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Cultivating Community: Political Identity and Civic Agriculture among Small-Scale Organic Farmers in North Central New Mexico

Rose Elizabeth Rohrer

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**CULTIVATING COMMUNITY: POLITICAL IDENTITY AND
CIVIC AGRICULTURE AMONG SMALL-SCALE ORGANIC
FARMERS IN NORTH CENTRAL NEW MEXICO**

by

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THESIS

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ABSTRACT

Little work has been done exploring the sociological experiences of individuals working in organic agriculture, a type of farming primarily characterized by rigorous restrictions on chemical inputs. Unlike the massive corporate farms that have become commonplace in much of the United States, farms in North Central New Mexico tend to be small and diverse, with a political focus on community-building. In this study, thirty in-depth interviews of ten producers/owners and twenty farmworkers on organic farms in the region were conducted over the course of the 2014 growing season. I use the interview data to examine how small-scale farm work and ties to the land translate into a community-oriented political identity. In tapping into the lived experiences of farmers, I explore the principles of civic agriculture directly and demonstrate how these concepts translate for individuals embedded in the practice. Building on the definition of agrarian identity and drawing on theories of civic agriculture and social capital, I argue the farming practices in this region embody principles of social integration and cohesion despite the fact that individual farmers are not necessarily organizing into a singular

“movement.” I also take into account the orientation of local organizations toward not only promoting sustainable, localized agriculture, but also toward generating community participation in farming is central to North Central New Mexico’s narrative of civic agriculture. The results of the research imply that fusing a place-based, political identity with civic agricultural practices yields benefits for both the individual and the community.

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PREFACE

The study which served as inspiration for this thesis is entitled “Health and Safety Issues in Organic Farming: A Qualitative Study.” It was designed to conduct research with the organic farming population in the realm of public health. Led by Dr. Francisco Soto Mas in UNM’s Department of Family and Community Medicine, the original study was funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health and the Southwest Center for Agricultural Health, Injury Prevention, and Education. The content presented in this thesis does not necessarily represent the official views of the funding agencies. The study’s aim was to pinpoint relevant issues related to the health and safety of small-scale organic farmers, which is highly understudied. However, during the interview process, topics beyond individual health and safety concerns arose; many farmers spoke of how their identities and roles as farmers promoted community well-being. The original study was able to examine these divergent themes as the research was designed to be exploratory in nature and broad in scope; there is little data anywhere in the literature on the experiences of small-scale organic farmers. Data for this research were collected during the 2014 primary growing season, late February through September. I would like to thank Dr. Soto Mas for bringing me onto the research team and allowing me to explore the issues I found most intriguing.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Organic farming is growing throughout the United States both in terms of economic impact and acreage. The United States Department of Agriculture's 2015 report on organic agriculture indicates that demand for organic products has been increasing by double-digit figures almost every year since the codification of the Organic Food Production Act of 1990 (Greene 2013). And although organic production took an economic hit during the recession in the late 2000s, both consumer demand and the number of acres certified for organic production rebounded by 2011 (Greene 2013).

Organic farming in the US has been regulated and defined by the United States Department of Agriculture since the 1990s, a result of the National Organic Food Production Act of 1990 (USDA 2007). In order to be recognized as a USDA certified organic farm, a farm must undergo a rigorous certification process and adhere to standards regarding inputs such as soil amendments and pesticides and seed types such as those that are irradiated or genetically modified (USDA 2013). The move toward distinguishing "organic" agricultural methods from "conventional" ones gained momentum in the 1960s, most distinctly after the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, but it took another 30 years for the distinction to be regulated by the United States (Lockeretz 2007). Carson's seminal work illustrated the consequences of pesticide use in farming with a focus on DDT. The initial drive toward organic methods of farming was concern for the consumer and the environment rather than concern for the farmers or farmworkers themselves; however, a parallel, albeit smaller movement toward safer and more community-based working conditions did develop among agricultural workers as well (Lockeretz 2007).

Organic agriculture was a relatively specialized market until the early 2000s, when the USDA fully implemented the certification process and consumer interest in local, organic foods began to resurface (Dimitri and Greene 2002). As organic agriculture experienced a resurgence of consumer interest, other positive pressures also paved the way for increased viability of small-scale farming and community gardening. Burgeoning research on food availability for different populations resulted in the identification of “food deserts” by scholars and communities who wanted to draw attention to the inadequate access to fresh, healthy food in many urban and isolated rural areas (Clarke, Eyre, and Guy 2002).

Increasing consumer demand and research into the social aspects of farming created an environment in which more farmers could viably become involved with organic production. These new organic farms and their operators tend to have markedly different characteristics than their conventional counterparts. In 2012, the USDA completed the Agricultural Census, finding that organic farmers are significantly younger than conventional farmers, with 13% of organic farmers and only 6% of conventional farmers under 35 years old.¹ The demographic information for organic farmers is limited by the way in which questions were asked by the Census of Agriculture and who was surveyed, though some states have more detailed records. For example, on the national level, only the principal operator for each farm was surveyed. This information is not able to create an illustration of the division of labor on a farm, nor is it able to showcase possible racial or gender disparities between operators and workers. Women are underrepresented in both organic and conventional agriculture, though organic agriculture

¹ *All demographic characteristics in this section are sourced directly from the USDA's Census of Agriculture (2012) as cited in the bibliography.*

does have a slightly higher proportion of farms operated by women (16% and 14% respectively). Farms, organic or conventional, are also disproportionately operated by White individuals; only 4% of either type of farm are operated by a person of color. “Spanish, Hispanic, and Latino” farmers are included within the wider race data and disaggregated separately; this group, regardless of racial identification, operates only 3% of conventional farms and 4% of organic farms.

The approximate amount of land cultivated conventionally is more than 200 times greater than land cultivated organically². There were 2,100,380 acres of conventional cropland harvested nationwide in 2012 in contrast to 8,923 acres of organic cropland harvested. However, the percent of small farms versus large farms is similar regardless of how they cultivate the land. Additionally, some of the larger farms may be animal farms or ranches as those are not disaggregated from the information on “all farms.” In the information for all conventional farms, 14,513 animal farms or ranches are included in the statistics; only 24 animal farms or ranches are included in the organic farm statistics.

Conventional and Organic Farm Size in the United States by Acres Farmed, 2012

<i>farms by size</i>	<i>conventional farms</i>	<i>farms with 50% or more of total sales from organic sales</i>	<i>conventional farms percentages</i>	<i>organic farms percentages</i>
1-9 acres	222040	1594	10.57%	17.86%
10-49 acres	587532	2017	27.97%	22.60%
50-179 acres	631542	2505	30.07%	28.07%
180-499 acres	344275	1763	16.39%	19.76%
500-999 acres	141989	566	6.76%	6.34%
1,000-1,999 acres	91021	252	4.33%	2.82%
2,000 acres or more	81981	226	3.90%	2.53%
	2100380	8923	100.00%	100.00%

² All numbers regarding organic production are for farms with 50% or greater total sales from organic sales.

With the United States' average farm size at 434 acres and the median at 80 acres, we can determine that there are a higher number of small scale farmers than large scale farmers, though some of the large scale farms are extreme in size. It is these small scale farmers that are most often discussed knowing their neighbors and selling directly to consumers, though the research on civic participation is mixed (Jackson-Smith and Gillespie 2005; USDA 2013; Obach and Tobin 2014). And while recognizing that farming is a job, it is important to ask whether the nature of the job itself creates a space for engagement with the community, increased social capital, and benefits to the well-being of the individual farmer.

Thomas Lyson (2004) characterizes the ideal type of agricultural production as “civic agriculture,” which is defined by six qualities embodying local-market orientation, embeddedness in the community, high quality production, a smaller scale, use of localized knowledge, and direct links to consumers. He also notes that production nearest to this model is frequently found in small-scale organic farming (Lyson 2004). Civic agriculture is a democratic process entered into by the farmer and community together (DeLind and Bingen 2008). However, much of the scholarship on the interactions between the farmers and the non-farming community is focused on the consumer (Hinrichs and Kremer 2002; Alkon and Norgaard 2009; Obach & Tobin 2014). Another site of research tends to be the community garden, a place Lyson (2004) also notes is a locus of civic agricultural production (Armstrong 2000; Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny 2004; Pudup 2008; Teig, Amulya, Bardwell, Buchenau, Marshall, and Litt 2009; Comstock, Dickinson, Marshall, Soobader, Turbin, Buchenau, and Litt 2010; Ghose and Pettygrove 2014).

In the gardening literature, many of the individuals describe benefits that they derive from, and provide to, their communities, some of which will be discussed in depth in Chapter 4. Additionally, a number of studies throughout the 2000s highlighted the positive effects of participation in community gardens and community-oriented farming projects on both individual and social health (Armstrong 2000; Pretty 2002; Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny 2004; Teig et al. 2009). However, unique to individuals *employed* in farming, a career in growing organic food can become more than simply a job; it can become an identity, often replete with civic and political interests in engaging their community in new ways through food production and food justice.

Overview of Project

The initial drive behind the original study, “Health and Safety Issues in Organic Farming: A Qualitative Study” (HSIOF), stems from the fact that agriculture is one of the most dangerous industries in the United States and “organic” farming, which is understudied, has been increasing since the passing of the National Organic Food Production Act of 1990 (USDA 2007). Further, there is a gap in the health literature regarding the psychosocial and contextual factors that contribute to health and safety in organic agriculture. However, the primary interviewers for the project, myself included, are trained as sociologists; we noticed patterns of a more holistic view on health when speaking to these small-scale organic farmers. We also began to see deep political ties to farming and the land and ideas such as “community health” and “social health” described by the participants. We took these ideas and began probing the interviewees’ ideas on community and exploring literature on organic farms and gardens and the communities surrounding them.

Little work has been done exploring the sociological experiences of individuals working in organic agriculture. Much of the literature either looks at consumer experiences with organic agriculture (Hinrichs and Kremer 2002; DeLind and Bingen 2008; Obach and Tobin 2014, for example) or community experiences with small-scale gardening (Armstrong 2000; Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny 2004; Pudup 2008; Teig et al. 2009; Ghose and Pettygrove 2014). This thesis is unique in that it reverses the more common research direction, focusing strictly on small-scale organic farmers and their experiences in agriculture. In this thesis I engage with some of the ideas put forth in the literature on both consumer and gardening experiences to see how they might translate to the organic farming community.

In the United States, small-scale organic farms and gardens have become an increasingly desirable feature both in rural and urban areas. North Central New Mexico, defined here to include Bernalillo, Sandoval, Santa Fe, Valencia, and parts of Rio Arriba County, is home to 68 of New Mexico's 144 certified organic farming operations including fruit and vegetable farms, feed operations, and animal-based farming (New Mexico Department of Agriculture 2014). Of the 68, 46 are operations of five acres or fewer. It is in this region that our investigation began, interviewing farmers and farmworkers on these small-scale organic farms during the 2014 growing season to learn about their experiences with health and safety. Using these interviews, I first began to examine ideas of organic farming as a political identity and community service rather than simply a means of employment and, second, I saw a definition of health that included ideas of community well-being. It is the second component I use to focus this piece, considering how individual farmers may see their contribution to the community as

generating increased collective efficacy through processes associated with civic agriculture.

