. There were two farms, one large-scale and one small, that provided health insurance for their employees. In both of these cases, most of the employees were family members so this was specifically a way to provide health insurance to family, rather than to offer a general benefit to workers. Under the Affordable Care Act (ACA), none of the farms I surveyed in the Driftless

Area local food system had workforces large enough to be mandated to provide health insurance to their employees. Several farmers had originally thought that the ACA would allow them to create a health insurance group of their farm employees. When the ACA first was going into effect, the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) sponsored workshops educating farmers on the rules and regulations. DATCP staff also provided guidance to individual farmers. Despite initial interest in creating a farm health insurance group, when running the actual numbers, it did not make good financial sense for either the farmers or the workers. The labor force on these farms was too small; it was cheaper for the workers to get their insurance on the exchanges.

Besides health insurance, the other traditional benefits offered had to do with time off, flexible work schedules, and bonuses. No farms offered paid time off, but two did allow, and even encourage, their employees to use up to a week of unpaid vacation time. I asked Brian, one of the farmers, why he gave his workers so much time off during the growing season. Brian had been in operation for a long time and explained that his goal was to have reliable labor. One of the ways to achieve that was by lowering worker turnover. The growing season coincided with family vacations, weddings, et cetera. If he gave his workers a week of vacation and encouraged them to use it for these sorts of events and trips, he believed it would boost worker morale and increase their job satisfaction. Since his farm had achieved low worker turnover, Brian considered his strategy a success. That same farm also offered workers a flexible part-time schedule. Within a set of time parameters, farmworkers who were hired under this flexible schedule arrangement had the autonomy to set their own work hours.

Three farms offered end of season bonuses; one of these was Brian's farm. Bonuses ranged from a fixed amount of $100 per worker to a retroactive additional $0.50-$1.00 for each

hour worked during the season. Unlike some employers who base bonuses on an individual worker's accomplishments, these bonuses were contingent on the farm having a good year financially. Bonuses were also only given to workers who worked until the end of the season, cutting out students who needed to return to school at the end of the summer.

That was the extent of traditional benefits. Many farms do offer more unconventional benefits to their workers centered around produce. Over half of farms with paid workers (54%) offered them vegetables from the farm. Some of the time this meant that workers could help themselves to seconds, but on a few CSA farms, workers actually received a weekly share box. One farm with value-added products gave their workers a jar of jam each week, but value-added products are more costly to give away, so most farmers stuck with produce. There were two farms that provided their workers with cooked lunch at least once each week.

Work crews. While the vast majority of paid labor in the Driftless local food system was hired one individual at a time, hired crews did exist on four of the farms that were surveyed. In each case the crews are made up of Southeast Asian immigrants, predominantly Hmong. The farms they work on are all large mature farms with 25 or more acres in vegetables. Each of these farms also has a CSA operation which accounts for between 33-100% of a farm's sales. But the real issue as to why these farms have nonwhite labor crews has to do with scale. Mature smaller farms are able to afford their more affluent, educated white workers but these bigger farms all seem to need cheap labor to remain viable.

One of the ways these farms have tried to control labor costs is by creating a two-tiered labor system with individual workers, almost always white in one group and the "crew" in the other. And on these farms, the "crew" is always Southeast Asian rather than Latinx. The

farmers, for ideological reasons, do not want to employ crews of (likely undocumented) Latinx workers, but they need cheap labor. So they're navigating a system that alienates the very workers (Latinx) who would traditionally inhabit those labor positions, but in order to make their system viable, they have been forced to take on new populations who are unaffected by legal or ideological parameters. These Southeast Asians are legal. They came in as refugees. The following chapters which focus on farming ideologies and labor queues will more deeply explore why the crews on these farms are Southeast Asian rather than Latinx.

CONCLUSION

The farms that make up the Driftless Area local food system are very small in scale compared to vegetable farms in California or the corn and soybean farms just next door. Because of this, 20% of the farms I surveyed relied solely on farmer labor. Most of the farms that do hire workers operate using ethical labor practices. With few exceptions, they have moved away from legally problematic internships toward wage labor. Most farms start their workers between $9-$10/hour, which approaches a living wage in some areas. Despite neighboring dairy farms heavily staffed by undocumented Latinx workers, the hired labor on vegetable farms in the Driftless Area local food system are almost entirely white Americans. During the course of phone surveys with farmers, it was not uncommon for them to share ideas about living wages, fair trade, and high road labor practices. Some farms seem to have figured out how to turn their ideals into a reality.

On one of the farms that I studied, some of the employees, all of whom are seasonal, have been there 8-10 years. They're making up to $18/hour as field workers, which is well beyond a living wage. They can take a week of unpaid vacation time or commit to a part-time flexible

work schedule. And they only work 40 hours a week. That's it. 40 hours. This is almost unheard of in farming. The workers who stay for years aren't people who are looking to become independent farmers; they're looking for financial stability and a good work environment, and they're getting it. These are folks who are white, who have college degrees; they have other career options.

This farm participated in the survey, but then I followed up with in-depth interviews with the farmer and current and past farmworkers. During the interview with the farmer, I asked why he had created this labor model. What was his farming ideology? He said, "I don't think most farmers think enough about how much high turnover negatively affects their farms. We recognized it as a significant problem, and we decided to make an effort to create systems that would lead to low turnover and greater employee satisfaction." For this farm, ideas of labor justice and socially embedded farming were not behind the decision-making. It turned out that productivity and efficiency were primary drivers of decisions. Chapter Two looks more deeply at the various farming ideologies among the vegetable farmers in the Driftless Area local food system and the impact that has on labor.

On closer examination, only part of this farm looks like a model of high road labor practices. Workers making $18 an hour are not the only ones on the farm. There is also a crew of Southeast Asian workers whose work hours are calculated by a crew leader. According to multiple farmworkers, they are referred to as "the crew" and eat by themselves at lunchtime. The white workers and the Asian crew don't socialize with each other and even do separate tasks on the farm. It turns out that the reason this farm has been able to create stability is they have a two-tiered caste system. It reproduces the social class and racial structures outside of the farm--even in a seemingly progressive area. The reason the white workers have great working

conditions is in part because they're pushing off the repetitive weeding--the grinding tedium of farm work--onto a Southeast Asian crew. These racialized labor queues are explored in depth in Chapter Three.

So, why does this matter? Because in an interconnected local food system, the ideas and practices of one farm can spread far beyond that farm's boundaries. This is a mature large farm with a relatively large labor force. Over the years, they have employed many workers, some of whom were interested in farming themselves. Because of this, there are quite a few younger farmers in the Driftless Area and beyond who got their start working on this farm. That experience, during a formative time of farming career exploration, has deeply influenced their farming practices, including how they structure their labor force. This one farm has a ripple effect in terms of what ideal labor practices look like throughout the local food system. They serve as a template firm – or in this case farm – having an outsized impact on how beginning farmers in the Driftless Area positioned themselves along a socially-embedded continuum.

Chapter 2

Alternative Farming Ideologies: Alignment and Misalliance Between Farmers & Workers

Nestled in the hills of Wisconsin's Driftless Area lies the small town of Viroqua. Despite having fewer than 5,000 residents, Viroqua has a thriving food co-op, and local farms supply food directly to regional consumers in Madison and Minneapolis/St. Paul. The chef at the Driftless Café was nominated for the 2017 James Beard Foundation Best Midwest Chef. It is also one of the only rural communities in the United States to have a Waldorf School. Viroqua, in many ways, represents the ideological heart of the Driftless Area.

Lyn MacGregor in *Habits of the Heartland* (2010) studied Viroqua to better understand small-town community life in the early 21st century. Rather than a town divided between native residents and transplants, MacGregor sketched out what she saw as three discrete social groups comprising the Viroqua community, each with its own orientation to community building. It was these distinct orientations to small-town life and not just length of time in Viroqua that best captured the social forces at work. These groups MacGregor termed the Alternatives, the Main Streeters, and the Regulars.

Regulars were described as local residents who thought of themselves as "regular people." They envisioned themselves as a sort of baseline of normalcy. "They were not interested in standing out, making waves, or drawing attention to themselves" (MacGregor 2010:39). Most Regulars grew up in the community and were connected through family, former schoolmates, church, and co-workers. They preferred to keep life simple, spending free time with family.

By contrast, the Alternatives have moved to the area deliberately because they believed it allowed them to create community as they envisioned it as well as live a certain lifestyle. "Part

of the motivation of this group was to construct and live in institutions that offered literal alternatives to 'mainstream' institutions and ways of life" (MacGregor 2010:40). They moved to the country to escape the face-paced, materialistic, and/or unsatisfying life they led in a previous urban area. Most Alternatives were relatively new to Viroqua and had few other personal ties to the area. Instead, their tie was a commitment to an ideal of small-town life.

The final group, the Main Streeters, were a sort of hybrid of the two previous groups. They believed in an ideal of community life like the Alternatives but were deeply committed to realizing that ideal specifically in Viroqua through investment in existing civic life. Main Streeters could be found fundraising to restore the historic downtown theatre or serving on the Parent Teacher Organization at the public elementary school. They sought to strengthen mainstream institutions rather than construct new ones. While not everyone in Viroqua cleanly fit into one of these three categories, these three social groups with their differing motivations and goals shaped much of community life.

The distinctions MacGregor drew are helpful when considering what ideologies motivate the farmers who make up the Driftless local food system. While the local food system is robust, it is certainly not the dominant form of agriculture in the Driftless. In this area, the "regular people" of agriculture are the corn and soybean farmers or the conventional dairy farmers. By contrast, almost no one who participates in the local food movement as defined in this study could be considered a Regular given their less conventional orientations to farming. Regulars are also people with deep, multi-generational ties to the community, and very few of the farmers or farmworkers I studied were locals. I did encounter one farmworker who had grown up involved in the Driftless local food system, but he was an outlier. While interactions between the Driftless agricultural Regulars and others will be discussed later in the chapter, the primary focus

is within the Alternative farmers of the local food community.

Building on MacGregor's classifications, I would argue that the Driftless local food system is also dominated by three primary groups, but all fall within her category of Alternatives. Almost everyone I interviewed talked readily about local food as an alternative to the conventional agrifood system. The first group is the Old Timers, although Aging Hippies would fit many of them as well. Old Timers have been part of the local food system for decades. Some of them were part of the Back-to-the-Land movement in the 1960's and 1970's. Other Old Timers just started farming two or more decades ago. The other two groups, comprising the majority of farmers that I interviewed, were still in their first decade of farming. Most of these beginning farmers fell into one of two groups – either they were Young Ideologues embarking on farming as their first career, or they were Chicago Transplants, midlife professionals making a significant career switch.

The differing motivations of these three groups of Alternative farmers are the subject of this chapter. What drives them ideologically impacts labor both in terms of practical decisions and in the ideals of what makes a good employer. Also, the different motivations shed light on the tension between local food as a movement or a niche market. Some farmers have visions of building local economies while others are driven to grow their own individual business. For others, farming is to create a lifestyle for their children. Competing ideologies within the local food system result in tensions over who is an authentic farmer and also shape interactions with the "Regulars" of the community, the conventional farmers and their conventional institutions like the Farm Bureau.

These farming ideologies also show the interconnectedness of the local food farming community. As both farmers and farmworkers largely belong to the "Alternatives," in many

cases, there is little social distance between the two groups. Motivations overlap between farmers and farmworkers. Often new farmers were themselves farmworkers only a year or two earlier. Because there are only a few farms in the Driftless local food system with large labor forces, quite a few beginning farmers got their start as farmworkers on this handful of large farms. These template farms have an outsized impact on how farms throughout the Driftless think about how best to structure their labor forces.

As an important reminder, there are very few non-white farmers in the Driftless Area local food system. During my fieldwork at farmers markets, I spoke with a few Hmong and one Black farmer, but all of them had farms located outside of the Driftless geographic boundaries. The Hmong approached farming pragmatically, relying on skills they had brought with them decades earlier as refugees. With limited education and English language skills, small scale farming was simply a familiar way to make a living. Relying on the younger generation for interpretation services, questions about farming ideology made little sense to them. They grew food and sold it because that was what they knew how to do. The Black farmer grew vegetables on a small urban farm and his challenges and vision were significantly different than the vegetable farmers in the Driftless Area. While a compelling topic in its own right, labor in urban agriculture is outside the scope of this research. Thus, like the descriptions of farm laborers in the previous chapter, the story of farming ideologies in the Driftless local food system is also a story of whiteness.

OLD TIMERS, YOUNG IDEOLOGUES, AND CHICAGO TRANSPLANTS, OH MY!

The Old Timers described above were heavily influenced by counter-cultural movements and sought to create alternatives to conventional farming. They comprised about 30% of the

farmers studied. Beginning farmers who have been farming for 10 years or less made up 67% of the farmers, which leaves a couple of farmers who started in the years between the Old Timers and the beginners. Like many of the Old Timers, almost none of the beginning farmers reported growing up on a farm. They opted into farming and specifically local food production.

Some beginning farmers were drawn to the land by the anti-globalization movement as well as the work of writers such as Michael Pollan. These Young Ideologues had very strong beliefs about farm scale and labor systems, and I was able to conduct in-depth interviews with 16 of them. By contrast, individuals who came to farming after having pursued lucrative careers in Chicago were largely drawn by their ideas about a rural lifestyle. "We left Chicago to have a country adventure" was how one beginning farmer described it. Though many Chicago Transplants do not operate vegetable farms, I interviewed five who did. In the small community that is the Driftless local food system, members of these various groups co-exist relatively peacefully, but tensions can flare over who is considered a "real farmer."

Early Adopters of Local Food System Production: The Old Timers

The farmers who were the vanguard of the Driftless Area local food system have been farming in the area for 20 years or more. Not all of these Old Timers are actually elderly. Some got into producing food for local markets early in their lives and by the time they moved out of young adulthood, they already had several decades of experience in the local food system. Additionally, not all of the Old Timers have large scale farming operations, although in most cases, the region's large farms are run by Old Timer farmers. When using Block's (1990) embeddedness continuum, most Old Timers would find themselves centered between the extremes of high marketness and high social embeddedness.

Some of these Old Timers arrived with the back-to-the-land movement in the 1960s and 1970s, which had a significant impact on the Driftless Area. Those years saw an influx of people moving into southwestern Wisconsin, particularly Crawford, Richland, and Vernon counties. Dubbed "back-to-the-landers", they were part of a larger alternative social movement happening in various places throughout the United States, where people from towns and cities sought to return to a land-based subsistence lifestyle.

The Wisconsin Humanities Council (2014) recently sponsored an oral history project collecting stories from close to 100 individual back-to-the-landers. Researchers Lemlee and Feyen estimated that 90% of the back-to-the-landers they interviewed still live in the Driftless, and their presence continues to impact the region. "There are food co-ops and alternative schools started by back-to-the-lander families that are still around, employing teachers and educating new generations. The commitment to a local economy supports a number of artisan cheesemakers and small-scale farmers whose businesses might not exist if not for the back-to-the-land movement." (Wisconsin Humanities Council 2014). The most well-known of these agricultural businesses grew into the massive and well-known farmer cooperative, Organic Valley.

The Old Timers in the local food system are not all back-to-the-landers, but some of them are; others simply started farming around the same time and had familiarity with the movement. Some of these farmers have built fairly large farms over subsequent decades. They are well established in both production techniques and labor force structures. These are the enterprises that members of the community point to as "successful" farms.

While some diversity of ideology does exist among Old Timers, like MacGregor's Alternatives, who sought to realize their own vision of community, the Old Timers sought to live

out their own vision of agriculture that provided them with a lifestyle and livelihood. Local food production fit neatly with their anti-industrial agriculture values. They have broadly shared values around organic farming, regardless of whether or not they are certified. Over the years, many Old Timers built up alternative institutions within the local food system. These are the farmers who helped local food co-ops get off the ground; they are founding members of FairShare, the Madison-based CSA coalition. Growing alternative institutions paired closely with the goals Old Timers had for their farms, which often centered around growth.

Researchers have wrestled with the issue of farm scale and farmer values. While advocates look to local food systems for embedded values such as social justice, environmental sustainability, democracy, and improved nutrition, Born and Purcell (2006) showed there is little about scale that inherently realizes these values. In the case of Old Timers, growing the farm size was a way to get food produced via their style of farming into the hands of more consumers. Growth was good.

Not all Old Timers had large farms, but all except one of the large farms I encountered in the Driftless local food system were run by Old Timers. It is these large farms that employ Southeast Asian labor crews and Latinx workers, raising questions as to how labor justice fits into the ideology of Old Timers. While not considering labor direction, Phil Mount (2012) raised the same question, "Is the value that adheres to local food scalable?" (p. 107). The best articulation of this came from a conversation I had with two young farmers.

Tess and Kevin, a young married couple, had worked in the Driftless Area as farmworkers but were now beginning a farm of their own elsewhere. They would best be described as Young Ideologues and saw Old Timers' ideology as different from theirs, particularly those farmers who had scaled up their operations significantly. They explained it to

me as follows:

> Tess: I do think…part of it is a generational difference. I think there's a sense of the more back-to-the-lander folks. I think there is.
>
> Kevin: Yeah, the back-to-the-lander folks, they have this hippy counter-culture thing. Ideology about opposition to industrial agriculture.
>
> Tess: They didn't come out of the anti-globalization movement.
>
> Kevin: I think my own thing is I'm coming out of the farm crisis. And so it's a devotion to family farming, and that means a certain idea about work against capital that caused me to be very careful about how we treat our labor.

