

“BELIEVE ME!”: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF PERSUASIVE INTERACTION AT THE
FARMERS’ MARKET

By

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Submitted to the graduate degree program in Communication Studies and the
Graduate Faculty at the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Date Defended: February 7, 2014

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Date Approved: March 26, 2014

Abstract

Farmers' markets have been growing in recent decades and one contributing factor is that customers have more interpersonal contact with sellers at farmers' markets than they do at grocery stores. Increased interpersonal interaction means customers gain more personalized service, the ability to befriend farmers, and the opportunity to build community (Hinrichs, Gillespie, & Feenstra, 2004; Hunt, 2007; Robinson & Hartenfeld, 2007; Sommer, Herrick, & Sommer, 1981). While researchers have demonstrated that farmers' markets offer a social experience, few scholars have critically analyzed the customer-farmer relationship as an object of study on its own. In other words, existing research offers limited generalizations about markets as a social, interpersonal space (Hunt, 2007; McGrath, Sherry, & Heisley, 1993; Robinson & Hartenfeld, 2007). Some scholars romanticize customer-farmer relationships without articulating the potential negative dimensions of these relationships (Robinson & Hartenfeld, 2007).

Researchers have conducted an abundance of survey work on markets. Existing survey research categorizes customer preferences, but it fails to interrogate how farmers use persuasion to influence customers and make sales (Andreatta & Wickliffe, 2002; Feagan & Morris, 2009; Hunt, 2007; Trobe, 2001). Customer-farmer interaction is predicated on farmers persuading customers to purchase products. By analyzing the Downtown Lawrence Farmers' Market in Lawrence, Kansas, I provide a richer understanding of interpersonal relationships and the persuasive dynamics that occur between farmers and customers.

Using ethnographic methods, I interviewed 36 participants, conducted 100 hours of market observations, and wrote 282 pages of double-spaced fieldnotes. Results revealed the five dominant messages that farmers sent to customers were: (1) the quality of the products is

superlative, (2) the market is an educational space, (3) the market is a personal place to shop, (4) local consumption is beneficial, and (5) family farms are important. In many cases, farmers sent messages that encouraged customers to trust farmer expertise, credibility, and friendliness.

I also uncovered an educational dynamic that situates the farmer as the expert and the customer as the student. This power differential further encouraged customers to trust farmers' credibility and expertise. However, when farmers presented statistical and scientific claims, customers displayed more skeptical attitudes. In cases where customers were not simply relying on farmer credibility, customers used quick evaluations like visual and taste cues to determine if a product was fresh, beautiful, or flavorful enough to purchase.

At the conclusion of this project, I examine how the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) of persuasion (Petty & Brinol, 2011; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1999) serves as an effective interpretive tool to analyze both farmers' persuasive messages and customers' reactions to farmers' messages.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my advisor, Adrienne Kunkel, for her mentorship and support these past four years. I am especially grateful for your willingness to take on my obscure projects and to show support for my work. Thank you for being willing tread new waters in order to help me fulfill my goals. I am deeply grateful for that. To my committee members: Dr. Beth Innocenti, for your continued positivity and chats about theory and Steelers football; to Dr. Tracy Russo, thank you for your continued challenges to make my work better, all while helping me see the big picture and move forward; Dr. Debbie Ford, thank you for your enthusiasm and willingness to drive from Kansas City amidst your busy schedule; and to Dr. Don Stull, for your frank honesty and friendship. I also want to thank Dr. Brian Lagotte, for your immense help with writing. All of you have sharpened my research skills and prepared me for career in Academia. Thank you.

I would like to thank the Downtown Lawrence Farmers Market organization and farmers for participating in my study and allowing me to spend so much time asking you questions. Special thanks to Phil, Avery, Steve, Alejandro, John, the Peters Family, and many more.

I want to thank my family for their continued support and prayers throughout this process. First and foremost, thank you to my wife Katherine for enduring the comprehensive exam process, my long absences during fieldwork, and the challenges and stresses of writing a dissertation while having a young child. Thank you for providing warmth to come home to each day, both in body and in spirit. Thank you to my son Henry for distracting me from my dissertation when I came home and for providing unbridled joy which always buoyed my spirits. Thank you to my Mom and Dad for your continued prayers and phone conversations; thank you to all my siblings and in-laws for your continued enthusiasm and support.

Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
Acknowledgments.....	v
Table of Contents	vi
Chapter One: Introduction and Rationale	1
Preview of Project.....	5
Chapter Two: Literature Review	6
Farmers' Market Growth	7
Avoiding Industrialized Agriculture.....	8
Fostering Sustainability	8
Environmental concerns.	9
Ethically produced food.	9
Allowing Urban Populations Access to Rural Life	10
Supporting Local Farming Communities	11
Providing High Quality Food	11
Fresh produce.	11
Encouraging Community Ties.....	12
Embeddedness.	13
Buying locally.	14
Civic activism.	14
Upper-class community.....	15
Conflict.	15
Offering More Interpersonally Rich Shopping Experiences	16
Sociality.....	16
Nonconventional actions.	17
Trust and responsibility.	18
Direct interaction with farmers.....	20
Feedback.....	20
Self-disclosure.	21
Research Questions.....	23
Chapter Three: Method	24
Participants	24
Research Context.....	25
Procedures.....	28

Data Analysis	31
Chapter Four Results: Farmer Messages	36
RQ1: Farmer Persuasive Messages and Evidence	36
1. The quality of products is superlative	36
Taste	37
Freshness	38
Health	39
Unusual products	42
Seasonality	43
Aesthetics	45
Crowds	46
2. The market is an educational space	47
More knowledgeable than grocery clerks	48
Production education	48
Product education	49
Price education	50
Cooking techniques	51
Recipes	51
Health education	52
3. The market is a personal place to shop	53
Eye contact	53
Smiling	53
Humor	54
Attentiveness	55
Remembering customers	55
Transcending the booth as barrier	56
Trust	56
4. Local consumption is beneficial	59
Environment	59
Quality	60
Anti-industrial sentiments	61
5. Family farms are important	62
Handmade products	63
Presence of children	64
Aesthetics	64
Chapter Five Results: Customer Responses to Farmer Messages	67
RQ2: Customer Reactions to Persuasive Claims	67
1. The quality of products is superlative	67
Taste	67
Freshness	69
Health	71
Unusual products	76
Seasonality	77
Aesthetics	78

Crowds.	79
2. The market is an educational space	80
Expert vendors.....	80
Pamphlets	82
3. The market is a personal place to shop.....	84
Eye contact	84
Smiling	84
Humor.....	85
Attentiveness	86
Remembering customers	87
Transcending the booth as barrier	88
Trust	88
Better service than grocery store	89
Non-immediacy	90
4. Local consumption is beneficial	92
Environment.	92
Taste.	93
Anti-corporate sentiments	93
Economics	94
5. Family farms are important	95
Handmade products	95
Presence of children	96
Aesthetics	97
Chapter Six: Discussion.....	99
Summary of Findings	100
RQ1: Farmer persuasive messages and evidence	100
1. The quality of the products is superlative	100
2. The market is an educational space	100
3. The market is a personal place to shop	101
4. Local consumption is beneficial.....	101
5. Family farms are important	101
RQ2: Customer reactions to persuasive claims	102
1. The quality of the products is superlative	102
2. The market is an educational space	102
3. The market is a personal place to shop	102
4. Local consumption is beneficial.....	102
5. Family farms are important.	103
Theoretical Implications	103
Elaboration Likelihood Model	103
High versus low elaboration.....	104
Central route processing.....	105
Peripheral route processing	105
Dual process	107
Internal factors that influence central and peripheral processing.....	107
Personal relevance.....	107

Issue involvement.....	108
Personal responsibility	108
Prior knowledge	108
External factors that influence elaboration.....	109
Distractions.....	109
No forewarning of persuasion	109
Argument quality.....	109
A qualitative approach to central and peripheral processing.....	110
Confirmation of ELM.....	111
Customer prior knowledge	112
Customer personal relevance	112
Customer personal responsibility	113
Customer source liking.....	113
Customer source disliking.....	114
Customer trust in farmers' expertise	114
Customer trust in farmers' honesty	115
Customer mistrust of farmers' honesty	115
Customer trust in irrelevant evidence.....	116
Customer trust in crowds.....	116
Distractions.....	117
Farmers' time constraints	117
Customers' social agenda.....	118
Extension of ELM	118
Analyzing the rhetor's strategies.....	118
Farmer emphasis on source credibility.....	119
Farmer emphasis on education	119
Farmer's emphasis on irrelevant evidence	120
Farmer emphasis on source liking.....	121
Farmer comments generate customer skepticism.....	121
Contradiction of ELM	122
Low elaboration but central route processing	122
Evidence quality	123
Methodological contributions.....	124
Qualitative adaptation	124
Practical Implications	125
Farmers' markets	125
Farmers.....	125
Customers.....	126
Food communication scholars.....	127
Limitations	127
Suggestions for Future Research	128
References.....	130
Appendix A: HSCL Approval Letter	136

Appendix B: Oral Consent Form	137
Appendix C: Demographic Survey	138
Appendix D: Interview Protocol 1	139
Appendix E: Interview Protocol 2	140
Appendix F: Themes and Subthemes of RQ1.....	142
Appendix G: Themes and Subthemes of RQ2.....	143

Chapter One: Introduction and Rationale

Farmers' markets have been growing rapidly in the past few decades, and I believe certain interpersonal aspects of these markets contribute to market growth in a way that is not yet understood. Farmers' market growth is not due merely to customer sympathy for the "Mom and Pop" store. Rather, the personal quality of the farmers' market provides customers the ability to trust that the source of their food is safe and that the food is of high quality. In this project, I examine the persuasive messages farmers send customers, the types of evidence farmers use to support their claims, how customers respond to those persuasive messages, and the evidence customers report trusting when evaluating persuasive messages. Determining what persuasive strategies are most effective offers applications for farmers, customers, and communication scholars.

This study may be beneficial for individual farmers who want to improve their marketing strategies, and it may also benefit farmers' market organizations that want to appeal to more diverse populations by helping their vendors to market products more effectively. This study also may benefit customers by revealing what types of persuasive evidence farmers use to sell products and how they as consumers might be influenced by those strategies. Though naturalistic studies pose challenges, this dissertation demonstrates how scholars can study issues surrounding food-related topics. Indeed, the exchange of a tangible product (food) creates the possibility for an exchange of intangible ideas and values, and at farmers' markets, those intangible ideas are negotiated through persuasive interactions. A rich understanding of the persuasive relationship between farmers and customers reveals insights into farmers' market growth, persuasion, and the market context.

The recent growth of farmers' markets (Lyson, Gillespie Jr, & Hilchey, 1995; USDA, 2013) suggests that they provide perceived benefits conventional grocery stores do not, and a better understanding of the interpersonal and persuasive dimensions of markets may explain this difference. The prevalence of food discourses in the United States testifies to a rising interest in food and cooking. The rising interest in food is evident by growing numbers of farmers' markets (Gowin, 2009), the prevalence of food shows on TV networks (Cramer, 2011), food campaigns (Todd, 2011), and an increased desire for sustainable food systems (Alkon, 2008a; Kloppenburg, Lezberg, De Master, Stevenson, & Hendrickson, 2000). Customers go to farmers' markets to champion environmental causes, participate in local community, support individual farmers, buy healthier food, and gain a social experience they perceive to be more personal than that of a grocery store (Hunt, 2007; Lyson et al., 1995; Robinson & Hartenfeld, 2007; Trobe, 2001). However, little research has focused on the persuasive interaction between customers and farmers. Thus, a more thorough understanding of how farmers may influence customers in a market space is needed.

Markets have been on the rise for a number of reasons, including that they offer fresh, healthy, and environmentally friendly food (Brown, 2002; Feagan & Morris, 2009; Robinson & Hartenfeld, 2007; Trobe, 2001). However, farmers' markets also have a personal quality that distinguishes them from the grocery store. Part of the personal quality rests on persuasive communication. By analyzing farmers' persuasive strategies and message content, I uncover a deeper, more robust explanation for how concepts of trust and credibility function at markets. Trust and credibility are foundational for understanding why customers find markets appealing and help explain why markets have grown in recent decades.

This study expands our understanding of why farmers' markets have been so successful, offers insights into how persuasion functions in markets, and open up new avenues for communication scholarship in food exchange contexts. It also provides several practical implications for farmers, customers, and market managers.

First, this study fills a gap in our knowledge about how persuasive communication functions in farmers' markets. The current literature on farmers' markets offers adequate information about consumer buying habits and motivations (Feagan & Morris, 2009; Trobe, 2001; Zepeda & Li, 2006), and yet these market theorists tend to lump all interpersonal phenomena into one category labeled either "social" or "personal." These works also fail to interrogate how the social dynamic is based on persuasive communication in which a farmer convinces a customer to purchase products. Other studies focused on persuasion stop short by only examining whether marketing strategies work and ultimately fail to examine how interpersonal relationships and source credibility serve as mechanisms to make those marketing strategies function (Feagan & Morris, 2009; McGrath et al., 1993; Robinson & Hartenfeld, 2007). While these analyses demonstrate how the personal qualities of markets attract customers, they lack analytical depth when it comes to showing how factors like source credibility influence relationships and trust in the market space. For example, instead of relegating the customer-farmer relationship into the broad category of the "social" aspects of markets as many studies do, we need to understand how trust and credibility are built through conversation and interaction. In sum, the literature on the "social" aspect of market interactions needs more detailed attention.

Second, I argue that we are also in need of a critical approach to market relationships. The most thorough treatment of farmers' markets and relationships (Robinson & Hartenfeld, 2007) reveals how community and relationships can form in these spaces, but this work overly

romanticizes market relationships. Farmers' markets offer many positive social dimensions: nonconventional actions like loaning baskets and taking out-of-town checks, increased customer-farmer feedback, trust and support, and self-disclosure (Hunt, 2007; Robinson & Hartenfeld, 2007). In an earlier study (Garner, 2012), I found that negative attributes such as guilt and obligation also arise as a result of a personal food exchange. Hence, we need to examine how farmers' motivation to make money influences their actions and persuasive strategies. Several dimensions of the persuasive relationship between customers and farmers remain unanswered. If customers have relationships with farmers, how does this relationship influence how customers process persuasive arguments from those farmers? What claims are farmers making in this space, and what evidence are they utilizing to support their claims? How does the farmers' market setting filled with music and crowds influence the way customers approach farmer claims, and how closely do customers analyze these claims? I address these and related questions in this study.

Finally, this study, while not the first to examine markets as social places, represents a starting place for qualitative scholars interested in looking at persuasive communication from both marketing and relational points of view. In comparison to typical survey studies on farmers' markets, the ethnographic methods I used serve as more nuanced tools for uncovering the richness of persuasive communication strategies between farmer and customer. Despite the fact that concepts like credibility and evidence are vital to persuasion, these communication principles are largely nonexistent in past work. This study comes at a time when communication scholars have begun to address food and communication issues (Cramer, Greene, & Walters, 2011). In sum, critically analyzing the persuasive interaction between farmers and customers reveals rich applications for persuasion, farmers' markets, and communication scholarship.

Preview of Project

The next chapter (Chapter Two) explores the literature on farmers' market growth and the personal dimensions of farmers' markets to contextualize the research questions. Chapter Three outlines my use of semi-structured interviews and participant observation as data gathering techniques and fieldnotes as a record of observations. Chapter Three also details my use of the data analysis techniques of open and axial coding, constant comparison, and thematic analysis. Chapter Four provides the results surrounding the first research question, which examines the messages farmers send and the evidence they use to support these claims. Chapter Five provides the results of the second research question, which examines customer reactions to farmer messages and details the types of evidence customers use when making decisions. I present themes to address each research question. Chapter Six is the final chapter in which I make analytic connections between themes, explore implications for farmers' markets, and use the elaboration likelihood model of persuasion to help interpret and elucidate my results. Chapter Six also delineates the limitations of the current study and offers directions for future research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter provides a brief history of farmers' market growth and examines the personal nature of market interactions. The overview offers specific reasons why farmers' markets have grown in past decades. An analysis of the major reasons why people have shopped at farmers' markets in the past provides comparative data for analyzing the types of messages farmers send to customers. Further, it provides a contextual account of why farmers' markets have grown and examines possible motivations customers have for scrutinizing persuasive arguments about food products.

Explaining why farmers' markets have resurged in recent years is a complex issue. Many factors play a role in creating a renewed interest in alternative food, and based on current literature, I have discovered seven major reasons to explain farmers' market growth. Farmers' markets: (1) represent an alternative to industrialized agriculture, (2) foster sustainability, (3) allow urban populations access to rural life, (4) support local farming communities, (5) provide high quality food, (6) encourage community ties, and (7) offer more interpersonally rich shopping experiences. Much of the literature focuses on food preferences, as well as economic and environmental reasons for going to farmers' markets. Some work on relational and community dimensions of markets also exists, but many of these studies lack depth when it comes to explaining interpersonal dynamics and tensions. In the following sections, I provide a brief overview of the major reasons researchers have identified to explain customer motivations for shopping at farmers' markets and then discuss why interpersonal aspects of markets may represent potentially rich but underexplored motivations. Farmers' markets serve as an ideal case study to analyze how persuasion and persuasive communication function in a naturalistic setting.

Farmers' Market Growth

The number of farmers' markets and the amount of market sales has increased dramatically in recent decades. While the rise of supermarkets in the United States (U.S.) led to a diminishing number of farmers' markets from the 1920s to the 1980s, since then, farmers' markets have regained strength (Lyson et al., 1995; Trobe, 2001; USDA, 2013). In the 1960s, there were reportedly only a few hundred farmers' markets in the U.S., but that number grew to over 3,000 by the year 2000 (A. Brown, 2002). In the U.S. and Canada, farmers' markets increased from around 1,000 in the 1990s to about 5,000 in 2009 (Gowin, 2009). Today, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) recognizes more than 8,000 registered farmers' markets (USDA, 2013). Estimates for farmers' market sales in 2005 were projected at \$1 billion, a 13% increase since 2000 (C. Brown & Miller, 2008). However, sales still add up to less than 1% of the American food market (Winne, 2008). Despite the small market share, increased numbers of markets and growing sales represent a dissatisfaction some American consumers have with mainstream food sources (Katz, 2010; Retzinger, 2008; Winne, 2008).

Many consumers now want food grown organically for health and environmental reasons, and farmers at markets typically sell organic food or food grown in environmentally friendly ways. As a testament to increased customer demand for organic food, the amount of certified organic farmland quadrupled from 1992 to 2005, even though it currently only adds up to .5% of American cropland (Retzinger, 2008). While not all farmers' market food is organic, many market vendors offer the organic food customers want. People espouse organic food for health reasons, and organic growing methods are supposed to be more environmentally friendly. Farmers' markets offer consumers these benefits by shortening food miles between production and consumption, selling environmentally friendly food, creating a sense of community, and

rebuilding trust in the food supply (Alkon, 2008b; McGrath et al., 1993; Retzinger, 2008; Robinson & Hartenfeld, 2007). So, farmers' markets fill a niche in consumer demand for organic or environmentally friendly food.

Avoiding Industrialized Agriculture

Farmers' markets represent an alternative to industrialized agriculture and many negative practices associated with it. Customers associate industrialized agriculture with large-scale pesticide use, unethical treatment of workers, and environmental degradation (Alkon, 2008a, 2008b; Retzinger, 2008). For some, supporting local farmers at the market "represents a conscious choice to opt out of the industrialized model of food production that demonstrates concern for their individual health as well as the health of the planet by eating locally, eating seasonally, and eating whole and unprocessed foods" (Retzinger, 2008, p. 252). Customers support local farmers because they see something they do not like in industrialized agriculture, and farmers' markets offer an improved option (Alkon, 2008a; Robinson & Hartenfeld, 2007). One of the implicit complaints about industrialized agriculture stems from the fact that consumers cannot see or know how their food was produced. Some theorists claim that farmers' markets offer transparency and allow customers greater confidence that farmers produced the food in environmentally conscious ways (Robinson & Hartenfeld, 2007).

Fostering Sustainability

Sustainability at the farmers' market has social, economic, and environmental dimensions. Sustainability serves a prominent role in farmers' market success, but the vagueness with which people use the term "sustainability" diminishes its significance. Prominent food writers like Michael Pollan (2007, 2008) have explored the environmental dimension of sustainability by revealing how much of our food is made with unknown chemicals, shipped

from afar, and damages the environment. Other researchers have voiced concerns about social sustainability, such as the terrible working conditions for employees of meat packing plants (Stull & Broadway, 2004). One study argued a sustainable food system should be ecologically viable and ethical, enhance resources, produce healthy food, and prioritize environmental and social issues (Kloppenburger et al., 2000). Because farmers' market organizations often advocate for environmental issues and express concerns about negative human labor practices, many feel they represent a more ethical and healthy way of consuming.

Environmental concerns. Many people attend the market out of concern for the environment (Alkon, 2008b; Retzinger, 2008), but environmental values do not seem to be as motivating in getting people to attend markets as other factors (Andreatta & Wickliffe, 2002; Feagan & Morris, 2009). Even still, markets offer customers a venue to voice their discontentment with industrial-scale agriculture through local consumption. From one standpoint, farmers' markets represent an environmental choice, and dollars spent at the market "constitute a form of a political action and power" (Retzinger, 2008, pp. 251-252). However, a comparative study of two California farmers' markets revealed that while environmental issues were an underlying principle for both markets, patrons at each market reflected differing levels of environmental concern (Alkon, 2008b). In another study, around 40% of respondents cited a general concern for the environment, but it was only "sporadically voiced" (Feagan & Morris, 2009, p. 239). Environmentalism undergirds the farmers' market philosophy, even if it serves a background role to concerns like obtaining fresh produce and supporting local farmers.

Ethically produced food. Some associate farmers' markets with food produced in more ethically conscious ways, and the phrase ethically conscious typically includes producing food in a way that protects the environment, is fair to human workers, and is humane to animals (Alkon

& McCullen, 2011; Kloppenburg, Lezberg, De Master, Stevenson, & Hendrickson, 2000; Robinson & Hartenfeld, 2007). For example, Kloppenburg et al. (2000) argue that a sustainable food system involves, among other factors, treating workers and animals humanely during production and harvest. Some claim that farmers' markets help assure ethical treatment of animals, humans, and the environment by "restoring consumer confidence and increasing product traceability" (Trobe, 2001, p. 183). Others assert that agricultural practices at markets are transparent, and face-to-face interaction with farmers who oversee food in nearly every stage of production gives customers confidence that the food has been produced ethically (Hunt, 2007; Kloppenburg et al., 2000; Robinson & Hartenfeld, 2007; Trobe, 2001). Farmers' markets, then, are often associated with food production methods that are considered more ethical.

Allowing Urban Populations Access to Rural Life

For urban populations, farmers' markets offer a taste of rural life (McGrath, Sherry, & Heisley, 1993). For some, the dearth of agricultural land in urban environments creates the desire to reconnect to nature through consumption. Customers attending farmers' markets sometimes yearn for a reconnection with nature, and concepts like "purity, health, and nature are given a central position in an urban environment ordinarily perceived by consumers to be far removed from nature" (McGrath et al., 1993, p. 308). By purchasing farm-raised food locally, customers can vicariously participate in concepts like "honesty, health, and hearth idealistically associated with rural life" (Robinson & Hartenfeld, 2007, p. 123). However, urban populations that romanticize markets as representative of a simple, former golden era of farm life may over-idealize the benefits that markets provide (Robinson & Hartenfeld, 2007). For instance, idealization can lead to misrepresentations of the "family farm" as a racially white concept that obscures minority labor in agriculture (Colasanti, Conner, & Smalley, 2010). This obfuscation of

labor contrasts with other theorists' claims that market practices are transparent (Robinson & Hartenfeld, 2007). Despite these challenges, farmers' markets allow customers to vicariously connect with nature.

Supporting Local Farming Communities

Purchasing "local" food helps communities by encouraging regional economic development, allowing customers and local farmers to meet, and increasing regional qualities of food. Local consumption most often means buying food from farms located within a given radius, typically less than 50-100 miles, and local consumption offers certain advantages. Farmers have direct access to a market, the local economy benefits from money being pumped back into the local system, and customers have the chance to form friendships with people who raise their food (Feagan & Morris, 2009). Cutting out the middleman allows the farmer to realize more money, and for better or worse, it also creates a direct connection between farmer and consumer. Social ties with the farmers' market represent an "uncommodifiable identity of place" (Hunt, 2007, p. 64). Food and farmers are grounded in particular geographic places that resist commodification while increasing local and regional qualities. By purchasing local foods, people contribute to the economic and social growth of their communities. However, some argue that the benefits of local food consumption should not be exaggerated and represent only modest improvements to food systems (Hinrichs, 2003).

Providing High Quality Food

Fresh produce. Another major reason people go to farmers' markets is simply to buy high quality, fresh produce (Brown, 2002). Consumers believe they get fresher, better quality products at markets than anywhere else. In fact, obtaining fresh products motivates people to go to farmers' markets more than other factors (Andreatta & Wickliffe, 2002; Feagan & Morris,

2009). In one analysis, the most common motivation for going to a farmers' market was to find fresh food, and over 70% of survey respondents felt farmers' market food was fresher than food from other outlets (Feagan & Morris, 2009). Historical analyses of markets demonstrate that the opportunity to buy fresh and high-quality products has motivated patrons to shop at farmers' markets for decades (A. Brown, 2002). The desire for freshness reflects patrons' lackluster view of typical supermarket produce and motivates customers to seek out shopping venues like farmers' markets.