These questions are important to investigate as a number of studies have shown declining civic and political participation across the United States (Putnam 2000; National Conference on Citizenship 2006; Obach and Tobin 2014). Civic participation is critical for building community capacity and collective action, processes by which the public is able to have an active voice in the political realm. The farming and gardening literature demonstrates that community agricultural projects are becoming more frequent features of both urban and rural landscapes and are also often epicenters of civic engagement (Armstrong 2000; Hinrichs and Kremer 2002; Macias 2008; Teig et al. 2009; Obach and Tobin 2014). It is the intersection of agriculture and civic engagement I explore throughout this thesis.

In New Mexico, initiatives such as *La Cosecha* (The Harvest), Project Feed the Hood, and the Farm to School Program are just a few ways in which local farmers become involved with community activism. *La Cosecha* is an initiative developed by the Agri-Cultura Network, designed in part to offer weekly produce at a low cost to community members who demonstrate need. Project Feed the Hood was designed by members of the Southwest Organizing Project (SWOP) to promote food literacy and opportunities to learn about and participate in organic gardening throughout the Albuquerque area. The Farm to School Program is working with Albuquerque Public Schools (APS) to try and reach an agreement that will have 1% of APS's food purchased locally, direct from local farmers. These types of projects demonstrate the deep linkage between political identity and farming for many small-scale farmers. In the literature, this

is sometimes referred to as an “agrarian identity” (Hinrichs 2003, Trott 2012), but my intention here is to emphasize the political aspects and explore an agrarian *political* identity.

A focus on the political aspects of identity among organic farmers is essential to understanding how participation in these small-scale, community-oriented forms of agriculture can undergird a growing social movement centered on building justice structures within the local community. The New Social Movement literature discusses the emergence of movements that have primary interests not in challenging the state or other institutions, but rather building a more autonomous civil society (Cohen 1985; Offe 1985). At the most basic level, farms and farmers are in a position to provide a service to their communities: fresh food and knowledge of growing that food. Those farmers who engage in this service are the focal point of this thesis, which seeks to outline an understudied interaction between producer and consumer that is not always couched in capitalist motivations.

Research Questions

In this thesis, I aim to illustrate some of the factors working together to develop an agrarian political identity in North Central New Mexico and to then explore ideas of community well-being and farming as a community service as discussed in the interviews. In doing so, I hope to move the conversation forward, exploring whether supporting small-scale, organic farms does not only work to provide healthy, local food to the region, but also whether that support helps grow a community of individuals invested in improving the local condition.

To that end, I ask the following research questions:

1. Does an agrarian identity translate into a political identity for individuals working on organic farms in this region? What factors influence an action-oriented agrarian identity?
2. Do the lived experiences of farmers in North Central New Mexico reflect ideas of “civic agriculture”? What role might participation in local agricultural coalitions play in improving community well-being and social integration?

Chapter Organization

The chapters of this thesis are organized as follows:

Chapter 2 begins by introducing organic agriculture in New Mexico to place local practices within a national context. Fitting this thesis into the broader national picture gives greater substance to the experiences that emerged in the interviews. I then discuss HSIOF, the research project from which the data was gleaned and the methodology used for this thesis, focusing on how the initial aspirations for studying health and safety led into ideas about community well-being and social cohesion. In this chapter I offer basic demographics of study participants and compare those to both state-wide and national demographics in order to give context to the study. I also position the research team within the community and discuss both our role and the participants’ role in generating the information gathered during HSIOF and how that information will be used.

In Chapter 3 I begin to directly analyze the data. I begin by examining the development of an agrarian political identity as described by the participants. I focus on concepts of identity development generally and then relate them to the factors described in the interviews. In this chapter, I identify key factors contributing to an agrarian

political identity as defined by the participants and begin to deconstruct the relationship individual farmers have with local agricultural organizations. I tie in concepts from literature on place studies and rural sociology to frame the context of identity development within North Central New Mexico, with special respect to the ethnic diversity represented in this region. I use literature focused on the agricultural and social history of New Mexico to develop the intersection of ethnic and agrarian identity as a primary factor influencing my findings. At the end of Chapter 3, I begin to build an intellectual bridge between the participants' political identities and their perceived roles in creating a space for increased community justice. I also explore whether the experiences of individuals working on a farm differ from individuals who own or manage a farm.

Chapter 4 utilizes data from the interviews to examine connections between farming as a career and farming as a community service. Using direct quotes from the participants, I analyze the ways in which individual farmers see themselves within the context of their communities. This chapter unites themes from the sociology of agriculture and the lived experiences of the participants, focusing primarily on ideas of civic agriculture and the role of farming organizations in the region.

The fifth and final chapter synthesizes the experiences of the farmers interviewed with themes seen in small-scale organic farming enterprises in the United States. In order to flesh out these themes, I briefly revisit theories of identity, social capital, and community well-being through the lens of farmers in North Central New Mexico. I also discuss implications of this research within the organic farming community and how this

case speaks to aspects of the social movements literature and could provide a direction for future research.

CHAPTER 2: METHODS AND BACKGROUND

Research Design

The original study, Health and Safety Issues in Organic Farming: A Qualitative Study (HSIOF), described in the Preface, was purposefully designed to be flexible in order to capture the broadest themes as discussed by the participants. Semi-structured interview guides were developed by project members early on in the study; however, those guides evolved over time to better include emergent topics. The interview guides are included in Appendix A. Participants are divided into two basic categories: producer or worker; each group was interviewed with a slightly different semi-structured bilingual instrument. Producers are defined as managers or owners of a certified organic, small-scale farming operation. Workers needed to be working or volunteering on a farm using organic practices, be at least 18 years of age, and have 150 or more hours of experience. These divisions were essential as producers are more likely to be in control of a farm's overall health and safety practices, such as requiring midday breaks, and workers are more likely to engage in individualistic behaviors such as applying sunscreen. Ten producers and 20 workers were interviewed. All interview participants were given small honoraria for their time and signed informed consent in either English or Spanish for the use of the interview material as per IRB approval.

Recruitment

Participants were initially recruited through direct phone calls to farms listed in New Mexico's organically certified farms database and through previously established community contacts. From there, the team utilized snowball sampling methods to recruit a wider array of farmers. Finally, local organizations and coalitions in the region helped

with recruitment by recommending farmers directly to the research team and by discussing the research we were doing with their contacts.

Data Collection

Interviews of the workers and producers lasted from thirty to ninety minutes and were conducted by at least two team members, one primarily responsible for the interview, the other for note taking. All interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed verbatim. Both interview guides focused on general themes of health, safety, and perceptions about organic farming; however, participants were encouraged to explore related tangents and other emergent topics. Data for this thesis are mostly derived from these emergent explorations that came from questions phrased like the following: “How did you get started in organic farming?”, “Is there anything else you’d like us to know about organic farming in this region?”, and “Is there an ideology behind your work in organic farming?”

Farmers were interviewed at their farms when possible, or in a nearby community center. In order to be included as a “small-scale” farm, we limited our sample to farms with fewer than five cultivated acres, fewer than eleven employees, and annual sales of less than \$200,000.

Five observations were conducted to view the farmers and farmworkers in their environments; however, this component was strictly focused on health and safety issues. I am not including the data from the observations in this thesis. The observation team consisted of three graduate students who worked in pairs on the observations and compared notes for inter-rater reliability purposes.

Regionally, HSIOF was focused on Central New Mexico, sampling farms from Bernalillo, Santa Fe, and Socorro Counties, though nearby areas of Rio Arriba County were included in the final sample and no individuals from Socorro County participated in the interviews. Participants and participant farms were originally selected using snowball sampling; interviewees who knew other producers or workers who might be willing to be interviewed gave the research team names and contact information. Participants were also recruited through networking efforts by various team members who called some farms directly, approached individuals at community events such as farmers' markets, and contacted local farming organizations for referrals.

The interview team consisted of four graduate students — two White women, myself in the Department of Sociology and not fluent in Spanish, the other in the Anthropology Department and fluent in Spanish, but a non-native speaker; a Latina woman in the Department of Occupational Therapy, who identifies as proficient in Spanish; and a Latino man in the Department of Sociology who is a native Spanish speaker. Having interviewers available to conduct interviews in Spanish was critical, as we wanted to be highly inclusive and able to represent each participant's ideas in their own words. New Mexico has the highest percentage of Hispanic ancestry of any state in the US, so allowing for individuals to choose to be interviewed in Spanish or English was especially critical here. The Principal Investigator (PI) is a Professor in the Department of Family and Community Medicine. He identifies as Hispanic and is a native Spanish speaker as well.

Participant Descriptives

Female : Male	6 : 24
Median Age	28.5 years
Median Years in Organic Agriculture	2-5 years
Counties Sampled	Bernalillo Rio Arriba Santa Fe
Median Level of Education	Some College Education
US Born : Non-US Born	24 : 6

Of the thirty individuals who participated in HSIOF, a total of six identified as women and only one was a producer. This resulted in a total sample that was 20% women with 25% of the workers and 10% of the producers identifying as women. The 10% is a slightly lower percentage than national organic farmer demographics, which put women owner/operators at 16% of the total population (USDA 2012a). However, with 25% of our worker population identifying as women, we sample just above the national average for women farm laborers, which is 18% (USDA 2012a). Near the end of the study, our team actively targeted women farmers for recruitment. The participants' ages ranged from 19 to 78 with a median age of 28.5 years. Again, this is low compared to national organic farmer demographics, with a median age range of 50-54 years old, but the organic farming population is generally younger than the conventional farming population, with more than 60% of the conventional farm operators being over 55 years of age and just less than 50% of the organic farmers in the same age range (USDA 2014). However, only 13% of organic farmers in the United States are under 35, illustrating the slightly skewed nature of our sample (USDA 2014). The sample population is also well-

educated, with the majority having at least some college education. Of those individuals not born in the United States, their countries of origin were France, Guatemala, and Mexico.

Although questions regarding race and ethnicity were not asked as a part of HSI OF, a number of the participants discussed their racial and ethnic background in the interviews. New Mexico is noteworthy in its racial and ethnic composition, with nearly 50% of its residents identifying as Hispanic, Spanish, or Latino of any race compared to 17% nationally (US Census Bureau 2015). Additionally, although the Census only reports 1.2% of individuals in the United States identifying as American Indian or Alaska Native, 10.4% of New Mexico's population identifies in this category.