Tess and Kevin have captured the essence of the difference between the Old Timers and many of the Young Ideologues. The Old Timers who have scaled up significantly came from, as Kevin put it, a hippy counter-cultural orientation that was largely focused on creating an alternative farming lifestyle for themselves in opposition to industrial, conventional agriculture. These farmers did not readily identify with issues of labor justice and appropriate scale.

Instead, these farmers often talked about the importance of organic farming and produce for the health of the environment and the consumer. In fact, all but one of the larger Old Timer farms were certified organic. Tammy, quoted above, talks about the importance of organic farming at an emotional level and reports feeling as though their farm is under siege from the neighboring corn and soybean farmers.

> It's surrounded by bad stuff which is…that's another reason that I feel we're at a crossroad. It has gotten so crazy with the way that our neighbors farm and the [pesticide] drift that we now receive. It wasn't that way before in the beginning. I mean occasionally it would happen, but not like now. And I don't see an end to that. We see the insect life change year to year, and that's weird and creepy. And not right. We don't know when we're going to get a drift or where it's coming from because it can travel so far.

For Old Timers on the largest farms, scaling up and getting more organic produce into the hands of local consumers was deeply aligned with their values. Jeremy, who is one of the

youngest Old Timers, described his goals as thus. "Goals for the farm?…well, we hope to get to a point…we want to continue to grow. We want to grow the CSA. We want to continue to grow our wholesale accounts. We haven't really put a ceiling on that, but we do want to continue to grow." It's important to point out that Jeremy's farm is already one of the larger farms in the Driftless local food system. He wants to take his big farm and become even bigger.

Interestingly Jeremy was the only Old Timer who incorporated concerns for labor justice into his farm vision. For Jeremy, increasing scale also meant more full-time, extended season or year-round employment for the farmers and some of the workers. "We want to continue to provide year-round work for employees. I think that's really important." It is important to point out that the workers Jeremy was hoping to transition into year-round employment were not his Southeast Asian crew, but rather the young white farmworkers. The most likely explanation for some awareness of issues of labor justice is that although Jeremy is an Old Timer in terms of years of experience in farming, he is closer to Young Ideologues in age. This adds weight to Tess and Kevin's belief that generational difference is at the heart of this ideological difference.

For Beverly, another Old Timer, operating at a large scale allowed her to provide full-time employment for her children. "There is a lot of family on this farm, which is really exciting. Our two sons and our son-in-law work full-time on the farm, and our daughter-in-law is the office manager. Our family is all full-time, year-round." As this farmer aged, her goal was to pass on a mature, profitable organic business to her children. Except for Jeremy, this was how Old Timers conceptualized season-extensions or year-round employment – as something for the farmer or the farmer's family. Supporting nonfamilial workers through year-round work was not a part of the farming vision.

Community prestige and financial success are not the only markers of Old Timers. Some

have experienced a different and more difficult career trajectory. For the Old Timers who are actually older in age, life course issues have begun to play a more significant role in their decision making. These farmers are beginning to think about the future of their farms beyond their time at the helm and to address questions of retirement.

David and Tammy are two aging Old Timers wrestling with these sorts of life course issues. Early pioneers in the local food movement, they have been farming since the early 1990s and are reaching the age when many people retire. I met with them one cold gray January morning and asked them to consider their farm's future. It was a bleak conversation that left me sad and chilled despite the hot tea and warm fire.

> Tammy: …A lot of work is getting to be too much work for just the two of us to do.
>
> David: It's been too much. And our [adult] kids watch so much struggle and so much floundering.
>
> Tammy: They help. Now they show up to help sometimes. The one who's next door, we're in a process now of seeing if we'll be able to transition things to him. But he wants to do something different, so…

One of their adult children may be interested in taking over the farm and transitioning it into animal production, but this would not solve the issue of retirement. After twenty plus years of farming, they do not have sufficient funds set aside to retire, but their declining physical stamina and health means that they cannot continue as before. Leaving farming would mean that they need to find other ways to generate income, and after so many decades farming, this is particularly daunting for David to consider.

> Here there is a rhythm and routine that is as old as the earth. After 20 years, I feel very comfortable in it. And it's familiar. I like it. When I'm exposed to the changes that are going on outside [the farm], I want to hide. I want to run away. I feel out of sync, out of touch, out of date. I realize my education at the graduate level is archaic. It's an artifact. I'm scared to go attempt anything else because I think people will look at it as old fashioned, out of step, out of date. I just don't

know how I could get a job anywhere.

Tammy, who had been sitting silently for a while, echoed David's concerns.

> Yeah. We're at a crossroad…we feel we're at a point where we'd like to teach what we know. But we don't have credentials for that. We have experience. Our credentials are totally unrelated to what we do which is weird. Yeah, I don't know. But we're definitely coming to a crossroads. And that's a hard place to be for anybody.

For this farming couple who did not enjoy much financial success, aging meant growing uncertainty. They had come to organic farming because of a love for the land and the living creatures within. They were some of the earliest producers for the contemporary local food system because they wanted to be part of community building around food. By this point in their careers, they knew how to grow high quality produce. But these skills and dreams were not sufficient to build a financially successful business and secure a comfortable retirement. While some Old Timers found themselves riding a farming career into financial security, there were several others with stories more aligned with Tammy and David's.

As mentioned earlier, many of the Old Timers were deeply committed to the ideals of Community Supported Agriculture and had been involved with some of the first CSAs in Wisconsin. David and Tammy had fully embraced the vision of CSAs, but struggled with the reality of operating a farm in a rural area that was quite distant from its subscribers. As other CSA farmers have shared, the CSA model often feels more like a very short commodity chain rather than a "community" around agriculture. Although Clare Hinrichs (2000) found that CSA farms were more socially embedded than farms selling at farmers markets, I found that CSA farms in the Driftless varied quite a bit in terms of social embeddedness. In David's case, his vision was for a deep community surrounding his farm but that vision has not materialized. This had become increasingly painful to David as he has aged.

> The realities of Community Supported Agriculture make the whole concept sort of a myth….If you had someone who is vital to your health, and that's what food is, looking out for your welfare, making sure no poisons got on your food. Making sure you ate the right food, good minerals and vitamins. And they did that for you for twenty years, wouldn't you be at least interested in what provisions had been made for their years when they're going to become infirm? Nobody has expressed any concerns.

In many ways, Tammy and David, Beverly, and Jeremy reflect the diversity among Old Timers. Different in farm scale, labor systems and retirement options they share ideological beliefs shaped by the back-to-the-landers and broader anti-industrial agriculture values. While most of these farms paid more than minimum wage, Jeremy was the only one who talked about labor justice despite also employing a Southeast Asian crew.

Young Ideologues

"The best book maybe that I've ever read in my life…about sustainable agriculture is Jan Douwe van der Ploeg. I may have told you about this book. It's called *The New Peasantries."* - Noah, a former farmworker turned farmer

Perhaps the most accurate way to describe the young adult farmers and farmworkers I interviewed is that they are widely read. They are inspired by the environmental movement and interested in ideas of anti-globalization and labor justice. Noah's favorite book draws on decades of research that centers peasants and their struggles in response to neoliberal globalized agriculture as a way forward towards sustainable development (van der Ploeg 2009). Others, like Kevin, are well versed in Karl Marx. Most of them have read works by Michael Pollan and Bill McKibben. They draw on these different threads from these readings to explain their orientation to farming and to farm labor.

For some of these young farmers, ideology around labor and farm scale are fundamental

to their understanding of themselves and their vision. In the previous chapter, I introduced you to two couples – Tess and Kevin and Devin and Miriam. All had experience as farmworkers in the Driftless Area but were now farming their own lands elsewhere in Wisconsin. These experiences of being farm laborers deeply influenced their own visions of farming which centers on being family-labor scale.

When asked to articulate his farming goals, Devin first talked at length about the mid- to late-career farmers he knew who had scaled up until many were unhappy managers rather than hands-on farmers.

> In the course of chasing profitability, I feel like I've seen a lot of people make compromises without realizing that they're making compromises until after the fact. And then there's just a lot of inertia that keeps you there – your contracts, your buyers. You have all these people who are sort of dependent on your operation.

Devin believed that many of the Old Timers pursued profitability through scaling up, and this forced them to stray from their original farming vision. Avoiding that situation was fundamental to his farming ideology. "My most succinct description of what I'm looking for in this farm is a small, primarily or exclusively owner-operated farm that at least provides a basic livelihood."

Devin was also deeply shaped by his experience working for one of the alternative agriculture institutions. He shared:

> I used to work at the [institution] and so I visited farms and I talked with them. I'd say the majority of farmers that you would look at and say, 'They've got it figured out. Solid business.' Behind the scenes, things are really tenuous either emotionally or financially or in terms of the relationship of the family. There's not enough time to spend with the kids or their partner or themselves. That opened my eyes. It's not like everybody has figured this out and has hit this happy medium.

He quickly added that he and Miriam did not have the balance between finances, farming, and

family all figured out either, but making their family life a priority was the goal.

> I think making sure that that's our starting point is really important, and it makes a lot of other decisions much more straightforward. It's not like 'Well, we could make a lot more money if we just grew 10 acres of produce and had these wholesale accounts' and this that and the other. But that would completely transform our life and how we farm. And that's not really what I'm looking to do.

Rather than farming to maximize production, Devin farmed for a lifestyle. Miriam agreed with Devin but pointed to another aspect of farming that was deeply meaningful for her. She had applied to be a farmworker somewhat on a whim.

> And I loved it. It was like wow! This type of very much hands-on, kinesthetic work and being able to learn while doing just felt a lot more authentic than the academic style of learning for me…I loved it, continued doing it. I guess I really liked the creative freedom, being able to do our own thing.

In addition to prioritizing farmer-labor scale, Devin and Miriam deeply valued independence but also the communal aspects of a farm crew.

> For me, I really liked the social aspect of working on some of the larger farms that had a larger crew…so farming just the two of us together can get lonely. A smaller scale just doesn't have the same labor needs. So I miss that aspect of it, but I love the creative freedom of being able to take a nap in the middle of the day if you need to take a nap.

They were seeking ways to build those relationships into their farming operation. Miriam added:

> We're in the process of forming a cooperative of which [Devin] and I and our landlord are part of this group, as well as a few other people, to purchase the land and have it be cooperatively owned and managed. And the idea is to have multiple collaborating enterprises here, because we really see a place for livestock and more perennials and all of that. But another pattern that we've seen is some young ambitious couples, such as ourselves, wanting to do it all. And it's just not possible. I mean, at least not with the type of lifestyle that I want to lead… so we see the balance of inviting other people here and having sort of multiple enterprises that collaborate in that way.

While they needed their farm to be financially sustainable, Devin and Miriam were deep in the social embeddedness end of Block's (1990) continuum. For these young farmers, farming is a relational enterprise. But Devin was clear that they did not want a farming operation where

lots of people flowed on and off the farm regularly.

> Even if we had 20 volunteers [come to the farm] every day so we could just totally stay on top of everything and have this be the most meticulously perfect agritourism experience, that's not fulfilling enough insofar as farming is not a job. It's a lifestyle and a life. And a livelihood. And so creating that social network here is pretty important to us as well.

Miriam added they wanted to have "other farmers here rather than all traveling into Madison to go to some event together and then socialize." They wanted to build a community that is deep and slow moving.

Miriam and Devin did have a small local customers-only CSA operation but struggled with it ideologically in ways that were similar to the dilemmas articulated by Old Timers Tammy and David. Miriam and Devin's vision was of a vibrant local community where subscribers functioned as extended family members who deeply engaged with life on the farm, but that had not been the reality of their experiences with CSA subscribers. Dennis groused:

> We don't really think we should be selling CSA shares far afield. That kind of defeats the purpose. With that said, I think it still kind of defeats the purpose for most people. I think CSA is no longer what it used to be or maybe never was. To me, it should be about a pretty profound connection between eaters and farmers. And I think for a lot of people it's either just the new thing or it's shopping around, especially in Madison. You just hop from farm to farm every year. That is *completely* antithetical to your supporting this farm…it just seems a lot more like going to the farmers market than really connecting with a farm.

Miriam added, "We're marketing to towns where there isn't really any other organic produce available. So that also makes for people who shouldn't be CSA members, but are because it's the only organic produce they can get. We just had a farm party this Sunday. One CSA member showed up." While becoming fairly successful farmers, Miriam and Devin were still struggling to realize their vision of a deeply socially embedded farm.

Tess and Kevin, also young beginning farmers, shared a similar ideology around farm scale. In the previous chapter, they recounted a heated argument they had with an Old Timer

over their different beliefs about what scale says about a farmer's values. Their CSA farm is maxed out at 200 shares because as Tess explains:

> That's the breaking point for being family-majority. So, because we make ideological claims about that a lot, we are tied to it. We can't say that our family farm is a farm where we provide the majority of the labor, if we don't provide the majority of the labor. That's totally not acceptable.

Their argument with the Old Timer extended beyond scale into labor. Tess and Kevin are strongly opposed to using migrant worker labor while this particular Old Timer does utilize that form of labor. Tess continued:

> He was trying to make this argument like 'But I really do need the labor, and the white farmworkers are lazy.' Kind of this 'Mexicans are the only reliable people.' A lot of the problematic ideas about labor that come with the indentured servitude of an H2A visa worker where you can't leave the specific farm.

She continued. "And Kevin brought that up. He [Kevin] said 'Well they can't leave your farm. Of course, they're going to act differently to you than someone who can quit and get a job on a different farm.'" Kevin chimed in, "He [the Old Timer] said they don't want citizenship."

Recounting this conversation fired up Kevin and he began to vent about the broader issues underlying an employer/employee relationship with migrant workers. "That's power…it's not purely an abstraction. It's citizenship. They don't have it. Citizenship gets legal access, state support. They can be mobile. Resources." By this point in the interview, Kevin was pacing around the barn punctuating his comments by jabbing a broken piece of irrigation tubing in the air.

Before I ended the interview, Kevin waxed more philosophical for a moment as he shared his struggles with being an employer and sometimes hiring lazy or incompetent workers. "I think scale confuses my Marxism a little bit because you're aware of the person's humanity and limitations when there's only you and them." At an abstract level, Kevin is very pro-labor. As an

employer and farm owner however, Kevin needs to get the work done and done efficiently. To reconcile this, Kevin and Tess have committed to limiting the scale of their farm to minimize the need for outside labor.

Kevin and Tess were highly sensitive to the labor exploitation inherent in using migrant workers, even those with legal authorization. While no one else was vehemently gesticulating with tubing to make their point, most of the Young Ideologues I interviewed were at least generally cognizant of the power dynamic inherent in various employer/employee relations. Farm scale decisions were a combination of realizing the young farmers' vision for their life while avoiding labor arrangements they found ethically questionable.

Young Ideologues are farming to create community and societal well-being. They are interested in the lifestyle, but their ideologies largely focus outside of the personal level. They are also more critical of organic and are more likely to use organic practices while not bothering with the certification. While Tess and Kevin experienced an actual argument over ideology, in general, the young farmers and the Old Timers get along fairly well. Many of the young farmers have worked on Old Timer farms and were shaped by these experiences. The argument between Kevin, Tess, and the Old Timer notwithstanding, the critiques the Young Ideologues raise are usually gentle. They may say, "We're going to do it a little differently," or "I reached a point where I didn't feel that I was going to learn more until I got out on my own, which is why we're out on our own now." This mentoring relationship is much less common with the third group, the Chicago Transplants.

Chicago Transplants

> That [farm name]. They came into it with tons of money. They built a fancy facility. And they hire all kinds of people and I don't know how they could possibly be making a profit. And maybe they're not. Maybe they don't have to, but that's a different operation…it's odd for us to see somebody two years into it

> teaching other people. But they just had a crapload of money, you know, from Chicago, to come and just set up this beautiful, state of the art packing shed and greenhouses and things we'll never have. So, it feels weird to compete with some place like that. - Tammy

The farm Tammy is referring to is one of several farms in the Driftless Area that were started by transplants from Chicago. Although I refer to this group as Chicago Transplants, the other farmers I studied are more likely to derisively refer to them as Chicago Money. Like the Young Ideologues, folks moving up from Chicago are new to farming. However, they are almost all middle-aged and previously had white-collar professional careers. Their entrance into farming represents a massive career and lifestyle change backed by a sizeable amount of wealth.

Carla is one of these Chicago Transplant farmers. I had crossed paths with her at several local food system events before I finally had a chance to visit her farm and formally interview her. She beat me to the interview questions by first asking me about my background. I told her about growing up in rural Appalachia before turning the questions back to her.

> Well, you had a better jumpstart than I did. I grew up in the city of Chicago, or right outside it…I got a master's degree in counseling and career development. As of seven years ago, I had no clue I was ever going to be on a farm. So, it's been kind of a late-in-life transition so to speak.