Encouraging Community Ties

Advocates of markets claim community life is central to the farmers' market experience (Feagan & Morris, 2009; Robinson & Hartenfeld, 2007). The term "community" refers to a social bond with a group of people who provide mutual support grounded in a local place where people speak a common social language and agree on basic values (Hyland & Hyland, 2005; Moore, 1996; Oldenburg, 1999). Further, Moore (1996) writes:

Communities provide intellectual, moral, and social values that give purpose to survival.

Community members share an identity, speak a common language, agree upon role definitions, share common values, assume some permanent membership status, and understand the social boundaries within which they operate. (p. 30)

In addition to Moore's (1996) definition, Oldenburg (1999) argues community often resides in third places, places distinct from home (first place) and work (second place) where people can hang out and make community ties (Oldenburg, 1999). Cafés, coffee shops, and bookstores where people hang out, meet others, and socialize often serve as third places. Community, then, is both a place and a social connection. Markets seem to fit the definition: they occur in a

physical place (often in central locations downtown), generate common values surrounding food production, and help foster social bonds between farmers and customers.

Markets can potentially benefit local communities by providing valuable social resources, diverse products, and economic stimulation. Several scholars have documented how markets create vibrant community life (Feagan & Morris, 2009; Robinson & Hartenfeld, 2007). One farmers' market analysis detailed how customers look to markets as a source of community and friendship (Robinson & Hartenfeld, 2007). Other theorists have noted the community benefits of markets. For example, Lyson et al. (1995) contend:

They [markets] can nurture local economic development, maintain diversity and quality in products, and provide opportunities for producers and consumers to come together to solidify bonds of local identity and solidarity. (p. 112)

The potential to form community bonds is one reason markets are appealing places to shop. If farmers' markets prove to be a strong locus of support and community formation, then they represent a powerful resource for individuals by giving them access to knowledge, friendship, and various types of aid.

Embeddedness. Farmers' markets are embedded in particular communities. Markets exist within different geographic and social contexts, and these contextual factors play a role in shaping the market (Feagan & Morris, 2009). Social embeddedness means that relationships formed at farmers' markets occur within a localized social community. In other words, people attending markets interact with farmers who live in the region. According to Hunt (2007):

Social interactions are a key component of farmers' markets, supporting information sharing between consumers and producers in fostering community interactions. Since the

economic interactions are socially embedded, product and community identities are linked through these exchanges. (p. 64)

A customer who attends a local market is socially embedded in specific time and place. Spatial embeddedness means farmers' markets are embedded in particular geographic regions, and products sold in that region are influenced by local weather and geographic terrain. Farmers' market food bears the stamp of local weather, geography, and taste that comes with regional food consumption. Not all markets in the U.S. are the same, and market variation is due in part to social and geographical differences.

Buying locally. Buying local products has emerged as a new value across the U.S., and buying local food engenders economic, taste, environmental, and social benefits. Consuming food from nearby farmers' markets represents one way to participate in local shopping. Most farmers live within 50 to 100 miles of the farmers' market (Feagan & Morris, 2009) and the proximity generates the spatial embeddedness mentioned previously. Further, local geographical boundaries encourage the production of regionally-based food items (Hunt, 2007). Buying locally helps economies by supporting nearby farmers, improving product freshness, and contributing to more sustainable practices (Feagan & Morris, 2009; Lyson et al., 1995; Trobe, 2001). Customers may gain satisfaction that they are supporting farmers, buying ethically produced food, and supporting local agricultural communities. Farmers who can make a living selling ethically produced food at local markets avoid being forced to ship their products afar.

Civic activism. There is not enough evidence to tell whether markets encourage political engagement, but markets may serve as a social gathering place that fosters community activism. Civic activism stresses qualities of the ideal citizen who should vote, get involved in local community life, and participate in social organizations. Organizations such as the Kiwanis Club,

the Lions Club, certain political organizations, art leagues, and churches exemplify civic engagement. Some observers fear American civic life has been on the decline for decades (Putnam, 2000) and farmers' markets may be able to rebuild interest in civic life. For example, one market McGrath et al. (1993) described aimed to rebuild civic life downtown and create a more varied shopping experience. Additionally, markets stimulate local economies and can foster community identity (Lyson et al., 1995).

Upper-class community. Consuming local, fresh food is a privilege not all can afford. Despite the potential benefits of the civic life of markets, the community formed at farmers' markets does not benefit all populations. Economic and social barriers prevent some from shopping at farmers' markets. Farmers' markets most often cater to white, middle- and upper-class people (often populations over 50 years old) who have affluence and time. Minorities do occasionally sell at and attend markets (Alkon, 2008a, 2008b), but these and low-income populations often face class barriers (Colasanti et al., 2010). While patrons at some markets say price is not as important as social enjoyment and community (Feagan & Morris, 2009), price remains a determining factor for lower-income populations (Colasanti et al., 2010). Thus, market communities often reflect a certain segment of the population: older, white, middle-class patrons with time and money to spend.

Conflict. Despite the general homogeneity of market customers, differences and disagreements among patrons do exist. Economic, class, and racial similarities do not preclude political, religious, and other differences. For example, conflict may arise during election years when market customers show public support for different political candidates (Robinson & Hartenfeld, 2007). People also rub shoulders with others in markets that differ across categories such as "modesty, dress, affection, religion, politics, and national allegiance" (Robinson &

Hartenfeld, 2007, p. 125). Personal differences exist under the veneer of similarity. While some common values of freshness, localism, and creating community may unite customers, issues like politics and religion can break them apart again when the public expression of those political or social values is sanctioned. The pursuit of ethically produced and high quality food consumption can help people transcend differences.

Offering More Interpersonally Rich Shopping Experiences

Farmers' markets provide interpersonally rich shopping experiences in contrast to impersonal, anonymous grocery stores (Robinson & Hartenfeld, 2007; Sommer, Herrick, & Sommer, 1981; Trobe, 2001). The increased interpersonal richness at markets undoubtedly influences customer perceptions of farmers and markets. While not all people attend farmers' markets for conversation and relational interactions, many do. Farmers' markets possess a greater degree of personal qualities than traditional grocery stores (Robinson & Hartenfeld, 2007; Trobe, 2001), and some researchers go so far as to say that farmers' markets are "more friendly, personal, and happier settings than supermarkets" (Trobe, 2001, p. 183). Yet the research exploring why people perceive farmers' markets as more "personal" proves theoretically thin and needs further explanation. Based on my reading of the literature, "personalness," or the abstract quality that makes markets more interpersonally rich, rests on at least six composite qualities: (1) sociality, (2) nonconventional actions, (3) trust and responsibility, (4) direct interaction with farmers, (5) feedback, and (6) self-disclosure (Feagan & Morris, 2009; Lyson, Gillespie Jr, & Hilchey, 1995; Robinson & Hartenfeld, 2007; Trobe, 2001). All of these factors contribute to the idea that markets personalize food exchange.

Sociality. Personalness, or the personal quality of markets, means that people go to markets to interact with others, have conversations, and simply be in the presence of others.

Some customers perceive farmers' markets as friendly places where vendors take time to have a conversation. By contrast, "In a supermarket, everybody is in a hurry" (Feagan & Morris, 2009, p. 240). Some patrons attend a farmers' market, but do not buy anything; they simply want to participate in local community life (Robinson & Hartenfeld, 2007).

The social side of farmers' markets may prove to be as compelling for patrons as the food that is sold at the market. Farmers and market coordinators who act friendly and encourage social interaction reinforce an image of markets as social places to shop. By contrast, Sommer et al. (1981) argue that traditional grocery store design discourages social interaction. For example, structural elements like shelf height prevent talking across to other shoppers, single-file check-out lines do not encourage interaction, the management is typically located in an office out of view, supermarket workers tend to be scarce, and there are few social places to sit in supermarkets (Sommer et al., 1981). These attributes, and others, appear to contribute to the perception that supermarkets do not encourage lingering (Feagan & Morris, 2009). In one analysis, a significant number of people at farmers' markets arrived in groups, while a majority at supermarkets arrived alone, which signals that people do not view the grocery store as a social place (Sommer et al., 1981). Additionally, Sommer et al. (1981) discovered that customers were four times more likely to interact with a seller at a farmers' market than at a supermarket. In sum, the fact that supermarkets seem to discourage interaction and farmers' markets foster interaction establishes farmers' markets as a social space.

Nonconventional actions. Nonconventional actions mark farmers' markets as personal places to shop. Nonconventional actions refer to personalized actions that occur at farmers' markets but typically do not occur in conventional grocery stores. At the farmers' market, vendors may accept personal and out-of-town checks, loan things like baskets to customers, let

customers defer payment if that customer lacks adequate cash, or place orders a week in advance (McGrath et al., 1993; Robinson & Hartenfeld, 2007). Conventional grocery stores tend not to offer these options. At times, farmers offer nonmonetary benefits such as recipes, explanations on how to cook unfamiliar foods, and advice on planting and growing. Farmers and customers may exchange gifts, take an interest in each other's lives, and call one another by name (Robinson & Hartenfeld, 2007). Customers even sometimes report back to farmers on how cooking ventures turned out (Robinson & Hartenfeld, 2007). Traditional grocery stores extend fewer nonconventional actions to customers. The farmers' market distinguishes itself from supermarkets by creating a personal shopping experience where nonconventional actions can happen.

Trust and responsibility. People no longer assume their food is grown in an ethical or healthful way in conventional grocery stores, and a fear of unethical and environmentally damaging food production methods has generated more interest in alternative food sources like farmers' markets. Customers want to trust their food supply, and negative byproducts of traditional agricultural practices have made some people fear their food. One researcher explains:

By the 1970s, hippies, health aficionados, and overeducated young people, including myself, had developed an uneasy sensation that there was something wrong with our food system. This growing awareness incited a number of disenchanted food fighters into food co-ops (sometimes called 'food conspiracies'), organic gardens, farms, communes, and other virtuous attempts to avoid an existential crisis of food....it was farmers' market organizing that established the first successful beachhead in the fight to overhaul the food system. (Winne, 2008, p. 45)

Mistrust of the food system resulted in farmers' markets being viewed by many as bastions of health, ethics, and sustainability (Winne, 2008). Some customers' mistrust of the industrial American food system has driven them to more accountable food sources. Hence, market success is due in part to the perception that local markets champion trust and responsibility. Farmers' markets serve as a remedy to consumer fears by providing a trusted source where people can get the food they want. Markets bear the burden of leading the way and providing a needed service that traditional stores fail to offer. Customers go to farmers' markets because they want ethical, environmentally friendly, and organic food (Feagan & Morris, 2009; Katz, 2010; Robinson & Hartenfeld, 2007).

As an example, Robinson and Hartenfeld (2007) reported that in their study, one market customer worried about food security and mitigated these fears by purchasing food face-to-face from the growers. By entering into a partnership of mutual responsibility, the vendors account for the quality of their food and growing practices, and customers support farmer businesses through patronage. Farmers' markets have come to represent ethical food production in contrast to industrialized agriculture. Industrialized agriculture often does not prioritize values that sustainable and ethical food systems advocate for, such as environmental preservation, fair labor practices, health, etc.; see Kloppenburg et al. (2000) for a full definition of sustainable food systems. Customers wanting assurance that a food product was grown sustainably may visit farms, witness agricultural practices for themselves, or simply choose to trust the farmer.

Customers in a Canadian farmers' market prioritized "trust, social interaction, and responsibility" (Feagan & Morris, 2009, p. 236). Vendors also implicitly request trust when they advertise that their products are uncertified organic and not government certified, a legal status which is expensive for small farmers. For example, a farmer may have a sign that reads,

“organically grown,” but not have government certification. Customers then can choose to trust or mistrust that the farmer grew the product according to organic standards. Because most customers will not visit each farm to inspect practices, “customers must rely on the integrity of the growers and the diligence of the market administrators” (Robinson & Hartenfeld, 2007, p. 106). By purchasing food from a farmer at a market, customers have a face and a conversation to accompany the product. Ultimately, trust in the market rests upon trust in each individual farmer. Customers benefit by knowing their purchases were ethically and healthfully grown.

Direct interaction with farmers. Seeing farmers face-to-face, forming relationships, and conversing with farmers about production methods help consumers gain confidence in market products. Direct interaction with farmers helps generate relationships based on personalness and trust. As one researcher argued, “there is a trust here that you don't have in stores” (McGrath et al., 1993, p. 304). Trust can occur when customers asking for advice about food, agricultural production, and trusting suggestions. Further, McGrath et al. (1993) note, “In addition to a proactive teaching role, vendors are viewed as agricultural experts and asked advice by consumers” (p. 306). However, customers may not always trust farmers.

Feedback. Feedback represents another personal quality of farmers’ markets that distinguishes them from traditional grocery stores. Feedback allows customers to give instant input to farmers about what they (customers) would like in a product. Consumer feedback “allows farmers to be responsive to customer demands” (Hunt, 2007, p. 63). Unlike large industrial food chain supplies, the short distance between farmer and customer allows instant feedback the farmer can use to change practices within a single season instead of waiting a whole season or longer (Hunt, 2007). The quicker feedback loop distinguishes farmers’ markets from large grocery chains and provides an extra benefit by giving patrons more influence over

products sold. Giving feedback to a person rather than a corporation empowers the customer and helps farmers better estimate what products customers will buy.

Self-disclosure. Markets can serve as social spaces, but whether customers form meaningful relationships with farmers depends on how much both parties self-disclose. During market conversations, people may reveal information about themselves to one another and form new relationships. The farmers' market "opens possibilities for shared histories, dialogue, and interdependence" (Robinson & Hartenfeld, 2007, p. 123). Self-disclosure may play a role in creating the personal nature of markets, and the possibility to form meaningful relationships through self-disclosure may be a powerful motivator.

Overall, all of the factors: the personal and social aspects of markets, nonconventional actions, trust, feedback, and self-disclosure make farmers' markets seem more personal. Not everyone will experience the possible benefits, but for many, the potentially powerful outcomes may generate a strong motivation to go to the farmers' market. Farmers and customers exist in a reciprocal relationship based on trust and disclosure. Farmers, too, benefit from having loyal customers who patronize their farms and who may give them emotional support. This type of relationship sharply contrasts with traditional grocery stores where customers do not see farmers and farmers do not have direct contact with the people who consume their products. If patrons and farmers can tap into positive relationships at farmers' markets, then they can gain social, emotional, and marketing resources.

An inherent aspect of the customer-farmer interpersonal relationship at farmers' markets involves persuasion and credibility. In other words, farmers attempt to persuade customers to purchase products. Surprisingly, currently no researchers have analyzed how persuasion functions between farmer and customer in the farmers' market setting. Much of the current work

on farmers' markets charts consumer preferences (Andreatta & Wickliffe, 2002; Brown, 2002; Feagan & Morris, 2009; Hunt, 2007; Trobe, 2001) but fails to analyze how those preferences play out on an interpersonal level. Robinson and Hartenfeld (2007) describe how at the market they studied, customers trusted farmers to truthfully communicate about how food was grown. Yet customers may not actually go visit a farm or witness agricultural production themselves. Customers must either trust farmers or not. No analyses have examined what factors make farmers at markets trustworthy or credible.

The concept of credibility is central to communication scholarship. In fact, credibility is one of the "oldest communication concepts" (Self, 1996, p.435). Some theorists cite historical definitions of credibility, such as Aristotle's notion that credibility involves character, intelligence, and good will (McCroskey & Young, 1981). More contemporary analyses of credibility often refer to this concept as source credibility, or the trustworthiness of the message source (McCroskey & Young, 1981; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). In terms of public speaking, Hogan, Andrews, Andrews, and Williams (2014) argue that credibility involves being "knowledgeable, widely read, and able to respond to challenging questions" (p.201). Similarly, Self (1996) uses the words "believability, trust, [and] perceived reliability" as synonyms for credibility (p. 435). At the farmers' market, farmers attempt to persuade customers to purchase products. Yet questions about how credibility functions during this interaction remain unanswered. For example, what strategies do farmers use to build credibility? What types of persuasive messages necessitate more complex credibility statements? How do customers respond to farmers' persuasive messages and attempts to build credibility? These and related questions remain unanswered. To analyze how persuasion plays out between farmers and customers at markets, I examined two basic research questions.

Research Questions

RQ1: What persuasive messages do farmers send customers and what types of evidence do they use when making persuasive claims at farmers' markets?

RQ2: How do customers respond to farmer persuasive messages and what types of evidence do customers use when evaluating farmer persuasive claims at farmers' markets?

I answer these two research questions by analyzing the types of messages farmers send customers. The overarching messages reveal both the content of farmers' persuasive messages and the evidence farmers used to support those claims. I also analyze customer responses to farmer messages and examine the evidence customers trust when making decisions. The subsequent chapter (Chapter Three) details the methods and procedures used in this study.

Chapter Three: Method

Participants

I interviewed 36 people (18 female, 18 male; average age = 43.9 years) in depth from the Downtown Lawrence Farmers' Market (DLFM) in Lawrence, Kansas, and observed 100 hours of market interactions. Seven of the interviews were with farmers and 29 were with customers. I interviewed 18 of the participants in pairs and the other 18 participants individually. Interviewing in pairs meant that husbands, wives, or friends sometimes contradicted each other during the interview. On several occasions, people corrected their partners about something the other had said, which added complexity and richness to the data. Interviews lasted from 52 to 91 minutes, with an average interview time of 64.6 minutes. Interviews were transcribed both by me and with the help of a transcription service (Transcription Hub). Any identifying participant information was removed before being sent to the transcription service. I verified the transcriptions for accuracy. Interview transcripts yielded 1,128 double-spaced pages of text.

From April 13, 2013, to August 31, 2013, I observed 100 hours of market interactions spanning 28 separate market days: 9 observations at the Tuesday market and 19 observations at the Saturday market. During observations, I talked with people informally about their farmers' market experience. At the beginning, I spent each Saturday observing a different vendor to analyze their interactions with customers. On many of these observation days, I observed the vendor the entire four-hour market period. Overall, I spent at least an hour with 14 different vendors and minor observations (15-30 minutes) with 7 other vendors. I recorded my observations as fieldnotes, and they totaled 282 double-spaced pages of text.

Fieldnotes are written notes, typically done at the end of each day in the field, that describe the researcher's observations (Sanjek, 1990). I walked around, observed farmers and

customers, bought food, took photographs, and hung out with farmers. I then went home and developed scratch notes into fully formed fieldnotes. All participants were over the age of 18. Further, the University of Kansas Institutional Review Board approved all methods and procedures for this study (see Appendix A).

Research Context



The Downtown Lawrence Farmers' Market (DLFM) is located in downtown Lawrence, Kansas, in two parking lots on New Hampshire Street between 8th and 9th Streets. The market is open on Tuesday afternoon (4:00-6:00 p.m.) and on Saturday morning (7:00-11:00 a.m.). The market occupies two adjacent lots, and the city allows the market organization the use of the lots. An alley bifurcates the two parking lots. The structural layout creates a figure-eight walking pattern for customers. The DLFM is a producer-only market, and this means farmers are required to produce all products they sell. For example, this policy prohibits shipping in fruit from the

neighboring state of Colorado to sell at the market. To support locally sourced food, the market management stipulates that food must typically be produced within a 50-75 mile radius of Lawrence. Though the number of vendors fluctuates from week to week, the market manager told me the peak summer Saturday market routinely has more than 100 vendors.

In the summer of 2013, the Kansas Department of Health and Environment conducted a rapid market assessment that indicated 7,523 people attended the market on a Saturday (A. Randles, personal communication, September 11, 2013). The Tuesday market is much smaller, ranging from 10 to 12 vendors weekly. The market assistant gave me four Tuesdays of customer attendance counts that averaged out to 137 adults per week. The Saturday market offers music, special events, and a sense of community interaction. Some people consider the Saturday market a ritual. Common components of market rituals include spending time with family, seeing friends, walking dogs, and eating breakfast. People routinely hang out for an hour or more socializing. Customers attending the Tuesday market are more utilitarian in purpose, lingering less, and shopping to fill gaps in their weekly produce.

Others consider the Saturday farmers' market a festival. For instance, the DLFM allows dogs on non-retractable leashes and many customers come to walk their dogs, socialize with other dog owners, and let their dogs socialize with other dogs. Others attend the market just to watch the musicians. Musicians create an extra layer of entertainment within the market, and customers often donate money into the musician's instrument case or bucket. The genre of the music tends to align with folk music or bluegrass, which both emphasize unamplified instruments. However, one band plays Zydeco music occasionally. Other customers talked about the importance of getting breakfast at the market, and one of the most popular stalls is run by a local restaurant owner who sells homemade tamales and burritos. In addition, other popular food

options include coffee, sausage biscuits, and cinnamon rolls. People who purchase hot food can either eat while they walk around or sit down at one of the handful of plastic picnic tables that the market manager sets up in the southeast corner of the market. Overall, the entertainment atmosphere encourages lingering. While the vendors bring products and arrange their booths aesthetically, the market management is more responsible for creating a festive atmosphere. The market manager often, but not always, arranges schedules with musicians to come play, coordinates special events, and sets out signs and banners.

Despite its informal and spontaneous appearance, the market is a highly structured organization and business. The market manager organizes where vendors are located, resolves disputes, sets up tables, arranges for facilities such as the portable bathroom, and manages day-to-day operations. Vendors pay fees to gain the use of stalls, and these fees pay for bills such as the manager's salary, insurance, marketing, and the use of the portable bathroom. Vendors sign a yearly contract and agree to abide by the market bylaws.

There are two basic types of vendor status: permanent stall holder and floater. Permanent stall holders pay in advance for the entire season and are guaranteed use of the same stall space each week. Permanent stall holders can show up later in the morning (typically between 6:00-6:30 a.m.). Farmers who are permanent stall holders have typically participated at the market for a greater number of years and have attended more consistently than floaters. Floaters are vendors who do not have a permanent status and must arrive Saturday morning at 5:30 a.m. in order to get a stall; stalls are not guaranteed. Typically, no farmer is turned away, however, and the market manager works to find every vendor a place to sell their products. Floaters pay either for the entire season or weekly. Most vendors desperately want a permanent stall because they believe it helps their sales and brand recognition.

Booth norms influence social interaction. Customers typically interact at the front or the side of a farmer's booth. One customer called the area directly in front of the booth the "selling" space. At the front of the booth, most conversation topics involve food or agriculture. Here, customers do not chat as long because they do not want to interfere with the farmers making a sale (unless there is no one waiting), and both customer and farmer seem to be more conscious of time. The "side" of the booth is the place where conversations go on for more extended periods, and people tell me they gravitate here so they can keep talking and yet get out of the way of the selling space. Side booth conversations with farmers tend to be reserved for family, friends, other farmers, and customers that the farmer has gotten to know more personally. Topics at the side booth could include anything: growing plants, agricultural methods, personal issues, family and health, vendor-to-vendor advice and support on selling or growing, and more. Behind the booth is the vendors' space, and customers typically do not go behind the booth. In sum, these spatial norms affect farmer-customer interaction.

Procedures

The ethnographic methods of participant observation and semi-structured interviews were appropriate for gathering the kinds of data that I was interested in—perceptions, social knowledge, real-time interactions between customers and farmers, and conversation. My goal with observation and fieldnotes was to analyze how farmers and customers interact by using thick description so that when I went to answer my research questions, my fieldnotes contained the raw data I needed. Thick description, as Geertz (2001) suggests, reflects a portrayal of tensions, nuances, and fully formed, detailed descriptions. I wanted to know how people perceive customer-farmer interaction at the farmers' market, and qualitative, interpretive data were appropriate for this aim. Rooted in symbolic interactionism, my research privileges perceptions

and experience with the understanding that qualitative work “rests on the importance of interpretation and understanding as key features of social life” (Denzin, 2001, p. 2). Many times, this meant that when I saw something unusual, I would tap a farmer or customer on the shoulder and say, “What just happened there?” or “Who was that?”

My strategy was to observe first and build an interview protocol (Appendix D) that included questions about actions I had observed at the market. From April (2013) through May (2013), I did six weeks of observation before I started my interviews. I then interviewed 16 people (out of 36). After interviewing those participants, I took what I had learned from the interviews and observed another five weeks from the beginning of June (2013) to the second week of July (2013). During this five-week observation period, old questions became saturated with the same answers, and new questions arose. To answer these new questions, I revised my original interview protocol. The primary difference between the two protocols was that protocol 1 focused on general interaction patterns between farmers and customers, and protocol 2 was narrower and examined persuasive messages exchanged between farmers and customers. Armed with new observations and a revised interview protocol (Appendix E), I interviewed another 20 participants (for a total of 36 participants). I followed those interviews up with four more weeks of observation through the end of August (2013).

I recruited participants in a number of ways. Most participants had also participated in a survey I had conducted for market management. The results of that survey are not relevant to this project, other than to explain that I used it as a recruitment tool. Over the past two years, I have become a member of the farmers’ market community. In December 2011, I became a community board member of the DLFM. I have served on two hiring committees, conducted a survey of over 260 customers, and presented that research to vendors. Hence, I am also involved in the

market community in that capacity. While my own perceptions enter the picture via fieldnotes, I prioritized participant voices above my own experiences. While participant voices were foregrounded, I also recognized that I played a central role in constructing and framing the narrative. My own understanding and member status at the farmers' market also helped me generate relevant interview questions, connect with participants, and effectively analyze the data.