In New Mexico's organic farming population, 32% of operators identify as Hispanic, Spanish, or Latino of any race compared to 4% nationally (USDA 2014). These demographics make New Mexico a special case for understanding how racial and ethnic identity may inform agrarian identity as small-scale farming is an important aspect of traditional Hispanic heritage (Deutsch 1987).

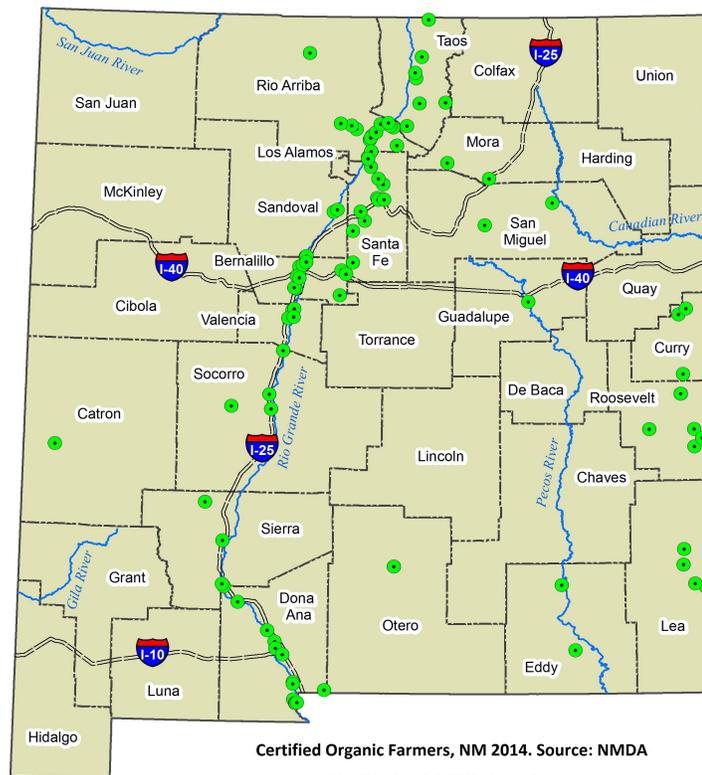
Setting

In 2012, New Mexico had a total of 1,080 square miles of farmed cropland within its borders, which is a slight decrease from previous census figures taken in the late 1990s and 2000s³ (USDA 2014). In a state of 121,298 square miles, this cropland takes up less than 1% of the state's total land. Much of this farmland lies along the Rio Grande River, often utilizing the widespread acequia system, a community irrigation method which has

³ This figure does not include animal farms/grazing land, idle cropland, or failed cropland

been maintained and communally governed by formal associations since the 17th Century under Spanish colonial rule (New Mexico Office of the State Engineer n.d.).

Of New Mexico's 144 certified organic farms, approximately 35% are located within Bernalillo, Santa Fe, and Socorro Counties (NM Department of Agriculture 2014). This number does include organic animal farms in addition to fruit and vegetable farms; however, this study focuses on the latter. HSIOF sampled farmers from these counties and from the nearby Rio Arriba County.



New Mexico's farms⁴ have greater average acreage than the national average, but bring in far less net income. An average organic farm in New Mexico is 1748 acres with a net cash income of only \$9,501 whereas nationally an average farm is 434 acres with a net cash income of \$43,750. However, the median farm size in New Mexico is 40 acres and the national median farm size is 80 acres. The low median size in New Mexico indicates a large number of smaller-sized farms with a few very large farms likely skewing the average. In fact, over 50% of New Mexico's farms are less than 10 acres and a full two-thirds are less than 50 acres. Some of the larger farms are likely to be pasture and rangeland, which makes up 95% of New Mexico's farmed land.

Compared to the rest of New Mexico, the counties included in HSIOF are slightly more urban than rural, including both Albuquerque, New Mexico's most populous city, and Santa Fe, the state capital (United States Census Bureau 2015). The proximity of the farms to urban centers, and frequent inclusion within those areas creates a unique urban-rural fusion, as is evidenced by the high number of organizations and resources available to the farming community.

Among the small-scale farmers we interviewed, nearly all produced mixed vegetable crops. This falls in line with most small-scale producers throughout the state, whether conventional or organic. Many also sell directly to the public via community-supported agriculture initiatives (CSA), farmers' markets, cooperatives, or small grocery stores. On average in New Mexico, 58% of organic farms sold their goods directly to a retail outlet and 12% marketed those products through a CSA. The direct retail sales in

⁴ These figures are based on all farms as organic farm acreage is not disaggregated from the sample. All data come from the USDA's "Census of Agriculture: Organic Agriculture 2012" as cited in the reference section unless otherwise noted.

New Mexico are much higher than the national average, which indicates only 30% of organic farms sold their goods directly to a retail outlet (USDA 2014). CSA numbers are comparable to national numbers, as 14% of farms sell their products through a CSA at the national level (USDA 2014). The proximity of organic farms to urban centers in New Mexico may facilitate direct sales along with the large number of organizations designed to support local farming projects.

In the early 2000s, community organizations such as Agri-Cultura Network and La Plazita Institute began working with farmers in New Mexico to help support local agriculture and provide healthy food to local communities. These organizations built on a foundation created by the Cooperative Development Center of New Mexico, the Traditional Native American Farmers' Association, the New Mexico Acequia Association, and the Southwest Organizing Project, which began their campaigns for community development and environmental justice projects in the 1980s and 1990s. The organizations named here are a small sub-sample of the myriad organizations working with land reclamation, environmental justice, and food justice issues in North Central New Mexico. Many of these local organizations make it clear from their mission statements that they are not only concerned with specific local causes, but are also concerned with the promotion of ethnic and/or New Mexican identity. The role of organizations in the farming community of North Central New Mexico will be further developed in Chapter Three, during the discussion of agrarian political identity.

Data Analysis and Management

All interviews were transcribed verbatim from audio recordings and analyzed in their original language using NVivo 10 software (QSR International). Identifying

information such as the name of the interviewee or the farm was removed from the transcript before analysis. The names used for the purposes of this thesis are pseudonyms agreed upon by the research team.

Prior to coding the data, the research team sat down with the interview guides and discussed themes related to health and safety that were the foundation of the project. Having participated in most of the interviews, I then developed a very basic coding guide for the team to use as a starting point when analyzing the interviews that encompassed concepts pertaining to health and safety in the traditional sense, but it also includes ideas of health of the whole person, community health, and identity. Specifically, I used the following codes for analysis in this thesis: “intellectual health,” “spiritual health,” “social health,” “contributions to community health,” “interactions with other farmers or community members,” “motivation to be organic or traditional,” “farming as community service,” “spiritual attitudes and beliefs,” “tradition or history,” “organic origin,” “environmental concern,” and “relationship to local organizations.”

Theoretical frameworks within the tradition of public health broadly shaped the analysis of the interview material, but the design also included coding using inductive methods associated with grounded theory, such as grounded-based coding (Charmaz 2006) and the creation of memos to compare notes among the research team and recode or reconceptualize items as necessary. Data reliability was addressed through the systematic way in which we conducted the initial interviews and throughout the multifaceted coding process.

The coding process involved members of the research team individually coding each interview for the designated codes and creating memos as divergent and emerging

themes arose. Six interviews (20%) were coded by two investigators, who then met to compare and discuss to ensure inter-rater reliability. After the coding process was complete, the PI read through each line of coded data and made notations. The entire research team subsequently met twice in order to discuss the PI's notes and work toward consensus on item coding we felt could use refining.

CHAPTER 3: AN AGRARIAN POLITICAL IDENTITY

“I would say a lifestyle of a traditional, organic farmer or anyone who’s doing anything organic or traditional method, you’re very much more humbled, first of all, cause you- you realize what work it takes to put food on the table...this is a lifestyle of purpose and noticing that everybody has a place, everything has a place.”

Gabriel, a worker in Bernalillo County

“Food is something that connects people to the Earth. I think it obviously nourishes them and it gives them a sense of belonging to place. And so to be a part of the first part of the food process of growing food and bringing it to the people, the restaurants, or whoever is very rewarding, I think.”

Peter, a producer in Santa Fe County

As I began coding the data, I found ideas of “agrarian-ness” or “agrarian identity” centrally located in many of the farmers’ narratives. Agrarian identity is a loosely defined term that encompasses feelings of being tied to the land and a sense of independence, and self-sufficiency (Hinrichs 2003). What the participants in the project were saying during their interviews reflected these ideas, but also seemed to say something more. Agrarian identity is bound and reinforced through interactions with other agrarian and rural actors (Jackson-Smith and Gillespie 2005; Trott 2012; Strand, Arnould, and Press 2014) and with the community in settings where the role is visible, such as farmers’ markets (Lyson 2004). It is intimately tied to the specific region of the farm, which means that an agrarian identity can mean slightly different things in different places.

Place-based research examines the construction of identity within a particular historical, social, geographical, and environmental context; it is useful in demonstrating the ties between farming as a land-based occupation and its seemingly transformative nature of an individual into a “farmer” and proactive community member (Wiborg 2004; Borer 2006). Understanding agrarian identity as a part of place-based research is essential to contextualizing individual experiences. Writing about place-studies in the realm of

sociology, Thomas Gieryn (2000) states, "...a place is not merely a setting or backdrop, but an agent player in the game — a force with detectable and independent effects on social life" (466). In both the farm and garden literature, scholars emphasize the importance of setting research within its specific locale in order to better understand how place plays a role in identity formation, access to healthy food, and community engagement (DeLind and Bingen 2008; Alkon and Norgaard 2009; Ghose and Pettygrove 2014). The literature on place studies helps us understand the historical processes that have shaped north central New Mexico and its agricultural practices and to interpret the words of the study participants within that frame.

Although similar processes shape all individuals who adopt a specific career, becoming a small-scale farmer involves not only an interaction with the market, but also with the environment and the community. This process of agrarian identity development is couched in historical and social contexts of farming, whether the individual has a background in agriculture, is tied to farming organizations, or is new to the career.

Not all agrarian identity can be considered political identity, however, so I will take some time to discuss the distinction. Agrarian identity and general ties to the land and to the occupation of farming can be considered a type of role-identity. This type of identity is embodied by an individual and, like the discussion of *habitus* above, involves interactions with others who identify in the same way, with the environment, and with the community. The more central this role is to an individual's sense of self, the stronger that individual's sense of self and personal worth will be (Thoits 2012). Having a strong role-identity positively impacts an individual's sense of well-being and purpose in the community (Thoits 2012).

I am arguing that an agrarian political identity goes one step beyond the role-identity as the individual not only sees her/himself as embodying the role of a farmer, but also sees farming as a catalyst for change and social justice in the community. An *agrarian identity* is often community-centered, socially responsive, and reliant on localized knowledge (Lyson 2004), but this is not always the case (Hinrichs 2000; Obach and Tobin 2014). Development of an agrarian *political* identity also involves negotiating boundaries and ideals among those who tend toward the same worldview, and is an active, engaged process rather than the slow acquisition of role-based characteristics. The embodiment of these ideals is similar to that of a social movement activist who incorporates political identity into a career. Further, for these reasons, I find it essential to emphasize my focus on the agrarian identity as political.