When asked what had prompted the career change and move to the countryside, Carla said what many of the Chicago Transplants say, "Well, for the most part, I just want to raise my kids on the farm."

Chloe, another of these farmers, described it as her family's "country adventure." For Chicago Transplants, the farming ideology is largely about creating a lifestyle for their families. In some ways, it's a modern twist on the Back-to-the-Landers with the focus on opting out of mainstream urban society. These beginning farmers have left their white-collar careers behind in order to live out what they envision as a farm lifestyle. They are less driven by an anti-

globalization or anti-conventional agriculture ideology. Their choice is individualistic and personal.

What MacGregor found with her group of Alternatives was that because they were new to the area, they did not have deep ties to other people in the community. "Instead, they shared a commitment to *an ideal* of small-town and community life…" (MacGregor 2010:41). Carla, echoing MacGregor, elaborates:

> I drop off vegetables in Madison all the time and people are 'oh, I couldn't do what you do.' And I'm like 'Yeah, you really could.' You just have to decide that this is a lifestyle choice you want to make, because we lived where you lived…We just didn't like what we saw. We didn't like the way society was going and we wanted to make sure our kids had a really good life and background.

Like MacGregor's Alternatives, the Chicago Transplants are enacting an ideal; in this case they are living out a country adventure. While only six of the farms I studied were Chicago Transplants, this orientation transcends vegetable farms. There are several others mostly in the Southeastern Driftless Area focused on creating their vision of a rural lifestyle. You'll find Chicago Transplants practicing sustainable homesteading, operating farm stays/yoga studios, and making cheese.

While many of these Chicago Transplants had successful professional careers, they arrived in the Driftless Area knowing little to nothing about farming. In the case of one farm, sometimes their aspirations are too big for their skill sets. The farm referenced in Tammy's opening quote wanted to be the biggest CSA farm in Wisconsin, if not the entire United States. That did not work out for them. They turned out to be not very good farmers and even worse employers. Retaining workers was a massive problem and they ended up shutting down for a time. While that farmer's professional skills and personality did not readily adapt to the demands of vegetable production, other Chicago Transplants are more willing to seek out

mentors for their farming adventure.

Carla was particularly reflective about her own lack of experience and how it impacted her first few years of farming. “It’s a large learning curve, and I don’t think that the majority of small farmers have as many degrees as my husband and I do. But even with those degrees, we are ill-prepared for some of this stuff. A lot of this is just learn by fire.”

In addition to providing vegetables to CSA subscribers, Carla’s farm also has animals and perennial crops. So not only did they need to learn to grow produce but also how to care for a variety of animals. Despite those advanced degrees, Carla and her husband had little knowledge of animal husbandry. “[A neighboring farmer] took one look at my hay and he was like, ‘That’s really bad hay.’ I had no idea that hay had a nutritional value to it, and I didn’t know that making certain cuts of hay at certain times affects the protein level.”

Fortunately for Carla, she and her husband started farming with sizeable financial resources which allowed them to weather costly mistakes like bad feed. For Carla and her husband, these deep pockets allowed them to not worry about the short-term profitability of their farm.

“So, in about 10 years, we would like to have this place up and running and create a decent income for one of us because my husband works off-farm right now. We’d like to take him and have him come back to the farm and work full-time.”

Deep financial reserves and one spouse, usually a husband, continuing to work off-farm in a white-collar professional job are common traits of this group of farmers. Chloe, another Chicago Transplant, explains it as:

> I’m not as motivated as some because my husband has a more than full-time job that can support this experiment…I’m basically paying to work really hard. Paying money. My husband is paying for me to have an all-out, balls-to-the-wall six months of the year stressed workout. And we’re not getting anything back

from it. Except, we do love it.

Unlike Chloe and Carla, most beginning farmers start with little cash on hand for expenses such as land, farming equipment, and hired labor. These new farmers need their farms to be financially profitable quickly because they cannot weather financial losses for very long. The Chicago Transplants are the exception. Many of them can stumble along for years without being profitable and not have the lack of farm income significantly impact their lifestyle.

Realizing a Chicago Transplant vision of farming entails having a farm that meets a certain aesthetic standard. For Chloe, having a pretty farm was of utmost importance. This impacted her labor expenses rather significantly.

> My initial vision was to connect with people and to create a stream of people coming to the farm and goods going out and mutual support. My vision was to share a beautiful farm with like-minded people. And instead I got bigger and I tried to compete on price with the bigger farms with bigger equipment [Old Timers] even though I don't have a ton of equipment. And when I run the numbers, my labor is too high to make these boxes available at the cheapest, at the competitive price with like a [bigger farm].

After a period of discernment, Chloe realized that her vision for her farm and her current production focus on CSA shares was not financially feasible.

> We really value the beauty of this farm. I don't know how many farms you've been on…I mean a lot of them are not all that cute because you can't put labor into everything and make a living. This thing is I really value a cute, pretty farm, and a lot of our labor goes into keeping it looking cute. Weeding the hedgerows, weeding the fences, weed whacking. Keeping everything nice and neat and planting flowers. I can't spend labor on that and charge for just a box because those people never even see the farm.

Chloe was rethinking her farming operation and realigning her vision with her day-to-day practice. She needed an income stream that would support all of the labor that went into maintaining a "cute" farm and bring people on-site where they could enjoy those efforts. Scaling down her CSA, Chloe was planning to focus more on farm-to-table dinners, crafting classes, and

potentially opening a bed and breakfast.

Carla was also planning to refocus their farm on farm-to-table dinners and other on-farm events. She had already hosted her first wedding, which revealed challenges in allowing an outsider, who did not understand the realities of a working farm, to event plan on her farm.

> Because of the standard I expect for my farm, the image I want for my farm, it is very hard for me to let go of that part of it. For somebody else to…design-wise and decoration-wise for the most part it was elegant and very formal and very neat…but from the perspective of organization and what it takes to work on a working farm, they had no clue. I mean they wanted to leave the cake out overnight and they wanted to leave garbage bags untied and I was like "No. The animals will tear through it and you'll be cleaning up for days after…"

Although impressed with the elegance of the planned decorations and party layout, Carla was stressed by the lack of practical farm knowledge displayed by the wedding part. Determined to control the image of her farm, Carla took over organizing the wedding.

> It was the lack of organization on the bridegroom's part that I ended up having to do so much. On the day of, I ended up being the wedding planner and at the end of the night, one of the [wedding party] looked at me and said "Well, you're a really good wedding planner." I just looked at him and said, "I'm not. I own the farm." And he said, "No! Really?" And I said, "Really."

Carla was clear that while her goal was to host more on-farm events, she would be firmly in charge of the planning. Visions of pretty farms that people flock to for events or farm-stays are common among the Chicago Transplant farmers. This vision is different from that of the Old Timers who want working farms, not agritourist farms. These differing goals lead to different labor needs. Old Timers and most Young Ideologues devote almost all of their labor towards vegetable production requiring more traditional farm labor. Chicago Transplants may need field workers, but they also need significant labor devoted to farm beautification and events. This also requires a different set of skills and knowledge on the part of the farmers.

In addition to event hosting, the Chicago Transplants are also joiners. Like MacGregor's

Alternatives, this group supports and participates in alternatives to mainstream institutions. In this particular case, they focus on alternative agricultural organizations. Many of these farmers are involved with the MOSES's In Her Boots rural women's project. There is also a local group – Green County Area Women in Sustainable Agriculture – that provides networking and fellowship opportunities for many. During the course of this research, I participated in numerous events hosted by both of these groups. In addition to the farmers who became part of the study, this is where I met numerous Chicago Transplants who were experimenting with other forms of agriculture and homesteading.

In brief, the Chicago Transplants who are growing vegetables for the local food system are predominantly female and want "pretty" multifunctional farms rather than the production-oriented working farms of the Old Timers. This means their labor goes into beautification tasks like weeding around the edge of the barn. They want farms that people come to for dinners and other events. Seeking a midlife career change, Chicago Transplants are trying to live out their vision of a rural lifestyle for themselves and their families; in the case of five Transplants, that meant growing vegetables too.

Tensions Between the Groups: Who is a "Real" Farmer?

The quote from Tammy introducing the previous section hints at some of the underlying tensions between these three groups. Occasionally during the course of an interview, my interviewee would offhandedly comment that "[so-and-so] is not a *real* farmer." At first, this struck me as a puzzling comment. What did my interviewee mean by "real"? Did it require dirt under the fingernails? A certain amount of time spent farming? Did they mean a real farmer was someone who grew up on a farm? Or was a real farmer someone who was able to have their

full-time job be on farm? After questioning the various people who made this offhand comment, I came to realize that calling someone not a "real" farmer was rooted in the different goals of the three groups of farmers. Primarily, this tension exists between the Chicago Transplant farmers and the others and is a way for the other groups to write off and dismiss what the Transplants bring to the local food system. It stems from three principal causes, two practical and one ideological.

The practical is fueled by financial inequality. Most other beginning farmers are not coming into farming with a lot of money, and don't have the start-up resources to buy a "pretty" farm with 25-50 acres of land. The deep pockets and ongoing off-farm support of a white-collar professional spouse give Chicago Transplants what is perceived by beginning farmers or financially struggling established farmers as an unfair advantage in the local food market.

The ideological component to the tension is rooted in what it means to be an authentic or "real" farmer. Young Ideologue Tess pulled no punches when talking about one of the Chicago Transplants she encountered at a MOSES farm event.

> The one I went to was like a collective bitching session. It was like a women in farming thing…everyone there was like 'The FSA won't even talk to me like I'm a real person.' 'I can't buy something at the feed co-op without my male neighbor.' Like women who are farming by themselves…And she [the Chicago Transplant] was like, 'I want to talk about blueberry pie recipes.' I can't handle her.

The Chicago Transplants farmers want a rural, somewhat nostalgic lifestyle while the Old Timers and Young Ideologues want to make a livelihood from a working farm. In the eyes of Tess and some others, many of the Chicago Monied farmers are not "real" farmers because of their emphasis on lifestyle rather than productive family farm. Despite a growing awareness in the Driftless Area of the importance of agritourism in bringing in outside dollars to the local community, the Old Timers still firmly root their identity in vegetable production-oriented

agriculture. Transplants like Chloe and Carla with their multifunctional visions of "pretty" farms and income streams from crafting classes and event hosting are seen as "not real farmers."

Most often I found Young Ideologues willing to level these charges, as they are competing with Chicago Transplants to establish themselves in the local food system. Tess circled back to another practical critique; this one focused on who is viewed as a legitimate leader in the local food system. Referring to a Chicago Transplant, Tess exclaimed:

> She's my pet peeve. She doesn't have a farm…She pretends she's a farmer. She pretends she's this expert, but she doesn't farm and she doesn't have any theory. And it makes me a little nuts. I picture her as an upper-middle class retiree from Chicago who needs something to do…

Several of the Transplants farmers, including Chloe, Carla, and Tess's antagonist all teach classes or serve in leadership positions with organizations in the local food system. What bothers farmers like Tess is that none of these people had more than five years of farming experience when they started teaching classes on farming. Farmers with only a few years under their belts may not have had to survive much in the way of difficult weather – floods or droughts. They also may not have experienced challenging market conditions. While years of experience does not necessarily equate to being an expert farmer, having been in operation for a number of years increases the likelihood that the farm has survived difficult conditions, which counts for something in the eyes of farmers like Tess.

Additionally, Transplants largely operate out of an ideology that emphasizes the multifunctionality of agriculture and elevates homesteading to an ideal. Because their orientation differs from many of the Old Timers and Young Ideologues, farmer education organized by Transplants may not be in tune with the needs of these different groups of farmers.

Tess attended one. "I went to one of those [events] and I was like 'I'm going to shoot myself.' I don't need slideshows of women working. That's not what I need." Tess was the

Young Ideologue with the strongest reaction to the Chicago Transplants, perhaps because she was also someone who explicitly tied practical farming decisions to an ideological framework – family-labor scale production farm. When confronted with a very different ideology – one centered around homesteading and idealized images of country life – Tess reacted.

While all of these groups - the Old Timers, the Young Ideologues and the Chicago Transplants - largely fall within MacGregor's Alternatives, they came to farming with different motivations and visions. The Old Timers sought to create alternative systems to conventional agriculture and many have built sizeable operations over the subsequent decades. Young Ideologues, steeped in anti-globalization issues, wanted to create working family farms that provide a livelihood and returned dignity to physical labor. Chicago Transplants are looking to escape, to remove their families from the larger urban world and live out their idea of a rural lifestyle. Despite these differences, they have all found their way to the Driftless Area and to a similar type of farming – small scale, diversified, and direct-to-consumer.

VISIONS OF SOCIAL EMBEDDEDNESS OR JUST A NICHE MARKET?

When Clare Hinrichs (2000) applied Block's concepts of marketness and social embeddedness to two common types of direct markets in local food systems- farmers markets and community supported agriculture, she argued that farmers markets function as an alternative market still primarily rooted in the commodity relations of the global food system albeit with a shorter distance between producer and consumer. As discussed previously, most farms in the Driftless local food system utilize a variety of market outlets making it difficult to locate farms on a market-social embeddedness continuum based on this one variable. However, when asking

farmers about their vision and goals for their farm, it quickly became apparent that how farmers saw themselves and their place in the local food system was indeed on Block's continuum.

Building Local Economies

On the continuum at the far end of social embeddedness, Chloe, a female Chicago Transplant farmer, talked at length about her vision for a farm that was deeply embedded in her rural community. Her story is particularly interesting because she had moved to rural Wisconsin so that her family could experience her idea of a country lifestyle. She participated in alternative farming and social groups rather than the more traditional institutions in rural communities. Over time though, Chloe had begun to shift her vision. While still involved with alternative farming groups, she increasingly became invested in the conventional institutions and businesses in her small town. This Main Street emphasis (MacGregor 2010) reoriented her vision away from her own individual farm and toward developing a hyper-local economy though agritourism.

> You know what [my vision] is? It's agritourism. I don't just want the food to go out from these communities, I want to bring people into these communities. Mt. Horeb, New Glarus, Mineral Point…Platteville is doing pretty good because it's a college town. But we all need more resources. I think agritourism is a good umbrella term. And it's a start, oddly, for a local food community because we need more [financial] resources in our communities and if we can get the money from other places…because we don't have that much money in our communities. We have natural resources, but we don't have capital and we don't have customers.

She had also evolved in the role she saw her farm playing in the local food system. At first, she wanted her farm to be a place to live out a rural ideal which involved a vibrant CSA farm with like-minded customers. But many of her like-minded customers were an hour's drive away in Madison. The distance her produce was traveling began to be more of a concern than feeding like-minded customers.

"The idea of just carting all your food…if you look at the Dane County Farmers Market, a lot of those people are four and five hours away. That's not exactly a local food economy. It's certainly better than California or Venezuela or wherever, but…"

At the same time as she bemoaned distance, Chloe reflected that a local food system focused on the purity of "local" was also contrary to her vision of rural economic development. For this offense, she blamed the food writers.

> We've gotten into this partly because of Barbara Kingsolver. I like her but did you read *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*? She's doing this legalistically… "Can we eat cranberries this Thanksgiving because we're doing a year of eating locally?" I think that is so missing the point because do we *really* want to go without coffee and olive oil? We need these things in our life. We need other countries. If we don't have bridges of commerce, we're going to fight more. Sharing resources between countries is what keeps the peace. That's not the enemy. The enemy is that we don't also have a local food economy or a local economy to speak of at all.

She summarized her emerging ideology as:

> It's not just about pumping food toward Madison or getting it into Metcalf's [grocery store] where they can say how many miles away it came from. That's so beside the point. I think our goal needs to be…it's can we keep these communities alive? And create an economy that can be sustainable and offer something? Like in Europe, not that Europe is the answer to everything, but in Europe, you can go outside of the city and buy things from farmers.

But Chloe saw a lot of political barriers to achieving these vibrant, food-based, local economies in Wisconsin. As she was embracing her existing community, she'd gotten involved in various campaigns, some successful, to change the political landscape to be more favorable to developing her local economy. One of the campaigns she threw herself into concerned passing a bill, colloquially known as the Cookie Bill, which would support the cottage food industry by permitting home bakers to sell their goods.

"The [Wisconsin] Cookie Bill just didn't get on the agenda. It failed. That's mind blowing. That Wisconsin is so unsupportive of its own potential agritourism that you can't buy

food from Amish kids. That's nuts."

Since the time of our interview, Chole and many others continued to work for the passage of the Cookie Bill. Eventually some of these local food activists were able to win a legal victory in 2017 when Judge Duane Jorgenson, of Lafayette County District Court, struck down the law against selling home-baked goods. Some of the most vocal supporters of the Cookie Bill and subsequent lawsuit were Chicago Transplants. Their vision of farming runs more toward diversified farm stores, bakeries and farm-stays than many, though not all, of the more vegetable-production minded Old Timers. While the Transplants may get dismissed by others as "not real farmers," their tendency to join together and fight to realize their visions of a rural lifestyle have begun impacting the political and regulatory environment in the Driftless Area local food system.

Chloe has now moved on to tackling other regulatory barriers to achieving her vision of a hyper-local economy.