In the survey, some participants agreed to be interviewed in person. I contacted these participants via email and telephone to schedule interviews. I also recruited a small number of my sample through snowball sampling. I first explained to participants my research and gained oral consent to participate (Appendix B). I then had participants fill out a short, one-page demographic survey (see Appendix C) before proceeding to the main interview. The demographic survey asked questions about: age, sex, income level, and related information about motivations to attend or sell at the market. When the participant completed the demographic survey, I began the interview with simple, easy to answer questions such as: "Tell me about some of the reasons you wrote that motivate you to attend farmers' markets." Once I established basic rapport, I proceeded to more focused questions such as: "Describe the relationships you have with farmers." Since interviews were relatively long (52-91 minutes; average length = 64.6 minutes), part of my strategy was to allow time for in-depth elaboration of thoughts, feelings, and perceptions. I also allowed participants to go off script if they mentioned something new. I gave all participants pseudonyms to protect their privacy.

My research protocol served as a framework to question participants about customer-farmer interaction. The first interview protocol (Appendix D) included 18 basic questions that got reworked into protocol 2 (Appendix E), which consisted of a revised 20-question list. Despite my use of specific questions, I remained committed to the principle of emergent data changing or

adding to my question protocol (Charmaz, 2006). For example, early on in my data gathering process, a customer discussed how farmers' booths serve as a type of barrier. I added that item to the revised protocol and asked other customers if that influenced interaction. The combination of structure and flexibility during the interview process allowed for gathering multiple sources of useful data.

As mentioned previously, my observations (translated into fieldnotes) comprised a major portion of my data gathering. Fieldnotes allowed me to record data that might not otherwise emerge in an interview. Fieldnotes not only helped contextualize the transcribed interviews but also helped provide triangulation support for my assertions (Warren & Karner, 2010). Triangulation, a qualitative technique whereby the researcher compares data from multiple sources, increases validity (Sanjek, 1990; Warren & Karner, 2010). I used my observations to corroborate interview data, combined with the existing literature, to see if all three of these sources (observations, interviews, literature) pointed in the same direction.

Data Analysis

I used several qualitative analysis techniques to explicate my data. After my first six-week observation period, I used techniques such as open and axial coding (Charmaz, 2006; Warren & Karner, 2010), thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Owen, 1984; Ryan & Bernard, 2003), and constant comparison (Charmaz, 2006) to analyze my interview transcripts. These techniques are epistemologically appropriate to use with qualitative research because they are grounded in the assumption that humans are subjective beings who make interpretations about the social world. Further, these techniques helped answer my research questions by allowing me to uncover member meanings and conceptual categories.

Open coding led to descriptive names, or codes, for paragraphs and sections of the transcripts. Open coding emphasizes reading interview data without prior thematic categories (Warren & Karner, 2010). At this first stage, my methodological approach was to remain open to new ideas, stay close to the data, and move quickly through to see the big picture (Charmaz, 2006). I compared interview transcripts to my fieldnotes using constant comparison, or the frequent oscillation between data sources (Charmaz, 2006). For example, as interviews led to the production of themes, I referred to my fieldnotes to find support or contradiction for my emerging theories. I jotted down initial codes but remained open to being surprised by unexpected answers that did not neatly fit categories. This strategy allowed me to make new connections between the data and look for broad trends, while at the same time looking for themes relevant to answering research questions.

Once initial codes were established, I used thematic analysis to catalog major categories and begin to condense large categories down to specific subthemes within interview transcripts. Unlike line-by-line coding that begins small and works to larger conceptual frames (Charmaz, 2006), I sorted answers into broad categories first and then reanalyzed them by breaking them down and grasping the interconnections and nuances among them. As I narrowed the focus, I again used my fieldnotes as comparison data to find examples of farmer persuasive messages and customer responses to those messages. Narrowing the focus allowed me to get theoretical depth—one large category often became several smaller and more specific categories, and subsequent interviews helped me fill out the categories (Agar, 1996; Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I achieved thematic depth by finding exceptions, analyzing conditions, and determining which contexts generated certain patterns.

I constructed analytical themes in several ways. Having multiple ways to generate themes encouraged a deep and close reading of the data. First, I noted when answers become repetitive across a variety of contexts including: “how often it appears...how pervasive it is across different types of cultural ideas and practices...[and] the number, force, and variety of a theme’s expression” (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 87). Other scholars agree that things like repetitive answers warrant theme designation and may be suggestive of larger social patterns and cultural schema (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Owen, 1984; Warren & Karner, 2010). The “‘keyness’ of a theme is not necessarily dependent on quantifiable measures—but rather on whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). A theme may explicitly or implicitly answer part of a research question. In sum, repetition and explanatory power are strong indicators of themes. I noticed when answers became repetitive, were strongly emphasized, or lucidly articulated a concept.

Second, I looked for answers to specific questions but remained open to new concepts that were relevant to the analysis. I generated themes because they directly helped answer research questions, but I was open to the emergence of new data or new questions. For example, I sorted all participant responses that shed light on the persuasive dynamic between customers and farmers into categories and gave them conceptual names like “relationship history” and “farmer claims.” I then broke these codes down into smaller, more detailed categories. While specific questions from my protocol led to answering the larger research question, I maintained flexibility for new concepts to answer my research questions in an *emergent*, unanticipated way (Charmaz, 2006). Rich points are another way to describe the importance of emergent data. Rich points are times when the ethnographer’s conceptual framework inadequately explains a phenomenon that occurs, and the framework must be reconceptualized to include and explain

new data (Agar, 1996). Surprises and exceptions provided new information and challenged my preconceptions, which helped to keep the analysis open and moving. As I combined and broke themes down into categories, constant comparison (Charmaz, 2006) allowed me to analyze each piece of data in comparison with all other similar cases. I formed tentative themes that I later modified and refined as new data came in. Gathering and analyzing data occurred simultaneously.

Overall, I began by determining broad patterns and then refined them to smaller, more detailed categories. I chose themes based on repetition, variety, forcefulness, explanatory power, and the theme's ability to clarify answers to research questions. Answers that appeared often were grouped into one large category and given a title that described the phenomenon before being broken down into more specific analytic categories. Concepts, quotes, and data that pertained to the category were copied and pasted into a document with all other comments that related. I then conducted digital pile-sorting and broke categories down into different types to tease out nuances. For example, I initially had a theme that described how farmers and customers talked about farmers' market products as being the highest quality. I labeled this category as "Best Quality" but soon realized that within that category, there were several dimensions of quality that included taste, freshness, health, seasonality, etc. Thus, the larger category of "Best Quality" was then sorted into smaller, more detailed subcategories.

Once categories were specific enough that breaking them into smaller categories no longer revealed new insights, I organized and began writing up paragraphs detailing the nature of each concept. Writing forced me to generate analytic connections between concepts and showed me where the boundaries of one theme intersected with the boundaries of another. By using constant comparison of data, I realized which categories lacked depth and which had so much

data that they required new, more refined categories. Distinct from randomized sampling in objectivist research, I used theoretical sampling, which refers to purposefully gathered information about a specific group, phenomenon, or theoretical concern (Charmaz, 2006). Theoretical sampling allows the researcher to identify gaps in the data and then provide a thorough representation of ideas within a sample. Writing and editing helped me break down analytical categories even further by revealing nuanced differences among participant comments and fieldnote examples.

I used triangulation to increase the validity of my argument. In interpretivist research, validity indicates that the analysis is linked to the data in an “experience-near fashion” (Warren & Karner, 2010, p. 242). The researcher stays close to the participants’ lives and context to increase the likelihood the analysis and data represents the participants accurately. Qualitative research, and ethnography in particular, allowed me to gain *experience-near* data because I did some farming, sold products, did frequent observations, bought products as a consumer, and solicited members’ input during interviews rather than imposing preconceived theoretical questions that may not have fit local knowledge. I triangulated data sources (i.e., interview transcripts, fieldnotes, literature) as a strategy to increase validity. Researchers who use triangulation apply different data-gathering methods to answer the same question from different perspectives to build confidence in the veracity of a particular interpretation (Warren & Karner, 2010). Fieldnotes detailing observations of customer-farmer interactions at the farmers’ market were compared to participant interview comments on those same relationships to see if both pointed in the same direction, or contradicted one another. If data sources were similar, I knew I was on the right track. If not, then I looked for reasons that made each particular case different. Triangulation prevented premature assertions about the data.

Chapter Four Results: Farmer Messages

In this study, I focused on interactions between farmers and customers at the Downtown Lawrence Farmers' Market (DLFM). I examined the content of farmers' messages, the evidence farmers provided, customer reactions to the content of the messages, and the types of evidence customers found convincing. Overall, I found farmers sent five primary types of messages to customers at the market. These messages included: (1) the quality of market products is superlative, (2) the market is an educational space, (3) the market is a personal place to shop, (4) local consumption is beneficial, and (5) family farms are important.

RQ1: Farmer Persuasive Messages and Evidence

To address RQ1, which dealt with the persuasive messages that farmers send to customers and the types of evidence farmers use when making persuasive claims about markets, I found five common messages that farmers sent customers. In this analysis, the term "farmer" included people who grow, raise, harvest, and sell food as well as vendors not directly involved in agriculture, such as those who sell baked goods made from purchased supplies. While sending the five common messages, farmers provided a variety of evidence to support their claims such as personal testimony, samples, scientific health data, nonverbal cues, and aesthetics. Farmers also emphasized their own credibility and trustworthiness. Interestingly, farmers often provided unverifiable evidence, thereby implicitly asking the customer to trust them.

1. The quality of products is superlative. Farmers argued that the quality of their products at the farmers' market is superlative. Since most (but not all) of the products at the market are food, this argument suggested that food from the farmers' market is better quality than food from the grocery store. The overarching theme of quality had seven subthemes: taste, freshness, health, unusual products, seasonality, aesthetics, and crowds.

Taste. Farmers argued that market products should taste better than products from the grocery store, and farmers used credibility as a persuasive strategy to convince customers.

Credibility refers to the farmer's personal trustworthiness or a third party's trustworthiness. For example, Ted, a farmer, used narrative to evoke the source credibility of his workers. Ted said:

And I tell people [customers], few years back we had all these gorgeous cherry tomatoes, different color and shapes, Yellow Pear, Matt's Black, and Sweet 100s, and Currents and Juliets, the football shaped, and the Romas and everything. But I knew we had Snow Whites out in the field, and every Monday I kept forgetting: how come we don't have any Snow Whites at market? And I finally remember to ask the crew one day—how come we don't have any Snow Whites at farmers' market? [They replied] Those are the ones that we eat...[sheepishly]. And then when I relay that story to a customer, they go, "Oh well, they must be good." And so then they buy Snow White plants and then we would get sold out.

Thus, if workers eat the product before it can be brought to the market, then customers should conclude that the product tastes good. Similarly, Jerry specializes in growing large organic onions and confidently stated to customers that his products are "*all good.*" He also routinely said: "*We only sell what we like,*" meaning that the flavor tastes good to him and his wife. These farmer strategies did not invite questions or critique; rather, they served as testimonial evidence. The persuasive messages emphasized credibility by referencing how the workers and the farmer eat the product themselves.

Farmers also made a taste guarantee and vouched for their product. If a customer did not like a product, most farmers said they would replace the product. Jerry touted to customers that his onions are the best tasting onions available, and he posed a type of challenge to people as a

strategy to sell the onion. In referring to the taste of his products, Jerry said, *“I’ll tell them [customers], ‘the best onion they’ve ever eaten.’ A lot of people go [makes a gesture of disbelief]. They come back the next week and say, ‘You’re right. It was.’”* Jerry vouched for his product if the customer returned it unsatisfied or if the product was not ripe. Similarly, Wren told me of a time when she made a farming mistake and refunded customers’ money. Wren said, *“Anybody who brought it up, we did talk to them about it, and there were one or two people, we did end up giving money back to.”* Farmers vouched for their products in order to instill customer confidence and trust.

Freshness. Part of getting a good tasting product means that the product is fresh, and farmers used verbal arguments to communicate that customers could tell if a product was fresh by how it tasted. Garden variety comments on freshness included farmer phrases like: *“I picked it yesterday”* as a reference to product freshness. For example, Carolyn sold corn at a feverish pace, espousing freshness as she dispensed corn and gave change: *“You can eat it right off the cob if it’s good [pointing at her corn]”* (Garner Fieldnotes, July 13, 2013). When I inquired about the corn’s freshness, Carolyn replied: *“Picked it last night, the only way to do it.”* Similarly, Celina told customers:

I’ll say, “I picked it myself just a few hours ago,” or “I picked it up myself yesterday,” or “I picked it up myself Wednesday.” Fresh. That sense of like I’m the person who’s selling it to you and I’m the person who pulled it out of the dirt, too....So like it’s really fucking fresh you know.

Phrases like *“picked last night”* and *“picked it myself”* require customers to believe the integrity and expertise of the farmer. Both Celina and Carolyn made claims that rest on the farmers’ promise and credibility.

Farmers also strategically used samples to demonstrate freshness. The logic was that customers could evaluate freshness by tasting it. For example, to prove her claims about freshness, Carolyn gave out samples of her corn on the spot. I noticed her forcing shucked cornhusks into people's hands to get them to try a bite, saying: *"Taste it. It's so fresh—it's good just off the cob."* The use of samples is complex because it may be possible to "taste" freshness, or the farmer may simply have a great storage facility and the samples may be weeks old. Stacy, who gave out samples, said: *"We can talk until we're blue in the face, but the proof is in the food."* Similarly, Margaret, who sells goat cheese, offers samples of her products every week. I noted, *"I could hear her talking about the pH of the cheese, varieties of culture, and giving out samples"* (Garner Fieldnotes, April 27, 2013). Others handed out samples of tomatoes, fruit, salsas, and more. Samples allowed customers a quick way to tell if the product's taste was as good as the farmer claimed.

Health. Farmers also touted the health benefits of their food. Farmers used four major ways to communicate health: through signage, by providing a verbal argument plus a sample, by distributing pamphlets, and by offering three or more pieces of evidence.

First, farmers used signs to communicate that their products were grown without chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides to distinguish their food from food grown following conventional practices. Stacy, a farmer who raises chickens and vegetables, hung a large banner that read: *"Organically Grown"* and *"No Pesticides."* Stacy commented: *"We're working toward creating something good. Which is health... you put your food in the government's hands, oh my God... [health] ...actually, that probably is our number one thing."* Another farmer sign said *"Health and pleasure,"* and a food truck had the painted logo that said *"Organic, healthy, delicious."* Another sign was handwritten with a black marker on cardboard,

saying, “*Uncertified Organic.*” The farmer using this sign implicitly asked customers to trust that he grows products organically even though he is not certified. Farmers used signs to quickly communicate information about growing practices and health.

A second strategy farmers used to promote health claims was to verbally cite one or two beneficial properties and give customers a sample. Farmers then fielded questions about product nutrients and the product’s positive effect on the body. Alex sold a fermented tea drink called kombucha, and he routinely offered samples and touted its health benefits. Alex told a customer why kombucha benefited one’s health: “*There are really two main reasons in the literature. One is the fermentation creates a probiotic, which is good for you, and the second because it is sour, and this serves as a detox*” (Garner Fieldnotes, July 13, 2013). Similarly, Carl sold micro-greens, offered a customer a sample, and said: “*Do you eat salad greens? It’s kind of like that, but it has kale, kohlrabi, chard, snap peas; it has a higher nutrient density*” (Garner Fieldnotes, August 17, 2013). These examples highlight cases where vendors provided both an explanation and a sample. Yet a sample is not adequate evidence to evaluate a health claim because people cannot judge by taste alone the potential health benefits of a product. Samples seemed to be used as secondary sales tactics to appeal to customers’ sense of taste in the event that the health claim did not succeed.

Farmer pamphlets were a third strategy to persuade customers about the health benefits of products. I define these materials as “pamphlets” since they are typed, paper evidence often referencing third-party research on a product. For instance, one farmer offered a handout on bee pollen entitled “*The World’s Only Perfect Food.*” This pamphlet, written by researchers from the 1970s, quoted six different “*health authorities*” and claimed the following benefits:

Natural weight control. 1 ounce of honeybee pollen, 10-15 minutes before eating stabilizes faulty metabolism, often involved in unhealthy weight gain or loss. Rich in lecithin, pollen causes a speedy increase in calorie burning.

That statement was one of eight paragraphs that also described how bee pollen provides essential nutrients, restores skin, increases red blood cells, increases recovery after a workout, is a natural steroid, encourages long life, and increases sexual stamina. Similarly, Allison provides pamphlets on emu oil. Just one of her pamphlets claims that emu oil helps the skin, arthritis, psoriasis, chronic injuries, bug bites, razor burn, and hair. A selection from one emu oil pamphlet read: *“Many of the claims regarding emu oil are documented by medical research as well as personal experiences.”* These farmers encouraged customers to trust the source expertise of the *“health authorities”* and *“medical research.”* Thus, farmers used the credibility of others to bolster their own credibility.

Finally, some farmers strongly reinforced their message by providing three or more pieces of evidence to persuade. Farmers used signs indicating health benefits, made a verbal claim, gave a sample, and handed customers a pamphlet that explained the numerous health benefits of the product. For example, a honey farmer named Dale made his health pitch, gave a sample, and told a customer: *“‘it’s good for energy, allergies, and the immune system.’ Dale then turned and got her a handout that he has on bee pollen which has nutrition facts and health claims on it”* (Garner Fieldnotes, June 25, 2013). Similarly, Allison used health signs, offered five detailed pamphlets, referenced how the KU Medical School Burn Center uses emu oil, explained how emu oil is good for the skin, and provided samples of the oil. Allison told the story of two men from Lawrence who were in a terrible fire accident, had life-threatening burns, and despite the pessimistic outlook of their doctors, survived with the help of emu oil. Allison

and Dale provided ample evidence for their arguments. Some of their evidence was able to be evaluated, and other evidence eluded verification. However, the sheer amount of data they provided may have overwhelmed customers or engendered customer skepticism due to the grandiosity of the claims.

Unusual products. Farmers used two dominant strategies to market their unusual products. Farmers displayed and sold visually beautiful, unusual products, which allowed them a chance to educate customers. Unusual and rare products are not typically found in grocery stores. There are countless examples I could cite to illustrate how farmers raised unusual varieties of crops and animals to bring to market. The examples I cite include “Italian Zucchini,” “Tromboncino” squash, “Violet Jasper” tomatoes, “Boer” goat, and yellow tomatoes. These examples illustrate how farmers used education to establish themselves as expert sources and provided visually interesting products to draw customers into their booths to make a sale. Farmers sold attractive looking, unusual products to situate themselves as experts.

To establish themselves as experts, farmers displayed more knowledge about the food than the customer. Farmers used unusual products as a strategy to elicit customer curiosity. As I spent time at the Jacobson family booth, I noted the new variety of zucchini squash they sold. I wrote: *“When the customer asked about some striped zucchini, Mrs. Jacobson said that they were Italian Zucchini”* (Garner Fieldnotes, July 2, 2013). Another example was of a nearly two foot long, curved zucchini. I wrote: *“I walked past Geraldine’s booth and noticed her very long and interesting looking squash. She called it a Tromboncino squash”* (Garner Fieldnotes, August 24, 2013). Geraldine explained the virtues of the Tromboncino squash in front of me and two other customers, but the unusual shape and size of the product was the most intriguing. Similarly, I wrote: *“Kyle introduced me to the tomato called ‘Violet Jasper,’ a striped green and red*

tomato I had never seen before” (Garner Fieldnotes, August 24, 2013). The visual intrigue of the tomato or the squash created a scenario in which the farmer could educate customers by espousing the virtues of that unusual product. Farmers used visually intriguing products plus educational information to build their credibility as expert food producers.

Farmers also viewed themselves as experts and talked in interviews about needing to educate customers. In this knowledge imbalance, the farmer taught the customer. When telling me about how she educated customers on the delicious taste of her goat meat, Wren said:

People have had terrible experiences with people producing goat that is very strong flavored, and so we have to do some education with them and say, “No that is really not what this is like. This is more like as Angus is to beef, Boer is to goat. These are animals that are raised to be meat animals. Their muscles, they are not rangy savanna goats.”

Similarly, Stacy told me a story about a customer who could not eat tomatoes because of the acid, and she introduced him to a variety he could eat. Stacy: *“I said, you know these yellow ones and the white ones have less acid... and I gave him one to try, and he was the first one in line that year.”* Farmers established themselves as experts by teaching customers about unusual products. Wren and Stacy used unusual products to attract and educate customers for the end goal to build credibility and make a sale.

Seasonality. Farmers also stressed the value of seasonal food as a dimension of quality. Farmers established this point by teaching customers what products grow locally at what times of the year and what products to select when they cannot find the product they want. Tom, for example, said:

We have to educate people about how to buy things in season...I mean part of using things in season is substituting when you don't have exactly what you want available. So

you're substituting yellow squash for zucchini, but you'd never know the difference if you close your eyes. Or buying Russian kale when that's the kind of kale we have.

Similarly, Wren said: *"Sometimes when we have a particular item that people love they will come back week after week after week until we no longer have it, and then that produces an opportunity to explain seasonality of things."* Farmers provided explanations of why certain products were not available, and in doing so farmers illustrated a subtle, implied argument that seasonality is important. Educating customers about seasonality further established the farmers as experts who were in tune with the seasons.

Farmers also used the argument of scarcity to make a sale. Because shopping seasonally means that customers cannot get all products they want at any time of the year, farmers capitalized on the opportunity to encourage customers to buy products when available. For example, Wren talked about the seasonality of lettuce:

They [customers] came back several weeks and then when we didn't have it [lettuce] anymore, they were disappointed, but it was a chance to say: "But we are going to have it again, we'll have it in a few months when the weather gets cooler again."

Likewise, one of the first Saturdays strawberries arrived at the market, I observed: *"Wren made a comment about needing to post on Facebook. She made a post right then about the neighbors' strawberries on Facebook because she thought it would get some more people down to the market"* (Garner Fieldnotes, May 25, 2013). Farmers like Wren used seasonality as a persuasive tool to get more customers to come to market and hopefully to increase sales symbiotically. In other words, Wren was not selling the strawberries herself, but she used the availability of strawberries as a marketing technique to attract customers to the market and potentially make more sales for her business. Ted and Flora Oakley also told customers when seasonal products

would be available through their farm e-newsletter. Customers who subscribe to the e-newsletter get the first chance to buy asparagus (and other seasonal products) because the Oakley's give these customers a three or four day window to purchase before all other customers. The day in April that I observed at the Oakley's booth, customer after customer came by asking if asparagus had arrived. The Oakley's gave them the same reply, one I would hear all day. Flora said:

No, we've been having really cold weather, and asparagus is about two weeks behind where it is typically. In 30 of 32 years, we have harvested asparagus within two days time of April 15, and this is one of the years that that has not happened.

Flora's narrative informed customers of how seasonality is tied to weather patterns, created product scarcity, and established her credibility as having grown asparagus for more than 30 years. In a different example, Ted made the case to customers that his hydroponic tomatoes are great because they produce fruit a month sooner than traditional tomatoes grown in soil. Ted said: *"These are the best tasting tomatoes you will ever find in June, and sometimes we have to push that."* In terms of persuasive strategy, we see how Ted used a familiar food item (tomato) combined with novelty (grown hydroponically) and scarcity (best available in June) to appeal to the customer value of taste to persuade customers to purchase his product. Farmers used the idea of scarcity to appeal to customers' need to buy products while they are in season and available. Farmers preached that the best products are seasonal and sometimes hard to come by.

Aesthetics. Many farmers also demonstrated quality through the use of aesthetics. I use the term "aesthetics" to refer to concepts like size, color, bounty, and arrangement of booth space in an artistic way. Aesthetics reflected the visual aspect of quality—whether or not a product looked attractive. Farmers told me that they intentionally considered aesthetics when arranging

their booths, and several hoped to communicate to consumers that an organized and aesthetic booth indicates a quality product. Pat said:

I think that our farms need to be neat and tidy and presentable and picturesque and beautiful. The produce that you sell and your booth should look the same way. If it is haphazard and sloppy or careless, then number one, that's not presenting a good public face....If your best face is haphazard and sloppy and disorganized, unattractive, then what is your food going to be like, you know?

Wren and her partner tried to communicate quality and professionalism through their booth presentation. Wren said:

Many people tell us that they think that we had such an attractive display or things look really beautiful. We take a lot of pride in that, because if it looks good and it looks neat and hopefully, we look neat enough and we care.

Wren told me she studied marketing in school, and this education made her attuned to unconscious ways to attract customers through the use of aesthetics:

We use white tablecloths over the tables instead of just throwing stuff on a plastic table, because the tablecloth helps hide that background. It sort of serves as a fourth wall. The white tablecloth also makes dark objects on them stand out and provides a uniform background for the eye...We also do tiered levels and try to angle things to the viewer.

While farmers like Pat and Wren wanted to communicate professionalism, they also perceived that customers respond to aesthetic factors like tidiness, color, shape, size, and angle.