In the literature, this identity is associated with values-oriented farming rather than market-oriented farming, though these categories are by no means binary (Allen and Kovach 2000; Lund, Hemlin, and Lockeretz 2002; Lamine and Bellon 2009). The fact that this study's sample is predominantly tied to the values-oriented viewpoint may simply be a reflection of the small size of the farms, which are not large enough to generate much revenue and are able to be located within urban areas. It is important to note that the agrarian political identity described here is not an idealized concept of tradition, but rather a lens through which the farmers see their role in working toward improved community well-being and social integration.

The intersection of farming and community-based political activism is not a new phenomenon. Surveying farming activism in the past 150 years, there are numerous examples that demonstrate these ties. In the late 1800s, during the Progressive Era, the

farmer-led “People’s Party” grew out of a populist movement seeking to address low prices for agricultural commodities, particularly in the South. In Great Depression-era Wisconsin, farmers went on strike, dumping milk in an attempt to drive up prices so fewer farmers would lose their livelihoods. In the mid-1960s, the United Farm Workers of America, under the leadership of activists such as César Chávez and Dolores Huerta, fought to improve conditions for farm laborers. And in 1999, after years of fighting against discrimination in lending practices, African-American farmers marched on Washington DC in an effort to save their communities and farms. These historical links between agricultural workers and the labor movement, the Left, the Civil Rights Movement, and other social movements demonstrates the importance of untangling what is undergirding an agrarian political identity.

The strong agrarian political identity discussed in the farming community also establishes feelings of credibility among the farmers, which is key to facilitating knowledge production (Epstein 1995). Many farmers in North Central New Mexico are engaging in localized knowledge production and some reject state-defined labels as a way of distancing themselves from the control of the state. These actions synthesize “knowledge-practices” (Casas-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell 2008) with issues of power and expertise (Epstein 1995; Scott 1998; Aparicio and Blaser 2008), redefining what it means to be an “expert” in their local areas and demonstrate how locating knowledge within a place can facilitate the reinvigoration of communities using local expertise and resources.

Twenty-two of the 30 farmers interviewed for this thesis described being engaged in behaviors related to an agrarian political identity or discussed how their identity is

deeply tied to the well-being of the community. I describe four major factors driving an agrarian political identity in my sample: a strong environmental ethic; a desire to improve community well-being through the provision of local, healthy foods; ties to tradition and history; and ties to local agricultural organizations. Though some of the categories tend to be closely tied together, each also is able to stand on its own. In the next section, I will use examples from both the data and the literature to illustrate how each category drives agrarian political identity.

Environmental Ethic

An environmental ethic is often related to motivations for farmers to transition to or start with an organic way of farming (Kaltoft 1999; Obach 2007). Prior to increasing consumer demand for organic products, rising prices, and a national labeling system, organic was primarily a local, small-scale endeavor undertaken by individuals concerned with the impact of pesticides and fertilizers on their communities and the health of their land (Guthman 1998). Perhaps, because of the producers' ties to the farm's origins, that is why we see a stronger discussion of environmental issues among the producers rather than workers in our sample. Jacob, a producer in Bernalillo County, sees an environmental ethic as integral to who he is as a person.

I could have used insecticides that are certified organic, but I prefer not to. The reason being is that my tradition dictates that the environment be disturbed as little as possible.

Others, like Dominic, a producer in Rio Arriba County, came to develop an environmental ethic over time. He discusses his process in coming to believe he could no longer in good conscious use pesticides when he connects the hazards of conventional methods to his home life:

I saw the [Sevin] Dust kinda flying off my pants...and I saw [my son] kinda rolling into that Dust. And I go, "This is bullshit." And I'm over there trying to get all this crap off and I saw my little kids rolling around in the same poison now. And I go, 'No that ain't gonna work...' That was my 'Ah-ha' moment on why I didn't want to do conventional type of agriculture anymore and that's when I wanted to go into organic.

Both of these responses are still somewhat individualistic ideas of environmentalism, focused on personal ties to organic methods. This contrasts to indications in the literature that an environmental ethic tied with farming tends to take on a more holistic character, with concern for the environment itself as the centerpiece (Verhoog, Matze, Lammerts van Bueren, and Baars 2003). However, the questions posed to the participants in the original study focused on health and safety issues, which influenced the types of responses we elicited. Some participants did, however, describe broader associations between their farming practices and an environmental ethic. Marcus, a worker in Bernalillo County saw his role as an organic farmer as deeply tied to the Earth as a whole:

If you really connect to organic farming...you wouldn't want to go out and leave the farm and then go litter or spill paint in another place away from the farm. So it has a carrying over...into other areas of our life. And then you realize everything is connected.

The idea that the environmental ethic continues off of the farm is typical of motivations described by organic farmers in their conversion process or when they begin using organic methods (Verhoog et al. 2003). Andrew, a worker in Bernalillo County describes his motivations for working on organic farms as follows.

I mean, I'm really doing organic because I don't really like killing anything. So I see the ants as part of what we're doing... It's not just humans making this happen, it's the web of life, bugs and birds and all that.

The motivations behind an individual's environmental ethic can range from concern for human consequences alone to concern for environmental consequences alone. None of the interviewees fell strictly onto one end of that spectrum, but Nathaniel, a worker in Bernalillo County, mostly spoke about his pride for New Mexico as his home and his desire to see it unspoiled:

New Mexico is a beautiful place that we should be able to self-sustain and grow regionally-appropriate foods...All those pesticides and fertilizers cost the environment and the air...there's just so many negative environmental outcomes. That's my main motivator when it comes to organic.

Although Nathaniel implicitly ties humans to nature in the first part of his statement, this concept of separation of the environment from people stems from the mainstream environmental movement for most of the 20th Century. This separation not only created (and still creates today) symbolic boundaries around access to the environment, but also around those who would be allowed to make environmental claims. To counter these boundaries, scholars in some areas have reinvigorated the Nuevomexicano concept of *la resolana* as “a pathway to knowledge that derives from a dialectical relation between thought and action in the everyday lives of people,” creating conduits for the legitimization of different forms of counter-hegemonic knowledge and dialogue (Montiel, Atencio, Mares 2009:34). In contrast, keeping definitions of the environment and nature separate from civilization creates a hierarchical space in which only the elite are allowed to enjoy the benefits. Utilizing local knowledge and practices, the work being done by farmers in North Central New Mexico provides another view of the development of an environmental justice framework and its impacts on local food production and sustainable agriculture.

Organic food itself is typically an elite commodity, and in some urban neighborhoods and rural towns, fresh food of any kind is inaccessible. In the next section, I will discuss how many farmers in North Central New Mexico embody an agrarian political identity by providing access to fresh food in their communities.

Community Food Production

The identification of particular locales as “food deserts” has driven many urban and rural community garden projects (Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny 2004; Comstock et al. 2010; Ghose and Pettygrove 2014), farm-to-school initiatives (Allen and Guthman 2006; Bagdonis, Hinrichs, and Schafft 2009), and other creative ways of getting fresh food into these food-poor zones (Allen, FitzSimmons, Goodman, and Warner 2003). A number of the farmers interviewed for this project see themselves as going beyond a small-scale fix for the food desert problem; they deliberately position themselves in such a way that they are able to produce and provide food to locations within their neighborhoods.

The comments about providing food to local people came more from the producers than the workers, though the idea permeated throughout many of the interviews. Individuals discussed culturally-appropriate foods, family values, and community health issues. One of the producers, Oscar of Bernalillo County, simply stated, “In the case of organic farming, it’s to feed the community.” Oscar’s motivation behind owning an organic farm is to provide food to an underserved area. The workers on North Central New Mexico’s organic farms echo these sentiments, finding purpose in not only providing food, but being involved in food education and raising awareness of power dynamics in food distribution.

Ricardo, a worker in Bernalillo County emphasizes a combination of providing food to the community with raising consciousness around healthy food and issues of power.

I'm not just growing food. I wanna grow a consciousness in the community...I want you to be aware of what you're eating [and] who's controlling your food.

Ricardo's sense that his work on a farm is in direct service to the community underscores the idea of an agrarian political identity that is action-oriented and responsive to the needs of the area. Clayton, another worker in Bernalillo County, works directly with children on the farm and sees education as one of his main contributions.

Sending kids home with watermelons and pumpkins and bags full of tomatoes...they just get so excited...So that's really my favorite part, is seeing how the kids respond and react and...how you can literally see their minds changing about things in those moments.

Like Ricardo, Clayton ties his work directly back into the community. He sees his work with youth as influencing their worldview by empowering them to learn about food and where it comes from. Paloma, a worker in Bernalillo County, looks at the composition of residents living in designated food deserts and also sees her farm as improving the lives of people in her community:

It's not only about providing fresh, local organic food to families, but it's about what is the overall health of that area — the well-being and community health and health of businesses and families. So not only addressing the fact that it's a food desert, but it's primarily a community of people of color and immigrants and poor people.

Acknowledging the historical, socioeconomic, and often racial component of food deserts creates a space for individuals to connect with the Earth in ways that are meaningful to their specific background and culture. The community-oriented space created by many of the organic farms creates a place in which individuals can negotiate both personal and collective identity (DeLind and Bingen 2008; Ghose and Pettygrove 2014)

Don, a producer in Santa Fe County, discusses how reengaging in local food production, providing for the community, and linking that work with personal belief shapes who he is as a farmer:

Food is something that connects people to the Earth. I think it obviously nourishes them and it gives them a sense of belonging to place. And so to be a part of the first part of the food process of growing food and bringing it to the people, the restaurants, or whoever is very rewarding, I think.

Don's statement begins to touch on the next major theme I found in the interviews, which is how ties to tradition, cultural practices, and a sense of place help establish an agrarian political identity that is rooted in the history of New Mexico.

Ties to Tradition and History

In this section, I expand on the cultural aspects of agriculture and identity, examining the interviews to see what it means to be an organic farmer in North Central New Mexico, a location with extensive layers of history and tradition that continue to inform farming practices today.

Despite living in what many would term a post-modern era in which identity is liberated from the local through processes of detraditionalization and globalization (Giddens 1990), many of the farmers interviewed for this project discussed ties to tradition and history as being an essential reason for engaging in organic agriculture. This echoes work done in place studies, which emphasizes that as individuals work with their environment, the place becomes more valuable and their feelings of attachment become deeper (Tuan 1977; Gieryn 2000). For many of the farmers interviewed, this attachment to the land is not new. Further, the concept of farming in an organic manner is also not new.

Samantha, a worker in Bernalillo County problematizes the word “organic” when she discusses her family history.