> Until those kinds of things are solved, this preoccupation with how many miles away your food came from is not going to create a true local economy. Because buying from the Driftless boys [Driftless Organics] is awesome, but they're not Madison's local economy. They're great, and more power to them. They are doing so much research and now we have sunflower oil. How awesome is that? But there's a bigger picture that we're missing with this local food legalism and morality. So moralists, put your money into your neighbors.

A Niche Market

When looking for farmers in the local food system with ideologies higher in marketness, the Old Timers are a good place to start. One farm that participated in the survey but declined to participate in in-depth interviews functioned more similarly to the conventional farmers, the Regulars of agriculture, than any other farm I interacted with. In operation for over 30 years,

they were also a very large farm for the local food system. Rather than diversified vegetables distributed through CSA channels, they focused on just a few crops sold at two farmers markets and their on-farm store. Not certified organic, they did not participate in any of the Alternative food and farm groups. As to their labor force, their hired workers were all Latinx and started with wages of $7/hour, which was less than minimum wage. Not surprisingly, these farmers shared little ideologically with the other vegetable farmers in the Driftless local food system.

Most other Old Timer farms were more socially embedded and struggled ideologically with a high marketness approach to farming largely focused on costs to the detriment of their other values. This was particularly evident around issues of labor. Jeremy, who operated a large farm, shared his struggles, torn between his ideals of a socially embedded farm and the reality of growing labor costs as their farm scaled up.

> What other big farmers say is you need to pull from the migrant labor force because history shows, or experience has shown them, you get more done for the dollar. We're touching on touchy subjects of racism or ethnocentrism or whatever. I don't even like talking about it very much because I don't have anything against anybody from another country….but experience has shown these bigger farmers that that's just the easier, more reliable workforce that you can get more productivity out of. But for me, someone who really believes in the idea of local food and local economy, to see that much money going elsewhere…I'm not saying I don't want to support another country, but it goes against the idea of local.

Questions persist about whether the socially embedded values of local food are scalable. In Jeremy's case, their decision to grow their farm made it likely that the increasing pressure to control labor costs was going to win out over his desire to provide jobs to locals.

> I think this is sad, but we're at 48% of our expenses are labor and that's…we're talking about $300,000 in labor. Our labor went up 70 grand this year and our vegetables sales went up 60 [grand] so we're doing something wrong. We're not sure what, but we're doing something wrong…so we're torn, definitely. We don't want to stop doing what we're doing now, but it's just sort of 'Well, maybe that's the answer.' In the back of our heads, we're thinking maybe that [a migrant work force] could solve our…our huge labor budget.

Although most Old Timers display some social embeddedness, as a group they reside closer to the high marketness end of the continuum than either the Young Ideologues or the Chicago Transplants. This is reflected in their labor practices for Old Timer farms, which were the only places that I encountered non-white farm crews. This was done to control labor costs but raised concern from Young Ideological farmers who had different beliefs around labor. But these three groups of Alternatives were not the only farmers in the Driftless Area.

INTERACTIONS BETWEEN CONVENTIONAL FARMERS AND FARMERS IN THE LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM

"Because we came into this from the outside, we're misfits. I have felt a misfit and unaccepted by the real growers. The real farmers." – David, an Old Timer

Unlike the internal tensions between Old Timers, Young Ideologues, and Chicago Transplants, David is referring to the relationship between the conventional farmers and those who practice some form of alternative agriculture. Tammy went on to clarify her husband's remarks, "Not the CSA farmers because they're weird too."

After more than twenty years of vegetable farming under their belts, David and Tammy are certainly real farmers. But David never felt that the Regulars of the farming community, the corn and soybean farmers and the conventional dairies welcomed Tammy and him as legitimate farmers. Because I was interested in labor on farms that produced vegetables for the local food system (i.e. the Alternatives), the Regulars of the Driftless agricultural community were not directly included in my research. However, the farmers and farmworkers I studied often commented on interactions with these conventional farmers as they sought to differentiate their visions of farming.

I first met Tammy and David at a local women-in-farming event sponsored by some Chicago Transplants. It was a family potluck, so spouses and children were also present. The Handphibians, a Madison-based community percussion ensemble, were providing the musical entertainment. While David and I were talking over ice cream, he remarked how wonderful it was that his wife had a supportive network of women in alternative agriculture. The men had no equivalent, he groused, and the local Farm Bureau was stuck in the mud - its members hostile to the small-scale farmers of the local food system.

In the course of her consulting and presentations, Chicago Transplant Carla also reported hostile encounters with conventional farmers. Her most recent example was from helping with the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Farm and Industry Short Course, a 15-week, non-growing season semester in hands-on agriculture.

> I happened to go in with [another female farmer]. We're both organic farmers; we were presenting our farms. And the kids around the table were third-, fourth-generation farm kids, conventional farm kids. And I felt the hostility in the room, and I couldn't figure out what it was. The questions that were asked [by the conventional farm kids] were really intelligent questions. But there was this wall between us and them. I was like "No, we need to break that wall." Just because your granddads and your great-granddads did it this way, does not mean it's the right way to do it. And if you even just implement a little bit of what we're saying to you, you can go a lot further with your business, with your farm. We understand what happened. We respect what they had to do to keep food on their table for their family. We're not saying that that's wrong. We're just saying maybe look outside the box a little bit.

If Young Ideologues like Tess were frustrated with Chicago Transplants teaching classes, imagine what a third- or fourth-generation conventional farmer is going to feel when a middle-aged, wealthy woman from Chicago with little farming experience starts talking. It was no surprise that the reception was hostile, but I pushed Carla for specific examples of the hostility.

> One girl, she was really irritated with me because of the breed of pig I picked. And I said, 'Well, they're really good foragers, and they're heritage. We want to keep them alive, so we're trying to sustain this breed. And it's a native breed.

> We're not trying to hybrid any of them; we're not trying to get them to market any faster. And they're not confined.' And she was just grumble, grumble, grumble. She was really irritated.

The conventional farmers Carla was interacting with were, like MacGregor's Regulars, committed to their homes. They've grown up in this community and have family ties, school ties, and other lengthy relationships connecting them to this place. The farmer kids Carla encountered often were farming land that had been in their families for generations. Carla, and other Transplants like her, represented the ultimate interlopers and not surprisingly, faced dismissal, scorn and sometimes outright hostility.

Unlike David who was so put off by the hostility he felt from the Regulars of agriculture that he rarely engaged with the Farm Bureau or other conventional institutions, Carla was undeterred. She was already seeking ways to have more interaction with conventional farmers.

> And I walked away from that presentation feeling like I would really love to do a roundtable with them. Instead of us talking to them, do a roundtable and just bring up five topics. See how they would handle it and how we would handle it. See how we would learn from each other because really, that's what I do. I spend time talking to all the farmers that I know, asking them questions.

Perhaps because she has no farming background or perhaps because of her extroverted nature, Carla does regularly ask questions of more experienced farmers. She was particularly reliant on a long-time conventional grains farmer who lived nearby. He had recently switched to organic grain production, which she took as a sign of his openness to dialogue and growth. "He's got a wealth of knowledge in that brain of his."

This same farmer who earlier in this chapter had explained to Carla that she was feeding her animals bad hay also had to teach her what alfalfa was.

> …and then I was baling hay when he came in and he was like, "You know all that stuff on the ground of the trailer floor? That's alfalfa; that's the highest protein you can give your animals. You just sweep it up and give it to them and they'll love it." And I'm like "Oh really? Usually we just shove it in a corner."

Carla, like many of the Chicago Transplants I interviewed, was very open to engaging with conventional farmers. Even though she had faced pushback from some young conventional pig farmers, she remained undaunted. I suspect it is because Chicago Transplants are more likely to embrace the multifunctionality of agriculture and rural life rather than be wedded to a particular *farming* ideology. Old Timers built their farms around rejecting conventional agriculture and Young Ideologues have strong opinions about farm scale; both orientations make building relationships with conventional farmers challenging.

AN INTERCONNECTED COMMUNITY

> There's a lot of interconnectedness in the vegetable growing community in Southern Wisconsin. A lot of folks come from working on other farms. There's a lot of people with their own farms now who have come out of [Farm A], a lot of people come out of [Farm B]. But I think a part of what that has meant is that there's not a huge diversity, not necessarily because other ideas aren't good or workable. It's because a lot of people getting into farming come with the ideas and systems from these two setups. – Devin

`Devin has recognized the outsized impact that two large farms have on the Driftless Area local food system. While I believe there are more than two, he is correct that the very small number of Old Timer farms with sizeable labor forces have created templates, both ideological and practical, for operating a diversified vegetable farm. Just as template firms in the mid-twentieth century auto industry—like General Motors—provided a model for other auto firms and even other branches of industry, these template farms provide a guide for beginning farmers in how to structure their production practices, market outlets, and labor force.

When most farms rely on little to no labor beyond what the farmer(s) provide themselves, these Old Timer template farms with large labor forces are often the training ground for future beginning farmers. The relationships between these beginning farmers and the farmers they

trained under most often takes the form of ongoing mentoring. This largely explains the good working relationships between the Old Timers and the Young Ideologues. While their ideologies may differ, these young farmers see the Old Timers as people to learn from.

Other times, though, the template is simply lifted from the originating farm and plopped down elsewhere. Old Timer Beverly, who farms in the southern part of the Driftless Area, recounted the following story.

> It was hysterical. Our neighbors were up in…somewhere in central Wisconsin. And they came across a CSA brochure in Wausau or wherever it was. They said 'Look! We found a CSA' in wherever they were and showed it to us. It was our brochure verbatim. It was hysterical. This [farmer] saw our brochure. This was maybe even before we had a website. It was a long time ago, but someone had seen our brochure and stole it!

Template farms aside, it is the Chicago Transplants who bring in new blood to the local food system. Arriving with little to no farming experience, they start farms based on their vision of a rural agrarian lifestyle. As shown throughout this chapter, they bring in farming and homesteading ideas beyond the vegetable-production oriented working farms of the Old Timers. While their presence can generate frustration, it also generates thought, collaboration, and political energy to change laws.

CONCLUSION

MacGregor (2010) found in Viroqua that the three primary social groups she identified had different goals and visions for their small community. The vegetable farmers in the Driftless Area local food system are no different. While only one of the farmers I studied would consider themselves "Regular" farmers, the rest, who considered themselves as "Alternatives," still greatly varied in terms of how much they embraced alternative institutions and farming groups.

The Old Timers built many of those institutions as a repudiation of conventional

agriculture with its focus on agrichemicals. Several of them scaled up, trying to get organic produce into the hands of more and more consumers. By the time the Young Ideologues came along, the anti-globalization movement and calls for labor justice were seeping into their consciousness, most notably shaping their beliefs about farm scale. The Chicago Transplants swept in with their money and their white-collar professional experiences, challenging notions of what it means to be a farmer and bringing their desires for multifunctional farms.

So what are the implications for labor? In a small interconnected community where members are involved in networking groups and alternative agricultural institutions, farmers have at least a working knowledge of each other's labor systems. Over time as enough conversations happen and some farmworkers evolve into beginning farmers, highly regarded labor systems get replicated. For example, beginning farmers often experiment with volunteer workershares. As I interviewed farmers about labor changes they'd made over the years, I realized the workershare programs were converging on the structure used by one template farm. The different farming ideologies present in the Driftless Area mediate the types of labor used on the farm, but as the following chapter explores, there are fairly predictable ways that farmers rank groups of potential farmworkers.

Chapter 3

Labor Queues And Race In The Local Food System

As vegetable farming in Wisconsin is highly seasonal, farms that are large enough hire paid farmworkers. These farms are on an annual cycle of scaling up and scaling down that labor force to meet fluctuating labor demands throughout the growing season. Moreover, high turnover among workers and changes in a farm's size or product mix mean that farmers must actively reconstruct their labor force. When seeking workers, farmers have in mind characteristics they desire in potential employees; they aren't just looking for warm bodies to fill positions. Because of the small size of farms, even work on farms that hire labor is carried out by a small number of people working in close physical proximity to one another. In this context, farmers prefer farmworkers with a "close social distance," that is workers who are similar to the farmers in both values and racial demographics. Those who are seen as ideal workers are more likely to get hired and also have access to better career opportunities. In this farming context, that means gaining the knowledge and skills to be able to transition from farmworker to farmer. Less desirable workers are denied the opportunity to even step onto that career ladder. This chapter examines labor queues among the farmers in Wisconsin's Driftless Area by drawing on in-depth interview and participant observation with farmers, farmworkers, and local food system allies throughout the region.

At the risk of stating the obvious, it is important to remember that farms are bound to a place in a very tangible way, at least for the growing season. This place, this geographic space, determines the labor pool from which farms draw workers. However, local food is a movement as well as a market. Farmers who are seen as ideological leaders are known outside their local

area where their name recognition allows them to draw from a larger geographic labor market. Workers with strong ideological local food system values will sometimes move to an area simply to work under a well-known farmer. In general, though, farms have to make do with labor that is nearby. Farmers also compete with the other jobs, both farm and non-farm, available in there area, which can constrain the types of workers they can access in the local labor market.

The findings of this research indicate that there is a clear labor queue based on race in the Driftless local food system. In a departure from other farm labor in Wisconsin, such as dairy, with very few exceptions farmers in this local food system actively avoid hiring Latinx workers, preferring native white, relatively well-educated workers. To summarize their rationale, farmers felt that Latinx workers symbolized a farming system (e.g. convention, globalized, labor-exploitative, or illegal) against which they have positioned themselves ideologically. This was especially true for Old Timers and Young Ideologues.

Instead of turning to Latinx labor, farmers sought to hire people who were culturally and racially similar to themselves. However, pressure to control labor costs as well as need for workers to efficiently accomplish repetitive tasks (i.e. weeding) has led several of the larger farms to employ labor crews of Southeast Asian workers. Predominantly though not exclusively Hmong, these crews provide contract labor, which differs from the labor structure of white workers who are hired individually. These small groups of nonwhite workers remain largely invisible both to other workers and to consumers of the farm's products.

One of the fundamental problems with these labor queues is that farmers in the Driftless local food system are building job ladders that train and mentor young white potential future farmers, while excluding people of color from meaningful participation. Because this type of farming – local diversified vegetable production – has low barriers to entry, anyone willing to

work hard can get started by renting less than an acre of land and doing the work by hand. They just need a little farming experience. By declining to give Latinx that experience and relegating Southeast Asian workers to the most repetitive tasks, farmers are ensuring that the pipeline for beginning farmers is almost entirely white. While I found no evidence that Driftless farmers were intentionally trying to build a white local food system, nevertheless, that is the impact of their hiring decisions.

INEQUALITY IN THE LABOR MARKET: EFFICIENCY OR SOCIALLY DRIVEN EXPLANATIONS

As highlighted in the chapter that presented survey data, the farmworker labor force in the Driftless Area local food system was almost entirely white. This immediately raised questions as to why. Some of the explanation has to do with simple racial demographics. If you trace the physical boundaries of the Driftless Area, communities along the periphery such as Beloit, Madison, Eau Claire, and La Crosse do have small populations of non-whites, but the racial make-up within the Driftless itself is very, very white. So most of the people applying for jobs and thus getting hired are going to be white.

But simple racial demographics do not answer all the questions. Why are so many of the workers on these farms white when Harrison and Lloyd (2011) found that approximately 40% of workers on Wisconsin dairy farms are Latinx? What follows is an overview of the literature on labor markets, hiring, and labor queues that offers some insights as to what may be occurring as Driftless farmers go about constructing their labor force. These theories will be applied in greater depth to my dissertation research data.

Skills and Motivation

Chris Tilly's (2006) comparison of socially and efficiency-driven economic narratives provides a useful handle for framing the analysis. Efficiency-driven explanations argue that demand for individual skills generates labor market inequality. Workers with better skills and experience will be in better paying jobs. The various forms of labor market inequality that are generated (earnings inequality, inequality in unemployment rates, etc.) are efficient in that they provide information to firms and families about how to optimize their behavior (Tilly 2006). When applied to my research, this would suggest that white farmworkers have more skill and experience--which farmers said they do not in the interviews I conducted.

Efficiency-driven explanations would also argue that workers with more motivation will be in higher paying jobs. Depending on a particular worker's ideology, they may be highly motivated to work on a locally producing farm as a way of participating in the local food movement. But no farmer suggested to me that they found their white workers more motivated to do the work. I spent a day volunteering on the farm of Old Timers Brian and Sherry. It was a sizeable and seemingly financially successful farm. They have a relatively large white workforce and also employ a Southeast Asian crew.

Within a few hours of beginning to work, Brian pulled me aside and remarked, "You're not from the city, are you?" Though not from a farm, I did grow up in the country and was familiar with outdoor work. Brian went on to reflect positively on how hard he saw me working compared to the amount of labor he typically saw from white people interested in farm work. On a mature farm with a large labor force, he had drawn this conclusion after seeing many farmworkers in action over several decades.

Jeremy, another Old Timer on another large farm with a Southeast Asian crew, remarked

about his Asian workers:

> They did tomatoes this last year, and they just blow us away with how awesome they are…We always joke that they're such a force. If you're not careful, they're going to…sometimes we plant too many beans because we're not sure or you don't want to stop a row halfway. So, you plant beans all the way, knowing that there's a good chance there will be too many beans. But if you're not careful, they'll harvest all those beans because that's what you told them to do. And then you have 500 pounds of beans you don't want and you paid to get those harvested.