Crowds. Farmers also attempted to make their booths inviting by creating the impression that their booths were worth visiting. Sometimes this meant managing the number of people standing in line to maximize marketing efforts. Farmers were not paying actors to come stand in

front of their booths, but they were conscious that having some lingering customers helped sales. For example, Ted said his wife will work through a long line quickly and then keep the last person talking and hanging around as a marketing strategy. Ted said:

She will hold that person there in front of the booth unless she's got to physically go and do something else. But on the marketing side, as you talk and talk and talk and you keep that person in front of you until the next person comes up...to walk up to an empty booth takes a commitment.

Deirdre also referenced her experience with crowds when she was a farmer:

When you see a stand that has 10 customers... I have seen it attract people to my stand. When I have a couple of people hanging out by my stand trying to shop and stuff, people are looking over their shoulders trying to see what they're missing out on. Absolutely that attracts people and you get more business, and we have put our farmers' market stand in front of the entry way to do exactly that, to have this impression that you walk by where the first thing you see is we have this beautiful display and this is a fantastic strategy.

While they have limited control of customer movement, farmers indicated that crowds can be a good thing for business. Farmers' crowd management techniques reflect an attempt to persuade customers by communicating that if others want the product badly enough to wait in line, the product is either of high quality or is at least intriguing.

2. The market is an educational space. The second major message farmers sent customers was that the farmers' market is an educational space where farmers teach customers. I briefly hinted at this educational dimension when I described how farmers' uncommon products led to educational conversations. However, in this section I discuss how farmers educated customers along several dimensions including: food and plant varieties, growing methods, and

food preparation. While farmers can learn from customers, the dominant expectation was that the farmer has knowledge and experience the customer does not. All customers, even knowledgeable shoppers, said they could learn some new information from farmers. Farmers reported that they are routinely asked questions about agriculture and that they teach customers about food.

Providing agricultural information, distributing pamphlets, giving out recipes, and sharing cooking techniques exemplify how farmers used education to establish themselves as experts.

Education provides another attraction to keep customers engaged and returning.

More knowledgeable than grocery clerks. Both during interviews and observations, farmers communicated that they are experts who are more knowledgeable than the clerks at the grocery store. Indeed, farmers felt that their knowledge about the food they sell is qualitatively greater than knowledge store clerks have about the food they sell at the grocery. Celina said that a worker at the grocery store has *“no connection to where that produce came from....He doesn’t even know if it came from Florida or California unless he reads the box.”* Similarly, Pat told me that people trust food at the farmers’ market because customers assume the farmers know what they are doing. Pat said: *“There’s just a basic expectation that what they’re [customers] going to get is somehow different qualitatively than what they would buy elsewhere.”* Pat used the word *“trust”* several times to highlight market vendors’ expert ability to provide a great product. Both Pat and Celina emphasized that their food expertise was superior to grocery store customer service.

Production education. Farmers educated customers about production techniques. In other words, farmers taught customers how they raise animals and grow plants. For example, Pat said:

We are an educational resource. We get lot of questions. I would say on average we get half a dozen questions [per week] about how you raise chickens....Do you have to have a rooster in order to have an egg? And what do you feed your chickens? And why do you do it that way?

Similarly, Stacy has taught customers how to grow plants and have them produce consistent fruit. She said, “*There are a lot of dead bees, so we’ve told people how to self-pollinate, you know, the squash plants.*” Ted said his farm gets so many questions they feel like a state agency:

We laugh that we’re extension office east and that we get questions that should go to the extension office. But they want to go to a producer....Can I grow this? Does anybody grow this? Sometimes there were things that we have tried that we can laugh about and say yeah, we tried that once.

These farmers educated customers about growing food and, in doing so, they reinforced the expert-lay dichotomy. This relationship encouraged customers to view farmers as experts.

Product education. Teaching about products also created a situation whereby customers viewed farmers as expert, credible sources. As mentioned above, many times teaching occurred because a customer came up to the booth to ask about an unusual product, and farmers delivered information. For example, Jane routinely educated customers about the many varieties of her tomato plants: “*At what seemed like every five minutes, Jane explained to customers about the varieties of tomato plants that she was selling: Black Krim, Cherokee Purple, and the Nebraska Wedding varieties*” (Garner Fieldnotes, May 11, 2013). Similarly, Margaret provided detailed information about her cheese. She said: “*All the whey is going to drain off, and that changes the pH, and that tells you what culture you’re using. There are thermophilic and mesophilic cultures. Aging also changes the pH of the cheese*” (Garner Fieldnotes, April 27, 2013).

Providing specific variety names like “*Black Krim*” and scientific words like “*pH*” and “*thermophilic*” set the farmer up as the expert. Farmers’ seamless vocal delivery of facts about their products encouraged customers to view farmers as credible.

Price education. Education also meant defending high prices. Farmers educated customers that market products cost more than grocery store products because they are often produced by hand and according to organic standards. Some farmers claimed that when you compared organic products at the market versus organic products at the grocery store, market prices were equivalent or sometimes better. Wren talked about educating customers why her meat costs more than meat at the grocery store. Wren said:

You also have to understand what you are getting with that [goat]. That it was pasture raised, and how it was raised, and what the inputs were for that animal. And where was it slaughtered? And how many miles did it have to go? And all that other information, which is what, [how you] arise to that price point. So you sometimes, you have to defend or explain that as well...the education is part of it; they need to feel, they need to be confident consumers.

Wren mentioned that her chicken eggs cost \$4.50 per dozen because she uses organic feed for the chickens that costs \$850 per ton. Wren said raising food on pristine grass and organic feed, slaughtering locally, and avoiding conventional chemicals increases prices. Similarly, Celina described how a man complained about the price of beets, and she told him: “*We do all this by hand, and it is all organic.*” Some farmers educated customers why high prices were justified. When farmers needed to marshal a defensive argument as to why their products cost a certain price, they employed concrete evidence like high feed prices and production costs.

Cooking techniques. Farmers also educated customers and demonstrated expertise by providing cooking advice. Celina, for example, said she gives people several options on how to cook unusual vegetables: *“I tell people like at least two different ways. I try to do at least two if not three.”* Similarly, Wren said she instructs customers how to cook her goat meat by using venison as an analogy. Wren said: *“Talking to them [customer] a lot about how to cook it, like most people’s point of familiarity with cooking things low and slow is venison.”* Teaching cooking techniques helped customers transform raw and often unusual products into flavorful cuisine. Providing cooking techniques established the farmer as an expert at preparing market products.

Recipes. Farmers also provided specific recipes for food products, and they supplied recipes via pamphlet or website. The analytic term “recipe” differs from “cooking techniques” because a recipe provided both technique and ingredient instruction, whereas “cooking techniques” focused on the cooking method only. For example, Wren said:

We do recipe cards sometimes for particular things we are trying to push in the springLast year, for example, we did recipes for using green garlic and elephant garlic, because elephant garlic, when it shows up, is a little bit strange to people.

Pat also talked about how duck eggs are a fantastic substitute for regular eggs in certain desserts.

I noted:

Pat then began to tell a woman that crème brûlée made with the duck eggs was particularly silky and great, and he recommended that she try it. [Later] Pat is talking to a woman about how to cook a boiler chicken in a Crockpot, and he told her: “You’ll get eight cups of beautiful stock and a cooked chicken. How big is your Crockpot?” He asked. “If you go to our website [gives her a business card], we have recipes on it.” The

woman asked: “How do you season your stock or cook it?” Pat replied: “I do mine pretty simply: bay leaves, salt, celery, and black pepper.” (Garner Fieldnotes, April 20, 2013)

Another farmer, Jerry, said: “Customers ask, ‘How do you cook your chicken?’ And so we’ll tell them our favorite way, of course: you want to stuff it with basil.” Recipes were a common way for farmers to teach customers about their products and establish their expertise and credibility at the same time. Recipes served as one more way for farmers to communicate their knowledge.

Health education. Farmers used health information to present themselves as expert educators. Health claims further contributed to the “farmer as expert” norm. For example, Beth sold roasted nuts and had a pamphlet that read: “Did you know pistachios are good for you? They’re loaded with antioxidants and phosphorus and naturally lower cholesterol! Eat up!” Similarly, the Danielson Family Farm pamphlet informed customers why probiotics are beneficial, naturally occurring, and produce a healthy roasting chicken. Their pamphlet read:

We also provide feed consisting of corn, roasted soybeans, natural supplements, and a probiotic. The probiotic is a naturally occurring live bacteria that promotes feed digestion and the general health of the chicken. They do not receive any hormones or antibiotics.

While this pamphlet refers to the health of the chicken, it becomes relevant information for health conscious consumers. As a reminder, I demonstrated in the health section above how farmers made health claims about products such as bee pollen, emu oil, kombucha, and micro-greens. These, too, exemplified times when farmers educated customers about health. Educating customers about health allowed farmers to build credibility and to solidify their status as experts about their food products.

Overall, this section illustrated that the market is an educational space in which farmers teach customers about products and practices. While a few farmers talked about learning from customers, most people viewed the customer-farmer relationship as one in which the farmer maintained the expert status and the customer assumed the student role.

3. The market is a personal place to shop. The third dominant message farmers communicated was that the market is a personal place to shop. Farmers reinforced this message by providing interpersonally rich immediacy behaviors. These farmer behaviors included: eye contact, smiling, humor, attentiveness, remembering customers, transcending the booth as barrier, and attempting to build trust with their customers. Providing a personal exchange increased the chance that customers would view farmers positively.

Eye contact. One of the simplest farmer immediacy behaviors was providing eye contact. Most farmers said eye contact represented a simple, basic tool of good salesmanship. For example, Wren said: *“I make eye contact, say their name if I know it, say ‘hi how are you?’ ...I think the market is a friendlier place if the people say hello”* (Garner Fieldnotes, May 25, 2013). Similarly, I noted: *“Jerry made a metaphor about customers being like animals and how you have to draw them in by making eye contact”* (Garner Fieldnotes, May 18, 2013). One or two farmers also stood out because of their ineptness at giving eye contact. I wrote: *“Brian [a customer] had trouble getting someone’s attention at Tom’s booth for a few moments. Tom doesn’t say ‘hello’ and makes little eye contact”* (Garner Fieldnotes, May 4, 2013). Making a connection through eye contact communicated that the farmer was friendly. Because most farmers provided eye contact, farmers who did not provide eye contact stood out by contrast.

Smiling. Another simple and obvious way to create immediacy was smiling. Ted said that his daughter used to sell at the market when she was a young girl. Ted explained: *“She knew*

how to smile at them. She knew how to engage in a conversation and she was just a kid.”

Likewise, Pat said: *“Smiling, definitely. Greetings, a lot of verbal greetings, even if it’s just ‘hi, how are you doing?’”* Farmers said they needed to smile to engage customers. Smiling created immediacy and helped farmers establish their reputation as likable people.

Humor. A few of the vendors used humor to connect with their customers, and humor created a friendly atmosphere. Humor included behaviors like telling jokes, laughing with customers, or sending nonverbal cues that displayed playful banter. Jokes flowed out of Andrew’s mouth effortlessly and often. I noted: *“A man walked up and said directly to Andrew, ‘I’ve got a question?’ Andrew replied quickly, ‘Buy low and sell high.’ Then Andrew laughed and smiled”* (Garner Fieldnotes, June 15, 2013).

Andrew used humor effectively and made customers chuckle and smile during interactions. In one example, a lady was purchasing one of his lavender products. *“‘Do you take cards?’ a woman asked. ‘Yes, we take cards, Yen, Euros, Drachmas,’ replied Andrew jokingly”* (Garner Fieldnotes, June 15, 2013). Andrew also made fun of himself and his wife by using a dramatic understatement: *“People used to ask us how long this lavender lasted, and we would say something brilliant like, ‘we don’t know’”* (Garner Fieldnotes, June 15, 2013). Then Andrew continued to tell customers that 88 other customers had reported back that his lavender products lasted at least a year. Here, Andrew tried to identify with customers by representing himself as an ordinary, bumbling farmer who eventually figured things out. Similarly, Ted used humor when he and his wife were trying to sell herbs. I wrote: *“Ted explained how they have to give some of the basil in the greenhouses a ‘haircut,’ and that is what ends up in the bags for sale”* (Garner Fieldnotes, April 27, 2013). Ted anthropomorphized his plant to explain how the plants they do

not sell one week became the bagged herbs for next week. Farmers used humor to make a personal connection with customers in hopes of making sales.

Attentiveness. Farmers also said they made sure to be attentive and responsive to customers. Attentiveness took different forms, and sometimes it meant simply being ready to help. For example, Pat said:

I actually have a hard and fast rule: I don't ever sit down at the farmer's market... and that's a purposeful thing...if you're standing up behind your booth or whatever it is, that indicates a physical readiness to present, you know, to engage the person...I'm already out of the chair and I'm ready to help somebody.

Andrew displayed attentiveness by prioritizing customers over casual conversations.

I couldn't help but notice how Andrew always interrupted side conversations with people who were not customers because he did not want to miss a sale.... Andrew's philosophy is that he is very responsive to making sales and connecting with people. He told me several times, "You have to engage people." (Garner Fieldnotes, June 15, 2013)

Andrew criticized a neighboring farmer for sitting down and not paying attention to customers, saying that his neighbor was not going to make sales that way. Farmers used attentiveness to make sales and to create positive customer regard.

Remembering customers. Farmers also attempted to remember something about customers as a way to personalize the sales exchange. Remembering customers' names or shopping habits encouraged the perception of the farmer as friendly and attentive. For example, Pat said: *"It's very important for me to know people's names, and I'm terrible with names. I'm going to ask you two more times what your name is, but after that third try, I will know you, and I will remember your name."* Pat may have been bad at remembering names, but he was talented

at taking an interest in customers' hobbies. Similarly, Wren said that she may not know people's names, but she remembered what foods people like to buy. She said:

I would say for the most part we do not know the name...Sometimes I will anticipate that and say, "Oh! You know, sorry you are going to be too late, because we don't have any eggs for you."

Remembering names or purchasing preferences sent customers the message that the market is a friendly place where vendors know them on a more personal level than the grocery store.

Transcending the booth as barrier. Some customers talked about the booth being a barrier between them and farmers. Hence, I noticed when farmers came out from behind the booth to talk with customers. For example:

In front of her booth, Flora began conversing with two children about age four or five, and said: "Hi, how are you?" She stooped down sort of a bit hunched to say "hi" to the kids and speak to them on their level. (Garner Fieldnotes, April 27, 2013)

Similarly, I observed: *"Jane steps out in front to sell tomato plants and is explaining the difference between the plants"* (Garner Fieldnotes, May 11, 2013). Both Flora and Jane routinely came out in front of their booths to talk with customers and interact with them. Stepping out in front of the booth allowed for more intimate interaction and maintained the image of farmers as personable and likeable.

Trust. Farmers worked to build trust among their customers. Farmers built trust by holding their products to a high standard, demonstrating reliability, and fostering a strong public reputation.

First, farmers built trust by holding their products to a high standard of quality. Farmers would not sell or display a product that was defective or too old. For example, several farmers

like Tom, Stacy, and Jerry told me about the concepts of “seconds.” Seconds are products that do not look quite as good or are week old leftovers, such as soft and oddly shaped tomatoes.

Farmers typically keep seconds in a box to the side of or behind their booths and sell them for a discounted price. Thus, any food on a farmer’s table represents the farmer’s best quality crop.

Tom’s employee, Celina, reiterated this philosophy: *“People don’t realize that what makes it to our table is the cream of the crop.... We harvest what is perfect for the table, and everything else goes to sit on the ground.”* Likewise, the farmer Stacy said:

Somebody brings me a squash and cucumber, and I pick it up, and I see something [bad], I say: “listen, I don’t really like the way this looks.” So that’s trust. They know I’m not going to sell them something just to make a buck.

Farmers displayed a high standard and even criticized their own products to create trust with the customer. Farmers were discriminating when it came to quality and freshness, and farmer standards encouraged customers to trust farmers as the source of their food.

Farmers also sought to build trust through their flavor guarantee. The flavor guarantee meant farmers would refund a poor product and that farmers listened to customer feedback. In terms of trust, Wren stated:

We tell people “come back and tell us what it was like,” because we want them to let us know what their experience was like so that they will continue to trust us; we will take that feedback and hopefully make use of it in some way.

Celina said her employer Tom would replace a product if it did not turn out to be good quality, and this attitude fostered customer trust. Celina said: *“If you do get something bad, you can come back and be like, you know, ‘I’ve bought this squash off you, and it was fucked inside.’ You know or whatever...and Tom is going to help you.”* Farmers guaranteed their product to build customer

trust. Farmers used this strategy because they were confident enough in their product that they did not expect to have to replace it often. Farmer confidence in the product aimed to boost customer trust.

Farmers also attempted to build trust by being reliable. Reliability meant consistently having high quality products. Ted said he provides customers *“reliability, and that’s the same thing as the trust.”* Similarly, Celina talked about how people trust her employer Tom: *“They trust Tom. Tom’s vegetables. I think they know that they’re going to get good stuff whatever they buy there. It’s going to be good. And also, he’s consistent and dependable.”* Farmers attempted to generate trust by being consistent. Having consistently good and reliable products helped farmers establish a positive, credible reputation.

Farmers also established trust by fostering a strong public image. Farmers relied on people in the community knowing and respecting them. Ted Oakley, for example, said:

It’s that hopefully we’ve got loyal customers because they’re dealing with the Oakley’s, and I feel that that is your reputation and the trust....I think being a local family that has been here for generations gives me...credibility.

Similarly, the farmer Pat said:

There is a public trust in a sense because, yes, with those customers that we do get to know on a first-name basis, there is the trust that comes with intimacy, but there is a general public trust as well, that you can go to our website, our public face, and it says very clearly on that if you look for it that it says that all of the vendors produce their own... the food that they sell, that it comes from within a 100-mile radius.

Farmers used their public image built on years of community involvement and face-to-face interaction to gain trust. Having a face that people remember and trust served as a way to boost credibility.

4. Local consumption is beneficial. Another persuasive message farmers used was that local consumption is beneficial because it improves the environment, improves food quality, and remedies problems stemming from industrial food production. Farmers extolled this argument more on signage than anywhere else. For example, several farmers had signs with the word “*local*” on them, but the benefits of local food were not always explained verbally. Farmers occasionally mentioned benefits during conversation. Farmers used the “local” argument to show how much more environmentally conscious they are compared to industrial corporations, how much better quality their food is compared to grocery store food, and how they possess personal knowledge and skills that grocery store clerks do not. In other words, farmers used these arguments to bolster the superiority of their own source credibility compared to that of corporate food producers.

Environment. Farmers espoused the environmental benefits of consuming locally. Farmers did not explicitly preach about environmental benefits when a customer came up to buy a product. Rather, farmers presented this argument through signs, pamphlets, and indirect means. One example was a farmer’s product label that read: “*Sustainable, Local, Fresh Organic Produce.*” Another farm had the name “*Willing Horse Farm.*” Using horse-drawn agriculture in a sign evokes nostalgia about the days before invention of the tractor and subsequent environmental degradation, something the farmer referenced when I asked her about the name. A third example is a farmers’ pamphlet that reads: “*We are environmentally responsible, using only biological pest controls in our greenhouse and many land conservation practices.*” While

environmental arguments about issues like sustainability and chemical use are potentially important reasons for attending markets, farmers focused on their own credibility as ethical, responsible local producers more than elaborating on the pros and cons of industrial food practices.

Quality. Farmers also argued that locally produced food is higher quality. Most farmers cited freshness and short travel distance as the reasons why local food tasted better. Pat, a farmer who sells frozen chicken and fresh eggs, said that the market offers “*Higher quality ingredients*” because “*It’s going to be the shortest distance between field and mouth.*” Similarly, a blueberry farmer’s sign read: “*Fresh local blueberries! Taste the difference*” (Garner Fieldnotes, July 2, 2013). For perishable products like blueberries or eggs, the “local is better” argument is logical because freshness depends on distance travelled. Yet for portable items like frozen meat, the local argument seems less relevant because frozen meat is not influenced by how far it travels in a freezer. Some products depended on short transport to achieve the highest quality, and other products’ quality was not influenced by travel distance. Some farmers still used “*local*” as a buzzword to market their products even when their products’ quality was not dependent on travel distance.

Farmers also used indirect strategies to espouse the quality benefits of consuming locally. Indirect strategies attempted to persuade customers that local food tastes better without explicitly making claims like Pat’s comment that local food is better because it is the “*shortest distance between field and mouth.*” For example, Wren focused more on *imagery* than *evidence* for taste. “*The couple came by and asked about the pear butter, and Wren said, ‘It’s great to get some Wheatfield’s bread, put some Iwig butter on it, and then put the pear jam spread on’*” (Garner Fieldnotes, May 25, 2013). Wheatfield’s Bakery and Iwig Dairy are two local businesses, and

Wren was not simply coming out and verbalizing: “support your local businesses.” Rather, she created imagery of a delicious food combination that incidentally involved purchasing products from specific local stores. Wren used verbal imagery to entice customers to shop locally rather than making an argument with pros and cons. This argument bypassed critical thought and emphasized positive sensory imagery and emotion.

Anti-industrial sentiments. Farmers argued that buying food locally helps customers avoid exploitation that can occur at the industrial level. Farmers framed industrial agriculture as the bad guy and the local producer as the good guy. For example, Tom said:

I tried to sort of play up the ethical aspect of like, carbon footprint that kind of thing, but I don't actually use that word very much....One of our biggest competitors is big corporate organic farms in California...[They] still exploit illegal immigrants and all that kind of crap.

Similarly, Pat said:

The way I explained it is, I think our prices reflect the true costs of producing. Whereas the costs that are represented by, for instance, say Tyson's chickens, there are all kinds of hidden costs in that that we are all paying for that we don't recognize as the cost of buying that chicken of \$3.29... handling the mountains of manure that come out of an industrial chicken.

Mentioning evidence like “carbon footprint” and the “hidden costs” of industrialized chicken production seems to be a scientific discussion of the facts, but farmers’ presentation of a one-sided slam against large-scale food production proved to be an ad hominem argument. Rather than talking about the pros and cons of both large and small-scale agriculture, farmers discredited corporate food to bolster their own source credibility as responsible local producers.

A second industrial food critique was farmers' complaint that grocery stores were impersonal. Here, farmers explained how the grocery store is not as good as local farmers at providing personal interaction and customer service. Pat said: *"It's just you know, it's [shopping at the grocery store] sort of a generic impersonal experience.... I mean you have to educate yourself if you're going to the grocery store."* Similarly, Wren used phrases like *"stores are set up to be impersonal so that they can minimize the amount of labor"* and *"do it yourself grocery shopping"* to describe shopping at the grocery store. Impersonal or nonexistent service contrasts directly with the personalized service farmers provided. Market farmers built a competitive advantage by making customers feel like they had an expert farmer available to help them make an informed decision.

A third farmer critique of industrialized food systems aimed at encouraging local consumption was farmers' argument that grocery clerks lack a connection to and knowledge about the food they sell. Farmers at markets, by contrast, grew the food themselves, know the varieties, and are able to speak intelligently about the product's characteristics. Pat said of the grocery store: *"Typically, there's not anybody to ask, you know....And if it is, if there is a stock boy out there putting stuff out that you know, some 16-year-old that doesn't know from Adam what he's putting out there."* Critiquing store clerks' lack of expertise, connection to the food, and knowledge about food served as another way farmers discredited the industrialized system in order to increase customers' desire to shop locally. Instead, farmers argued that shopping locally meant customers would receive the personalized service mentioned previously.

5. Family farms are important. Another persuasive message that farmers communicated was that family farms are important. My use of the term "family farm" refers to businesses that are typically small-scale and involve multiple family members working on the

farm. The term family farm delineates one household that derives at least a portion of their income from farming. Some farmers used the phrase “Family Farm” in their farm name. Five ways farmers at this market communicated the concept of family farming included: handmade products, the presence of children, and aesthetics, which included photographs and anti-corporate sentiments. Farmers used the family farm persuasive message to influence customers by establishing their expertise and credibility as artisan producers and to appeal to customer sentimentality. Rather than providing concrete evidence for why family farming is important, farmers used emotional appeals and aesthetics to persuade.

Handmade products. Farmers who labeled their wares as “*handmade*” communicated the message that handmade products are better than machine manufactured products. Farmers used this label to communicate that a product had been imbued with some value-added knowledge, expertise, or care. Valued-added is the colloquial concept of taking raw agricultural products and turning them into something culturally significant, like taking berries and making jam. For example, the Jacobson Family Farm labeled their baked goods “*handmade*,” a common practice among bakers. Additionally, one salsa producer had a label that read: “*Handmade with love in every jar*” to communicate the care and physical labor involved in the salsa’s production. Handmade was also communicated in person during conversation. During my observation with Andrew, he explained to a customer the artisanship involved in producing his lavender products: “*Everything is handmade, hand painted...we cut this in the field, strip it down by hand and bundle it*” (Garner Fieldnotes, June 15, 2013). Farmers’ portrayed themselves as artisans by emphasizing how they put hard work, love, and handmade care into their products. Farmers did not typically elaborate on why handmade was better, and this omission suggests that they were using “*handmade*” as a signal or buzzword to get customers to view the product as artisanal and

the producer as an artisan. Farmers used the “*handmade*” label to emphasize expertise and product quality.