Again, we come to that term, ‘organic’ ...it’s always been just inherently a part of how I do the growing of food... ‘organics’ is this new term relatively and traditionally that was how things were done, without chemicals or pesticides.

For a number of the individuals interviewed here, the codification of “organic” agriculture was really just a way for the state to control production and regulate methods already in use. In one discussion with Lynne, a producer, he describes some of the “machinery” he uses around the farm in a tongue-in-cheek way that nevertheless reflects feelings he has about the state coming to inspect his farm:

Interviewer: “I was gonna ask you about machinery, but you just went through that with us.”

Lynne: “We use knives, and guns, and everything else.”

Interviewer: “Um?”

Lynne: “To protect ourselves from the uh, organic certifiers.”

The distancing from state-defined terms and methods is a common theme among individuals from North Central New Mexico, extending beyond the data gathered for this thesis (Gonzales 1993; Hoffmann 2014).

Language plays an important part in establishing credibility within a field or movement (Bourdieu 1991; Epstein 1995). In order to have a say in decisions made within specialized fields such as law, medicine, or science, activists need to make themselves look and sound like the experts. In the case of farmers in New Mexico, many have been the experts on local “organic” agricultural practices, long before the USDA created certification mechanisms.

Linguistic capital allows individuals to communicate authoritatively within an accepted field. This form of capital is unevenly distributed throughout society as “the

social mechanisms of cultural transmission tend to reproduce the structural disparity between the very unequal *knowledge* of the legitimate language and the much more uniform *recognition* of this language” (Bourdieu 1991:62, emphasis added). One of the struggles for farmers who choose not to be certified organic, but engage in organic practices is a potential lack of legitimacy when selling their products. However, the label, “organic” comes from above rather than within the community. Thus, ability to relay the idea of “traditional” as equivalent to, or perhaps superior to, “organic” is critical so those individuals can have their voices better heard and understood by those consumers who accept the dominant definitions for agricultural practice. Scholars have noted the use of the dominant language to be an effective tactic for opening doors that are otherwise closed to “outsiders” (Epstein 1995; Prior 2003).

Knowledge production has long been the cornerstone of environmental justice movements. Although the idea of “organic” agriculture holds sway in the dominant discourse of sustainable agriculture, certification is a lengthy and costly process that focuses on consumer health rather than the health of the farmer or the environment. Maintaining a distance from that process keeps the decision-making squarely in the hands of the farmer rather than in the hands of the state. New Mexico-based knowledge of sustainable, chemical-free farming that existed prior to the point at which the USDA began standardizing organic certification has not been overwritten by the requirements of the State. Instead, localized practices and knowledge exchange are growing in North Central New Mexico in tandem with federally-based mandates. To this end, Antonio, a worker in Bernalillo County states, “Well, the intent to have an organic farm in the

[area] is really because of Chicano history, how we've always grown organic food, but we never really called it 'organic food.'”

Prior to Spanish colonization, the indigenous peoples of North Central New Mexico utilized runoff from mesas and channeled that water into agricultural lands designed to conserve water (Rivera 1998a). However, the establishment of the acequia system by Spanish colonists in the late 17th Century facilitated the growth of agriculture in the region; this traditional irrigation system continues to define current farming methods in much of the Rio Grande Valley, drawing upon influences of Moorish-Iberian, Puebloan and Roman origin (Rivera 1998b). As the Anglo population began to enter New Mexico in the late 19th and early 20th Century, agricultural production moved toward livestock-feed crops and away from food systems (Scurlock 1998). Feed crops tend to be mono-cropped and often need heavy irrigation. These changes led to problems with traditional acequia irrigation, including erosion issues, a lowered water table, and changes in the drought-flood cycles (Scurlock 1998:125). In 1923, community acequia associations and other New Mexican residents pushed the state to form the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District (MRGCD), which was designed to manage the irrigation systems and control floods in the mostly heavily populated and cultivated region of the state (Shah 2000). Though the MRGCD has gone through cycles of function and dysfunction, it has generally been able to mitigate the water issues faced by farmers of the early 20th century, creating an effective system for controlling the drought-flood cycles and managing this critical resource (Shah 2000). These community-based methods and resources create a space for truly localized knowledge production and the creation of an agrarian expertise that is founded within traditional irrigation practices.

Over time, the face of New Mexican agriculture has changed as well. Since the 1960s there has been a resurgence of small farms planting crops for human consumption, especially with the rising consumer interest in organically cultivated crops (New Mexico Department of Agriculture 2014). Many of these small farms have both improved upon technologically and reinvigorated the traditional use of the acequia system throughout the years, moving away from flood irrigating, as is done with alfalfa and other feed crops, toward more conservative irrigation methods (New Mexico Department of Agriculture 2014).

The acequia system is not simply community irrigation, however; the organizations which manage the acequias are political subdivisions of the state of New Mexico. The additional political component of the acequia system creates a network of organizations that focus both on agricultural development and community development. Many farming organizations in North Central New Mexico work in conjunction with the acequia associations to promote an amalgamation of traditional and modern practices and the promotion of community and history. Recognizing the role of not only the farmland, but also of the water is essential in understanding the complex dynamics involved in New Mexican agriculture.

Farmers in central New Mexico are continuously generating an expert knowledge of *place*, drawing on tradition and history as well as experiences shared within their networks. These individual and collective acts, which consist of both “alternative economic” and “social and cultural models,” present a challenge to dominant ways of knowing and being (Casa-Cortés, et al. 2008:46). This place-based knowledge not only informs how individuals will engage with the land, but also how they see agriculture in

New Mexico as part of a larger cultural and environmental system, as is indicated in the words of Raúl:

But it's something that's New Mexican, to grow corn, grow chile, you know, respect the water, like our acequias...it's something that been our democracy in this land for a long time, and something that's also been systematically influenced by governments and different policies and procedures that change the way we interact..."

Raúl's words emanate from the context of his place attachment. In North Central New Mexico, *Nuevomexicano* identity is intimately connected to the concepts of *herencia* and *querencia*. Directly translated, *herencia* means "heritage" and references ties to the Spanish colonization of the region (Arellano 1997; Trott 2012; Gonzales 2016). *Querencia* is not as straightforward of a translation. *Querer*, from which *querencia* is derived, means "to desire" or "to want." *Querencia* refers to feelings of homeland and a sense of place and the desire to protect and defend that place (Arellano 1997; Trott 2012; Gonzales 2016). It is action-oriented rather than passive and reflects the ideas that many of the farmers discuss when they talk about serving the community. Andrew, a worker in Bernalillo County, perfectly illustrates this relationship between taking action in the present but maintaining deep roots in both the environment as a global system and his community:

The most important thing is that families are just having an interaction with food, and a relationship with the Earth. They can learn how to cultivate the earth, too, to provide for the family; it's like we've been doing for thousands of years. It's been systematically removed from our culture, but we're still tearing it up and that's what we want to continue, too, the sustainability aspect of our culture and tradition, and not being dependent on systems to survive, but being dependent on each other, community, and the Earth and our stewardship of the Earth.

Not only do individual farmers talk with the spirit of *querencia* and keeping history as part of modern agriculture, but many local farming organizations also take this stance. In the next section, I discuss how local agricultural organizations reinforce agrarian political identity by maintaining an emphasis on the components listed above: an environmental ethic, community food production, and ties to tradition and history.

Relationships with Local Agricultural Organizations

In the first chapter of this thesis, I briefly touched upon the numerous agricultural organizations in North Central New Mexico. In this section, I will discuss farmers' relationships with some of these organizations more deeply and will demonstrate that connecting with local, place-based organizations provides a space for engaging in practices that encourage the building and managing of collective identity/identities (Wiborg 2004; Rodriguez 2007).

Agricultural organizations in North Central New Mexico range from secular to religious, from identity-driven to universal, and from community-oriented to strictly focused on skill acquisition. However, the majority of these organizations, regardless of their orientation, employ a social justice framework, linking farming to economic, political, and social rights within the community. The role of these organizations in community-building will be discussed in-depth in the next chapter.

Most of the farmers interviewed for this thesis were associated with one or more agricultural organizations, most notably, Agri-Cultura Network. Farmers talked about how different organizations reinforced an agrarian political identity, rooted in concepts of social justice and environmental stewardship. Samantha, a worker in Bernalillo County,

talks about how belonging to an association helped her reconnect with farming, maintain ties to her ethnic identity and refresh her skills:

I had this whole piece of land that I knew was old agricultural land and it was something that felt like it was ready to be loved again, worked again and I just didn't have the resources...I went to a Traditional Native American Farmers' Association permaculture design course and met [names individual]...we started farming then and...again we come to that, that term 'organic.' ...It's always been just inherently a part of how I do the growing of food...without chemicals or pesticides.

Samantha's statement encompasses the aspects of agrarian political identity that are linked to both environmentalism and history and tradition. Without the organization, Samantha may have internalized these beliefs and feelings, but she might not have acted upon them. The organization provides a community that validates and encourages group identity and engagement (Gioia 1998).

Clayton, a worker in Bernalillo County describes how his identity as a farmer is tied into his relationship to "Grow the Future," a project developed by the Southwest Organizing Project. "With this Grow the Future Project, we want folks to start thinking about food production differently...changing the way people think and the way people consume their food."

His words are reflective of part of Grow the Future's mission statement, which reads, "Grow the Future will create vibrant spaces for students, parents, activists and community to engage in workshops and educational sessions regarding health, agriculture, and sustainable living" (Grow the Future 2015). Community education and engagement are built directly into the program and embodied and reinforced by those farmers who participate. These interactions continue to establish boundaries that help

farmers maintain and develop their agrarian political identity, grounded in both agriculture and activism.

Conclusion

The concept of agrarian identity, which involves ties to place and an internalization of farming as a way of life, is taken a step further by farmers in this study, who engage in civic agriculture, to maintain ties to the traditions and heritages of New Mexico and to create a sense of improved community well-being by providing fresh, local, organic foods and an environmental ethic that is cognizant of the history of the land. The interplay of the agrarian and the political is important because the economic structure of “local” food or “organic” food can either work toward community building, as found in some farming and gardening literature (Armstrong 2000; Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny 2004; Jackson-Smith and Gillespie 2005), or it can work to reproduce structural inequality, found in other literature (Hinrichs 2003; DuPuis and Goodman 2005; Ghose and Pettygrove 2014). Among the small-scale organic farmers this project sampled in North Central New Mexico, ideas of community building, knowledge exchange, and activism are the norm rather than the exception.

Agrarian political identity is key to developing a project built on the democratic production of knowledge. In order to reimagine democracy, autonomy and equality must be available to all. Even movements based on a unifying identity are themselves heterogeneous (Stephen 2001). Equality must both be established within a group (regardless of its unifying qualities) and fought for outside of it in order to re-envision a truly democratic society. Ideas of “civic agriculture” help structure this place-based identity and explain how farming can become more of a vocation than a career. In the

next chapter, I will examine how an agrarian political identity informs individuals' ideas about community engagement and action-oriented agriculture.