While these are just two specific examples, none of the farmers I interviewed offered any evidence to indicate they believed that white workers were more highly motivated than workers of color. If efficiency-driven explanations were accurate, it should have come up in the data – that is, at least one of the farmers would have described their white workers as motivated.

By contrast, socially driven explanations point to complex factors such as norms, networks, stereotypes, and power differentials (Akerlof 2002; Spence 2002; Stiglitz 2002). Under this framework, labor supply and demand are largely socially determined (Tilly 2006) and job skills and worker performance depend heavily on social context rather than raw brains, brawn, or nimble fingers (Darrah 1994; Vallas 1990).

Hiring

While there are several points of interaction between workers and farmers where labor market inequality can become manifest, perhaps none is as critical as the hiring process. Hiring decisions have substantial ripple effects. According to efficiency-driven explanations, hiring is the process of matching the skills of the individual with the needs of the firm (Tomaskovic-Devey 1993). Including ascribed categories such as race and gender as factors in the hiring process is inefficient and hurts the firm; this should eventually lead to decisions based solely on skills matching if the farm is to optimize.

Tilly (2006) and Tomaskovic-Devey (1993) both suggest that efficiency-driven explanations are correct in that race and gender as "pure" categories have come to matter less, but they argue that they continue on in new forms. Numerous researchers have demonstrated that employer perceptions of and attitudes toward different racial and ethnic groups affect hiring practices (Kirschenman, 1991; Kirschenman and Neckerman 1991; Neckerman and Kirschenman 1991; Moss and Tilly 2000; Waldinger 1997). This is critical to understanding the hiring decisions made by farmers in the Driftless Area.

Labor Queues

When farms have an opening, farmers already have in mind what their ideal worker looks like; most have a ranking system that sorts prospective farmworkers into a hierarchy. According to an efficiency-driven narrative, rank depends on how an employer perceives labor cost in relation to potential productivity (Doeringer and Piore 1971). However, socially driven narratives, such as queuing theory, see ranking operating out of a structural framework, based more on ascribed characteristics than individual qualifications and preferences.

Queuing theory was first articulated by Lester Thurow (1969) who reasoned that black Americans had higher unemployment rates than whites because Blacks ranked lower in an employer's queue. Thurow argued that these rankings were widespread and persistent, based on racial categories rather than on individual merit. In the US, this meant that the category of "white" was the top ranked while "black" was on the bottom. Subsequent research reaffirmed Thurow's findings (Hodge 1973; Lieberson 1980) and broadened them to include internal labor markets, which affected promotion and advancement opportunities (Doeringer and Piore 1971). In addition to governing hiring and promotion, queuing theory posits that groups low in the labor

queue will also be the first terminated or laid off (Reskin and Roos 1990).

Catanzarite and Strober (1988) and others (Epstein 1988; Heilman 1995) further developed Thurow's theory by arguing that labor queuing is more complex than a simple binary hierarchical ranking. Rather, since jobs are typically segregated by gender in addition to race (Tomaskovic-Devey 1993), a diamond-shaped queue (white men on top, black women on bottom, and white women and black men on the sides) better reflects how employers construct labor queues (Catanzarite and Strober 1988). If a job is viewed as female, employers begin with white women and move down from there; if a job is seen as male, the queue starts with white men and moves down to black men.

In summary, research suggests that rather than one universal labor queue, there are different labor queues for specific jobs. While all jobs may have an ideal worker, the gender, race, immigrant status, and other attributes of that worker will vary according to the job. Taken all together, labor queuing presents a complex but enduring framework for understanding who gets hired in the Driftless Area local food system.

Why Socially Driven Explanations for the Driftless Labor Market are a Better Fit

When exploring where farms in the Driftless local food system fall on a marketness/social embeddedness continuum with regards to hiring labor, I started with a broad consideration of evidence for efficiency or socially driven explanations. It was particularly helpful to consider my data in light of the three flaws Tomaskovic-Devey (1993) identified in efficiency-driven reasoning. The first is that efficiency-driven models overestimate the role of competition in the daily life of a firm, or in my case a farm. Tomaskovic-Devey points out that only occasionally does market competition reach the level where a firm is on the edge between

survival and failure. Thus, most hiring decisions are made far removed from a competition-created crisis.

Hiring on farms follows the seasons with labor scaling up in the spring, running fully staffed during the summer, and winding down in the fall. Patterns of cash flow depend on the type of market outlet(s) used. Most notably, farms with sizeable CSA operations have an influx of cash during the winter/early spring which is prior to the time they scale up their labor force and start incurring labor costs. When talking with farmers about hiring decisions, no one mentioned competition from other farms shaping their hiring. Rather, the discussions focused on whether or not the Driftless local food system could hold more CSA farms and how to increase demand.

It is important to note that many of the farms in my study did in fact operate on the edge between survival and failure. At least ten of them have closed or substantially changed their farming orientation since I completed my fieldwork. In the case of CSA farms, there is some concern that these farms have reached market saturation in the Madison area. If so, this saturation may contribute to a crisis stemming from competition over market outlets, but farmers were not consciously framing hiring decisions in terms of competition.

A second flaw Tomaskovic-Devey identified was that market forces only work if there is labor competition. This critique is typically applied to gender, and as most women work in jobs surrounded by other women and men in jobs surrounded by men, gender competition during the hiring process is usually lacking. However, across the Driftless local food system, I found approximately the same numbers of men and women employed on these diversified vegetable farms, so I found this critique of limited value when assessing evidence for efficiency- or socially driven explanations in my research.

There was one interesting caveat to this. One Chicago Transplant farm I studied solely hired neighborhood teenagers and young adults. This was the same farmer, Chloe, who was profiled in the previous chapter for her vision of rebuilding a local economy. "In smaller towns, there's very few jobs. So, it's very important for me to provide jobs to teenagers and young people."

We went on to talk about the gender of her workers and who she saw applying. Most farmers I asked recalled a mix of men and women applying and ultimately reported a fairly gender- balanced paid labor force. When I asked Chloe about the gender of her workers and who was applying, her story was a little different. Currently, with the exception of her managers, her labor force was female.

> My two managers [21 years old] are guys…I've kind of let the crew introduce new members because if I need a new worker, I want someone that everyone is going to get along with. I want them [the current crew] to pull them in and train them. So, if we need someone, I'm like "Who do you have in your pool that you would like to work with and that would be good?" Because they know the kid and they know the work.

Relying on referrals from current employees is a common strategy, but this farmer has grown to specifically prefer female workers. To begin to understand her gender preference, I asked her how she got started finding her first paid crew. She explained:

> So, I have four kids. My eldest two are boys and my youngest two are girls. And my youngest two both worked for me. A lot of the paid crew, they pulled in. Actually, they pulled in a lot of guys because they're both really cute. So yeah, I did have those guys.

Her kids are now grown so I asked about her current network recruitment strategy. "There's a family of girls across the street and their two girls have worked for me now for…like four years. And a lot of the new crew members have been their friends. So, I think we ended up with a lot of girls just because it was girls." Eventually Chloe explained her gender preference:

> Frankly, there are a lot of girls that will work harder than the guys. We're going to bring on one of the guys' brothers this year. But a lot of times…they come…they might be tough. They might be someone who plays football. But the skill set is just different than toughness.

She went on to talk about her belief that teen girls were also generally more responsible and dedicated to their work than teen boys.

The neighborhood guys were welcome at her farm though. "They still come around for big projects and potluck dinners." While Chloe drew on stereotypes of nimble-fingered young women to justify her gendered hiring decisions, most farmers did not speak in gender stereotypes when talking about their labor force.

Tomaskovic-Devey's third critique is that the efficiency-driven model does not adequately account for the defense of discrimination by those in power. Many farmers were clear that they did not wish to hire Latinx workers for ideological reasons, bringing race to the forefront of their hiring decisions. Rather than recognizing that they could in fact hire Latinx workers in a way that was not contributing to labor exploitation, farmers doubled down on their preference for non-Latinx workers. This racial preference will be discussed further in regard to labor queues.

While only two of Tomaskovic-Devey's critiques were helpful in evaluating my data, it is clear that socially driven explanations are more useful in explaining the labor market in the local food system.

The socially driven narrative suggests that employers do not consistently operate in ways that maximize profits (optimization); rather, they incorporate "prejudices and beliefs as well as managers' individual goals" into their labor decisions (Tilly 2006:3). I found much more evidence for socially driven explanations in understanding why farmworkers in the local food system were almost exclusively white.

This was not a surprising finding given the earlier work of Fred Block (1990) and Clare Hinrichs (2000). As Block demonstrated, when social embeddedness rather than marketness is high, more variables than cost and/or price are taken into account in business decisions. While Hinrichs found variability on the continuum within local food systems, all her farms fell somewhere along the socially embedded end of the continuum regardless of market outlet. With the vegetable farmers that I studied in the Driftless Area, the Young Ideologues were highly socially embedded, and the Chicago Transplants were busy embedding themselves into their visions of rural communities. Even the Old Timers were not only driven by market concerns. Given this orientation, I expected to find that hiring decisions for these farmers would be socially embedded to varying degrees as well, rather than driven solely by cost and price.

HOW TO EXPLAIN A LARGELY WHITE, RACIALLY STRATIFIED LABOR FORCE?

Recruitment

It is important to note that hiring is more than one specific interaction at a discrete point in time. It is a process that expands in time before and after the moment when a job is offered and involves numerous decisions on the part of both the farmer and the prospective worker. Granovetter (1995) demonstrated that recruitment and hiring occur in large part through social networks, which exist prior to the job offer. Using data from the Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality, Holzer (1996) found that current employee referrals produced about 25% of new hires of non-college employees. The percentage of employee referrals increased to 45% when Holzer looked specifically at blue-collar occupations. On the employer side, decisions must be made about the job description, search and recruitment strategies, and how to use information gathered (such as resumes, interviews, references, etc.) to evaluate prospective workers.

Farmers in the Driftless local food system also rely on current employee referrals. While not all farmers go as far as Chloe, who puts her existing crew in charge of recruitment, almost all of the farms with paid labor reported that word of mouth was their primary way of finding new workers. They spread the word among their current employees, CSA members, friends, family, and neighbors. A few farms also utilized more formal methods of searching. To recruit college students, farms advertised to the F. H. King Students for Sustainable Agriculture group at UW-Madison and several agriculture clubs at UW-Platteville. In addition to word of mouth, four farms reported posting fliers in local grocery stores (such as the Driftless Market in Platteville) or coffee shops. Three farms recruited workers through their own website or Facebook page. Not all farms needed to look for workers. The farms that are considered leaders in the local food movement reported that they rarely needed to recruit because potential workers sought them out.

These approaches to recruitment generally relied on existing social networks, which farmers reported were comprised of people similar to themselves. Their networks were largely white and made up of people interested in alternative agriculture. The coffee shops and local food groceries are primarily frequented by white consumers and the student organizations are also predominantly white. Perhaps unconsciously, farmers have created employment recruitment channels that will continue to funnel white prospective workers, perpetuating the exclusion of non-white prospective workers into the hiring pool.

Screening

When potential workers are identified, the farmer faces the challenge of sorting. Like all employers, they are trying to predict worker productivity and must sift out a good worker from all others. Nine of the farms I surveyed reported difficulty in finding workers, so first their

challenge was finding enough interested potential workers. Those farms and several others reported difficulty in finding "good" workers. This is where screening comes in.

Here again, efficiency-driven and socially driven explanations offer differing ideas of how employers accomplish this. Statistical discrimination theory suggests that employers make hiring decisions by using an observable "signal" as proxy for unobservable qualities. Under an efficiency-driven model, "The argument is that all employers have to make employment decisions based on imperfect information….To minimize the risk of a bad (i.e. costly) job match, employers use certain cues such as education, experience, standardized tests, and interviews to make an educated guess about the potential productivity of a candidate" (Tomaskovic-Devey, 1993:135). Here, the observed cues are often focused on the potential employee as an individual with human capital. According to Holzer (1996), this can put an additional burden on non-white job applicants, who are more likely to have come from poorer schools and have lower test scores than whites.

Socially driven explanations suggest that rather than using cues about human capital to assess potential productivity, employers also use cues like addresses, parenting status, and names to make these determinations. Using cues that have little do with an individual's potential as a worker when hiring reproduces labor market inequality along racial and gender lines.

In the memorably titled experiment, "Are Emily and Greg more Employable than Lakisha and Jamal?" Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004) sent out resumes with either white-sounding or black-sounding names responding to help-wanted ads in Boston and Chicago newspapers. They found that white-sounding names received 50% more calls for interviews despite equivalent resumes. In a nod to statistical discrimination theory, Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004) also varied the quality of the resumes. As expected, the quality of resume

did affect the number of callbacks; a better resume led to more callbacks *but* while white-sounding names clearly benefited from a stronger resume, black-sounding names only benefited slightly. Pager, Western, and Bonikowski (2009) conducted a similar experiment focused on entry-level jobs in New York with intentionally matched white, Black, and Latinx applicants and found that the white applicant was twice as likely to receive a callback or job offer. Because the labor market I studied relied so much on word of mouth rather than formal applications, I was unable to determine what role racial or ethnic name markers played in getting a potential worker an interview. This would certainly be an area for future research, particularly on larger farms with more formalized hiring processes.

An additional avenue to explore in future research in a more racially diverse area of the country is whether or not residence location is used by farmers to evaluate potential workers. By varying the postal address of the resumes, Bertrand and Millainathan (2004) examined the role of residence on calls for interviews and found that for white-sounding names, living in a "better" (i.e. wealthier, higher education, whiter) neighborhood improved the likelihood of a callback. This was not the case for black-sounding names. Ihlanfeldt (1999) also found that under certain conditions, employers will discriminate against potential workers based on their residence; employers in poor urban neighborhoods viewed workers in the local area as less productive and more trouble than workers from outside the neighborhood. This employment discrimination occurred when Blacks were the dominant racial group in the neighborhood, but not when the dominant group was white or Latinx (Ihlanfeldt 1999). Because the Driftless is overwhelmingly white, I did not find any communities where I could explore this further.

So how does screening continue in the interviews? The Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality found that close to 90% of job applicants had to participate in some form of interview

(Holzer, 1996) meaning that race and gender could be visually assessed before any job offer was extended. Holzer found correlations between employer attitudes and the race/gender of the applicants who were eventually hired. For example, although two-thirds of employers said they were not interested in hiring someone with a criminal record, most did not actually check to see if applicants had criminal records (Holzer 1996). This was racialized as Holzer posited that lacking actual evidence of criminal activity, employers would be particularly reluctant to hire young black men. What this means is that "those who have (*or are suspected of having*) [emphasis added] criminal records or unstable work histories will have difficulty being hired in even the lowest-wage and least skill-intensive sectors of the economy" (Holzer 1996:62). More recently, Pager and Quillian (2005) demonstrated in Wisconsin that regardless of what an employer claimed, they were less likely to hire any Blacks compared with white ex-offenders.

I asked all of the farmers I interviewed about their decision-making during hiring. What were they looking for in assessing whether or not someone was a good candidate for the job? One Old Timer at a large CSA-focused farm captured the essence of what most farmers told me. He replied, "Just a lot of the stereotypical interview things like looking them [him, the farmer] in the eye and asking questions and being engaged…."

These are soft skills, not farming-specific skills, and eye contact in particular is culturally based. For white Americans, a firm handshake and looking a potential employer in the eye is expected. Within the Hmong community, direct eye contact can be seen as a sign of disrespect. Hmong may also be hesitant to speak directly and ask questions because of cultural norms. Depending on the tribal affiliation, Native Americans in the Driftless Area may also share similar norms around eye contact and would not greet someone with a firm handshake. Although farmers are emphasizing the importance of eye contact in their interviews, this has

little to do with whether or not an applicant is a good farmworker. Instead it becomes one more way to unconsciously open the door to whites while marginalizing the area's non-white workers.

The same Old Timer continued, "a good person makes a good employee. That's a huge part of it because it's not difficult work. I think your character makes you a good worker in a job like this..."

I found myself nodding along to this remark. No one wants to employ, or for that matter even work with, someone who is trouble. I asked him, then, how he could determine whether or not he had found a good person.

"It always comes down to more or less the references…we're looking for people that if we call up the reference they say "Yes. I miss that person. Why have you not hired them yet?"

Few of the farmers interviewed mentioned specific hard skills as important for a good employee, but I did talk with two farmers who were considering going to a working interview. Rather than sitting around and asking the potential employee questions, they would work together in the fields before the farmer made a final hiring decision. While neither farmer was clear how long the working interview would last, they both wanted to make sure it lasted long enough to see how the potential worker held up over time. One was considering doing a half day working interview.

Incorporating working interviews into the hiring process would potentially shift the screening emphasis from soft skills to hard skills, which are easier to quantify. However, most farmers were still attempting to assess hard skills by looking at people rather than actually having them demonstrate the job skills. This is how one farmer responded when I asked him what he looked for other than soft skills.