Presence of children. Additionally, farmers used children as a persuasive argument to convince customers that the family farm is important. Farmers may or may not be cognizant of how their use of children constituted a persuasive strategy. For instance, Pat had an arrangement with his kids to help out on the farm in exchange for providing them a technology allowance. I wrote:

Isabelle, Pat’s daughter of about seven or eight years old, sells some eggs to a woman customer. Woman: “Wow, you’re so good. Thank you, dear.” The woman walks on. I joke with Pat about seeing his scheme of getting his kids to sell products because they seem innocent and sweet. Pat said jokingly, “it’s the ‘cute’ factor.” (Garner fieldnotes, April 20, 2013)

Other farms like “Ridgetop Ranch” and “Hillsdale Farms” posted photos of their family members at the booth to convey an image of kids being involved in production. Because farmers typically made arguments about the taste, health, or freshness of their products, the presence of children was tangential evidence that served as an emotional appeal.

Aesthetics. Farmers also used aesthetics to persuade customers. Aesthetics refers to the ways farmers use beauty to influence people, most often by presenting a beautiful or nostalgic booth. Typical aesthetic choices for the family farm included old wooden crates, antique farm implements, and idyllic names and logos, all of which harken back to a mythic and nostalgic era. For example, the Jacobson Family Farm hung their wooden sign from an old metal farm scale at the entrance of their booth. Similarly, in the following quote, Wren discussed her philosophy on aesthetics:

We know that use of some objects makes things look better: using baskets, attractive baskets, using old fruit crates....People associate that with the farmers' market, and grocery stores do this too, now....I think it harkens back, whether mythologically or not, to the old, you know, the roadside vegetable stand that would have things in crates or whatever. It is myth making, because that's not what we actually, for the most part, that's not how we actually pick a product and put it in. We put it in a plastic tub and haul it to our wash area, clean it up, pack it in such a way that it is going to stay fresh in the refrigerator, and then when we want to display it, it is part of creating an attractive display. It is this emphasis on this old-timey idea of the family farm raising vegetables, putting them out in their wood crates. So your Norman Rockwell idea of what a farmer's market transaction might be....But I do think that they are attractive, and also, the fruit boxes we have from, they seem to be from the 40's or 50's or so, they were from another farm given to us....I think that farmers' market is...built on that nostalgia, because it is the idea of the one-on-one customer relationship, and you don't have that in very many things any more.

Wren and her colleague used wooden crates in a purposeful way to create an aesthetic booth space. During one observation day, Wren's colleague referred me to an online article she wrote for a nationally recognized farmers' market magazine. The article emphasized ten important steps for making farmers' market booth spaces aesthetically pleasing. Other farmers used idyllic images and aesthetics of family farming in their logos and farm names. While pseudonyms have been used elsewhere in this manuscript, real examples of farm names at this market include: Homestead Ranch, Red Tractor Farm, Honeydell Farm, Clark Family Farm, and Sweetlove Farm. Farmers who used idyllic imagery of the family farm sought to evoke nostalgia in

customers. Farmers used farm memorabilia to appeal to emotion and aesthetic value more than to rational criticism.

In sum, farmers' five major messages linked farmers' markets with quality, education, personalness, local consumption, and the family farm. Farmers used a variety of strategies and evidence to communicate these messages: verbal claims, samples, personal guarantees, pamphlets, and visual cues. Many of the forms of evidence farmers used encouraged customers to trust farmers' expertise and credibility.

Chapter Five Results: Customer Responses to Farmer Messages

RQ2: Customer Reactions to Persuasive Claims

To address RQ2, which dealt with how customers respond to farmers' persuasive messages and the types of evidence customers used when evaluating farmer persuasive claims at the farmers' market, I matched up customer reactions to the five primary farmer messages discussed above. The organizational structure below is symmetrical to the section about farmer claims. As I identified the five most prevalent farmer messages, I focused on both observational and interview data that revealed how customers responded to these messages. Thus, the results are broken down into the same five categories: (1) the quality of market products is superlative, (2) the market is an educational space, (3) the market is a personal place to shop, (4) local consumption is beneficial, and (5) family farms are important. This organizational structure creates a type of call and response whereby I can assess which farmer messages customers affirm and which messages customers may miss, ignore, or reject.

1. The quality of products is superlative. To begin, I matched up customers' responses to farmer arguments about product quality and looked at how quality motivated customers to purchase food. To maintain parallel structure with farmer claims, quality was broken down into the same seven subthemes: taste, freshness, health, unusual products, seasonality, aesthetics, and crowds. Analyzing customer perceptions corresponding to farmer claims revealed the kinds of evidence customers used when making decisions and why certain farmer messages were persuasive.

Taste. Most customers bought into the message that farmers' market food is the best tasting food available. Customers reinforced the idea that farmers' market food is high in quality. The customer Luke, for example, described the food at the farmers' market saying: "*Produce*

from the farmers' market tastes better than produce from the grocery store." Luke told me his top priority when purchasing is taste. Likewise, Gwen said she likes the flavor of tomatoes at the market even though she generally does not like tomatoes, and she emphasized: *"The quality of food is so much better than at Checkers [grocery store]."* Similarly, Sam said:

The other day we ran out of Pat's eggs, and my wife got some from Dillons [grocery store], and they look like they were sick. I mean, you crack them and you just go, "my God," what the hell's wrong with it, it didn't even look like an egg. It was awful.

Overall, customers who were interviewed perceived the market to have excellent tasting food that is better than grocery store food.

Customers approached taste seriously, and if the taste of a product did not fit their expectations, customers sometimes responded drastically. "Drastic" encapsulates how some customers showed bitter disappointment and ceased patronage if a food product did not meet their expectations. While telling me a story about how she once she got a tasteless, expensive burrito from a hot food vendor, Laurel said that when the flavor is not good, it violates the assumption that the market is a place where all the food is delicious. Laurel said: *"It was [pause], no flavor. It was a huge disappointment...it's purely a taste thing."* Laurel said she was unlikely to return to that vendor. Similarly, Sam said: *"If Pat's chickens suddenly just sucked, I think I'd have to sever the relationship [laughing heartily]. Well I wouldn't, I just wouldn't buy from him."* Sam has attended the market for over 20 years and values developing relationships with vendors like Pat, so to joke about prioritizing flavor over friendship indicated how much he valued the taste of the food. Customers esteemed taste as one of the highest values at the market.

When evaluating farmer arguments about flavor, the most persuasive proof of taste customers used was sampling because it provided direct evidence for the claim. Consumers trusted their taste buds. For example, June said:

Oh my God, the white tomatoes. We never would have believed white tomatoes were any good. And it's just like a red tomato. You know, same with the Japanese pears. Wouldn't have given them a chance if someone hadn't, you know, cut you a piece.

Patricia and Thomas also talked about samples being persuasive evidence. Thomas said, *"If it reminds me of my grandma's strawberries, I would buy a bunch...that is incredibly persuasive."* Patricia added, *"Yeah, I love samples. We bought fudge because of samples last week."* Luke said a flavourful sample *"influences me a lot"* and *"would be really helpful."* Because Luke said the unusual varieties often have a *"price premium"* associated with them, he was hesitant to spend money on something he had not tried before. A sample was the perfect evidence to evaluate the farmer claim of taste because it allowed customers to make a quick assessment of a product's flavor.

Freshness. Numerous customers reported the importance of freshness, and visual cues served as one criterion customers used to evaluate freshness. Customers believed that just looking at a product provided them a quick way to tell if it was fresh. For example, Nick said:

I know they [some farmers] are trying their best to shade their products, but the products look wilted. So I mean I'm not going to get something from them even though I can probably rejuvenate it by throwing it back in water....The one thing I guess that I would expect from it is it should be fresher. I expect that it was picked or baked or whatever fairly recently.

Similarly, Lacy said: *“Sometimes, we’re just getting in to see, did their radishes look better?”*

For Nick and Lacy, appearance correlated with freshness. For these customers, eyeballing whether a product looked good was a deliberate and logical way to evaluate freshness because they correlated appearance and freshness. Customers used visual cues to make quick decisions about produce freshness.

Customers also used seasonal cues to tell whether or not something was fresh. For example, at other farmers’ markets, the presence of products like strawberries late in the summer may indicate the fruit was shipped in from afar because strawberries are not in season in Kansas in late summer. Deirdre connected seasonality with freshness and health when she said: *“Fresh, seasonal food is really important. The more that I have learned about health over the years, the more I have recognized that it’s very important to have the freshest possible product.”* Similarly, Laurel linked the concept of seasonality with getting the best quality product. Laurel said: *“I mean that there are, yeah, very defined seasons for things...when you’re in the heart of the summer and it’s just, you know, the really good corn.”* I will discuss seasonality at length below, but for now it is useful to note that Deirdre and Laurel connected freshness with seasonality in a well thought out, rational way. Recognizing what was and was not in season represented a deliberate approach to shopping.

Some hard evidence for freshness does exist, but one farmer said that customers may not take advantage of it. Tom, a well-respected farmer who has been selling at the market for over a decade, told me that hard evidence for freshness is product duration, or how long the product lasts in the refrigerator. Tom said of his products:

And that's why I was getting at where it's still good after you've had it in your fridge for two to three weeks, which is when freshness really shows. You know, the day you take it home; you might not be able to tell a difference.

Tom's report that customers are unaware of how long a fresh product can last indicates that customers may not take advantage of this evidence.

Health. Customers reported they valued personal health and concurred with farmers that market food is healthy. Shopping at the market often meant avoiding unhealthy food and consuming nutritious food. For example, Rick said:

Growing up on the [Native American] reservation, I had a kind of high dependency on commodities just for assistance and survival and when you get things like powdered eggs or powdered milk, stew that's just completely processed and you pull it out, it's just like a big can of spam....You get to a point where you would start to just gain weight like crazy and I mean that's a kind of problem for a lot of Native Americans is obesity.

Rick said farmers' market food represents a healthier option. Similarly, Sam used words like "values" and "nutritionally" and "for your health." Customers who were concerned about their health perceived the market to provide more nutritious food, and these customers displayed a greater awareness of nutrition information than those who were not as concerned with health.

Farmer signs relating to health elicited four basic customer reactions. First, some interested customers viewed signs as an invitation to ask questions and learn more about the sign's message. When I discussed signs with Georgeanne, she said: "Maybe prompt me to ask about it, you know? And see what are you are talking about." Similarly, Deirdre said: "It makes me want to have a conversation with them ... I have a lot of questions about it." One reaction to signs, then, is to seek more information.

Second, health-related signs also generated empathy for the small-time farmer because customers perceived the farmers to be working within a limited budget that did not allow for expenses like fancy signs or money to get USDA organic certification. When I mentioned how one farmer had a handwritten, cardboard sign communicating that he grows food organically but is not certified organic, customers responded with empathy. Luke said:

I don't actually consider that a mark against it. The certification process is, I know involves some work and, again, my priority in these things is, I'm trying just for a local grower, and if they are smaller scale and haven't decided that it is worth it, that's fine by me.... In all honesty, it might even increase the likelihood that I buy from them.

Georgeanne said she would assume “*they were just struggling farmers*” and that a homemade sign is “*more genuine than if they had something, you know, like \$10,000 on a neon sign.*”

Laurel said: “*A handwritten sign like the, you know, Sharpie on a cardboard is actually, may be more appealing than if it was like a typed, laminated sign...[because] it just feels more homey.*”

For some customers, a handwritten sign about health communicated a personalized, struggling local farmer as opposed to a big industrial chain store.

Third, some customers ignored signs. For these customers, signs with health information must be really interesting to grab their attention. For example, Rick said: “*I might just pass it up unless there is something that's really flashy or something that really catches my attention visually.*” Jared said in terms of sign persuasiveness: “*Not for me....I don't think I paid attention....I'm asleep when I'm there, dude, Saturday morning.*” Phrases like “*flashy*” and “*don't think I paid attention*” suggested that these customers processed signs quickly, if at all.

Fourth, one very critical customer said she valued the USDA certified organic sign when thinking about health. Deirdre was adamant about eating healthy food, and she restricts the food

she and her nursing child consume. Signs were a way for Deirdre to establish whether a farmer raised food she can conscientiously eat. Deirdre said:

I see the USDA logo and you say it's organic, yes, I will trust that. If I don't see the logo real big behind you, I'm going to need to do some more exploration...I don't want the chemicals in our bodies.

For Deirdre, a certification sign served as a quick but powerful piece of evidence to persuade her of a farmer's credibility. Deirdre trusted the government certification process. Overall, many signs included health-related information, and customers tended to either quickly glance at signs or ignore them. The few who said they appreciated signs were health-conscious consumers.

As I noted earlier in the section on farmer health claims, some farmers simultaneously cited a health claim and gave a sample, and in these situations, customers trusted samples the most. Luke said: *"My purchase choices are more oriented towards taste rather than health."* Similarly, I noticed two customers one day commenting more on the flavor of the kombucha than the health benefits. I wrote: *"'You said you wanted a sample,' said one customer to the other. The other replied, 'I like the fizziness of it,' after she had tried a sample"* (Garner Fieldnotes, July 13, 2013). I also observed a customer, Kim, sampling the kombucha with a friend. When I pulled them aside to ask what they thought, *"Both said they would buy it based on taste more than anything"* (Garner Fieldnotes, July 13, 2013). These customers may value health benefits, but they purchased based on flavor. When a sample was used in conjunction with a health claim, customers seemed to focus on the sample even if it did not allow them appropriate evidence to evaluate the health claim.

When presented with health pamphlets, customers had four types of responses: appreciative, critical, ambivalent, and dilatory. First, some customers appreciated what they

perceived to be the farmer's good-hearted efforts to provide customers more information. These customers said that they would read the pamphlet. For example, Jared said, *"I would definitely look it over and maybe think it was crap after I read it, but I would look at it."* Rick explained why pamphlets are useful, saying: *"It substantiates it if you put like some more, I guess, scientific information in there. But it also just helps back up what you're saying."* Patricia said that extra data *"might be more helpful."* Indeed, some people were appreciative of extra product health facts.

Second, other customers displayed a high level of criticality towards health pamphlets. Mike, the president of a local food organization, said: *"Each one is different, so we read it to make sure....Some of them are convincing, some aren't."* Deirdre, who works for an agricultural organization in the county, stated:

They [farmers] gave me the materials, and I'm going to want to crosscheck it...It's good that you ask my level of my education, because...before college I would not have been this critical....I would have said, 'oh, they're handing me information, it must be true.' No matter what they hand me, it came from them, and it's a marketing material.

These customers were more critical towards health claims on pamphlets.

A third group indicated ambivalence toward pamphlets. Either customers did not want marketing material, or they said would be unlikely to read it. Customers felt that the farmers' market was not a place to sit and read pamphlets. Laurel said:

There's that limit of what you can absorb, right?...And am I going to sit and read a page long summary about how bee pollen is good for your health on a Saturday morning while I'm doing my grocery shopping? Probably not. It's not why I'm there, right?

Similarly, Jessica said: *“I don’t know that I would be appreciative of that [pamphlets] unless I asked, you know, I think, well, I don’t want a hard sell at the market.”* Finally, George said that it was unlikely he and his wife would read any pamphlets, saying: *“I think it’s really unlikely either of us would read it. It would still be more convincing without us reading it....Even if it’s just the lyrics of ‘Frosty the Snowman,’ we’d never find out.”* Pamphlets were not always appreciated at the market because customers may perceive the farmer to be pushy or because customers felt the farmers’ market was not a place where they wanted to read documents.

The fourth group of customers approached pamphlets in a dilatory fashion. In other words, these customers said that if they read pamphlets, they would do so at a later time. Like customers who were ambivalent toward pamphlets, dilatory customers viewed the market as an interactive and social space rather than a place for reading pamphlets. Luke said, *“I probably read it later after I got home.”* When George commented about how he would not read the pamphlets, his wife surprised him by saying she would. Their dialogue went as follows:

Trisha: *I would read it.*

George: *Really?*

Trisha: *Yeah.*

George: *Did you read that hand-out we got two weeks ago?*

Trisha: *I did.*

George: *You did?*

Trisha: *I did. Much later, but I did.*

Distractions like music, socializing, and toting bags full of food are a few reasons why customers may postpone reading pamphlets until later.

Unusual products. Customers said the ability to purchase unusual products motivated them to attend the farmers' market, and the appeal of unusual products meant having a wider array of specialty products than the supermarket, more opportunities to purchase heirloom products, and the ability to discover new varieties. Heirloom, for example, refers to plants that were grown with seeds that have been passed along for generations and which have escaped genetic modification (either natural hybridization or becoming a genetically modified organism). Customers perceived heirlooms to have more complex flavor than typical produce. Wendy said, *"I prefer like heirloom, you know like, just because they're prettier, and they taste better."* Thomas said he likes to ask farmers questions *"When there are heirloom varieties that I have never seen before."* Nick discussed unusual products this way: *"They're [farmers] going to hit those niche markets, and you're going to be able to get those products the grocery stores don't carry because trying to carry in bulk is just not profitable."* Products like heirloom varieties appealed to customers because they believe the market is the only place they can acquire these unusual products. If the market is the only place to buy certain products, customers may be motivated to purchase because of scarcity.

Because of their penchant for unusual products, customers depended on farmers to teach them about new varieties. Looking to farmers for information indicated that customers trusted farmer expertise. Brian made the comments: *"Tom, for example, has probably the best variety"* and *"He'll tell you how many species he's got that year."* Luke talked about how he learns about new products from farmers and purchases based on farmer recommendations. Luke said that farmers *"identified products we don't know sometimes"* and *"explain the difference in varieties between different kinds of peas."* June used the phrases *"I like the expertise," "free to ask questions,"* and *"forced you into learning a few new types."* Customers who did not know

unusual varieties leaned heavily upon farmer knowledge. While some customers knew about unusual varieties, many did not. Customers, then, relied on farmers' expertise when making decisions about unusual products.

Seasonality. Customers paid attention to the seasons and purchased products when available because they perceived that seasonal products were highly desirable and in limited supply. Customers' attention to the seasonal scarcity of products proved evident during observations and interviews. For example, customers at the market anxiously anticipated the arrival of strawberries this year at the market. I observed:

There was another woman in her mid-50s, Caucasian, who came and got the last of the asparagus. She asked Tom when strawberries would be ready. She asked him how the plants were looking so far. Tom said they looked fine, and she asked for him to let her know in advance when they would be at the market. Tom said that he would tell her when they were green strawberries, and that would give her some notice. (Garner fieldnotes, May 7, 2013)

One patron who considers himself an avid gourmand, Sam, mentioned:

There are certain things you can get down there, like last Saturday was the first Saturday for strawberries. Strawberries were pretty good, and next week they will be killer if they're going to be good at all. And the week after that they'll be going downhill, and that's it.

Jessica, too, cited seasonality in terms of scarcity. She said:

It was like that supply-demand, urgency kind of thing....You know when, like, the fruit guy comes in the fall, I have to bring a bag to, like, you know, reinforce, I just carry all the apples, because I am like...this could be the last week for the Asian pears, you know, so I

buy tons of them.... I tend to overbuy some of the stuff because I am worried it won't be there next week, or I can't get there next week, or what if I don't get there early enough?

Others, like Jamie, said: *"I will not buy tomatoes out of season anywhere in a grocery store. What a waste, what a waste of money."* Customers connected seasonality to quality. Motivated by expectations of scarcity, customers purchased seasonal products when they arrived at the market.

Aesthetics. The aesthetic beauty of products and booth presentation influenced customers, and most customers' comments on aesthetics related more to beauty than to the professionalism and quality some farmers said they hoped to convey. Customers reported more information about the appearance of a product than the logic of what the appearance indicated. For example, Gwen said: *"You can get, like, these beautiful cherry tomatoes....They're, like, they're all sorts of different colors and there are, like, purples and oranges, and I freaking love them."* Ellie said: *"Having their stuff laid out attractively makes a big difference."* Another customer, Jen, said:

I think that may have been sort of like Italy, I think, to me, because they had everything beautifully arranged there all the time. The display is definitely a part of it....I wasn't going to buy it, but because that is the biggest whatever I have ever seen, or, there is a beautiful display or something, you know.

These comments reflected how some customers were swayed by attractive, large, and artfully arranged products. For these customers, aesthetics simply attracted them to purchase products.

Only a few customers associated professionalism and food quality with aesthetics. In other words, customers rarely commented how the aesthetics of a booth or product indicated something more profound than a simple attractiveness. The customers who did associate product

appearance with quality said they judged vendors by product appearance. Mike commented of one vendor: “*his vegetables advertise that [expertise]. Kale looks really good.*” Similarly, Deirdre extolled the aesthetic beauty of a friend’s booth:

They have these really sweet little baskets and they arrange things just so. And they’re spraying with a water balloon, they care about their product. When they put that level of attention and care about their product that much even at a unconscious level I’m drawn to that....[Another farmer] has these little chalkboards, individualized chalkboards for every single product....And those are darling, and I say I’m not going to go out and buy the lavender because I don’t need them, but when I see them doing that immediately in my subconscious mind or maybe even my conscious, I’m saying if they’re that professional, there are food safety issues in hand here. Who is washing their product? What assumptions can you make? If they keep a clean stand at the farmers’ market, they’re probably going to keep a clean stand when they are washing the product taking it out of the ground.

These two customers, Mike and Deirdre, viewed aesthetics as reflective of professionalism and expertise. However, Deirdre’s comments demonstrated that booth attractiveness and friendship may influence the way even critical customers process arguments.

Crowds. While farmers were limited in their ability to manipulate crowds as a persuasive strategy, customers’ comments demonstrated that crowds were effective at generating the perception that the farmer had a desirable product. Ellie, for example, said:

If there’s a crowd, that helps....It makes me wonder like what’s going on, yeah. How do I get in on that? Is there something that is about to sell out? Do they have morels? I went on a serious hunt, like a couple months ago.

Morels refer to the coveted and expensive mushroom that emerges in springtime in Kansas. People go hunting for them, and farmers told me they fetch from \$30-\$60 per pound. Crowds also formed when popular, seasonal crops arrived for the first time at the market. When the first major corn crop came in, I noted: *“The line was about seven people deep for corn”* (Garner Fieldnotes, July 13, 2013). Most lines were never as long as the seasonal corn line. A similar effect happened when strawberries arrived for the first time. One booth that had the largest crop of strawberries drew the most concentrated customer attention, creating two lines of three to five people each. The topic of crowds emerged spontaneously during a few of my interviews and was not part of my formal interview protocol. Therefore, more extensive research needs to be done to assess how crowds influence customers. The presence of a crowd in front of a farmer’s booth appeared to attract other customers who believed the farmer had a desirable or scarce item.

2. The market is an educational space. The farmers’ market is an educational space where farmers teach customers, and while some farmers learn from customers, the dominant relationship is one in which the farmer has knowledge and experience the customer does not. Farmers’ knowledge centers on agriculture, specific food varieties, growing methods, and food preparation. Knowledgeable customers do exist at the market, but most customers depend on the expertise of the farmers.

Expert vendors. First, customers used farmers as a resource for learning about food and agriculture. Customers asked questions, sought farmer advice, and accessed farmer knowledge. For example, Brian said:

I mean if you are kind of curious about this stuff, and secondly if they are really kind of open about telling you about it and educating you...They [farmers] know their product...Like Pat, he can explain to you about eggs and cholesterol and what you’re

going to get. You know, cholesterol depends, it depends on how your chickens are treated and what they eat, and within a chicken itself, the cholesterol levels vary. I mean, it's information that you're not going to get that at Dillons [grocery store].

Jen also viewed the farmers as a resource:

I have learned a lot from them. You know, for years I have gone and just used the vendors there as a resource, you know, like how did they the get the whatever [plant], you know, to look like this, you know, and so I have gotten a lot of good suggestions for varieties that do well here and then also techniques that work.

When talking about growing food, Jamie said she might ask farmers these questions: “*What new implement to buy? What's that? How does that work? Teach me something I don't know.*”

Similarly, Jessica said: “*Information is shared about their product and growing seasons, and I think I have become more knowledgeable as a consumer of, you know, fruits and vegetables.*”

Looking to farmers to teach and explain reflects how customers relied on the source expertise and credibility of the farmer. These comments also indicate that the customers have accepted their “student” role.

Customers also valued personal experience as a form of evidence. Customer trust in farmers' testimonies further demonstrated how farmers maintain the expert role. Rather than simply reading information in a book or magazine, customers found farmer personal stories convincing. When discussing growing plants, Jim said:

A couple of them [farmers] I've talked to there, a couple had some hybrids, and I'm not real knowledgeable about the hybrids, and I'm just wondering what their experience was, their real life experiences, rather than just read reviews or something like that.

Similarly, Laurel said: *“If you want to tell me about your personal experience, because like I said, I think it’s so much about the relationships and the communication.”* These customers viewed farmers’ testimonies as convincing evidence. Valuing farmers’ personal experiences reflects customers’ trust in farmers’ expertise.

There were a few exceptions to the trend that farmers play the expert role and customers the student role. Knowledgeable customers seemed to differ from the general population. Deirdre said that because she used to be a farmer, other farmers treat her as an equal. In fact, she said:

Jane probably treats every customer different. She may have those customers who come up and are just looking at her stuff like, “What the hell is that spaceship? And she can say, “Have you ever seen Kohlrabi?” I think that there is an educational component, and she sees me and notices that I don’t need that, that I have grown all the crops that she has grown and that I’ve used them all. And she might ask me, how ours are doing? Or how I’m going to use it?