CHAPTER 4: CIVIC AGRICULTURE IN PRACTICE

“[I]t’s healthy farms, healthy families, and healthy communities. They all tie in together so you can’t have one without the other.

Dominic, a producer in Rio Arriba County

“The farm is more than just a place that grows food. We want to build community around food.”

Leroy, a worker in Bernalillo County

This chapter’s focus moves away from the processes reinforcing and establishing agrarian political identity to the role of that identity in the community. Using information about local farm-to-community programs, the participants’ discussion of their lived experiences, and mission statements from local agricultural organizations, I draw upon the community-building nature of civic agricultural practices to demonstrate that small-scale organic farmers in North Central New Mexico are contributing more to the region than locally-grown food. I will first discuss the ways in which these farms reflect practices involved in civic agriculture. I then connect the work done by agricultural organizations in the region to improved ideas of community well-being and to how civic agriculture is enacted in the community.

Civic Agriculture

As noted in chapter one, civic agriculture is an ideal type of production defined by qualities reflecting an agricultural system’s market orientation, localization, and connections to consumers and the community (Lyson 2004). Engaging in civic agricultural practices means farming in a broader part of a community system according to democratic ideals and social justice (DeLind and Bingen 2008). In this section, I will focus on four of the six characteristics of civic agriculture defined by Lyson (2004:85): local market orientation, community embeddedness, use of localized knowledge, and

direct links to consumers. I do not include specific data examining Lyson's other two focal characteristics, high quality and small scale production, as they are implicitly a part of the farming community examined in this study.

Local market orientation

North Central New Mexico's agricultural community is not strictly characterized by small-scale organic production discussed in Chapter 2. However, the majority of farms are less than 50 acres, well below the 80-acre median of all national farms (USDA 2012b, 2014). A significant part of a farming order that embodies ideas of civic agriculture is that the farms be smaller and able to act in cooperation to serve the community rather than in competition with each other to reduce the price point of their produce (Lyson 2004). Size and integration alone, however, do not inherently support a locally-oriented democratic system. The nature of the greater market rewards competition and tends to provide greater incentives to farms that work to increase efficiency at the expense of practices that facilitate social equity (Hinrichs 2000; DeLind and Bingen 2008; Obach and Tobin 2014). Members of the sample in this study have mixed market orientations, recognizing that they need to compete in order to remain financially viable, but wanting also to create a more sustainable food system for their communities.

Dominic, a producer in Rio Arriba County, for example, notes that on his 3-5 acres, he has been able to develop "an economically viable model that is sustainable for future generations." He also notes that he could make more money with a larger farm and more employees, but recognizes the benefits of maintaining a smaller-scale farm:

So we start with the question how much is enough? So it's not anymore that I want to be a millionaire or I want to feed the world, but it's how much do you need to make yourself and your family and community healthy?

Dominic's questions are essential to understanding how the market orientation of small farms can contribute to a fuller incorporation of economic activities into particular locales. He finds that farming is enough to sustain his family's needs, and rather than expanding his farm into larger markets and perhaps increasing his profit, he remains satisfied providing food to his local region. These economic ties, alongside emotional, historical, and social ties, work to shape the meaning and value people find in their communities (Hinrichs and Kremer 2002).

Local non-profit organizations in North Central New Mexico also serve to support farmers in order to facilitate the maintenance of a local market orientation. In a portion of their mission statement, Farm to Table New Mexico indicates how they promote the local agricultural market:

Farm to Table enhances marketing opportunities for farmers; encourages family farming, farmers' markets and the preservation of agricultural traditions; informs public policy; and, furthers understanding of the links between farming, food, health and local economies (Farm to Table 2015).

Local agricultural development is a primary component in creating economic sustainability within a community. Further, integrating agriculture into community development plans has been shown to enhance socioeconomic well-being and increased social capital among residents (Lyson and Green 1999; Green and Hilchey 2002). The Cooperative Development Center of New Mexico (CODECE) recognizes the connection between supporting the local agricultural economy and building on the historical and social processes that continue to undergird community development of New Mexico. According to its mission statement:

The Cooperative Development Center of New Mexico (CODECE) works to create healthy Indigenous and Mexicano and Chicano communities through economic development cooperatives. We work closely with communities to form

successful business cooperatives that provide long-term economic security and increase quality of life (CODECE 2011).

CODECE's mission promotes both New Mexican identity through collaboration and shared experience and the importance of maintaining individual ethnic identities and ties to place. Grounding development in the community is a central tenet of civic agriculture, as it promotes not only local economic development, but also the establishment of food and farming as an essential component of a thriving community (Lyson 2004). In North Central New Mexico, local development and community embeddedness reflect ideas of place and identity.

Community embeddedness

Embedding small-scale agriculture into a food desert begins to address structural inequalities by lessening both issues of physical access and economic barriers hindering a community's ability to purchase healthy food (Macias 2008; Alkon and Norgaard 2009). Localized markets can also promote a more stable food system as reliance on imports and shipping costs for food decrease when farms sell within their region of production (Hinrichs 2000, 2003). Agriculture can be embedded in a community by way of farmers' markets, educational programming, direct-to-consumer marketing such as CSAs, community gardens, and school gardens. In North Central New Mexico, most of the small-scale organic farms participate in one or more of these strategies, creating links between their farms and community members. Again, the interaction alone is not enough to generate social capital or create increased civic engagement, but the building of a relationship and use of those interactions to promote the exchange of ideas can solidify bonds of community and promote civic behavior (DeLind and Bingen 2008; Macias

2008). Among the participants, interacting with the community is frequently the centerpiece of their work.

Many of the farmers in Bernalillo County describe their work to establish a contract with Albuquerque Public Schools both to bring fresh, local food into the school system and to support local agricultural business. Nathaniel, a worker in Bernalillo County, indicates the relationship between farm and school got him into organic farming in the first place:

I came to organic agriculture through the Farm to School movement and school gardens and elementary nutrition; the organization I was associated with was big on organic farming and production and connecting schools to local producers who were particularly practicing sustainable organic, chemical-free farming.

Oscar, a producer in Bernalillo County, echoes this satisfaction with integrating agriculture and community: “I really take pride in that...through Agri-Cultura Network, our product goes to APS schools. We feed our community, we feed ourselves and our families.”

Many of the farms also include workshops and trainings that promote local agricultural knowledge and the imparting of both historical and modern practices. These programs work together to embed agriculture in the community, particularly among the youth population. Oscar describes how his farm promotes community educational outreach at the farm site rather than simply bringing farm products into the schools:

And as far as outreach...in the summer we have the Children’s Literacy Bootcamp, where there will be poetry reading, and uh, a book corner, and we’ll explain the *Librotraficantes* [a group fighting against bans on ethnic studies curricula], and why that is important. But then we also have a compost workshop, and we also tie it to art. So last year they painted some little pots and then they planted a seed. So we try to bring that all together, so that they see the whole picture.

Oscar's farm is not unusual in its education component; a number of other farms, particularly those in Bernalillo County, also include programs that involve engaging the community through educational programming. Marcus, a worker in Bernalillo County, describes how his farm works to bring educational opportunities to children in the community through field trips:

[The farm]'s a sort of intentional experience that you can share. And we have a beautiful site where we do that. So we have all the schools come out and they get to see all the different aspects of the production of food.

Erda Gardens and Learning Center, a multi-site organic and biodynamic farm located in Albuquerque's South Valley Neighborhood, includes "To build community through shared work, play, education, and food" as part of its mission statement (Erda Gardens 2015). Similarly, the mission statement of the Rio Grande Community Farm, located in Albuquerque's North Valley Neighborhood, states, "Our mission is to connect people, earth, water and wildlife in an urban setting by farming sustainably, enhancing wildlife habitat, educating our community, and providing fresh, certified organic food to diverse populations" (Rio Grande Community Farm 2015).

Use of localized knowledge

Localized knowledge in the context of civic agriculture involves the recognition that the best farming practices utilize knowledge of the particular ecosystem, history, and culture within a region to adapt modern practices to be more appropriate to the specific context of the farm (Lyson 2004). It also relies on the sharing of information and the creation of space for community problem-solving endeavors rather than the reliance on individual competition and trade secrets (Lyson 2004). This sharing of knowledge is a part of what Macias (2008) calls *natural human capital*, which emphasizes both

interactions with nature and interactions between individuals that build knowledge within the realm of the natural. Natural human capital is created when individuals within a community work together to exchange ideas about growing food and supporting local agriculture.

The social ties generated through knowledge sharing encourage the development of social capital in the community. Social capital is seen in reciprocal relationships and connections that help individuals enter into and create social networks (Putnam 2000). Knowledge exchange within the context of civic agriculture builds ties through both the formal trainings and the informal exchanges held within the community.

In North Central New Mexico, many of the formal interactions happen between farmers who participate in agricultural coalitions and cooperatives. These organizations frequently emphasize farmer interaction and information exchange, holding workshops and conferences to facilitate these encounters. Miguel, a producer in Bernalillo County, describes the growing interest in events that bring farmers together in his area:

I don't know about anywhere else, but man it's really popping off here in the South Valley. [There are] conferences going on just about everything so like the knowledge flooding around for all this organic farming is just going crazy here in the South Valley.

One organization that frequently held workshops and trained a number of the local farmers we interviewed is the American Friends Service Committee of New Mexico. In its mission statement, it commits to create “economic viability through the training of small farmers in sustainable agricultural practices, thereby protecting land and water rights and traditional cultural practices” (AFSC NM 2015c). Their focus on tying historical practices to modern ideas of sustainability emphasizes the importance of linking the two to create true local agricultural knowledge. Further, establishing a

localized knowledge that is based in the farmers' experience of place, reinforces the expertise of local farmers on the land.

Formal workshops, conferences, and trainings make up an important part of community knowledge exchange, but they also create space for informal personal exchanges. Andrew, a worker in Bernalillo County, describes a semi-formal knowledge exchange that ties his practice to his heritage:

In this field in organic growing, there's a lot of communal knowledge that's shared, there's a lot of traditional knowledge passed on from elders, and we prioritize that to work with our elders, to learn our cultural practices with food and with the Earth, so that we can learn them and continue them. Because what's happening a lot is our elders are getting old and passing on and if that medicine and that knowledge isn't given and passed on, then we'll lose it. I think I've learned so much from so many elders, more than I can describe in this interview, but I think that happens a lot.

The exchange of localized knowledge also comes in very informal settings, as is described by Cassandra, a producer in Bernalillo County, when she is asked about how she exchanges information with other farmers: "Talking, getting together. Going for a beer. Just, you know, it's like small scale networking I guess. (laughs) A lot of us don't really have time for the internet and stuff."