"What else? We do want to hire people that are healthy, that look like they can

stand the elements and lift heavy things."

He reflected silently for a minute and then went on. His next comments moved away from the physical strength of a worker to what he describes as a commitment to the work, but he quickly pivoted back to culturally specific soft skills.

> And then I just want people that want to be committed. When people say, 'I want to work here but I need these four weeks off in July.' Well we need bodies on the ground in July. So that's a big part of it, but I don't know. People come in. They're smiling. They shake my hand. They're happy to be there. They've got a better chance of getting hired.

In interview after interview with farmers of all different ideological orientations, questions about what a good worker looks like continue to come back to soft skills.

The first part of this farmer's comment is also telling. This is not one of the few farms that allow workers unpaid vacation time. Instead his typical employee is on summer break from high school or college and he expects them to spend their entire summer break working. This issue of work/life balance will come up again later in this chapter when comparing native white workers to migrant workers.

Until employment screenings based on actual farming skills become commonplace, soft skills are what farmers are subjectively assessing. Depending on the farmer I talked with, those soft skills encompassed everything from social graces to optimism to language and personal habits. It's not surprising then, that hiring based on soft skills produces a workforce that is fairly similar in race and ideology to the farmer.

Employers have been harshly criticized for using screens that have disparate impacts on hiring across race and gender. When the screens are not correlated with actual job performance, they simply serve to perpetuate labor market inequality along racial and gender lines. The challenge, as Holzer (1996) argues, is that it is difficult to sort out what is effective screening

from discriminatory attitudes and perceptions.

If non-white workers don't have the opportunity to be hired into these mentoring-type labor positions, they don't get the leg up that the white workers do in learning how to produce vegetables for local markets – a kind of farming that has low barriers to entry as a farmer. Why doesn't the Driftless local food system have more non-white farmers? In part because they are not given opportunities to develop those farming skills.

Holzer made a similar argument when he looked at hiring practices of employers in four cities – Los Angeles, Detroit, Atlanta, and Boston.

> It is possible that blacks and Hispanics are underrepresented in jobs requiring certain skills (like computer use) because of discriminatory employers who underestimate their abilities, rather than because of their skill deficiencies per se. Indeed, if the skills used in these jobs are acquired through on-the-job training, hiring decisions may in fact determine who acquires these skills in the first place (1996:83).

This was particularly true when employers, like the Driftless farmers, relied on informal networks for referrals.

Moss and Tilly (2001) argue that rather than expressing an outright dislike of a particular group, employers now frame their decisions as related to a perceived lack of skills, both soft and hard. In the case of black employees they found that "employers' criticisms of blacks' hard skills often shaded over into discussions of soft skills – for example, the claim that many African Americans do not know how to apply for a job" (p. 486). Bobo, Kluegel, and Smith (1997) refer to this as "laissez-faire racism." This means that if legal barriers for, in this case, Black advancement have been removed, remaining labor market inequality between Blacks and whites must be because of lack of effort or ability on the part of blacks.

While this section explored the impact of the recruitment and hiring strategies on perpetuating labor market racial inequality, labor queues constructed by farmers also come into

play and function at a more theoretical level than the nuts and bolts of how farmers go about finding workers.

LABOR QUEUES

Thurow (1969) started with a simplistic conception of labor queues with whites on top and blacks on the bottom. However, subsequent researchers found that labor queues are often job-specific and constructed in various racial and gendered configurations, depending on the job in question. In the Driftless Area local food system, I found that white workers were on top. Latinx workers were so undesirable that, with very few exceptions, they were completely avoided. And when larger farms faced significant pressure for cheap labor, which is when farms in other sectors turned to Latinx labor, farms in the local food system brought in Southeast Asian crews.

In another early work, Lieberson (1980) had emphasized "the importance of population dynamics and local labor market structures in determining the shape of the labor queue" (Browne, Tigges, & Press, 2001, p. 375). Reskin and Roos (1990) pick up that argument and offer an even more nuanced picture of how queues are constructed. They posit that labor queues are the results of three structural factors: what groups of workers exist (ordering of elements); the size of the worker populations (shape); and the intensity of rankers' preferences.

It is important to note that these structural factors can change over time. Group sizes can vary, for example. During times of war, women and minorities have historically moved into positions previously held by white men, who were off at war. In this way, labor shortages can provide space for groups lower in the labor queue to secure better jobs (Reskin and Roos 1990). However, Strober and Arnold (1987) pointed out that these replacements followed a specific

sequence reflecting group labor queue rank - in this case, white women, black men and finally black women. Conversely, if the higher ranked group grows in size (e.g. returns from war), they can move into jobs held by lower-ranked groups, displacing those workers who in turn displace those lower in the hierarchy (Reskin and Roos 1990). During the economic boom in the 1990s and the tight job market that came with it, employers looking for unskilled workers were willing to hire less desirable workers (e.g., welfare recipients, high school dropouts, racial minorities) (Holzer, Raphael, and Stoll 2006).

Two structural factors - what groups of workers exist and the relative size of their populations - reflect the racially homogenous Driftless Area. To recap, the Driftless Area is made up of white, Latinx, and Southeast Asian residents, but whites predominate. According to U.S. Census Bureau population estimates (2019), Wisconsin is 81% non-Hispanic white, with most of the non-white population living outside of the Driftless in urban areas. Aside from a prison near Boscobel, the Black population is nonexistent. Native Americans are also largely absent from the Driftless Area although larger populations are elsewhere in Wisconsin. When thinking about who is available to work in agriculture, the data from Harrison and Lloyd's (2012) research on dairy farm labor shows that Latinx workers are overrepresented in some sectors of the farm labor workforce.

In a labor market with few desirable workers, there will be more opportunities for those farther down on the labor queue (Hodge 1973; Lieberson 1980). "Both the absolute and relative size of each group in the labor queue affects lower-ranked workers' chances of getting desirable jobs. The larger a subordinate group relative to the size of the preferred group, the harder employers find it to deny its members good jobs" (Reskin and Roos 1990:31). But in the Driftless, the massive size of the white worker population means that farmers do not need to hire

non-white workers unless they wish to.

Beyond simply the size of the white population, why are there so many white, relatively well-educated people in the labor pool for farm work? It has to do with job queues. Parallel to the labor queue is a job queue where workers rank specific jobs (Granovetter and Tilly 1988; Reskin and Roos 1990). The rank of a particular job is typically based on a combination of wages, benefits, and working conditions. Therefore, jobs that pay well, have opportunities for advancement, are less dangerous or physically demanding, are viewed as prestigious and are seen as stable sources of employment rank high on the job queue (Jencks, Perman, and Rainwater 1988; Reskin and Roos 1990).

That description may not sound like farm labor, but the criteria for job rankings are not exhaustive. Individual job seekers may also weigh specific job attributes differently. While the job queues literature finds that white-collar or non-manual labor jobs are usually seen as more desirable than blue-collar jobs, the specific type of farming that diversified local vegetable farms offer is compelling. As mentioned earlier, the MOSES conference, one of the largest organic farming conferences in the country, is dominated by young white farmers or aspiring farmers. There is a coolness vibe to alternative agriculture, including local food, that draws highly educated white folks to be part of a social movement, not just a niche market.

However, the rank of a particular job is also relative to the attractiveness of other jobs in the local labor market (Rotella 1981). For all but the most ideological committed farmworkers, their job market is local; they rank jobs based on what is available in their local area. I interviewed three workers based in Madison who were willing to travel 45 minutes to get to a job on a farm regarded as a good employer, but that was the longest commute I heard about. With few exceptions, farm job markets are local, and the desirability of a specific job is relative to

what else is available. What would be a low-ranked job in one community may rank much higher on the job queue in an area where there are few "good" jobs to be found. Part of why Chloe can take her pick of local neighborhood kids is because they don't have a lot of other options for jobs in her rural community. Like labor market queues, job queues are composed of ordered elements and have a shape (e.g. linear, diamond). They also reflect the intensity of the rankers' preferences for one job over another (Reskin and Roos 1990).

Job queues and labor queues, although separate, interact with one another in predictable patterns. When a job is high on the job queue, workers at the top of the labor queue (often white males) are typically drawn in (Catanzarite and Strober 1988; Strober and Arnold 1987). If a job is seen as less desirable, then workers at the top of the labor queue look elsewhere and firms have to select from workers who are lower ranked in the labor queue (Reskin and Roos 1990). Additionally, jobs at the bottom of the job queue may sit vacant while workers at the bottom of the labor queue may sit jobless (Thurow 1972). Not surprisingly, the farms that offer very low starting wages and are not seen as leaders in the local food movement reported having trouble finding workers.

Like labor queues, job queues are not fixed but vary over time and place. "Any change that reduces an occupation's financial rewards, mobility opportunities, or job security can depreciate its ranking in a job queue" (Reskin and Roos 1990:44). When the number of highly ranked jobs shrinks, highly ranked groups on the labor queue (such as white men) will look elsewhere for good jobs or be forced to spill over into less desirable jobs (Reskin and Roos 1990). Conversely, if the number of highly ranked jobs increases, lower-ranked group members have a better opportunity to land a "good" job.

The final factor in labor queue construction, intensity of rankers' preferences, affects how

much weight employers put on a potential worker's qualification versus their group membership. Some employers will always hire from their preferred group, while others will use preferred group membership to decide between similarly qualified potential workers (Reskin and Roos 1990). In my research, farmers expressed a strong preference to *not* hire Latinx workers; therefore because they were a small population and at the bottom of the labor queue, I found almost no Latinx farmworkers.

Scaling Up and Labor Queues

Where rankers' preferences got especially interesting were on the Old Timer farms that had scaled up their operation to a size that required a sizeable non-family labor force. Farms that are small are able to hire white workers, culturally and racially similar to the farmers themselves, from the top of the labor queue. They hire a neighbor kid or a local college student to help out during the summer. Non-white workers rarely even make it onto jobs on those farms. But something happens to these labor queues when farms scale up as several Old Timers had done.

These larger farms all had run into trouble managing labor costs. Old Timer Jeremy shared, "Our labor went up $70 grand this year and our vegetable sales went up $60 [grand], so we're doing something wrong. We're not sure what, but we're doing something wrong."

As they scaled up, eventually, all of the large farms where I interviewed farmers or farmworkers had reconstructed their labor force to include a reliance on non-white workers. Almost always, this meant hiring a crew of Southeast Asian workers. Jeremy's farm had such a crew. There were also a couple of farms in and around the Driftless Area that relied on H2A visas to bring in temporary Mexican agricultural labor and one who relied on low-paid non-migrant Latinx labor.

While Stevenson and Pirog's (2008) work on value-based supply chains suggested ways that an agriculture of the middle – scaled between direct marketing to consumers and the global agrifood supply chain – could thrive and incorporate some of the values of fair trade (Constance 2008), what I found in the Driftless Area was more problematic. Instead these farms larger farms emphasized production at the expense of high road labor practices. Additionally, their commitment to local did not always extend to investing in a local labor force.

For Jeremy, as an Old Timer, his emphasis was on growing his farm and getting more organic produce into the hands of local consumers. His understanding of participating in the local food system also meant hiring local workers.

> We really like the idea of drawing from the community. I personally like the idea of keeping money local and in the local economy. You know, the people that live here spend money here…obviously everyone shops at Amazon, but everyone, or I'd like to think that majority of people, that work here shop at the co-op, support the people that support us. I really like that and I want to keep that.

Within local food systems there is growing pressure to scale up bringing us back to Phil Mount's question, "Is the value that adheres to local food scalable?" (2012:107). Jeremy sounds committed to both providing for and hiring from the local community but is seriously considering bringing in migrant workers from Mexico to reduce labor costs. I went into the research wondering if the socially embeddedness in local food could survive scaling up or if the movement would lose out to the market. When it comes to broader issues of labor justice and race, scaling up in the Driftless local food is problematic.

LATINX WORKERS IN THE LABOR QUEUE

Because almost all the farmers I studied rank Latinx workers at the bottom of their labor queue, very few farms reported any Latinx workers, let alone an entire labor force. It is

important to note that Latinx workers in the Driftless Area are not homogenous; there is diversity of immigration status within this group. Some are Mexican workers who enter the United States on H2A visas for temporary agricultural worker visas to work on a specific farm. Many others reside in Wisconsin long-term, with or without legal documentation. Most local Latinx workers have roots in Mexico, but there are a few from other parts of Latin America. In my conversations with farmers, it was clear that these distinctions are often overlooked.

H2A Visa Workers

In their research, Moss and Tilly (2001) found that some employers favored immigrants over whites because of their perceived work ethic. One employer in their study said:

> When I was younger…in all restaurants, you always had young, white American boys washing dishes. Now, you know, I almost try to stay away from them in a way because they're so lazy at times…I get Cape Verdean kids in here and they bust their butt. You know, I get these white kids in here, they're young, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen years old, and they think they're just going to hang out and just be lazy all day. (p. 488)

There is at least one farm in the Driftless and a few in the greater region that rely heavily on temporary H2A workers from Mexico. I was unable to gain access to this Driftless farm to interview the farmer, but I did interview former employees and others who had engaged with this farmer on labor issues. Because this farm is large and well known in the community, several other farmers, including Jeremy, who were wrestling with their own labor decisions would use this farm for comparison. While their information about the H2A farm varied in terms of accuracy, the way they react to migrant labor provides insights into how they make their labor queues.

Jeremy had worked on the H2A farm many years ago and still maintained ties with his

old boss. I asked him why he thought that that the farm relied on H2A workers. Jeremy silently reflected for a few moments before deciding to speak frankly with me. What Jeremy described was the same sort of lazy whites versus hard-working immigrants beliefs that Moss and Tilly (2001) found in their research. "When I first started working for [H2A farm], we got to talking about labor once in a while, and [the farmer] would always come back to 'Don't hire local people.'

Despite there being local Latinx people working on nearby dairy farms, in this farmer's mind, local equaled white. When I asked Jeremy to speculate why he thought his former employer said that, Jeremy told me that he didn't have to guess. He'd heard his boss say it often. "These are his words. 'They don't work as hard. They don't show up all the time. Lots of excuses - I have to leave early; I've got this or that. I don't want to work late or weekends are out of the question.'"

Several decades as a farmer on his own farm allowed him to reflect on the stereotypes he heard about lazy white workers. "Basically, what it boils down to is they have lives, which is great. That's something that we want to support. But you're torn when you want to have a vegetable farm and you need people all the time. You need people to be labor."

Here we see the tension Jeremy feels between his socially embedded values of supporting the local people in the local community and the increasing high marketness pressures to control labor costs. He likes the idea of a work-life balance, but as the boss, he doesn't want to see his workers actually have that balance during the growing season. Additionally, like his former boss, Jeremy also equated local with white.

As our conversation continued, Jeremy began to move away from supporting local labor, but expresses discomfort at doing so.

> What [the H2A farmer] says, what other big farmers say is you need to pull from the migrant labor force because history shows or experience has shown them, you get more done for the dollar. We're touching on touchy subjects of racism or ethnocentrism or whatever. I don't even like to talk about it very much because I don't have anything against anybody from another country. And I would like to venture to guess that you are going to have bad apples everywhere, from every country.

This was the most that any of the Old Timers was able to articulate the racialized labor exploitation so frequently tied up with agricultural labor. But Jeremy continues to find himself orienting more towards higher marketness as he continues to scale up his farm.

> But experience has shown these bigger farmers that that [migrant workers] is just the easier, more reliable workforce that you can get more productivity out of. But for me, someone who really believes in the idea of local food and local economy, to see that much money going elsewhere…I'm not saying I don't want to support another country, but it goes against the idea of local. So, we're torn, definitely. We don't want to stop doing what we're doing now, but it's just sort of--well maybe that's the answer. In the back of our heads, we're thinking maybe that could solve our…our… huge labor budget.

Before moving on from Jeremy's struggles, it is important to remember that his farm already employs a crew of non-white workers to increase efficiencies while decreasing labor costs. His use of a Southeastern Asian crew will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter.

There were other farmers and farmworkers who had strong opinions of Latinx labor, particularly migrant workers. Young Ideologues Tess and Kevin had been outspoken in their local community about the need for immigration reform, which led to them being on the receiving end of a tense phone call. Kevin started the story:

> So, we wrote this op-ed which was about…it was basically a progressive stance on immigration with this idea that if you come here…basically if people come here undocumented or on H2 worker visas, if they want to farm and have family farms, we should be embracing that. Right? We should be embracing rural community…rural communities are founded on hard work and unity and these people are part of our community….

As Young Ideologues, Tess and Kevin are deeply committed to the idea of family-labor

scale farms. More people on small farms is their dream for rural America. They are currently farming in an area that has a number of large dairy farms and those were the farms they had in mind when they spoke out. Tess jumped in to continue their story.

> Around here it's dairy. And there's a lot of issues with dairy labor, right? And really, really problematic forms of exploitation and wage theft. And so, we didn't couch it in that way but we did kind of confront certain farms. I think we named [a dairy farm]. We almost always name [a dairy farm], which is in the area. We're pretty open about it. They are horrible to their workers. But [H2A farmer] called us on the phone. And then we were both afraid to pick up.