However, Deirdre said that she still learns new information about products that she has not raised before, such as meat. Knowledgeable customers like Deirdre were not as influenced by farmer expertise because she has vegetable farming expertise. However, her dependency on farmers’ expertise increased when buying products she had not raised.

Pamphlets. Although I discussed pamphlets previously as a medium for health claims, here it is important to elaborate on pamphlet use to show how pamphlets contributed to customers’ expectation of farmers as experts. To recap, a few customers said they appreciated educational pamphlets about the health benefits of products, but more were ambivalent or negative toward pamphlets depending on how the farmer presented the material. Overall, pamphlets tended to evoke customer ambivalence or criticality.

In contrast to pamphlets about health claims, customers responded positively toward cooking pamphlets. Cooking describes how farmers provided both recipes and techniques for preparing food. Even highly critical customers seemed to appreciate recipes and viewed them differently than marketing material. For example, one of my most critical participants, Deirdre, responded more positively to recipes than to health claims. Deirdre said: *“If they hand me a recipe, that’s different than if they hand me something that’s reporting a point.... ‘this is delicious, try it.’ It’s different than ‘this is healthy,’ because healthy is so complicated.”* Brian said part of the benefit of getting recipes is learning how to cook unusual products he has purchased. Brian said:

You get ideas from them on how to prepare it, and that’s often, you know, like what do you do with this stuff anyway? And often though, you try something if you haven’t tried it before. What the hell is arugula? Wren over there, she’s real good on recipes. She can tell you how to prepare some of the food that’s simple and pretty good.

Matt and June, a young married couple, discussed how the Emu farmer provided them more information than they knew what to do with. June said:

If you get near enough and ask her about any one product, she’ll tell you literally everything that you could do with it, everything you should do with it. I mean she gave us pamphlets, she gave us some instructions, gave us temperatures, and then suggested it in a tacos. It was really cute. We made [emu] tacos the first time. It was really good.

Customers appreciated and often needed recipes, especially for cooking unusual products they had never encountered before. Recipes served as nonthreatening, persuasive arguments that bypassed customer criticality.

In sum, the educational dynamic means farmers predominantly maintained the expert status in the customer-farmer relationship. With the exception of customers who were knowledgeable about agricultural issues or who were simply more critical, most customers trusted farmers' expertise. Customers who trusted farmers relied on those farmers' expertise and knowledge.

3. The market is a personal place to shop. In this section, I examine how customers responded to farmers' attempts to provide personalized interaction. I explore how customer comments matched up with the previous farmer strategies: eye contact, smiling, humor, attentiveness, remembering customers, transcending the booth barrier, and trust. I also reported how customers said they shop at the market because they receive better service there than they do at the grocery store. Finally, I note that customers reacted negatively when farmers engaged in non-immediacy behaviors.

Eye contact. Customers noticed eye contact, and eye contact represented a simple immediacy cue. Making eye contact added to the personal quality of farmer-customer interactions. When I asked what farmer behaviors were positive, Gwen said, "*Smiling, making eye contact.*" Jamie, too, said "*Eye contact.*" Many customers mentioned eye contact as a friendly farmer behavior. Customers viewed farmers as nice people because of immediacy cues like eye contact.

Smiling. Customers also said they appreciated basic interpersonal nonverbal cues like smiling. Nick said: "*I think, just smiles. Smiles that say good morning.*" Nick indicated that he does not like getting stuck in awkward situations at farmers' booths, and farmers who smile effectively communicate that friendliness is not contingent upon them making a sale. Brian, who described himself as more reserved, said that farmers who smile and are less reserved are more

effective at selling than farmers who are not outgoing and expressive. Brian cited successful farmers as people who are effective at connecting with people. Brian said:

If you look at the Oakleys, if you look at Pat, I mean they're not reserved and laid-back, and neither is Wren or Robert, and even Bill up in, well, he's over in Tonganoxie. He's a very friendly guy. He smiles and he doesn't even have many products there.

Customers reported positive feelings towards farmers who smiled.

Humor. Customers responded positively to effective humor. Customers appreciated humor for many reasons, including that it made the farmer more relatable. Mary, a 76 year-old retired woman, said one of the vendors joked with her about her age. Mary said, *“When he said ‘young woman,’ I said ‘old man’....but he’s got a sense of humor so, you know the next week I said something else.”* Mary enjoyed being teased about her age and joined in by teasing the farmer also. Another customer, Matt, commented on how a vegetable farmer’s joking amused him. Matt said, *“He [farmer] made a comment to us once that his kale would make us jump higher and run faster. And that’s the kind of personal sales pitch that we find amusing.”*

Customers associated humor with friendly farmers.

Despite the potential benefits of humor use, not all humor was effective. Ineffective humor indicates jokes that customers either did not understand or that offended them. For example, Tom had a cardboard sign written in a black marker that read: *“Now Certification Free!”* Tom’s intent with the message was to humorously thumb his nose at the organic certification process. When I asked several people about this sign, most of the customers were merely confused by its meaning. Luke said: *“I wouldn’t understand bragging about not being certified. It sounds like they’ve lost certification, and that doesn’t, I just, I feel like there’s a story that I don’t understand.”* Drew, likewise, missed the intended joke when he responded: *“I think*

that, that would make me think that somebody barked up the wrong tree and they have to put down something to say, 'No, we're not certified.' Just kind of a forced disclaimer." When I explained the joke to Mike, another customer, he said he did not like the meaning behind it because it publically devalued the certification process. Thus, not all farmer humor was effective. When humor was not effective, it either confused people or offended them.

Attentiveness. Many customers noticed when farmers were attentive and engaged them interpersonally. "Attentiveness" can include eye contact and smiling, but it also encompasses other nonverbal cues that demonstrate readiness, such as standing or paying attention to customers. William said the farmers he patronizes regularly have the following characteristics: *"They want to engage you, they want... you know, this is what we have and anything I can answer, you have questions about...Attentive and friendly and you know, make you feel like you are wanted there."* Jen used the phrase *"pretty involved with people."* Similarly, Nick said: *"If a farmer acknowledges me, by acknowledging me, two things are happening: they are saying good morning to me, which is always nice, but they are also engaging me, which means I'm at least looking at their booth."* Customers liked it when farmers acknowledged them, engaged them in conversation, and made them feel wanted in the farmer's booth space. Farmer attentiveness and customer loyalty seemed to go hand in hand.

Customers also mentioned that negative behaviors revolved around farmer inattentiveness. Inattentiveness means not paying attention to customers, prioritizing other tasks, or not providing immediacy cues. For example, Laurel said:

Well, I think I'm always surprised because there are those people that are sitting behind their booth on their phone or reading a book or something, not engaging at all and it's just like, you realize that, that makes you unapproachable, right?... You would think that

that would cross their mind and obviously hasn't, but such a large part of it is, you know, looking friendly and being inviting, you know, saying good morning, and a smile makes me much more likely to walk up and look at the items that you're selling.

Ellie commented:

I noticed a big difference between, there are some vendors who sit on the back of their truck and so they are remote from you like six feet, and they often look kind of bored or like they're doing something else. And unless they have some product that nobody else has, I'm a lot less likely to go approach that because it looks like I don't want to bother them....And so you see some people hanging out in the back of their truck who are just not that engaged.

Customers disliked inattentive behaviors because they contradicted the norm that farmers' market interactions are personal. Inattentiveness led to negative customer reactions.

Remembering customers. Customers liked it when farmers remembered them. In other words, customers liked it if farmers remembered their name, their hobby, or their purchasing habits. Lacy and Jim are married and have been coming to the farmers' market for around 20 years. When Jim said he preferred to be an anonymous shopper, Lacy corrected him, saying:

He's thrilled when someone remembers him as the pepper guy. Like there's this one girl who he always buys hot peppers from....And so, like last week, she's like, "I can never remember what your name is, but I know you're the pepper guy." And it thrilled him that she knew he was the pepper guy.

Jim did not dispute the fact that he enjoyed being known as the pepper guy. Similarly, Ellie stated: *"The pie lady says, 'When can I make your dad another cherry pie?'...The people who remember the things you like, is probably more important to me than if they actually know my*

name.” Even die-hard customers like Sam, who loves food and has attended the market over 20 years, did not know many farmers’ names. One name Sam remembered was Pat, and yet he lauded Pat’s excellent people skills, saying: *“Pat would remember [your name].”* Knowing names or facts about purchasing habits generated positive customer feelings. Customers enjoyed it when farmers remembered something about them.

Transcending the booth as barrier. Some customers mentioned that farmers’ booths created a barrier. When farmers came around in front of their booths or talked at the side, customers viewed the behavior as a positive attempt to create a personal connection. Customers said this action communicated a willingness to engage the customer interpersonally. Nick said:

I think it shows that they [farmers] are even more interested in talking to the people that are there. I don’t take it to mean that they are being pushy, but it is just, you know, you got a table in between you and you know, and granted, it is just a table, but it is a barrier. You know, and by coming in front of it, they are showing that they are a little more open and more available for you to come talk to and everything.

Mary said that engaging people in front of the booth was helpful. She said: *“She [farmer] came out and said, ‘How can I help you, would you like some?’ You know so that’s how she works...from behind the table...to the front.”* While Lacy did not view the booth as a significant barrier, she said coming out from behind it was even *“more approachable to not having the booth in between.”* Coming out from behind the booth was a way for farmers to communicate they were willing to engage customers on a friendly level. Customers responded positively to this behavior.

Trust. Many customers felt farmers’ trust building efforts were successful. Customers said they trusted farmers because of positive experiences, the farmer’s professionalism, or the

farmer's reputation in the community. For example, George said: *"I also trust them [farmers] more because I had a good experience with the lettuce."* Dierdre said of one farm: *"They're pretty professional about the way that they run their operation. So I trust them."* William said: *"I trust everybody here regardless. They are part of my community."* Finally, Georgeanne commented: *"I think people who are there, who have been there for a period of time, come back every year, I trust them."* These comments indicated that trust was built through positive experiences, professionalism, and long-standing positive reputation in the community.

Better service than grocery store. People also reported that farmers at the market offered much better service than employees in a grocery store. While farmers did not use "better service" as a verbalized argument, I included customer comments on this subject because of how it fits the overall pattern that farmers offer a personal interaction. The two main points customers mentioned included local farmers' expertise and availability.

Customers appreciated interacting with expert growers at the farmers' market because they did not get that expertise at the grocery store. People perceived farmers at the market to possess expertise that store clerks simply do not have. Patricia, for example, said:

The funny thing is at the grocery store, even if you wanted to pull one of the employees aside and ask him or her, you know, do you know where... you know where did these tomatoes come from? They'll probably just laugh at you, but that would be such a nice thing to have at a grocery store, right?

Nick said about the grocery store:

I'm not going to be bugging them about their opinions about is the product good or not, or should I go this way or that. [But at the farmers' market] Yeah. I mean if I am confronted with, say, various heirloom tomatoes. Heirlooms, from what I hear, are

awesome, but I would imagine that we're talking about varieties, and so they're going to have different qualities to them.

Customers who were interviewed said that grocery store employees, on the whole, did not have the same expertise as farmers at the market. Customers trusted the source credibility and expertise of market farmers more than that of store clerks.

Customers also favored farmers' market customer service over grocery store service because at the market, farmers were available for conversation. Hence, the simple fact of farmer availability made markets friendlier than grocery stores. Laurel said:

Well, there's just access to people [at the farmers' market]. I mean, you go in a grocery store, and, I mean, depending on what grocery store you go to, but generally no one acknowledges that you're there or asks if you have any questions or offers you any guidance or insight.

Similarly, Trisha said: *"It's [farmers' market] not the same as a grocery store. I'm not going to ask anyone at the grocery store anything except for 'where is it' ...there is no interaction at the grocery store."* Trisha's husband, George, added: *"We use self-checkout...it's literally zero interaction."* Something as simple as availability offered customers the chance to talk with the person who grew their food. Availability increased the opportunity for customers to develop trust in farmers.

Non-immediacy. Some vendors were not as good at smiling or showing interpersonal warmth, and these behaviors stood out by contrast to the general air of friendliness at the market. While customers only mentioned a few vendors who were not very friendly, two vendors received multiple negative reviews: Tom and Mitch (pseudonyms). For instance, Sam said that

all the people at Tom's booth are unfriendly, and Sam conjectured that they pick it up from Tom, the owner. Sam described the negative nonverbal behavior:

[No] Eye contact, no smile, let me take your money and here's your bag, turn around and walk off. It's kind of a.... If you are looking for the friendliness that you get from other vendors, that's not the place.

Deirdre said that she and her husband boycotted Tom for a year because he acted rudely to them. Similarly, Matt said he perceived Tom and his crew to be more commercial and more interested in business than relationships.

Several people referred to Mitch, even more than Tom, as grumpy and unpleasant due to his negative nonverbal cues. Aaron used the phrase "*such a jerk.*" Mary said, "*Now he [Mitch] is grumpy, but once you get him started, he will talk to you...It would be very easy for me to walk past his booth and not say anything.*" Wendy described Mitch as "*frowning,*" "*really angry,*" and "*disgruntled.*" Further, Wendy said: "*I tried asking a question, and he just kind of like gave me the cold shoulder.*" Customers responded negatively towards farmers who were not friendly because negativity violates the expectation that the farmers' market is a friendly place. Farmers who are perceived as rude are less likely to get customers to develop positive regard towards them.

In sum, customers reported perceiving the farmers' market as a friendlier place than the grocery store because farmers offered positive nonverbal behaviors and because customers had access to knowledgeable farmers. Farmer availability allowed customers to ask questions of people they viewed as experts. Customers viewed the grocery store as lacking interpersonal interaction. Further, customers said if they ask grocery clerks any questions, these pertain mostly to the price or location of the item in the store. By contrast, at farmers' markets, customers had

the opportunity to have personal interactions with knowledgeable farmers who grew the food. Customers viewed farmers who engaged in immediacy behaviors positively. Being friends with a farmer may make customers more likely to trust farmer arguments.

4. Local consumption is beneficial. In this section, I examine customer responses to farmer arguments that local consumption is valuable for environmental, taste, and anti-corporate reasons. Many customers identified with these causes and also cited economic reasons why they wanted to support local food producers. While farmers did not verbalize economic reasons as a part of their argument, I included it to reflect customer values.

Environment. Consistent with farmer persuasive claims, some customers agreed that eating locally benefited the environment because they believed local consumption reduced the miles food had to travel to reach the consumers' plate. Reducing food miles purportedly reduces greenhouse gas emissions. People linked local consumption at farmers' markets with environmental stewardship. Jessica, for example, commented: *"I think the food is better. I think environmentally, it is better."* Gwen, said: *"It's really good, it's fresh, it hasn't travelled a 1000 miles, hasn't travelled 3000 miles you know, like, it's here."* Similarly, Rick mentioned:

I'm looking for here, just trying to stay very close and connected to the earth. I mean I'm just trying to make sure that everything is kind of, it's replenished. That whenever we do the farming that, it's something that can be, it's not just strip-mining the land...the farmers' market here in Lawrence and how they tend to try to just keep practices in a way that will allow the different areas they have been cultivated to continue to produce year after year.

Likewise, Deirdre said:

And when I find a farmer who tells me “I’m not using any chemicals, that I’m doing everything I can to treat the ecosystem well and I also employ people at a fair wage”... ethical reasons are a major driver [for me].

These comments illustrated why customers bought into the environmental claims farmers made at the market. Customers like Deirdre, Rick, and Gwen elaborated in detail about their reasons for believing that markets were environmentally friendly and had a well-reasoned rationale for their patronage of local products.

Taste. Customers also agreed with the farmer claim that the taste of products improved with local consumption. For example, Sam said of farmers’ market meat: *“The food is good because it’s local, and it’s grown naturally....The food is better. If Dillons [grocery store] could turn out a natural [pause]. They can’t.”* Similarly, Jared contrasted low quality food with grocery stores and high quality food with local markets: *“Well, I want it [food] to be fresh and taste good, because once again, it’s not like, you know, it’s not a sale at Hy-Vee [corporate grocery store], you know, ten for a dollar.”* Many customers associated better taste with local food because of the freshness factor. Customers like Sam and Jared correlated local food with high quality.

Anti-corporate sentiments. A few customers agreed with farmer claims that supporting local production was important because it meant abstaining from supporting large corporations. These customers preferred local farmers’ markets over corporate stores for different reasons. Rick, for instance, said: *“Staying away as much as possible from kind of corporate America, from the, these big conglomerates that ultimately hurt the farmer, hurt the market...take for instance, Wal-Mart.”* Similarly, Deirdre said:

I was raised with local business owners and farms or local businesses, and supporting my local economy and keeping my dollars local is really important. And corporate, national and global economic systems are something that I don't want to have dominating what I spend my income on.

Others mentioned the aesthetic advantage of markets over corporate grocery stores. Lacy said that the grocery store *"is a corporate, sterile environment...whereas I really think there's a hominess about and a community that's involved with going to the farmer's market."* Customers like Rick and Deirdre expressed economic and business reasons why they like to support local farmers, but customers like Lacy were more influenced by the positive aesthetics of the farmers' market environment. Customers preferred to support local food and avoid the corporate model, even though their reasons differed.

Economics. While I rarely heard farmers explicitly argue that supporting the market benefits local economies, customers mentioned this rationale often. From customers' point of view, supporting local farmers benefits the community because it keeps money circulating locally as opposed to going to shareholders nationally or internationally. For instance, Gwen said: *"I want to participate in the local economy; I want to participate where I could get some good fruits and vegetables."* Similarly, Brian said: *"I believe in cooperatives and all of those that... support local economies."* Luke said: *"I like that there are a lot of growers, and I want to support them, and so I try to purchase from more than just one grower."* Others focused on supporting specific farmers. Jessica said: *"I just can't not buy from James, and it is great honey."* Jamie said: *"I need the Oakleys to give me good food....They are there for me. They give me the good food, and when they're in trouble, I need to be there to help them."* Customers'

desire to support specific individuals reflected customer loyalty. Customers wanted their money to support local farmers and keep farmers in business.

5. Family farms are important. This section examines how customers responded to farmer persuasive arguments that come in the form of handmade products, children, and aesthetics.

Handmade products. Customers respond to the handmade argument by seeing the health benefits of handmade products. Customers who talked about “*handmade*” products believed that these products were healthier because they were made from scratch with ingredients and not from strange chemicals. For example, George and Trisha were more conscious of the food that they consume now because of how nutrients or chemicals trickle down to their young baby through breastfeeding. Trisha commented: “*Like real food...like you know what you’re getting, you know... the list of ingredients is there, and it’s something, stuff we would have in our pantry, like, not... factory.*” In response, George chimed in, citing typical boxed food at the grocery: “*We’re thinking, you know, where there are 75 ingredients and it’s pre-made. This [farmers’ market] is, we’re starting from scratch and making real food out of, without, without sodium xanthate.*” George and Trisha processed the handmade argument by seeing it as a remedy to factory food problems. This couple was careful about the food products they bought because they wanted to provide their child the best possible nutrition.

Some customers rejected buying handmade projects. Reasons included high prices and inadequate taste benefits. For example, Luke said: “*My wife is really good at baking things, so I think her work is generally better, right?*” Luke chose not to purchase bread products because he perceived the flavor to be inferior his wife’s cooking and because market products were expensive. As a graduate student with two children and wife to support financially, Luke was not

persuaded by the handmade argument. Money and taste barriers prevented him from purchasing. Luke carefully considered his approach to handmade products, but unlike George and Trisha, Luke came to a different conclusion.

Other customers responded positively to handmade products because they allowed the customer to enjoy something about the person who produced it. In other words, some customers valued the expertise that went into making the product. Customers purchased this expertise through the form of the product. Lacy, for example, mentioned how she buys spoons from a boy who makes them by hand. Lacy said: *“I’ve hired him to make spoons because he’s like 10 years old, 11 years old, and he makes spoons with his tool. And they’re nice, for a freaking kid, he’s doing it by hand.”* Thomas said: *“I value how much craft you put into something, and I value how much, you know, effort you put into your garden.”* Both these comments reflected customers who appreciated the artist behind the product. Appreciation of the artist suggests that these customers were influenced by the expertise and charisma of the farmer.

Presence of children. Some evidence suggested that customers responded differently when purchasing from a child compared to when purchasing from adults. Customers seemed to be swayed by empathy for children. During my observation at Pat’s booth, a woman came by and asked how big the chickens were. Pat explained the details of the chicken. When the customer turned and talked to Pat’s daughter, the customer changed her vocal tone to a higher pitch. I wrote: *“The woman asked Isabelle: “Well, I have to feed a family of four and one teenage boy, so can you help me figure out how much I need?”* (Garner Fieldnotes, April 20, 2013). Another customer, Mike, indicated that child vendors encourage people to purchase products. He said:

If somebody really wanted to improve their market, they don't feel like they're selling as much as they want, they pick up three or four kids put them in overalls and put straw hats on them....and have them selling their stuff....Down in Springfield, the farmer's market, people are lined up because they assume that the family was Amish....People were in line twenty deep in front of every one of those kids.

Similarly, when I asked Georgeanne if she bought products because children were selling, she replied: *"Oh sure, I do that. Or if the dog was selling."* These comments hinted that children seemed to influence customers by appealing to sympathy and emotion.

Aesthetics. Customers expressed a positive view toward an aesthetic booth display generally. Customer reactions to each specific type of farmer aesthetic persuasion strategy I mentioned above are difficult to gauge because I did not originally set out to test, for example, whether farm implements were more persuasive than wooden baskets or photos. Many people I interviewed made general comments about aesthetics being helpful for attracting them to a booth. For example, Brian said: *"There's a lot on presentation...the way you kind of present your product."* Others, like Lacy, said: *"Maybe not all people notice that [booth arrangement]. I do because of the [retail] business I'm in."* Above, I mentioned how Deirdre connected aesthetics to professionalism, and she used the phrases *"sweet little baskets"* and *"arrange things just so"* to describe how aesthetics influenced her on an *"unconscious level."* Attractive visual aesthetics positively influence customers.

In sum, customers affirmed many of the messages that farmers espoused. Customers reported that farmers' market products were of the highest quality. When this was not the case, customers responded negatively. Customers used samples, visual appearance, health information, unusual products, seasonal cues, and crowds as indicators of a product's quality. Customers also

looked to farmers for education about unusual products, agricultural information, and for cooking suggestions. This customer dependence on farmer knowledge solidified farmers' role as expert. Customers also mentioned many of the same positive immediacy behaviors that farmers said they try to provide. Customers said that they shop at the farmers' market because they get better service than at the grocery store. This direct comparison to competition was not something farmers mentioned often. Customers also noted that it was negative when farmers did not provide immediacy behaviors or even worse, behaved rudely. Customers wanted to shop locally for environmental, taste, and anti-corporate reasons. However, customers also mentioned that supporting local economies was important to them. Finally, some customers bought into the family farm argument. These customers were influenced by handmade products, the presence of children, and aesthetics.

Chapter Six: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine how persuasion influences the customer-farmer relationship in a farmers' market context. The research questions I examined included the messages farmers sent to customers and the evidence farmers provided to support these claims (RQ1). I also explored customer reactions to farmer claims and the evidence customers depended on when evaluating messages (RQ2). Through analysis of the data, I discovered the persuasive messages farmers sent customers, the evidence farmers used to support their claims, customers' reactions to farmer persuasive messages, and customer reliance on certain types of evidence. To analyze these questions, I conducted ethnographic analysis at the Downtown Lawrence Farmers' Market (DLFM) in Lawrence, Kansas, from April 13, 2013 to August 31, 2013. I interviewed 36 people in depth, and transcribed interviews, which totaled 1,128 pages of double-spaced text. I also observed 100 hours of market interactions that were recorded as 282 pages of double-spaced pages of fieldnotes. Overall, I found that (1) customers generally trust farmers and rely on their expertise, (2) farmers use persuasive strategies that emphasize source credibility and samples, and (3) the market context distracts customers from concentrating on farmer messages.

I first observed for six weeks, did one round of interviews with 16 people, then observed five more weeks, conducted interviews with an additional 20 people, and finally, followed that up with four more weeks of observation. This analysis focused on the persuasive dimension of customer-farmer relationships. I narrowed my analysis to persuasion and credibility when I realized that customer-farmer interactions were built on a plethora of farmer persuasive claims. To understand what scenarios involved credibility and trust, I had to examine the claims farmers made about their products and see how customers processed those claims. From my fieldnote and interview data, I searched for themes and subthemes that described persuasion and trust. I

began to view farmers' marketing attempts as persuasive communication efforts, and I analyzed both the rhetor's strategies and the audience's reactions.

After data analysis, I recognized that the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) offered a useful framework for interpreting and understanding my results (Petty & Brinol, 2011; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1999). ELM provided useful constructs that helped me interpret farmer use of evidence and customer prioritization of various types of evidence. Because little had been done using ELM from a qualitative, post-hoc vantage point, I spent considerable effort to develop a classification system to apply the ELM lens to analyze my data. My goal was to expand methodological opportunities to use ELM with interpretive projects. The following sections provide a brief summary of findings, along with implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

Summary of Findings

RQ1: Farmer persuasive messages and evidence. The five major persuasive messages farmers sent customers at the farmers' market included: (1) the quality of the products is superlative, (2) the market is an educational space, (3) the market is a personal place to shop, (4) local consumption is beneficial, and (5) family farms are important.