These informal interactions are as important as formal interactions in creating a sense of civic agriculture and contributing to the community's sense of efficacy and social capital as they create a space for diverse sets of people to interact in a space of mutual interest (Putnam 2000). The formal organizations may facilitate the initial interaction and creation of weak ties (Granovetter 1973), but it is the continued work together toward the improvement of a community and the transfer of knowledge that is embodied in ideas of civic agriculture (Lyson 2004; Macias 2008; Ghose and Pettygrove

2014). It is these interactions that drive interest in agriculture to move beyond a shared cause among like-minded individuals to deeper social connectedness (Putnam 2000).

Oscar, a producer in Bernalillo County, sees knowledge as a unique commodity in the farming community:

[A] lot of people hoard their knowledge, they use that as a type of power... [Farming] is not like that. [The farm's] owners and program directors have been in the environmental justice movement for over 50 years....[T]hey share the knowledge, their giving spirit, their generosity, attracts like people. So everybody there, you try to share what you know...the volunteers, myself, we're not just sharing knowledge, we're gaining knowledge, from everybody that steps on there.

Oscar's discussion of knowledge as a communal resource further reinforces the civic mindset of organic agricultural production in North Central New Mexico. For most of the participants in this study, working together to build community is more important than out-competing each other in the market.

Knowledge exchange is not limited to farmers alone in North Central New Mexico. Many of the farms and agricultural organizations are designed to not only work to educate each other, but also to educate the community on local food production and healthy eating.

Aaron, a worker in Bernalillo County, talks about his farm's participation in a local coalition that promotes community-based economic development and knowledge-sharing through small-scale gardening.

The idea was sort of two-fold. One, there's food insecurity in this low income community and that we could create this garden to have as more or less a demonstration space to show people how to grow and then we have another part of the project [where we create] home gardens with people...The idea there is to increase access to healthy food and expand knowledge about food production.

Encouraging and educating community members on how to directly produce some of their own food may seem counterintuitive to a business that survives by selling food to

the community. However, this orientation reinforces the idea that some farmers' identities are intimately tied to a commitment to local foods and food security as discussed in the previous chapter. Creating bonds within the community is also a way for farmers to educate consumers about their products and potentially increase not only the pool of interest buyers (Obach and Tobin 2014), but the awareness of food politics within the market (Alkon and Norgaard 2009).

Direct links to consumers

A community of civic agriculture requires interaction between farmers and consumers, in a space that allows for weak ties to develop (Lyson 2004). This connects back to ideas of community embeddedness, but is focused on the relationship between the producer and the consumer. Most of the literature on civic agriculture analyzes consumer behaviors and attitudes rather than those of the farmer (Hinrichs and Kremer 2002; Hinrichs 2003; Seyfang 2006; DeLind and Bingen 2008; Alkon and Norgaard 2009; Obach and Tobin 2014). The data presented here do not examine consumer behaviors and attitudes, but rather explore the locations in which farmers interact directly with consumers. These interactions take place primarily in farmers' markets and community-supported agriculture initiatives (CSAs).

At the time of this writing, Bernalillo County holds approximately 20 farmers' markets throughout the growing season; Santa Fe County holds four, and Rio Arriba County holds three (NM Farmers' Markets 2015). The Santa Fe Farmers' Market is the largest farmers' market in the New Mexico and was founded in the late 1960s (Santa Fe Farmers' Market 2015). Farmers' markets in Bernalillo County are located in or near every neighborhood from the outlying townships to the urban center of Albuquerque.

Some markets, such as the newly founded Rail Yards Market, have mission statements that reflect the idea that the interactions between consumers and producers are the foundation of a more democratically-oriented form of agriculture. A part of their mission statement reads, “The Rail Yards Market is focused on building a resilient, sustainable local economy that we all love to work and play in” (Rail Yards Market 2015).

Community-supported agriculture initiatives (CSAs) are also widespread throughout North Central New Mexico. Five of the farmers interviewed for this thesis spoke directly about their CSAs without being directly questioned about the ways in which they engage the community.

The Agri-Cultura Network unites farms across Bernalillo County. When a farm chooses to participate in the network, it also participates in a CSA program called *La Cosecha* (the harvest), which provides a combination of full-cost and low-cost buy-in options for consumers in order to reach economically disadvantaged community members as well as the wealthy consumers. Miguel, a producer in Bernalillo County, explains his affiliation with the program simply,

We do La Cosecha — it’s a program that helps people get organic produce for very cheap. 250 families that are low-income get bags of produce for \$3.00...[E]verybody in our community is eating and that’s what we’re grateful for.

The combination of multiple market locations, historically-rooted markets and farms, mission statements that reflect a desire for community-building endeavors, and community-supported agriculture initiatives generates a social space for civic agriculture in North Central New Mexico that designed to benefit both the community and the farmers.

The Role of Agricultural and Social Justice Organizations in Promoting Community Well-being

Although a number of agricultural and social justice organizations have been discussed briefly in other parts of this thesis, it is important to recognize the contribution they make to a culture that supports a system of civic agriculture and community well-being. Without such organizations and their resources, the cohesiveness of much of the organic agricultural community might not be what it is today.

Some of the most notable actors throughout this narrative are Agri-Cultura Network, the American Friends Service Committee, the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice, and the Southwest Organizing Project. These organizations are either directly mentioned by many of the participants or are indirectly related to the founding of the farms. Combining resources for organizing farms and farmers with an emphasis on community well-being and the promotion of economic growth, these organizations help shape the socio-agricultural landscape of North Central New Mexico.

Agri-Cultura Network's primary goals are "to support local growers and to ensure that local, organic food is accessible to *all members of our community*" (Agri-Cultura Network 2015, emphasis added). The member farms of Agri-Cultura Network generally take a community-oriented stance. La Plazita Institute, a founding member of the network, ties agriculture directly to personal ethnic identity and community healing:

Designed around the philosophy of "La Cultura Cura" or culture heals, La Plazita's programs engage New Mexico's youth, elders and communities to draw from their own roots and histories to express core traditional values of respect, honor, love, and family. LPI supports them in leaving behind violence and a destructive lifestyle....We focus on healthy food, social and economic justice, and

land reclamation while also providing the opportunity for the community to reconnect to its agricultural heritage (La Plazita Institute 2015).

With fourteen member farms and an extensive farmer-training program, Agri-Cultura Network has the capability to influence the ideological orientation of organic farming culture in Bernalillo County. It is clear that the organization's roots are intimately related to social, environmental, and economic justice ideals.

Miguel, a producer in Bernalillo County notes Agri-Cultura Network's extensive reach into the community by way of their training programs:

[A]ll these different farmers they kinda grouped up and they did the whole Agri-Cultura thing — they did like all these extensive training programs on organic farming and so that is how come I say like they have the main Jefes [(owners or managers) of the farms] here in the South Valley. Then they have all their first year trainees, their second year trainees, and all the different trainees that they trained over the years. Every year they are training somebody else...It's really different here 'cause everybody is just really connected.

Agri-Cultura Network also has origins within the American Friends Service Committee of New Mexico (AFSC of New Mexico). Since 1976, the AFSC of New Mexico has provided farmer-to-farmer training in numerous counties statewide, focusing on organic production (AFSC 2015b). In 2009, this organization collaborated with other local organizations to form Agri-Cultura Network, but has since stepped out of a main role, with the local partner organizations taking over the Network's primary functions and ideological direction (AFSC 2015a). The AFSC of New Mexico's mission statement also reflects the importance of connecting history, identity, and agriculture in order to create a more just community:

AFSC New Mexico has identified with the struggles of local people to empower themselves, with particular attention to water and land use and the need to support traditional ways of life. AFSC New Mexico creates economic viability through the training of small farmers in sustainable agricultural practices, thereby protecting land and water rights and traditional cultural practices (AFSC 2015b).

Despite the AFSC's orientation as a national, religiously-affiliated organization, it is clear the membership recognizes that the emphasis on community-building needs to come from local organizations and be reflective of local practices. The origin ties between the AFSC of New Mexico and Agri-Cultura Network also serve to link the diverse farms under a social justice umbrella.

The connectedness of many of the farms in North Central New Mexico is also a result of the work of organizations such as the Southwest Network for Economic and Environmental Justice (SNEEJ) and the Southwest Organizing Project (SWOP). These organizations have been working on environmental and social justice projects since 1990 and 1980, respectively. Over the years, their missions have evolved to include and support initiatives related to agriculture and food production.

One such initiative, spearheaded by the former director of SNEEJ, is Los Jardines Institute, a community center in Albuquerque's South Valley neighborhood that includes a small farm. The mission statement for their farm reads,

Our community farm is an inter-generational learning environment that nurtures the traditional agricultural skills of members who have limited access to open-space and healthy food. The produce grown at Los Jardines is distributed among members of the Institute, volunteers, and sold at local markets to generate revenue to support our community campaigns and invest in the viability of the local economy (Los Jardines Institute 2015).

Although the farm is only a portion of Los Jardines Institute and its relationship to SNEEJ, the boundaries between agriculture production and urban living are intentionally removed, with the explicit intent of supporting the well-being of the community through farming.

SWOP, too, promotes community well-being through its farm and garden programs in Bernalillo County, which include Project Feed the Hood and Grow the Future. Project Feed the Hood hosts community garden space in Albuquerque, designed to reconnect people with fresh food. Andrew, a worker and member of SWOP's Feed the Hood project describes it as follows:

Project Feed the Hood kind of speaks to who we are and where we come from and what we wanna do; you know, we wanna feed people, we wanna teach them how to feed themselves really...So for us it was always kind of a community building too, and you know the fact that we had healthy, organic food out of it is a happy side effect.

For Andrew, community well-being is inherently connected to both self-sufficiency, education and personal identity. Despite the fact that this project focuses on community gardening rather than farming, it utilizes resources from local farmers in order to exchange knowledge and shape the community's ideas about local agriculture.

Since its recent founding, Grow the Future has branched out from its SWOP origins to create its own non-profit. Demonstrating commitment to more than just local agriculture and education, it begins its mission with, "Grow the Future is here for our community" (Grow the Future 2014). This community-orientation is reflected in the rest of the statement, which reads:

Grow the Future will directly engage community through bringing groups and volunteers to the farm, collaborating to create a Farmer Apprenticeship program, and through building relationships with schools and other community groups. Through this partnership and together with our community partners we hope to ensure the *health* and *vitality* of our families for the next 300 years (Grow the Future 2014, emphasis added).

Again, built directly into the mission statement of local agricultural organizations is the idea of community health and well-being.

The literature supports the combined emphasis of community well-being and engagement in local agriculture as catalysts for improving collective efficacy and overall empowerment is supported in the literature (Armstrong 2000; Macias 2008; Teig, et al. 2009; Comstock, et al. 2010; Obach and Tobin 2014). Feelings of empowerment and collective efficacy are generally brought about by way of a combination of loose social connections and structural support within a community (Putnam 2000; Mulvaney-Day, Alegría, and Sribney 2007; Ohmer 2010).