By attacking exploitative labor practices in the conventional dairy industry, they had inadvertently attacked one of the Old Timers in the local food system. Kevin eventually answered the phone:

> [The farmer] was very defensive. And he was like, 'I want to talk to you a little bit.' He has a lot of H-2 worker labor, but he's also open about it. They've written CSA newsletters that say, 'This is how much we pay people. This is what we offer.' But he…it was an interesting conversation for us...he was trying to make this argument like – 'But I really do need the labor. And white farmworkers are lazy.' Kind of this…Mexican workers are the only reliable people.

Tess and Kevin do believe that in some ways this farmer is a good employer. He provides steady employment and pays what they consider a good wage. Often the same workers return for many years and do get pay increases. But after hearing the stereotypical narrative of lazy whites and hard-working Mexicans, Tess frames the issue more broadly.

> A lot of the problematic ideas about labor come with indentured servitude of an H2 worker visa where you can't leave the specific farm. And [Kevin] brought that up [in the phone call]. He said, "Well they can't leave your farm. Of course they're going to act differently to you than someone who can quit and get a job on a different farm." And [H2A farmer] was kind of like, "But they don't want that."

This goes back to the intersection between job queues and labor queues. H2A workers cannot leave their current job in the United States and apply for a different one. Their visa is contingent on working for that specific employer. Their job queue options are severely curtailed,

giving them a choice between their present employment or work back in their home country. For this Old Timer, being part of the local food system meant providing food to a large number of local consumers. His preferred labor pipeline was decidedly not local.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Tess and Kevin have a farming ideology that is almost the philosophical opposite of the large-scale farms in the Driftless. Tess and Kevin believe that most of the labor on a family farm should be done by the family, whereas the larger farms in the Driftless cannot possibly operate on primarily family labor. Divergent ideologies resulted in different labor queues on these two farms. Neither side was willing to budge in this conversation.

Tess concluded somewhat defensively. "I mean it's not weird to say, 'I want to talk to you about this.' But I feel like he was like, 'Let me inform you about how it really is. This is what it really looks like and you guys have this romantic vision that is not reality.'" With several years of successful farming under her belt, she was not about to accept this criticism of their deeply contemplated labor ideology.

Local Latinx Labor

The few farms in and around the Driftless that rely on H2A workers are the outliers when it comes to constructing labor queues, but I did have a brief interaction with one farmer whose non-family labor force were all local Latinx workers. I spoke with this farmer by phone. She reported that their starting wage was $7/hour, which was below minimum wage. I was unable to gain interview access to explore this in more depth. During the survey, I discovered that there were three other farms who each employed one local Latinx worker. All three of these farms were operated by Old Timers and each farm also had a crew of Southeast Asian farmworkers.

With this limited amount of data, I cannot speak to the experiences of local Latinx workers on farms in the Driftless local food system. I do, however, want to share two stories told to me by white farmer workers who had worked on a number of diversified vegetable farms within and near the Driftless Area.

Chris worked as a manager on a farm in Illinois's Driftless Area that had a large workforce of both local white workers and Mexican immigrants.

> Beloit [Wisconsin] has a pretty large group of Mexicans. People mostly from the Guanajuato region. There's a group of brothers who grew up on a small farm in Mexico and so they really are drawn to the work [on this farm]. They're not making a ton of money, but they're the highest paid people on the farm because they have been there the longest….

Chris knew quite a bit about these brothers and the local Mexican community. He noticed the background of the white workers hired was very different.

> I think we ended up hiring a lot of young white kids from Rockford [IL] or sometimes other folks too. All people who were in some type of life crisis. Either it's just being young, which I think in itself can be a life crisis, or you're like 35 and you just lost your job. Or you're 40 and you're just having a career change. Those are the folks who generally came and worked at [Farm Name].

This difference in culture, work history and expected longevity created some division between these two groups of workers.

> There was sort of like two teams. There was the Mexican crew. They were brothers, and so they were particularly tightknit. They wouldn't even talk to [white] people for a long time, and [white] people were often weirded out by that. Though if you just engaged them, they did really enjoy having a conversation with you, but they weren't going to stick their heads out and meet you, mostly because I think they know that there's a good chance you're going to be gone in a year. So these guys, they would do an amazing job, but they really avoided taking leadership. Sometimes they would come to someone and mentioned that something was happening that was incorrect, but they really would never take the steps that were needed to…They would usually just talk amongst themselves if they saw something wasn't going well. I could speculate as to why, but I don't really know exactly why.

As Chris continued to work on this farm for a number of seasons, he noticed changes.

> The funny thing was as management improved, we got more and more feedback from them [the Mexican brothers] about how things were going. When they started to see that I was sticking around for a long time and that [other manager] was really taking leadership, they were much more willingly to engage with us about how they were seeing things happen, which was great.

Building communication and trust allowed Chris to benefit from the depth of farming knowledge these brothers brought.

> Working with [the brother] who sort of leads them, I mean he had just an unbelievable amount of knowledge and technique and skill. Really, I mean the skill that he had was unmatched by any person I've ever seen working on a farm because he's been doing these things since he was little. And it was even surprising to learn that he…apparently there's a show that he would watch that is in Spanish. I tried to find it, but I never could. He would be like "Oh yeah, I was watching the show and they trellis cucumbers down South." I was like "Really?" "Yeah. We should do that." And I would say "Yeah, I don't know how to do that, but we should try it." He was essentially doing research and learning about new techniques, basically being innovative, which was a big part of that farm.

Because the farm Chris worked on was willing to hire local Mexican workers, they benefited from employing workers who had grown up on diversified small-scale farms. The farmer on this operation could be considered an Illinois Old Timer. Like some of the Wisconsin Old Timers. he had scaled up his farm to get more organic produce into the hands of local consumers. Unlike most of the farmers in Driftless, he saw local Latinx workers as fitting into his vision of farming.

Sam, another white farmworker I interviewed, told me a story about a Latinx coworker he had on a farm he had worked on in central Wisconsin. Like Chris's farm and the farms in my study, this too was a diversified vegetable farm, growing produce for the local food system.

> I worked with one guy. I think he came to the United States from Mexico when he was 6, really young. This was just a good job for him. And he was definitely the hardest worker on our crew. But what was really impressive was that he knew that he was a good worker…and he was the only one that year who would pursue a raise.

Sam had been at a talk several months earlier that I had given at a local food system conference presenting my survey findings and concluding by reflecting on the first few interviews. Sam remembered I had expressed surprise that none of the few farmworkers I'd interviewed at that point had mentioned low pay.

> Now that I'm thinking about it...you said that all the people you talked to never complained about getting paid, right? Which is kind of hilarious because man, on the farms that I worked on, I got paid diddly. And then, my friends who actually pursued a career post-college would talk about their salaries and then I would tell them our combined household income in 2010, I think, was $18,000. They would balk. But [my Mexican coworker], he was the one that really pursued getting paid better. Because…this is my speculation, when I walked onto that farm, I knew that I was going to walk off of it. I knew I was there for an educational experience and to see if I wanted to do this more. I don't think that was within the scope of what [he] was thinking when he started working on that farm, and he had a wife and 2 kids and I think a third on the way. So, I think his perspective of that job was very different.

Sam is highlighting the difference in job queues for white well-educated workers and Latinx workers. While this chapter is focused on the labor queues of the farmers, it is important to keep in mind that most of the white workers on these farms are there to experience being part of a food system that they value. They have other more lucrative options. In the more remote parts of the Driftless, the white workers may be a mix of teenagers working a summer job or adults with fewer job options. The job ladders for Latinx immigrants is more limited. Sam continued:

> So, I was trying to learn as much as I could and then I realized that I didn't really want to work at that farm anymore but I wanted to work on my own, so I just left. That was an option, and that's the thing. This whole time, I've had the option to go and do something that paid me more money. And I think that's what a lot of these kids you've been interviewing have. They have the option. So, unlike the folks in the Hudson River valley that you read about in that book, or a lot of the other kind of migrant laborers, they do not have options. So, when you don't have options, and you're getting paid $10 that seems like much more of a sore subject. When you do have options and when you're getting an education….

Sam's voice trailed off, but his message was clear. Sam could easily leave this job while

his Mexican coworker could not. Sam has since gone on to start his own farm with his partner. And this is where these racialized labor queues really matter. In a few short years, Sam was able to work on a couple of farms and gain enough experience to start his own farm.

> I went to a really hippy-dippy college. I had the time to think and read Marx or maybe not Marx but Michael Pollan and other things and think about how I wanted to shape things. Maybe that's why there are so many bright hippy-dippy kids going into farming. [Mexican coworker] is probably great at all sorts of things but for a while because of his language barrier, they didn't want him to work at the farmers markets. At first, he probably had some trouble, you know, numbers in foreign languages are generally pretty tough. Just spitting out $2.65 for us is no problem, but it's tough for him. But he's really quick with adding. So, at this one point, they were short and he had to go to the farmers market. They didn't want him to go to the farmers market, but when he did, he was a whiz. He totally dominated, of course. I think he has actually done really well. I've kept in contact with him. He's done really, really great when they've had other…other…uh…other migrant laborers coming in…not really migrants…immigrants coming in who really don't speak English. I think he's done a really good job of managing them. You've just got to give people responsibility and identify them.

Throughout my interviews with farmers and farmworkers, very few made a distinction between H2A workers, undocumented Latinx immigrants, and first-generation Americans, let alone recognizing differences in nationality. Assumptions were made broadly, equating all Latinx people with undocumented immigrants from Mexico. Even someone like Sam, who has paid attention to racial dynamics, lacks a deep understanding of the different Latinx communities connected to farming. Rather than working through this discomfort and becoming familiar with the local Latinx communities, with very few exceptions vegetable farmers in the Driftless local food system simply avoid hiring anyone Latinx.

SOUTHEAST ASIAN WORKERS IN THE QUEUE

Sometimes groups of minorities are ranked against one another and not just in comparison to whites. For example, Holzer (1996) found that many employers preferred Latinx

workers to Blacks. The general perception is that Blacks are more troublesome and less compliant than immigrants (Kirschenman and Neckerman 1991). In Holzer's work, this perception gives Latinx more entry into manufacturing and other blue-collar forms of work than Blacks, even if Latinx workers have greater skill and credential deficiencies. In the local food system of the Driftless Area, this queuing of racial minorities gave entry to Southeast Asian immigrants at the expense of Latinx workers.

Because of historical refugee resettlement efforts following the Vietnam War, Hmong are the largest, though not the only, Southeast Asian immigrant group working in the local food system. On the largest farms, operated by Old Timers, I found crews of Southeast Asian workers laboring separately from white workers.

The literature on global outsourcing suggests that women are preferred when they are perceived to naturally possess more of some sort of skill or dexterity as is required in vegetable farming (Collins 2002; Green 1997). While my survey found an overall balance of gender in farmworkers, the crews of Southeast Asian workers were predominantly female and middle-aged or older.

Earlier in this chapter, Jeremy celebrated his nimble-fingered crew, describing them as a force when it came to harvesting beans. "They pick a lot of our peas, our berries, beans, edamame. Tomatoes. They did tomatoes this last year, and they just blow us away with how awesome they are…."

Social Invisibility

These crews provide an infusion of labor but remain socially invisible. This social invisibility is manifest in two primary ways. First, they are rarely visible in a farm's promotional

materials. I reviewed the websites and Facebook pages of all of the farms whose survey responses indicated they employed Southeast Asian workers. Only one farm had any photographs or mention of their non-white crew and that was one photo buried at the end of their farm photos simply labeled "the Hmong crew." On the remaining websites and social media accounts, only the farmers and white crew were visible. Sarah, a former farmworker at one of these farms, mentioned this invisibility immediately during our interview.

I asked her to describe the types of farmworkers she saw on the farm where she worked. After a long pause, Sarah started explaining the racial caste system.

> …the mystery Hmong work crews that nobody sees so it's like absent labor. The Hmong work crews aren't helping at farm events. It's their predominantly white college-educated farm crew that is at events, and they are like family. And when they take pictures of their farm crew, the Hmong work crews are not part of those pictures. So, they have this 'other' labor issue.

While the farmworker quoted above was sensitive to the invisibility of the non-white workers, this was less common even among those I would describe as Young Ideologues. I interviewed four other white workers who had worked on the same farm, and Sarah was the only one who brought up that farm's Hmong crew without prompting. The other four workers only mentioned the Hmong in response to my questioning.

Young Ideologue Tess had worked on the farm with the one Hmong crew photo and felt these farmers were more open about their non-white labor crew.

> And then they have Hmong workers. And [this farm] is not going to lie to you about their labor. They feel like, "We're doing something reasonable. This is good. This is our mix. We're employing our children full-time." They have all of their children and their spouses living there… But the Hmong work crew is a whole other labor consideration…And they're not…I feel like they're not going to hide anything from you at [this farm]. They're very comfortable with it…..

Despite Tess's beliefs in this farm's transparency, when I interviewed these farmers, they did not readily mention their crew. I had to prompt our conversation about labor to include the crew.

In addition to social invisibility, there is a physical separation between the Southeast Asian crews and the white workers. They are assigned different tasks and exist separately from the white workers.

Physical Separation

"We never collaborated on anything. There was no cross work. We didn't ever pair up for a similar activity; it was all separate. Yeah. So, the most you could really ever do was say hi and bye when they were arriving or leaving." – Sarah, a white farmworker

The physical separation between the Southeast Asian crews and the white workers breaks down along two lines. First, the Southeast Asian crews work separately from the white workers. On some farms their assigned tasks differ greatly from those of the white workers whose tasks are more varied. Work hours and working conditions can also differ. Second, the crew takes lunch or breaks separately. Different lunch breaks can mean exclusion from farm "benefits" such as cooked meals.

When I interviewed Sarah, it had been over a year since she had stopped working on one of these farms, but she was still deeply troubled by the bifurcated labor system.

> So, this is probably the biggest thing I struggled with, and it wasn't even my experience…So there were two teams. There was a team of all white people. We were all…I wasn't the youngest, but I was on the younger end. So, there were one or two students, a couple of recent graduates, and then a couple of people who had worked there for a long time. And then there was the Hmong team. And we worked separate shifts, we worked in separate teams. The Hmong team would come at five in the morning and work until 3:30. Whereas we would come at nine and work until 5:30.

Initially, I thought it sounded like the Hmong crew got the better end of the deal, with less time in the hot summer sun, but then Sarah started to talk about the tasks that each team was assigned.

> And there was definitely an inequality in terms of diversity of work and perks on the job. So, the Hmong crew did either the same chore or only one of two chores throughout the entire day. So, they were either weeding, picking beans, or picking peas. And I don't think I saw them do anything different all summer. Whereas our team, we were part of seeding. We were a part of greenhouse duties. We're part of transplanting. We harvested, you know, 20 different varieties. We weeded. We did miscellaneous tasks that needed to be done. So, over the course of the day, I would do probably anywhere between two tasks - I think the most I ever did was six hours of sorting tomatoes and that was the most I ever did of one chore - and I liked that job because it was sitting in the shade. But most of the time I would have anywhere between 2 to 4 jobs within the course of a day and that changed from week to week. So there might be one week where I was picking cherry tomatoes half of the time I was there, but the next week, I was doing watermelon…. So, there was more diversity of activities. And I can say that [the Hmong were] stooping down and weeding…they used hoes all day long. So, there was definitely an inequality there.

As the weather got hotter, Sarah had noticed even more inequality in how tasks were divided.

> We also got a lot of tasks in the shade; they never had tasks in the shade. We were also allowed to use the vehicles, the trucks, to move things back and forth, stuff like that, and they were never in the cars. Yeah, we also had tasks that included watering, and so that was a little bit refreshing. They did not get that.

Tristan started working on this same farm the season after Sarah left. He was more hesitant initially to identify the division as one of racial inequality.

> There wasn't much interaction, and part of that just had to do with people's effort to interact. People maybe didn't put in the effort to create a connection there, but I think a big reason why people didn't put in the effort was because things were just set up so that their work and our work were different, in different realms of the farm. There was obviously a language barrier there and that, from [the farmer's] point of view, made trying to get them more deeply involved in the technical aspects difficult. I understand that, but there was probably more separation there than there could have been. The Hmong crew only worked for part of the season. After all the weeding tasks were pretty much done, [the farmer] didn't have them come out anymore. So, it always felt like there were just these two separate worlds.

Tristan and I talked for a little while about what farm tasks he most enjoyed doing then he brought the conversation back around to the Hmong.

> They were essentially assigned the jobs that were very time intensive, very repetitive jobs that really people would rather not do if they didn't have to. And they always worked as a group. They always worked as the whole group on one task. So, they were essential to the functioning of the farm. Without them or a group like them, a group that was dedicated to doing the work they were doing, the farm would've been out of control with weeds, for example. That's most of what they did was weeding. So, I don't know.

This farm also provided transportation assistance as a "benefit," but according to Sarah, this was not extended to the Hmong crew. Sarah also reported that the Hmong were not included in weekly cooked meals the farmers provided to the white workers. "And they also were not given two free meals a week. And we were actually not even allowed to lunch together because [the farmers] did not want the Hmong crew to notice that we were getting this meal. So obvious distinctions there."