1. *The quality of the products is superlative.* Farmers posited that market products were of the highest quality, and quality had seven dimensions: taste, freshness, unusual products, health, seasonality, aesthetics, and crowds. Quality appears to be one of the most, if not the most, prevalent messages farmers communicated to customers at the market. More data surfaced concerning the quality of market products than any other factor.

2. *The market is an educational space.* The customer-farmer relationship was characterized by education, where the farmer assumed the teacher role and the customer assumed

the student role. Farmers educated customers about products, prices, cooking techniques, recipes, and health. Further, teaching customers about food products allowed farmers the chance to display their knowledge of food production and distinguish themselves from grocery store clerks. Farmers used the educational dimension to get customers to rely on their (farmers') expertise.

3. *The market is a personal place to shop.* Farmers suggested that customers can get a more personal interaction at the farmers' market than at the grocery store. Farmers generated a more personal shopping experience by making eye contact, smiling, using humor, being attentive, remembering customers, transcending the booth as barrier, and building trust. Farmers used immediacy-building behaviors to engender a more personal exchange, thereby encouraging customers to view them as positive and friendly people.

4. *Local consumption is beneficial.* Farmers also communicated that local food consumption benefits the environment, improves food taste, and bypasses industrial food problems. However, ethics were rarely talked about during customer-farmer interaction, and environmental claims were largely represented on signage. Farmers often cited the taste benefits of consuming locally produced food. Farmers used the word "*local*" to make a sale, sometimes when the concept was relevant to their argument, and sometimes when it was not.

5. *Family farms are important.* Farmers implicitly argued for the value of the family farm by their use of handmade products, children, and aesthetics to persuade. Farmers' emphasis on the term "*handmade*" evoked a sense of artisanship, craft, and expertise put into the product. Several farmers used the presence of children in the farm operation as a rhetorical strategy. Farmers also used aesthetics to persuade, including using old farm equipment, wooden crates, idyllic logos and farm names, and idealized illustrations of tractors and grain silos.

RQ2: Customer reactions to persuasive claims. I analyzed customer responses to farmer messages and the types of evidence customers trusted when making decisions.

1. *The quality of the products is superlative.* In terms of taste arguments, customers responded positively to samples. When evaluating freshness, customers reported using visual cues as evidence. For customers, signs about health information encouraged conversation, generated empathy, were ignored, or elicited trust and pamphlets elicited appreciative, critical, ambivalent, and dilatory attitudes. Unusual products attracted customers and provided an opportunity for customer education. Customers looked for seasonal products and noticed when crowds formed in front of a booth. Customers did not to connect “professionalism” with aesthetics, but they reported being positively influenced by aesthetic arrangements.

2. *The market is an educational space.* Customers reinforced the educational dynamic by looking to farmers for information and advice. Customers relied on farmer source credibility and expertise. Exceptions to the rule were a few customers who knew a lot about the products, were involved in local food organizations, and generally did not need farmers’ knowledge. Everyone, even knowledgeable participants, said they could learn something from farmers.

3. *The market is a personal place to shop.* Customers responded to farmer immediacy efforts by viewing farmers as friendly folks. Customers viewed farmer immediacy behaviors positively, and some evidence suggested that customer friendship with a farmer biased customer message processing in a positive direction. Negative bias can also occur, as in the example of farmers who did not provide immediacy behaviors or who had poor reputations.

4. *Local consumption is beneficial.* Customers identified with the “local” argument by citing environmental, taste, anti-corporate, and economic benefits. Customers believed local food tasted better because reduced travel distance meant the food was fresher. Customers did not

recognize how some food could travel without being negatively influenced, as in the case of frozen meat. Customers were influenced by “*local*” even if it proved superfluous.

5. *Family farms are important.* Customers identified with the handmade argument because they perceived handmade products to be healthier or because they wanted to enjoy the personal handicraft of the farmer who made it. Several customers also suggested kids selling products influenced purchases, and I noticed one customer raising her vocal tone and trying to connect with a child vendor. Customers viewed aesthetic booths positively in a general way.

Theoretical Implications

After constructing themes and subthemes around customer-farmer interaction, I found persuasion to be both the most compelling aspect of this relationship and an aspect that was central to its existence. Interaction exists at markets because farmers attempt to sell customers products. As I classified and tried to make sense of farmer messages, I looked for a theory that could help explain farmer strategies and customer reactions. The elaboration likelihood model (ELM) of persuasion provided a useful framework for understanding ways farmers presented certain types of evidence to support their claims and for analyzing how customers relied on certain types of evidence when making decisions (Petty & Cacioppo, 1983, 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1999; see also Griffin, 2012, for a parsimonious description of ELM). ELM provided key concepts and terms that helped illuminate the phenomena I noticed. However, my data also complicated some of ELM’s basic definitions in a way that may contribute to its theoretical development and possible expansion. In the following section, I explain the theoretical underpinnings of ELM before applying it to my data.

Elaboration Likelihood Model. ELM explains the level of elaboration a person uses when analyzing a persuasive argument (O’Keefe, 2013; Petty & Brinol, 2011; Petty & Cacioppo,

1983, 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1999). The degree of elaboration indicates whether people are thoughtfully considering an argument or making decisions based on irrelevant stimuli or cues. Researchers using ELM stipulate that “‘persuasion’ refers to any effort to modify an individual’s evaluations of people, objects, or issues by the presentation of a message” (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986, p. 25). In my study, persuasion meant that farmers attempt to convince customers to buy a product. Attitudes refer to “general evaluations people hold in regard to themselves, other people, objects, and issues” (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986, p. 4). I also use “strategy” to communicate farmers’ intentional crafting of persuasive messages to achieve specific outcomes. Next, I will explain “degree of elaboration” and how it relates to central and peripheral processing.

High versus low elaboration. Degree of elaboration refers to how much people elaborate on arguments across an elaboration continuum. Elaboration is “the extent to which a person carefully thinks about issue-relevant information” (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986, p. 7). Customers who process persuasive messages thoughtfully and critically (high elaboration) react differently compared to customers who process messages less critically. Those who engage in high elaboration tend to produce more counterarguments and are more resistant to persuasion (O’Keefe, 2013; Petty & Cacioppo, 1983, 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1999). Processing claims in a high elaboration fashion requires a great deal of cognitive energy and attention (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1999). Theorists also assume the inverse, if people elaborate less on the argument; they are saving energy, effort, and time (O’Keefe, 2013; Petty, Brinol, & Priester, 2009; Petty & Wegener, 1999). In general, people engaged in high elaboration of an argument tend to be engaged in central route processing. People who are engaged in low elaboration of arguments tend to process messages through peripheral cues.

Central route processing. Determining whether a person is using central processing is based on both (1) elaboration level and (2) relevance of the evidence (stimuli) to the argument. Central processing involves, by definition, higher elaboration of the argument and more thinking about evidence that is pertinent to the argument (Petty & Brinol, 2011; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1999). Also, evidence relevance is a key factor in determining whether someone is engaged in central processing. Evidence relevance means the evidence matches the claim or is appropriate for evaluating the claim. For example, an attractive model in an advertisement for a beauty product is relevant to the product because the model's attractiveness serves as an argument for that product, whereas that same model in front of a sports car is peripheral to the argument (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). People may make a causal link between beauty product and attractive appearance because that is the intended goal of beauty products. However, there is no causal link between a sports car and an attractive model. The attractive model serves as a peripheral cue or stimulus. Attitudes formed via central processing are more robust overall than attitudes formed by peripheral processing. Centrally shaped attitudes will last longer, are more resistant to change, and are more predictable (O'Keefe, 2013; Petty & Wegener, 1999).

Peripheral route processing. Peripheral route processing means that people make decisions by taking a mental shortcut of relying on simple cues. By definition, peripheral route processing means that the person will tend not to engage in as much elaboration of the argument and will not dwell on issue relevant thinking (Petty & Brinol, 2011; Petty & Cacioppo, 1983, 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1999). Instead, people rely on simple heuristics, schemata, or scripts based on inference rules and past associations (Petty & Wegener, 1999). Peripheral cues include factors such as distractions (sights and sounds), source likeability, source expertise, source

credibility, and simple affective cues (O’Keefe, 2013; Petty & Cacioppo, 1983, 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1999). Relying on peripheral cues saves time and energy by allowing people to make simple inferences when making decisions. In contrast to attitudes formed by central processing, attitudes derived from peripheral cues are more easily swayed, do not last as long, and do not resist counter arguments as well (Petty & Cacioppo, 1983, 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1999).

There are several peripheral cues that are relevant to this study including: source likeability, source expertise, source credibility, the number of arguments, other people’s belief in an argument, and classical conditioning. Source likeability refers to the charisma of the speaker or positive nonverbal cues the speaker may exude (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1999). Source liking or disliking can lead to biased processing in either a negative or positive direction. Source expertise refers to the ability of an audience to trust the source of information, and expert speakers are more persuasive than lay speakers (Cialdini, 2001; Nass & Yen, 2010; Petty et al., 2009). A speaker’s perceived credibility also influences processing, and people who can establish themselves as credible are more influential than people who lack credibility (O’Keefe, 2013). In studies where advocates provided numerous arguments or a plethora of evidence, people believed the argument simply because of the appearance of widespread support for that position (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1999). A customer may take a mental shortcut and rely on the belief of others instead of processing the message critically themselves (Cialdini, 2001; Petty & Wegener, 1999). Finally, simple positive exposures of one object with another can also create a basic conditioning response (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1999). All in all, peripheral processing occurs when people make quick, unelaborated decisions based on cues that are not relevant to the argument.

Dual process. According to the ELM framework, decision making is a dual process that involves central and peripheral route processing. When making decisions, people process information through both central and peripheral routes simultaneously and along a continuum (Petty & Wegener, 1999). A common misunderstanding of ELM is that explicit messages are central cues and non-message factors are always peripheral cues (Petty & Wegener, 1999). People sometimes incorrectly assume that words are always processed centrally and objects or visual elements are processed peripherally. However, both types of processing influence our opinion formation, but some scenarios favor one or the other type of processing. In fact, a variable can influence customer attitudes in several ways: as an argument, as a cue, by influencing elaboration, and by biasing elaboration (Petty & Brinol, 2011; Petty & Wegener, 1999). The challenge is to compare both degree of elaboration and evidence relevance to determine where along the central-peripheral continuum a particular example fits.

Internal factors that influence central and peripheral processing. Four internal factors that influence message elaboration and which directly relate to my data include: (1) personal relevance, (2) issue involvement, (3) personal responsibility, and (4) prior knowledge.

Personal relevance. Personal relevance refers to how much a subject relates to the person's life or consequences (Petty & Brinol, 2011; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1999). These issues directly influence people's lives (Petty & Wegener, 1999). Personal relevance increases the amount of energy a person will put into evaluating the arguments and is one of the most influential factors that determine whether a person will engage in issue relevant thinking (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1999). However, in public situations where people must enact impression management, some analyses indicate that people may take weaker

stances due to the social ramifications of critically analyzing friends' arguments (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

Issue involvement. Issue involvement indicates a well-read, informed citizen who considers an argument from a distance because it does not affect them directly. The person has knowledge about the issue, and they gain information because it *might* affect them at some point in the immediate future (Petty & Wegener, 1999). People who have more interest in issues tend to consider arguments more critically than those who do not care about that issue.

Personal responsibility. Personal responsibility is also associated with a more critical approach to persuasive messages. A typical study assessing personal responsibility compares people who were told they were only one of four people evaluating a text to people who were told they were one of 16 evaluating the text (Petty & Cacioppo, 1983, 1986). When people feel more responsible for some outcome, they are more likely to put more cognitive effort or energy into that work (Petty & Cacioppo, 1983, 1986). Feeling personal responsibility makes people more likely to elaborate on messages and process them centrally.

Prior knowledge. People with prior knowledge about a subject are more likely to critically evaluate messages about that subject. In experimental work, those with high prior knowledge generated more counterarguments and fewer favorable thoughts in response to messages they encountered (O'Keefe, 2013; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). However, people will not engage in counterarguments unless motivated by other factors like high personal relevance or personal responsibility (O'Keefe, 2013; Petty & Cacioppo, 1983, 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1999). Prior knowledge reflects people's ability to refer to a storehouse of information if they desire to critically evaluate the argument.

External factors that influence elaboration. In contrast to internal factors, external factors originate outside the individual. External factors, too, influence whether a person will elaborate on a persuasive message. External factors applicable to this study include distractions, no forewarning of persuasion, and argument quality.

Distractions. Distractions include sensory factors like noise, music, visual elements, or other stimuli that prevent people from elaborating on a message. When distraction is high and central processing is difficult, people revert to making choices based on peripheral cues like perceived credibility (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

No forewarning of persuasion. People who are warned that they are about to encounter a persuasive argument are more critical and ready to analyze those arguments (O’Keefe, 2013; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1999). Those forewarned proved more resistant to arguments and produced more counterarguments (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). The opposite is true as well—if people are not warned, they are less likely to be critical. Warning someone that you are about to persuade them “biases message processing in the negative direction” (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986, p. 130). Expectation dictates how critically people will analyze a message.

Argument quality. Strong arguments are more persuasive than weak arguments. Under multiple conditions, researchers have demonstrated that strong arguments have a higher degree of persuasive value (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1999). However, distractions neutralize argument quality because people cannot access the higher quality argument (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Some have critiqued ELM for using circular logic (O’Keefe, 2013). O’Keefe (2013) suggested that argument quality resides in situations where people are convinced that their end goal (personal relevance) will be achieved by doing what the speaker says.

A qualitative approach to central and peripheral processing. To use concepts from ELM to further analyze and understand my data, I had to find a systematic way to achieve two goals uncharted in previous ELM studies: (1) use ELM as a lens to interpret qualitative texts *after* data collection was complete and (2) include analysis of the message sender's strategies. I needed to classify qualitative data based on the ELM framework and analyze how farmer persuasive strategies might fit into that framework. Whereas quantitative studies use pre-test measures to control for the variables mentioned above (e.g. argument quality, personal relevance, etc.), I had to determine *after* data gathering whether or not a slice of data exemplified, for example, how a customer's prior knowledge influenced decision making. I believe translating the ELM framework to a qualitative study could allow future researchers to use ELM insights in real-life settings where variables are uncontrollable or incomplete.

Analyzing qualitative texts *after* data gathering required me to reshuffle analytical categories to analyze variables. The overarching challenge was sorting through existing data to make a judgment about whether a social phenomenon I saw in the field fit a concept from ELM. Whereas quantitative studies typically examine a few controlled variables (Petty & Cacioppo, 1983, 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1999), I faced many uncontrolled variables. For example, factors like the weather, music, relationship with farmer, customer preference for a product, and other factors may bias customer message processing toward either the central or peripheral routes. Customers may have a great amount of prior knowledge about tomatoes, which allows them to recognize and reject specious arguments about tomatoes. However, those same customers may lack knowledge about meat production, engage in low elaboration about meat production, and rely on the farmer's expertise when purchasing.

I also analyzed whether the rhetor's (farmer's) strategies for presenting evidence favored central or peripheral processing. My analysis was motivated by the question: did farmers present arguments in a way that encouraged customers to process the data centrally or peripherally? The current work on ELM focuses on consumer reactions, and in typical studies, the researcher assumes the rhetor's role by presenting controlled arguments to participants (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1999). Analyzing how a farmer could use evidence to manipulate customer elaboration provided a more complete assessment of the communication event.

In each case, my goal was to examine the text, see which criteria applied, and interpret how the criteria influenced the processing or delivery of persuasive messages. I evaluated whether (1) farmers' arguments encouraged customers to focus on central or peripheral processing and (2) whether customers' decision making favored central or peripheral processing. Some data provided stronger and more abundant evidence, while other cases presented more ambiguity. In each case I gauged the relative strength of the evidence before making a classification. In the end, I triangulated fieldnotes, interview transcripts, and contextual factors to classify customer reactions as indicative of central or peripheral processing.

Confirmation of ELM. My research confirmed many aspects of ELM. These included how prior knowledge, personal relevance, and personal responsibility motivated customers to elaborate on persuasive messages in greater depth. I confirmed that customers' biases toward farmers encouraged peripheral processing. Positive biases were due to customer source liking toward farmers, customer trust in farmer expertise, and customer trust in farmer honesty. Negative biases occurred because of source disliking and mistrust of farmers. Other evidence supported the idea that customers processed messages in a predominantly peripheral way

including: customers' trust in irrelevant evidence, customers' trust in crowds, customers' social agenda, and market distractions.

Customer prior knowledge. Some customers displayed evidence of knowing a lot about an agriculturally relevant subject. According to ELM, prior knowledge equips people to make more informed decisions and produce more counterarguments (Petty & Brinol, 2011; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1999). Several customers mentioned having read books on agriculture, dieting, or displayed detailed knowledge about health. Others had experience farming or working in agricultural jobs. These people analyzed claims more carefully. For example, Deirdre used to be a farmer herself, and she stated: *"I have grown all the crops that she [another farmer] has grown, and I've used them all."* William mentioned a great deal of information about gourmet food items, discussed having eaten in fine restaurants in France and New York City, and said he makes his own vanilla extract at home. Mike said he had read the health and environmentally focused book *"Diet for a Small Planet."* Similarly, Luke made the comment: *"The [organic] certification process is, I know, involves some work."* Customer prior knowledge seemed to correlate with the participant's level of criticality of arguments. These participants showed more criticality in their comments than those lacking prior knowledge, which suggests central route processing.

Customer personal relevance. Participants who were more involved or had more personally at stake in food issues scrutinized the arguments in a high elaboration way. Theoretically, issue involvement and personal relevance are so closely related that I combined them under the "personal relevance" heading. According to ELM, both issue involvement and personal relevance suggest higher elaboration (Petty & Brinol, 2011; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1999). One of my highly critical participants, Mike, is the president of a local

food organization. Deidre religiously ate only organic food and worked for a local agricultural organization. William used the “*Paleo*” diet and told farmers: “*I can’t eat that stuff anymore*” in reference to bread products. Examples like health concerns provided a clear rationale why these participants evaluated the arguments carefully. These customers’ closer examination of arguments suggested that they engaged in central processing because it was personally relevant to them.

Customer personal responsibility. A few customers made comments that indicated personal responsibility influenced their purchases. According to ELM, if people feel more responsible for an outcome, they are more likely to attend to the argument closely (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1999). Personal responsibility surfaced in parents who were responsible for their children’s nutrition. For example, two mothers of nursing children (Trisha and Deirdre) carefully considered how the nutrients they consumed would pass on to their children through breast milk. I noticed their comments indicated caution toward unhealthy food products. Though not nursing, Jessica mentioned regretting buying corn for her children at the conventional grocery store because she did not know how it was grown or whether it was genetically modified. Finally, Laurel said that she would probably care more about buying organic if she had kids. Customers who were personally responsible for a child’s nutrition were more critical and elaborated more on messages. Higher elaboration and more scrutiny suggested central processing.

Customer source liking. Participant word choices often indicated source liking (or disliking), which revealed potential biases. Positive bias means that if a farmer presented a faulty argument, the customer may not be as critical and is more likely to maintain preexisting attitudes about that farmer (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1999). In other words, customer

liking toward a farmer skews perception. Several examples fit customer source liking. For example, Georgeanne commented about a farmer: *“I just like him.”* Similarly, Lacy said it *“thrilled”* her husband when a farmer remembered him as *“the pepper guy.”* William commented that the farmers he patronizes: *“make you feel like you are wanted there.”* Matt said one farmer’s humor was *“the kind of personal sales pitch that we find amusing.”* Customers sometimes focus on the farmer’s positive qualities more than on the argument, and this positive bias revealed peripheral processing.

Customer source disliking. Negative bias also existed and seemed to cause customers to engage in peripheral processing. Negative bias occurred when customers’ negative feelings toward a farmer dominated their decision-making process. For instance, Deirdre boycotted Tom for behaving rudely to her and for buying another farmer’s nonorganic product and selling it under his organic banner. Nick said he would never purchase from one farmer who was such a *“jerk”* that he got himself banned from a local kickball league. Negative biases indicated instances when customers made unelaborated decisions based on the source of the information rather than the argument.

Customer trust in farmers’ expertise. Customers also strongly relied on farmers’ agricultural and food preparation expertise when making decisions. ELM indicates that when people encounter source expertise, they will tend to be peripherally influenced by that expertise when making decisions (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Customers at the market depended on farmers to learn about unusual products, cooking techniques, recipes, and agricultural production. Jen used the word *“resource”* when discussing farmers, and Brian said *“you’re not going to get that at Dillons [grocery store]”* in reference to information about products. Others like June

commented: *"I like the expertise."* Cases where customers demonstrated trust and dependence on farmers' expertise suggest peripheral processing of farmer messages.

Customer trust in farmers' honesty. Many customers simply trusted the farmers at the market which suggests a source bias that leads to peripheral processing. Customer word choices reflected a trust in farmer honesty. For example, Georgeanne said: *"And I just trust him, you know?"* Another participant used the word *"blindness"* when referring to her trust of the farmers at the market. Comments in this vein revealed that some feel they do not have to think hard about the arguments they are processing at the market because they trust farmers. Other customers trusted farmers based on positive past experiences and community reputation. Customers who trusted farmers relied on source credibility when making decisions, and emphasizing source credibility fits peripheral processing.

Customer mistrust of farmers' honesty. There were a few highly critical customers who indicated a lack of trust in market farmers. These critical participants did not assume farmer credibility. For example, Deirdre said that before she would buy anything from someone she did not know, she needed to get to know them, be familiar with their farming practices, and ask around about their reputation with other vendors. She used the word *"crosscheck"* to refer to assessing a farmer's claim. Mike, also highly critical, said that some pamphlets are better than others and *"each one is different, so we read it to make sure."* He criticized the farmers' market organization for allowing products like kettle corn to be sold at the market, using words like *"worrying"* and *"concerned."* Critical and negative word usage suggested that customers were engaged in central processing, and these particular customers' high prior knowledge, high personal relevance, and high personal responsibility further supported this view. Critical

customers provided a more detailed rationale for their skepticism, and more detail (higher elaboration) indicates central processing.

Customer trust in irrelevant evidence. Customers also showed evidence of making decisions based on irrelevant, peripheral evidence. According to ELM, stimuli that are tangential to the argument serve as peripheral cues (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). In some cases, customers mentioned liking certain features of a product that did not pertain to the farmer's argument about the product. For example, several customers I watched drink kombucha samples only focused on its taste and rarely engaged the argument about its health properties. Barbara, for instance, uncritically asked how much kombucha was required to receive its health benefits, and this comment showed that she already assumed the health claim to be true. Other customers said they buy more based on taste than health. Customers' emphasis on taste attributes showed that many customers were not seriously considering the farmer's health claim. In another example of irrelevant cues, Jen said the booths at the farmers' market reminded her of Italian markets, and she reported buying products that were the biggest or because the display was beautiful. Customers often used mental shortcuts and made choices based on peripheral cues that did not pertain to the argument at hand.

Customer trust in crowds. Further, customers who said they were influenced by scarcity and crowds used the peripheral cue of trusting others' judgment. Others' belief serves as a simple heuristic cue that influences audiences (Cialdini, 2001; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1999). For example, Ellie said when she sees a crowd, she thinks: "*How do I get in on that? Is there something that is about to sell out?*" Crowds and seasonal products go hand in hand, and I noticed crowds forming at booths when strawberries and corn first arrived at the

market. Trust in others' belief was a way customers took a mental shortcut to make choices about which products to buy.

Distractions. Contextual distractions also influenced people's ability to process arguments in this space. ELM stipulates that external distractions affect an audience (customers) by reducing elaboration and forcing the audience to rely on source credibility as a heuristic cue when making a choice (Petty & Brinol, 2011; Petty et al., 2009; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1999). Distractions at the market included music, crowds, the visual array of products, or the need to keep a watchful eye on one's child or pet. Barring inclement weather, musicians played weekly at the market. People often crowded around the musicians, creating a traffic jam in front of several vendors' booths at once. Feeling social pressure to get out of the way, customers may make a purchase and move on, thus reducing their ability to process an argument thoroughly. In some locations, the music itself created a noise barrier to having an extensive conversation with the farmer. For people afraid of dogs, the routine presence of many dogs may have distracted customers. Many brought their kids to the market, and the effort involved in monitoring children may have prevented effortful evaluation of persuasive messages. Many distractions potentially prevented customers from thoughtfully evaluating arguments. If customers are distracted, they are more likely to rely on the peripheral cue of farmer credibility.

Farmers' time constraints. Farmers were busy on market days. Time factors like farmer availability influenced whether or not consumers had the opportunity to elaborate at length about an argument. Higher elaboration requires more time (Petty & Brinol, 2011; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Farmers faced time constraints during peak season, and they often rushed customers through the line. The busier the market booth, the less likely a farmer had time to answer more

than the basic questions about varieties, taste, and cooking. If farmers' time is limited, customers have fewer opportunities to elaborate on arguments.

Customers' social agenda. Customers viewed the farmers' market as a social place, and customers' social goals competed with the energy it takes to scrutinize arguments. Higher elaboration of arguments requires more energy (Petty & Brinol, 2011; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1999). Customers expect to be social with farmers and other customers, as well as to engage in people watching. Jared called the market a "*social thing*," and Laurel said: "*part of the Farmers' Market, too, is the people that you run into and those relationships.*" Thomas said, "*I really love to go there and people watch.*" Lacy commented, "*It's more like a Renaissance fair or a fair at home... It doesn't feel like a business.*" Trisha said the market is "*Like Mardi Gras, you don't really go to do anything but walk around, and there are people all around you.*" I could spend many pages elaborating on how customers use the market as a social arena, but here I merely needed to illustrate that customers used the market for social aims. Customers who were motivated to attend the market for social reasons seemed to be distracted by sociality and appeared less likely to spend the energy analyzing arguments about food products.