Tristan, by contrast, thought that lunch arrangements were a matter of preference on the part of the Hmong.

> They would never eat lunch with us. They always ate in their own little area, and that was probably a lot of their choice, too. But again, there could've been more effort put out on our part and on [the farmer's] part to integrate the workers. I would've been happy with that.

Towards the end of my interview with Tristan he opened up more about feeling some discomfort with the racialized division of labor.

> It was a little bit awkward when I stopped and thought about it. There was that division, and I guess I never felt comfortable enough to try to bridge that gap either by talking to [the farmer] or by encouraging the Hmong crew to come over here, encouraging everyone else to go over there. It is what it is, I guess, but I think that on the part of people who have more authority, have more say, and know the Hmong crew a little bit, they'd be able to do more than they did.

Tristan was willing to push aside his discomfort and expect someone else to address the

situation, but the racial inequality bothered Sarah so much that she decided to speak up about it.

> And I did bring it up with some of my managers and they were like 'Well, you know, the white workers aren't willing to do it. The Hmong are and they're good at it. And so that's why they have them do it.' And I'm kind of like, well that might be true but there's still an issue there with it.

I asked Sarah whether or not this division bothered anyone else and she first reflected on her observations of the Hmong crew.

> English was not, was certainly not, the first language of really any of them. So, it's hard to say exactly how cognizant they were of the differences or how much it bothered them. But it certainly bothered me as a worker, and I know it concerned one of my managers. She had brought it up [to the farmer] before and there was no change.

Different Labor Organization

As a first-year worker, Sarah made $10 an hour but thought the crew was paid less. She also suspected they were paid differently.

> In our check-in and check-out binder where we logged our hours, it had all of our names in alphabetical order and then there was a tab that said Hmong folks in the back that they had to flip to, which would suggest to me that they did payroll differently. But just the way it was labeled, Hmong folks, it was…to me it was glaring that there were racial issues going on at that farm.

Tess, however, knew for certain that the farm where she worked was paying the crew differently. When asked about starting wages for white workers she replied:

> I think probably their [hourly] low is $10. But the Hmong work crews is a whole other labor consideration because it's piecemeal [piece rate]. So, you're basically paying for a task, like a farm crew. But you're also paying a crew. So how that gets doled out….And they even mentioned that when I worked there because I asked them about it. And they're not…I feel like they're not going to hide anything from you at [farm]. They're very comfortable with it. I think at one point [farmer] was like, 'yeah sometimes we just ask how are you doing this, but it's basically up to them.' So, they could pay somebody $2/hour that's on a crew for the day because…it's almost the relationship of like…the coyote, kind of. You hire the boss for the day and he brings in the crew. You pay the boss….

Jeremy was the farmer most willing to talk to me about his crew of workers. Here's how he described their labor arrangement.

> We do have a…we just decided…our weeding crew is contract workers and that's a Hmong crew. For the most part, very legal. We do W-9's, contract their labor. They bring their own tools, and we provide them with money to get here in terms of gas money and car expenses. We pay their mileage and such. We can't necessarily tell them…I forget how it works with contract labor. You can't tell them what to do, or you can't…anyways, we have always tried to be very legal with all of this. And that's really worked well for us. They're a great crew. They seem to be happy. They listen. They know what they're doing. They work really hard.

When asked about their Southeast Asian workers, farmers presented them as a critical part of the farm labor force, but it is clear that the farmers and most of the white workers see them as members of a group rather than individuals. They are "the crew." Speaking a language other than English aids in this view of them as a group, different and distinct from the rest of the farmworkers. While the language barrier may be a rationale for separation, the exclusion of the Southeast Asian workers from farm photos and events suggests a deeper division in who is visible in the local food system and who is hidden away.

Some of these bifurcated labor systems have been operating for years, but the Southeast Asian crews are aging and not being replaced by the younger generation. Jeremy recognizes that and is contemplating what he will do in the future.

> It's an older crew, and we're not dumb. We realize that they're not being replaced by younger people from the Hmong community. You know, they're more educated people that are taking higher-paying jobs. So, we're not quite sure what we're going to do…Basically we expect them three days a week for 10 hours a day. We couldn't run the farm without that force. We're just not quite sure what we're going to do without it.

For the time being, he is willing to make accommodations to keep his crew operational.

> There are certain things that they won't do, which is fine. It's just a matter of managing that. Like for example, they don't…they won't bring their stuff to the packing shed. Anything that requires the heavy lifting, which is fine. A lot of

> those ladies are 60, 65 years old. So, it just means that we need to be on top of getting out there a lot, like on a hot day with beans or peas or something.

Although the larger farms like Jeremy's have mostly avoided Latinx labor for ideological reasons, their ability to control labor costs on the backs of Southeast Asian workers is coming to an end. Because these farms are higher in marketness than other farms in the local food system, I suspect that as their cheaper labor force diminishes in the coming years, they will move to embrace Latinx workers rather than reorient themselves towards more socially embedded and labor justice focused labor arrangements.

CONCLUSION

So why does this matter?

First, as discussed previously, jobs on these local vegetable farms pay several dollars an hour more than minimum wage. The larger farms also employ season extension techniques, providing workers with a longer period of employment. As seasonal farm labor jobs go, these are better than some others, and in the more isolated rural areas they may be some of the better paying jobs available. Despite the presence of Latinx workers on neighboring farms, and a few crews of Southeast Asians on the largest farms, the labor force in the local food system farms remains almost entirely white.

In my research, most of the farms studied were too small to have much of a hierarchy, or career ladder on the farm. The top position was held by the farmer(s) and everyone else was on the same tier below. The largest farms typically had a packing shed manager or a field manager, but that was the extent of middle management. But, thinking outside the confines of a single farm, there is a career ladder that exists. Producing diversified vegetables for local consumption is a category of farming where making the transition from farm laborer to farmer requires

minimal infrastructure and upfront costs. Getting a job on one of these farms can be the beginning of a career ladder which leads to a farmworker eventually owning their own farm.

Understanding how farmers construct racialized labor queues provides critical insights for understanding and addressing existing labor market inequalities. What has happened in the Driftless is that farmers have used labor queues to construct a bifurcated labor market. The native white workers, most of whom have little to no farming experience, are brought in on what appears to be a bottom rung of a very short ladder. But unlike the Southeast Asian crews, they are not limited to repetitive tasks like weeding or harvesting beans. The white workers participate in distribution channels and sometimes administrative tasks in addition to various aspects of vegetable production and packaging. While the farmer(s) largely maintain control of operating the tractor, white workers, particularly those who work on the farm for multiple seasons, have more access than the Southeast Asian crews to the knowledge they need to eventually run their own farms. The Latinx workers in the area can't even gain access to the bottom rung of the ladder. The racialized labor queue in the Driftless Area keeps the farmers in the local food system very white.

Conclusion

At the 2014 Wisconsin Local Food Summit, keynote speaker LaDonna Redmond, of the Campaign for Food Justice NOW!, challenged attendees to create a food system that "is not based on exploiting black and brown people. [That] is not based on exploiting labor generally nor exploiting the land" (Redmond 2014).

At first glance, the Driftless Area local food system appears to do just that. Almost two-thirds of the farms that make up the local food system are certified organic or use primarily organic practices. The farms are very small scale; almost half of them rely solely on the labor of the farmer(s) and extended family members. The farms that do hire workers largely operate using ethical labor practices with starting wages two or three dollars above minimum wage. Rather than exploiting interns through questionable "educational" opportunities, most farms have organized their paid work force around regular wage labor. The farmworkers who work on these farms are almost entirely white, young Americans with relatively high degrees of education. As a group, these workers have other, more lucrative career possibilities, but at least for the time being, they are choosing farm work.

But evaluating labor systems is more than a quantitative reckoning of wages and benefits, however loosely they may be defined. Because local food is a movement as well as an agricultural market, the farmers that I studied have come to this type of farming for ideological reasons. These ideologies have shaped their decisions about farm scale and farm labor system. This dissertation has sought to contribute to the limited body of knowledge of labor in local food systems by exploring how farming ideologies and labor queues affect labor relations within one active region in the movement.

Most of the group I have called the Driftless Old Timers display some social embeddedness, but as a group, they reside closer to the high marketness end of the continuum than either the Young Ideologues or the Chicago Transplants. Rejecting conventional agriculture with its focus on agrichemicals, Old Timers sought to get organic produce into the hands of local consumers, creating and scaling up alternative agriculture institutions as they did so. But as DuPuis and Goodman (2005) have shown, local is not inherently just; in fact, it may simply replicate existing injustices in labor relations. It was on the largest of the Old Timer farms where I encountered non-white farm crews, hired as a way to control labor costs and outsource the most tedious farm tasks away from the white workers.

Although most visible on these larger farms, labor queues throughout the Driftless local food system are fairly consistent. Regardless of farming ideology, which mediates the type of labor used on the farm, there are fairly predictable ways that farmers rank groups of potential farmworkers. Highly educated white workers are on top. When labor costs become a factor, farms draw from their preferred group for cheap labor – Southeast Asians. This is such an accepted practice that few of the Young Ideologue farmworkers I interviewed, who as a group are quick to speak about labor justice for Latinx workers, even thought to comment. Latinx workers, while prevalent in the dairy labor force, are so far down at the bottom of the queue in the local food system that they are unlikely to be hired at all. Because Latinx workers regardless of their country of origin, documentation status, or length of time in the United States symbolically represent an agrifood system that almost all of the farmers are contesting, the farmers I studied cannot see them as part of the local food system.

This racial marginalization or outright exclusion that Southeast Asian and Latinx workers experience in the local food system is deeply problematic. With this labor queue, Driftless

farmers have created an employment ladder for white farmworkers while continuing to deny non-white workers similar access. Because this type of farming – local diversified vegetable production – has low barriers to entry, anyone with a little farming experience, a willingness to work hard, and access to sales outlets can get started by renting a small amount of land. By declining to give Latinx that experience and relegating Southeast Asian workers to the most repetitive tasks, farmers are ensuring that the pipeline for beginning farmers is almost entirely white. The Driftless local food system is made up of job ladders where young white potential farmers are mentored and trained, and people of color are excluded from meaningful participation.

Farmworker Sarah saw the racial dynamics within local food system labor as parallel to those within conventional agriculture.

> I think within agriculture, we need to have more dialogue about what's going on with immigrant labor – what's going on within poorer ethnic communities and how is that impacting agriculture – because it's a pretty common complaint. I have mixed feelings about the whole thing because on the one hand, we all need jobs. So, to sit there and say "The Mexicans are stealing our jobs" or "Why are we giving all the jobs to Mexicans?" Well, Mexicans need jobs too, you know. Everybody needs jobs. But the issue becomes how much more are we willing to allow the [labor] standards to bypass our consciousness because they're not white workers? And then why is it that white workers aren't willing to work as "hard?"

Sarah paused for a moment before continuing:

> Or maybe the bigger question is should we even be working workers that hard? Is it okay to justify how hard the work is because they're Hmong or Mexican or whatever other immigrant minority that we tend to use for agriculture? So, I think we need more discussions about what is really just.

In addition to not being inherently just, local is also not inherently stable. I learned this during the survey phase of research as the publicly available lists of farms producing vegetables for local markets were hopelessly outdated within a few short years. Painful phone calls with farmers who had stopped growing due to financial difficulty or health issues or divorce made

real the lived experiences behind the numbers. Farming is a hard business for the farmers, let alone the workers.

I was reminded of this again recently when I looked up several of the farms featured in this research. More than one Chicago Transplant had decided to transition out of the vegetable CSA business. Rather than continue to operate with the high labor demands inherent in producing for CSA boxes, they are reorienting their multifunctional farms toward more events – farm stays, weddings, farm-to-table dinners. Most surprisingly, two of the Young Ideologue farms that I thought had the most high road labor practices – decent wages, worker autonomy, opportunities for workers to grow professionally, no immigrant labor crews – have undergone dramatic changes in their farming, also moving away from diversified vegetable production towards perennials, tree fruits, and seedlings. This was disheartening news. Since many of the Young Ideologues intend to remain at family-labor scale, I was particularly interested in the few that did have a hired labor force. I had hoped to return in the future to see if these two farms had become more like Old Timers in their labor systems as the Young Ideologue farmers evolved and their farms matured.

I undertook this research hoping to find that farms in the Driftless local food system were deeply socially embedded in ways that included high-road labor practices. I was looking for workable alternatives to a globalized, industrial agrifood system that incorporated ideas of social justice around labor and could be replicated in other local food systems. What I found was more complex. In many ways the farms I studied were socially embedded. Younger Ideologues had visions of family-labor scale production farms, and Chicago Transplants threw themselves into creating their own visions of rural community life. Almost all of the farms with hired workers paid their workers more than minimum wage. However, the Driftless Area local food system has

not fundamentally addressed racial inequality in farm work. Individual farmers choose to remain family labor scale to avoid what they believe are problematic labor relationships, but the system as a whole has not found a workable solution to scaling up without relying on low-paid, non-white farmworkers.

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Labor in the Local Food System: A Survey of Driftless Area Vegetable Producers

1. About how many years have you been farming this operation? _____

2. Did you grow up on a farm? Yes No

3. In 2012, how many total acres of land did you operate? _____
    a. Of these acres, how many did you own? _____
    b. Of these acres, how many were leased? _____

4. In 2012, how many individuals were involved in the day-to-day decisions for this operation? _____
    a. Who are they?

5. In 2012, which best describes this operation's legal status for tax purposes?
    a. Family or individual operation
    b. Partnership operation (includes family partnerships)
    c. Incorporated under state law
        i. IF THIS CATEGORY IS SELECTED, ASK: Is this a family-held corporation?
            Yes No
    d. Or something else _____

6. Do you participate in any of the following?
    a. Producer coops Yes No
        i. IF YES, ASK: Which ones? _____
    b. UW Center for Integrated Agriculture System Yes No
    c. WI Farmers Union Yes No
    d. Land Stewardship Project Yes No
    e. MOSES conference Yes No
    f. Anything else? _____

Questions about products

7. In 2012, what were your primary products by amount of acreage?

8. Are any of these products certified organic? Yes No
    a. If yes, which ones? _____

9. Do you have any other certifications? Yes No
   a. If yes, which ones? _____

10. In 2012, did this operation

	X IF YES	IF YES, ASK: what?
Raise animals?		
Produce value-added products (such as jerky, jams or jelly, cheese, cider, etc)?		
Have an on-farm packing facility for distribution?		

11. There are many ways that farms sell products. In 2012, did you sell products

	X IF YES	What % of products go to each outlet?
Through community supported agriculture?		
Through farmers' markets?		
Through farm stand/on-farm direct sales?		
Directly to retail outlets (e.g. restaurants, grocery stores)?		
Directly to institutions (e.g. schools, hospitals)?		
To wholesalers?		
Other -		

Questions about farm labor

12. In 2012, how many PAID farm workers, including paid family members and office workers
   a. Worked less than 150 days on this operation? For example, they were hired for the growing season. _____

	How many were…	What type of jobs did they do? For example – office work, planting/weeding/harvesting, selling.	How many, if any, were women?
Family			
Paid interns			
Contract workers			
Other -			

b. Worked 150 days or more on this operation? _____

	How many were…	What type of jobs did they do? For example – office work, planting/weeding/harvesting, selling.	How many, if any, were women?
Family			
Paid interns			
Contract workers			
Other -			

*IF NO PAID WORKERS, ASK Q13 and Q14, SKIP Q15-23. IF PAID WORKERS, SKIP Q13.

13. Can you tell me more about why you don't have any paid workers?

14. In 2012, how many UNPAID farm workers, including family members and office workers, worked on this farm? _____

	How many were…	What type of jobs did they do? For example – office work, planting/weeding/harvesting, selling.	How many, if any, were women?
Family			
Unpaid interns			
Volunteers			
Other -			

15. How many MIGRANT workers were on this operation in 2012? (A migrant worker is a farm worker whose employment required travel that prevented the migrant worker from returning to his/her permanent place of residence the same day. Include hired and contract workers.)

_____

a. What type of jobs did they do?

16. How were the workers paid?

	X IF YES	What are base wages for…	Which workers does this apply to?
By the hour			

By the piece			
Salary			
Owner wages			
Other -			

17. How do you decide what your base wages are going to be?

18. How do you decide when to pay someone more?

19. Have you ever had to pay people less than you paid them in the previous year? Yes No
    a. IF YES, SAY: Tell me more.

20. Do you offer any of the following benefits to workers?

	X IF YES	Which workers have access to these benefits?
Health insurance		
Sick leave		
Vacation		
Other -		

21. How do you find workers?

22. In 2012, did you have any difficulty finding enough workers? Yes No
    a. IF YES, SAY: Tell me more.

23. In 2012, did you have any difficulty retaining workers? Yes No
    a. What was your turnover rate like?

24. In what ways, if any, have your labor needs changed over the past 5 years? IF FARMING LESS THAN 5 YEARS, SUBSTITUTE YEARS FROM Q1.

a. IF APPLICABLE, ASK: What about over the past 10 years?

25. Looking forward, what changes, if any, would you like to make in your labor force in the next several years?

26. Is there anything else that you think I should know?