Extension of ELM

Analyzing the rhetor's strategies. I have also paved a way for scholars to analyze the way rhetors can encourage or discourage types of processing through the evidence they cite. Most ELM analyses examine only the message recipient's responses (Petty & Cacioppo, 1983, 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1999). Yet researchers can analyze whether rhetors strategically attempt to influence customers' processing style by drawing customers' attention to certain evidence. For example, farmers sometimes presented biased information. Some farmer claims even evoked

skeptical central route processing. The following examples show how rhetor strategies guided customer processing towards central or peripheral processing.

Farmer emphasis on source credibility. Farmers emphasized their own credibility by citing unverifiable evidence to persuade customers. ELM stipulates that focusing on source credibility can lead to peripheral processing (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1999). Farmers encouraged peripheral processing by making claims that required the customer to simply trust in the farmer's integrity. For example, farmers made statements like: *"I dug these up only yesterday," "This is the best crop we've ever had,"* and *"We only sell what we like."* The customer had little way to verify these statements and was forced to rely on the farmer's source credibility. Other farmer messages drew attention to their own credibility as farmers. These messages included phrases like *"We are environmentally responsible"* and *"We do all this by hand."* Focusing on credibility strongly suggested that the farmer wanted customers to rely on the peripheral cue of their (farmer's) trustworthiness and credibility. Farmers presented biased information that emphasized source credibility.

Farmer emphasis on education. Farmers' expectations and habit of educating customers set them up as experts. As mentioned previously, expertise influences customers peripherally (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1999). Farmers encouraged the expert-lay relationship with customers by selling unusual products, taking time to teach customers about the products, offering cooking information, and providing advice about agricultural production. Pat said, *"We are an educational resource,"* and Ted commented, *"We laugh that we're extension office east."* Sometimes this education meant teaching customers why products cost more, as Wren mentioned with the price of her goat meat and organically raised chicken eggs. Farmers viewed themselves as more knowledgeable than grocery clerks and proved their expertise by

demonstrating extensive knowledge during conversation. For example, Celina commented that the “*kid [grocery clerk] has no connection to where that produce came from.*” By emphasizing their expertise, farmers encouraged customers to focus on the peripheral cue of source expertise rather than the argument.

Farmer’s emphasis on irrelevant evidence. Some evidence suggests that farmers provided irrelevant or peripheral evidence to persuade customers. In other words, farmers offered evidence that distracted customers from evaluating the central merits of a claim. For example, Pat used the “*local*” buzzword to argue that his meat and eggs had taste and quality benefits that imported meat lacked. This argument made sense for perishable fresh eggs, but “*local*” proved less relevant with frozen meat that can travel without being negatively influenced. Unlike the blueberry vendor’s claim that freshness depended on local sourcing, Pat’s evidence for his meat peripherally related to his argument about quality and taste. Similarly, when Alex made a health claim about kombucha, his sample served as peripheral and distracting evidence for evaluating the purported health benefits. Had Alex made a taste claim, samples would have served as central, relevant evidence. Other examples included Wren’s use of old farm crates from the 1940s or her arrangement of produce to create an aesthetically pleasing display. Wren said she picks produce and puts them in a plastic bucket before transferring them to the aesthetic box at the market. Her use of aesthetics has little to do with her argument about food quality. Likewise, the farmers who tacked up family photographs encouraged peripheral processing by making a sympathy appeal to support family farming. Farmers attempted to persuade through emotional appeals and irrelevant evidence, which suggests that farmer strategies aimed to focus customer attention on peripheral cues.

Farmer emphasis on source liking. Farmers used immediacy behaviors to portray themselves as friendly people and to encourage customer source liking. Farmer immediacy behaviors included eye contact, smiling, humor, attentiveness, remembering customers, transcending the booth as barrier, and providing superior service compared to grocery stores. Examples included Andrew joking about himself as a bumbling farmer, Jane coming out from behind her booth to explain products, and Wren saying “*I think the market is a friendlier place if people say hello.*” Other farmer tactics that encouraged source liking included having children sell products and having logos saying things like “*Handmade with love in every jar.*” These and all the immediacy examples reflect how farmers portrayed themselves as friendly. This farmer strategy emphasized their friendliness (source bias) rather than the argument.

Farmer comments generate customer skepticism. Interestingly, some farmer strategies appeared to evoke customer central route processing. Farmers who made extraordinary health, scientific, or statistical claims seemed to make customers think more about the issue. For example, when I posed farmer claims about health benefits, Thomas cited how health research changes frequently, and thus he views health claims skeptically as a general rule. Similarly, Andrew said his product lasted a year and that “88 customers” had confirmed this fact. Several customers viewed this claim skeptically, and Jessica said it sounded like a “*hard-sell*” television advertisement. Hence, extravagant claims appeared to elicit central route customer processing. However, farmers like Allison and Dale may have encouraged customers to process messages peripherally because of the abundance of evidence they presented. Overall, customers valued farmer personal experience and testimony more than statistics or scientific data. Relatedly, Dennis and Babrow (2005) found that, in the absence of universal preferences for stories or statistics, consumers of information can be easily prompted to privilege one or the other.

In sum, farmer communication strategies that focused customer attention on cues like source credibility, farmers' expertise, irrelevant data, and farmer friendliness encouraged peripheral processing. These farmer messages directed customer thinking toward irrelevant cues like the farmer's credibility rather than the argument quality. By contrast, farmers citing studies or providing pamphlets represented tangible, verifiable evidence that encouraged customers to process messages centrally. However, if farmers presented extravagant claims about their products, even if they appeared well-supported and scientific, customers viewed these more skeptically. Customer skepticism emerged most often about health claims. While farmers could not directly control customer message processing, farmers could influence customer processing by offering certain types of evidence.

Contradiction of ELM. Some results from this dissertation did not fit neatly into ELM constructs. According to ELM, central route processing occurs when people process centrally relevant evidence in a high elaboration way (Petty & Brinol, 2011; Petty et al., 2009; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). The amount of elaboration is one clue for determining central or peripheral processing, and the other clue is whether the evidence is relevant to the claim made. My analysis revealed cases in which customers processed centrally relevant information in a low-elaboration way.

Low elaboration but central route processing. Several examples from this study demonstrated how customers can process centrally relevant evidence in a quick, low elaboration way. For example, eating a sample of food reflected central route, low elaboration evidence for a taste claim. When I contacted Richard Petty to discuss my dissertation research, he said that a sample represented central route evidence for a taste claim because a sample is direct proof for that claim; yet samples were on the low end of the elaboration scale (R. Petty, personal

communication, September 27, 2013). In other words, customers were not spending a lot of time evaluating the taste argument or thinking high elaboration thoughts like: “Will all of the fruit taste this good?” Samples offered a quick way to assess the merits of the claim.

Another example of low elaboration, central route processing was customers’ approach to signage. Signs served as a central route piece of data and informed customers about relevant health information. Farmers offered information about chemical and pesticide use on signs, yet even health-conscious customers spent little time evaluating signs. Farmer signs included claims like “*Grown with No Pesticides or Herbicides*” and “*Hormone Free.*” Customers were able to quickly assess the relevant evidence and find key words that indicated farmers’ growing practices.

Additionally, customers who quickly looked at products to evaluate freshness also exemplified low elaboration, central route processing. Customers used visual cues to see which products were the freshest. Nick glanced at products and Lacy walked around to compare products. These customers believed a correlation existed between appearance and freshness, and they acted thoughtfully on that assumption. Yet these customers did not ask questions about when the product was picked or how long it would last in the refrigerator. Visual appearance of the product was centrally related to the claim of freshness, but this action reflected low elaboration.

Evidence quality. Low elaboration, central route data reflects how some evidence was more potent because it directly matched the claim and engaged people’s senses. To convince audiences in a short amount of time, evidence must be highly persuasive. For instance, samples proved to be the strongest evidence customers had for taste arguments because people had a direct experience with the product and trusted their senses. Other forms of evidence for taste

arguments such as verbal statements were less convincing because they were further removed from the direct sensory experience. Similarly, eyeing product freshness was also directly tied to first-hand, sensory data. Gilbert (1997) referred to an argument modality he calls “visceral,” or in other words, arguments that are based in physicality (p. 94). Sampling and eyeing product appearance fit this definition because they allow the customer to experience a product’s qualities firsthand. While more research needs to be done, my data suggest that visceral and aesthetic evidence, when appropriate to the claim, is more persuasive than verbal evidence.

In sum, there needs to be theoretical space for low elaboration, central route processing. Scholars need to expand or clarify what constitutes central and peripheral processing by analytically distinguishing among ambiguous cases. My data analyses exposed some of the areas where ELM concepts break down. We also need to know how enduring customer attitudes are when customers use central route, low elaboration processing. Given the strength of food memories (Connor, Armitage, & Conner, 2002), it is possible that central route, low elaboration message will endure. For example, Laurel recounted her complete disdain of the vendor who sold her the bad burrito, an event she remembered a year after the experience. Yet more data are needed to make robust assertions about the endurance of low elaboration, central route processing.

Methodological contributions. This study has provided two methodological contributions: (1) using ELM for qualitative research, and (2) proposing a way to analyze message senders’ strategies for encouraging central or peripheral processing.

Qualitative adaptation. By analyzing whether customers relied on peripheral or central cues, I opened the door for scholars to analyze other qualitative documents after data gathering to distinguish (1) high and low elaboration, and (2) central and peripheral processing. I

demonstrated that researchers can achieve these goals by triangulating interviews, fieldnotes, and contextual data to make an argument about the type of processing occurring. Given enough information, researchers can make a reasonable claim about customer processing and farmer strategies. Determining customer processing type by looking at interview and fieldnote data allows scholars to eschew the sole reliance on self-report data (Petty & Cacioppo, 1983, 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1999). Comparing several sources makes researchers' assertions about the type of processing more robust.

Practical Implications

Farmers' markets. One question I raised early on was why farmers' markets are growing quickly. My research indicates that markets are growing because they: (1) offer high quality products, (2) provide customers a source of education, (3) personalize food exchange, (4) appeal to the customer value of local consumption, and (5) appeal to the desire to support the family farm. While only indirectly relevant to this study, I also discovered that (6) customers found the market appealing because they perceived it to be a festival space. In many cases, these positive characteristics of farmers' markets stood in stark contrast with customer experiences in grocery stores. Customers viewed grocery stores as impersonal, utilitarian shopping venues. The farmers' market, however, represented a place to spend leisure time in an attractive location with friendly farmers. Further, customers' trust in farmers appears to be another reason for market success. In other words, customer confidence in market farmers and their products is high.

Farmers. There are several practical applications for farmers. Farmers should emphasize actions that build customer trust and credibility. Given the number of distractions at the market, farmers should do everything they can to increase their credibility. When forced to make a split-second decision in a distracting environment, customers will rely on that credibility. Farmers

should continue to provide immediacy cues to customers to maintain a competitive advantage over grocery store customer service. However, some customers said they did not like pushy sales people. Still others preferred to shop anonymously. Farmers should judge their audience and tailor their persuasive messages according to individual customer nonverbal cues. Farmers should continue to provide customers education about new and unusual products. Displaying knowledge about products helps establish farmer credibility. Additionally, farmers must continue to provide the highest quality products possible to maintain the perception that market products are qualitatively better than grocery store products.

Customers. Three practical applications for customers exist. Customers should be aware of how the market atmosphere influences message processing, that not all farmers are equally credible, and that not all farmers are honest. Walking around listening to music in a beautiful outdoor market on Saturday morning may disarm customers' critical eye and make them rely on evidence that is not adequate. The festive atmosphere may distract customers from fully evaluating farmer arguments. Additionally, farmers may not be the experts consumers assume them to be. Deidre expressed some doubt about other farmers' abilities to process food products, and she indicated that some are not as trained as others when handling safety sensitive crops like spinach. I also learned firsthand that not all vendors are equally credible. One day I wanted to buy organic cantaloupe because I wanted my one-year-old son to avoid chemicals in his food. I asked a young man who was selling cantaloupe if the fruit was sprayed with pesticides and fertilizer—he said that it was not. The following week, I returned to the booth and posed the same question to a different, older man who actually grew the cantaloupe. He told me they added chemicals. While many farmers may be credible, not all are. One customer said she had good information that a farmer bought nonorganic produce from one vendor and sold it later under his

banner as organically grown. Maintaining a critical eye is important for health conscious consumers.

Food communication scholars. This study demonstrated a way communication scholars can approach new contexts like farmers' markets. Communication scholars have only begun to scratch the surface of how food and communication intertwine (Cramer et al., 2011). In this project, I have illustrated how food exchange mediates interaction in the farmers' market context. All the education, relationship building, persuasion, and other factors are based on the premise of food exchange between farmer and customer. This study represents a step forward in looking at how food exchange and persuasion occur in naturalistic settings. I uncovered how food communicated concepts like farmer credibility and expertise. Food also served as evidence for taste claims. Studying market interactions has yielded new insights into how persuasive relationships function in informal exchange settings. I have revealed some of the various roles food plays in the relationship context (mediator, argument, and evidence). This diversity of roles testifies to the complex ways people communicate through food. Insights from this study may also apply to other open-air marketing contexts. Understanding how people use persuasive communication to convince audiences in situated contexts lies at the heart of communication scholarship. Scholars can derive organizational, interpersonal, environmental, and marketing applications from this study.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, I recruited most of the interview participants from an online survey that I had conducted for the market management in my role as a volunteer board member. Given this, the participants I interviewed were those who were willing to participate in an online survey and who indicated they would be willing to do an in-person

interview. This excluded individuals who did not use the Internet or who did not want to participate in a survey. This analysis is but one case study of farmers' market interaction, and people at other farmers' markets may have different values, which may influence persuasive dynamics. For example, the DLFM is a producer-only market, which means all the products for sale at the market are supposed to be produced by the farmers. However, other markets do not have this producer-only rule, and customer responses about trust, for example, may be different in these contexts. Also, while the overall interview sample size was ample for a qualitative work (36), some of the more interesting data on persuasion emerged during the middle of the data gathering periods. I only had the opportunity to test ideas about specific farmer persuasive strategies I had observed on participants in the second round of interviews (14 customers, 6 farmers). The first round of interviews (16 participants) also yielded data about persuasion, but the second half of the interviews was more theoretically focused (i.e., it occurred to me that ELM might be a useful lens to unpack, understand, and "ground" my data; see Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Tracy, 2008; Tracy & Craig, 2010). Another limitation was that while I observed scores of customers at the market, I was forced to interpret what their behavior signaled when I could not hear their dialogue. I only asked a handful of customers in situ what they thought about a farmer strategy. I spent more time asking customers specific questions during semi-structured interviews.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future studies on communication at farmers' markets could seek a larger and more diverse sample size. For example, researchers could ask more questions of participants in the market itself and recruit a more diverse population that includes participants from specific age, sex, and ethnic categories. Future researchers could also ask customers at the market to fill out

exit surveys to see how they evaluated claims and what types of evidence they found persuasive. In addition, future studies could study markets that are not producer-only to examine the persuasive dynamics at these markets. Since some of the food at markets that are not producer-only markets will be shipped in from afar, customers may not be able to rely on the source credibility of the vendors, something a producer-only market offers. In other words, claims about local and organically grown food may require more intense scrutiny in locations where the organization is not tightly regulating who sells at the market. Through this dissertation, I have provided a rich theoretical understanding of the persuasive message exchange that occurs during farmer-customer interaction. This study shed light on concepts central to the communication field, including source credibility, persuasion, and interaction. This project provided a fresh context for analyzing core communication principles.

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Appendix A: HSCL Approval Letter



6/19/11
HSCL #19488

Benjamin Garner
COMS
Bailey Hall

The Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL) has received your response to its expedited review of your research project

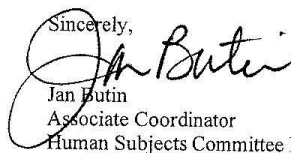
19488 Garner/Kunkel (COMS) Ethnographic Analysis of Relationship Formation at Farmer's Markets

and approved this project under the expedited procedure provided in 45 CFR 46.110 (f) (7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. As described, the project complies with all the requirements and policies established by the University for protection of human subjects in research. Unless renewed, approval lapses one year after approval date.

Since your research presents no risk to participants and involves no procedures for which written consent is normally required outside of the research context HSCL may waive the requirement for a signed consent form (45 CFR 46.117 (c) (2)). Your oral consent procedure meets HSCL requirements.

1. At designated intervals until the project is completed, a Project Status Report must be returned to the HSCL office.
2. Any significant change in the experimental procedure as described should be reviewed by this Committee prior to altering the project.
3. Notify HSCL about any new investigators not named in original application. Note that new investigators must take the online tutorial at http://www.rcr.ku.edu/hsc/hsp_tutorial/000.shtml
4. Any injury to a subject because of the research procedure must be reported to the Committee immediately.
5. When signed consent documents are required, the primary investigator must retain the signed consent documents for at least three years past completion of the research activity. If you use a signed consent form, provide a copy of the consent form to subjects at the time of consent.
6. If this is a funded project, keep a copy of this approval letter with your proposal/grant file.

Please inform HSCL when this project is terminated. You must also provide HSCL with an annual status report to maintain HSCL approval. Unless renewed, approval lapses one year after approval date. If your project receives funding which requests an annual update approval, you must request this from HSCL one month prior to the annual update. Thanks for your cooperation. If you have any questions, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Jan Butin
Associate Coordinator
Human Subjects Committee Lawrence

cc: Adrienne Kunkel

Appendix B: Oral Consent Form

As a graduate student in the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Kansas, I am conducting a research project looking at how people go to farmer's markets to have conversations and create personal relationships while buying food. I would like to ask you a few questions about why you attend farmer's markets and whether or not you form personal relationships with farmers/customers. You have no obligation to participate and you may discontinue your involvement at any time. Participation in the interview indicates your willingness to take part in this study and that you are at least 18 years old. Should you have any questions about this project or your participation in it you may ask me, or my faculty supervisor, Dr. Adrienne Kunkel in the Department Communication Studies. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call the Human Subjects Protection Office at (785) 864-7429 or email mdenning@ku.edu.

Appendix C: Demographic Survey

Name: _____

1. Age _____

2. Male / Female

3. Ethnicity/Race _____

4. Political Orientation _____

5. Occupation _____

6. Highest level of education completed?

a) High School b) 2 yrs. of College c) 4 yr College d) Graduate Degree f) Other _____

7. How often do you go to the farmers' market? _____

8. Where do you currently live?

a) Lawrence b) Kansas City c) Eudora d) Other _____

9. In order of importance, list the main 2-3 reasons you shop/sell at the Farmers' market. 1=

Most important, 2=Second most important, 3=Third most important

1.

2.

3.

10. How long have you been coming to the farmers' market? _____

11. CONTACT INFORMATION

Phone: _____

EMAIL: _____

Appendix D: Interview Protocol 1

1. Describe the relationships you have with farmers (*customers) at the farmers' market.
 - a. Real examples? Names?
 - b. In what locations you interact with farmers during the week?
2. I've noticed that vendors and customers sometimes talk at the side of the booth at the farmers' market. Do you do this? With whom?
3. Sometimes Farmers' will come out and talk to customers in front of their booth. What does this communicate?
4. What about farmers makes you feel that they as an individual or their booth are inviting?
 - a. How do these behaviors affect your buying habits or conversation?
5. What behaviors do farmers do that is not inviting?
 - a. For those behaviors, how does this affect your buying habits?
6. Describe a typology of customers
 - a. A vendor told me that there are three types of customers: 1) those who know the vendors, 2) those who are getting to know the vendors, and 3) those who just purchase and leave. What do you make of this? Does this ring true?
7. Describe the different types of farmer personalities.
 - a. How does each affect you?
8. [Farmers' Only] I've noticed that farmers' tend to smile and show enthusiasm for customers—does this come naturally or is it something you have to work on for your business?
9. Describe what (if any) community exists at the Farmers Market?
 - a. What behaviors qualify as community building?
10. Tell me what role ritual/regularity plays for you in going to the farmers' market.
 - a. Dog Walking?
 - b. Baby & Stroller?
 - c. See friends?
11. Describe what buying (selling) food face to face does for you?
12. Compare how the farmers' market differs from the grocery store in terms of interaction with food sellers.
13. Describe what you get out of relationship with a farmer (customer).
 - a. Resources (information, money, gifts, connection, friendship)
14. Have you developed a loyalty in patronizing certain farmers?

Can you provide an example or two?
15. When you buy from someone at the farmer's market, what assumptions do you or I hold to be true about their food? Trust? Common values?
16. Pretend you are writing a novel and you are trying to describe the farmers' market's social scene. What would you write about the social scene? What happens there?
17. What causes are you supporting when you buy food at the farmer's market?
 - a. Local? Organic? Green? Environment?
18. Define local and explain your take on it.

Appendix E: Interview Protocol 2

1. Tell me why you go to the farmers' market.
2. Describe the relationships between customers and farmers.
3. Describe what you get out of relationship with a farmer (customer) in terms of resources (information, money, gifts, connection, friendship, etc.)
4. Have you developed a loyalty in patronizing certain farmers?
5. What kinds of things/causes are important to farmers at the market?
6. Tell me some of the claims farmers make. What evidence do they provide for some of these claims? [Farmers=what claims do you make...?]
7. I've noticed farmers making claims such as, "You are the 88th customer who has come in and said our lavender products last for at least a year." Describe the effect these sorts of statements have on you.
8. I'm going to give you some scenarios I have observed, and I want you to tell me your reaction to them. (When possible, I will use the answer they give from #3 in the following scenarios)
 - a. A farmer wants to convince you that bee pollen is good for your health. Please tell me how the following modes of communication affect you.
 - i. A farmer tells you during a conversation that bee pollen is good for your health (Reaction/Comment)
 - ii. A farmer has a sign that says bee pollen is good for your health
 - iii. A farmer gives you a handout with studies on bee pollen
 - iv. A farmer lets you sample bee pollen
 - v. A farmer lets you hold the product
 - vi. A farmer refers you to his/her website
 - b. A farmer wants to convince you that his/her tomatoes are organic. Please tell me how the following modes of communication affect you.
 - i. A farmer tells you during a conversation that their tomatoes are organic
 - ii. A farmer has a sign that says their produce is "uncertified" organic
 1. Another sign reads: "Now certification free?" – what does that say to you?
 - iii. A farmer gives you a handout on organic food
 - iv. A farmer lets you sample the tomato
 - v. A farmer lets you hold the product
 - vi. A farmer refers you to his/her website
9. In sum, please rank which message source/evidence you find most persuasive and why (conversations, signs, handouts, samples, websites, other).
10. Are there things you communicate to farmers? [Customers only]
11. How does the fact that you are in an outdoor market affect the way you respond farmer claims about their products? Festival?
12. Tell me about trust/lack of trust at the farmers' market.
13. Do you know vendors names? Is it important for them to know your name?
14. I've noticed that farmers' tend to smile and show enthusiasm for customers—does this come naturally or is it something you have to perform?
15. Describe what (if any) community exists at the Farmers Market?
 - a. What behaviors qualify as community building?

16. Tell me what role ritual/regularity plays for you in going to the farmers' market.
17. Compare how the farmers' market differs from the grocery store in terms of interaction with food sellers
18. Describe what buying (selling) food face to face does for you?
19. What are the values of the farmers market?
20. How do you learn about/pick up on these values?

Appendix F: Themes and Subthemes of RQ1

Farmer Persuasive Messages and Evidence

1. The quality of products is superlative
 - Taste*
 - Freshness*
 - Health*
 - Unusual products*
 - Seasonality*
 - Aesthetics*
 - Crowds*
2. The market is an educational space
 - More knowledgeable than grocery clerks*
 - Production education*
 - Product education*
 - Price education*
 - Cooking techniques*
 - Recipes*
 - Health education*
3. The market is a personal place to shop
 - Eye contact*
 - Smiling*
 - Humor use*
 - Attentiveness*
 - Remembering customers*
 - Transcending the booth as barrier*
 - Trust*
4. Local consumption is beneficial
 - Environmental*
 - Quality*
 - Anti-industrial sentiments*
5. Family farms are important
 - Handmade products*
 - Presence of children*
 - Aesthetics*

Appendix G: Themes and Subthemes of RQ2

Customer Reactions to Persuasive Claims

1. The quality of products is superlative
 - Taste*
 - Freshness*
 - Health*
 - Unusual products*
 - Seasonality*
 - Aesthetics*
 - Crowds*
2. The market is an educational space
 - Expert vendors*
 - Pamphlets*
3. The market is a personal place to shop
 - Eye contact*
 - Smiling*
 - Humor use*
 - Attentiveness*
 - Remembering customers*
 - Transcending the booth as barrier*
 - Trust*
 - Better service than grocery store*
 - Non-immediacy behaviors*
4. Local consumption is beneficial
 - Environmental*
 - Taste*
 - Anti-corporate sentiments*
 - Economics*
5. Family farms are important
 - Handmade products*
 - Presence of children*
 - Aesthetics*