Conclusion

Civic agriculture is an ideal concept for agricultural practice that creates a democratically oriented and self-sustaining community. Small-scale organic farms in North Central New Mexico are moving toward this ideal, creating community structures that reflect community well-being and a more stable food system. Both the farmers themselves and the local organizational structure create an environment conducive to maintain a local market orientation, community embeddedness, promotion and dissemination of localized knowledge, and direct links between farmers and consumers. Further, many of the organizations surveyed here work to blur or erase the boundary between farmer and consumer, engaging in practices that encourage local participation in food production. These practices are often rooted in the social, economic, and environmental justice goals promoted by local organizations engaged in both community and agricultural activism. The work farmers are doing to promote well-being and food justice is reflected in the myriad ways in which organic agriculture is rooted in North Central New Mexico's community.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This thesis aimed to assess the ways in which small-scale organic farming in North Central New Mexico both drives personal political identity and creates a space for building collective efficacy and community well-being. Using data from in-depth, exploratory interviews with small-scale organic farmers conducted during the 2014 growing season, I was able to tie individual lived experiences into the context of their communities. Many participants described what I have termed an “agrarian political identity,” one that is action-oriented and place-based. This identity feeds into processes associated with civic agriculture, improving the participants’ sense of community well-being. In this final chapter, I will recap the key findings from my research and tie those insights into the literature. I will also address the limitations of the study and propose some implications of my research and directions for future study.

Key Findings

In the third chapter of this thesis, I distinguished between the idea of “agrarian identity,” which is generally defined as an internalization of farming as a way of life, bounded and reinforced through interactions in a place-based context (Hinrichs 2003; Jackson-Smith and Gillespie 2005; Trott 2012; Strand, Arnould, and Press 2014) and “agrarian political identity,” which, I argue, is action-oriented and community-focused. In North Central New Mexico, agrarian political identity is driven by one of four factors: an environmental ethic; a commitment to local foods; ties to history and tradition; and/or membership in local agricultural organizations. Despite the fact that different factors may drive agricultural activism in a particular community, many of the farmers’ goals remain the same. Goals of improved community well-being and social justice undergird the idea

that the role of the farmer goes beyond producing food for the abstract market. Farmers in this study see themselves as active community members working toward a civically engaged agricultural model.

The dedication to farming as a way of life involves orienting agricultural practices to be responsive to local economic and community needs by providing direct links between farms and consumers and by utilizing the wealth of local knowledge of farming practices in the region. These tie together into Lyson's (2004) concept of "civic agriculture," which roots farming practices in social, economic, and environmental justice goals.

Farmers in North Central New Mexico tend to have mixed market orientations. They need to be financially viable and yes, they want to provide affordable local food for their communities. Their practices work to embed them in the community by way of educational programming, community agricultural initiatives, and contracts with the public school system. Further, by developing direct links to the community through farmers' markets and CSAs, farmers are able to directly interact with the individuals purchasing their products.

Finally, civic agricultural practices are built into farms in the region through the training programs and educational exchanges that enhance local knowledge and connect traditional and modern methods of farming. By examining the role of local organizations in local agriculture, I have been able to document how farmers and community members work in tandem to promote these ideas and create improved community well-being. In this region, identity and community are built together through the reinforcement of socially-minded agricultural practices. Moreover, North Central New Mexico provides a

unique context for exploring how *Nuevomexicano* identity is intimately connected to a sense of place and the desire to protect and defend that place, known as *querencia* (Arellano 1997; Trott 2012; Gonzales 2016). This thesis takes a strong step toward understanding that connection, linking the words of the participants to both the ideological missions of the region's agricultural organizations and the local history of agriculture.

Significance

This thesis contributes to the sociology of agriculture literature on small-scale farming, first in its exploration of issues from the perspective of farmers themselves. Previously, these issues have primarily been discussed either from the consumer perspective (Hinrichs & Kremer 2002; Alkon & Norgaard 2009; Obach & Tobin 2014) or the community gardener perspective (Armstrong 2000; Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny 2004; Pudup 2008; Teig, et al. 2009; Comstock, et al. 2010; Ghose and Pettygrove 2014). In tapping into the lived experiences of farmers, I have been able to explore the principles of civic agriculture directly and demonstrate how these concepts translate for individuals embedded in the practice. This study provides a basis for contrasting profit-oriented farming with local, civic farming. In applying the tenets of civic agriculture to a specific region, I have been able to illustrate the role small-scale, local farming can have in building community when the nature of the agricultural endeavors are tied to civic practices.

Noting the difference between what has been defined as *agrarian identity* and what I define as *agrarian political identity* is another significant contribution of this thesis. In looking for the factors that contribute to the negotiation of an agrarian political

identity, I have been able to illustrate how attitudes toward organic farming can work together to establish a sense of civic agriculture. Although the specific factors identified in this study may not perfectly transpose onto ideas of agrarian political identity in other agricultural regions, my work contributes to the literature, linking political activism to a relationship with the land by way of farming and food production.

Finally, many of the farmers in this study discuss personal ties to history and tradition. This contributes to the argument that studies of organic farming methods need to both ground their research in the socio-geographical context of place (Lamine and Bellon 2008) and consider how historical processes and interactions with organizations and the market shape local agricultural practices. How this plays out in North Central New Mexico is a noteworthy contribution of this study. The role of *Nuevomexicano* identity connects tradition and history to place and to a legacy of localized knowledge production. Furthermore, the orientation of local organizations toward not only promoting sustainable, localized agriculture, but also toward generating community participation in farming is central to North Central New Mexico's narrative of civic agriculture.

Limitations

A limitation of this data is that single interviews at fixed points in time are snapshots of the lives of individuals rather than full assessments of transitions of their engagement with organic agriculture or their relationships with local organizations. Understanding the processes over time and the changes in, or fixed nature of, identity would give valuable insight into the ways in which farmers move from an agrarian identity to an agrarian political identity.

A second limitation of this data is that it only focuses on small, organic (or organic-practicing) farms and farmers. The results presented here can neither encompass the processes by which large-scale farmers potentially develop an agrarian political identity, nor can it exclude them from the process.

A final limitation of this study is that the nature of the questions posed to the farmers was focused strongly on health and safety. Although we began to ask direct questions about identity and motivations after we saw the emergence of the theme, having had more specific questions focused on those components from the beginning of the research might have painted a more nuanced picture of agrarian political identity and civic agriculture in North Central New Mexico.

Implications and Future Directions

Beyond the scope of this thesis, but related to civic agriculture, is the idea of networked small-scale organic farming as a social movement. Many participants, though not connected to organizations that are particularly focused in changing policy at a broader level, have ties to local agricultural organizations that aim to improve well-being and build a stronger community; this merits deeper investigation. The emergence of movements whose primary interests are not in challenging the State or other institutions, but rather in building a more autonomous civil society, is considered a component of “new social movements” research (Cohen 1985; Offe 1985), for which I have provided some evidence. However, I also argue that further research could uncover the possible interests of the organizations in challenging the state and other institutions. What I have demonstrated here is that the agricultural organizations in North Central New Mexico are characterized by a well-developed network of farmers. The organizations work to

maintain identity as a way of engaging people in activities to build community and social capital. These factors have been linked to the possibility for collective action and mainstream social movement emergence (Freeman 1973; McAdam 1982; Taylor and Whittier 1992), something we did not explore in our research.

Further, many of the organizations profiled in this thesis are connected to the environmental justice movement. The structure of the environmental justice movement tends to be grounded in grassroots organizing, facilitated by the establishment of nonprofit organizations (Rios 2011). These nonprofits are focused on education, organizing, and research, rather than lobbying and policy-changing efforts (Rios 2011). In order to better understand how small-scale organic farming might be conceived of as a social movement, the organizations themselves and the motivations of the farmers would need to be further researched.

Another direction this research could take is the further investigation of how consumers at large perceive and react to small-scale organic farming. Small-scale farmers argue their position helps facilitate community well-being and the building of social capital; do greater community members agree? Examining the role of the farm in the community for both farmers and non-farmers alike could strengthen the rationale for providing support to local farmers for reasons beyond the fresh food they provide.

Finally, this research could be expanded to include small-scale conventional farmers, and both conventional and organic large-scale farmers to better understand if the characteristics of the farm are reflected in the ideology of the farmers.

Conclusions

The experiences of individuals engaging in agriculture is greatly understudied. Focusing on both practices and individual motivations, this study has demonstrated strong ties between agrarian political identity and the understanding of an activist role for farmers engaged in community-building activities *vis-a-vis* civic agricultural practices. Participants understood their role in the community as intrinsically linked to their chosen career and related to social and historical processes encapsulated in the context of North Central New Mexico. Their ideas of creating a space for community growth and well-being are best reflected in Andrew's (a worker in Bernalillo County) words:

With the overall vision of doing all this community organizing work and doing all this garden work with kids, schools, and families, [we want] to be a strong network of people that can then speak out on policy issues...And so sure, gardening, food, and health is our primary concern, but also secondary to that is this more systemic change that we can all effect by being a community and by having relationships with one another.

The fusing of agrarian political identity and civic agricultural practices has yielded a growing network of community engagement, well-being, and reciprocity that will continue to resonate through the value-oriented farming being done in North Central New Mexico.

APPENDIX: INTERVIEW GUIDES

Interview Guide: Producers

- I. Introduction
 - A. Welcome
 - B. Confirm inclusion criteria
 - certified organic producer
 - located in Central New Mexico (e.g. Bernalillo, Santa Fe, Socorro, etc.)
 - less than five acres operation
 - operation with less than 11 employees
 - operation generates less than \$200,000 in sales annually
 - C. Present informed consent
 - D. Obtain consent

- II. Background
 - A. History and operation
 - Do you only farm organic, or do you also use nonorganic farming methods?
 - How long have you been “organic”?
 - Why did you become “organic”?
 - Describe your operation. Explore the following:
 - location
 - size
 - type of production
 - seasons/months of operation
 - number of employees
 - relationship to employees
 - Are employees volunteers, students, non-conventional workers?
 - B. Which tasks on the farm do you do most often? Which do you prefer? Which do you dislike and why?
 - C. How many hours do you work a day and for how long at a time? How many a week?

- III. Business
 - A. current sales
 - B. sales history
 - C. marketing and sales activities
 - D. business outlook
 - E. Is this farm your primary source of income?

- IV. Previous education & training
- A. organic production
 - B. machinery and agricultural substances/inputs use
 - C. health and safety (types of Personal Protection Equipment)
 - D. do you read publications, newsletters, magazines about organic farming practices or about health and safety in organic farming?
- V. Practices
- A. Production
 - describe a typical session (preparation, planting, growing, harvesting)
 - describe a typical day (for each season)
 - B. Machinery
 - Describe the use of machinery/equipment. Explore purpose, frequency (e.g. daily/weekly), user(s), other
 - Describe the type and condition of your equipment. Explore condition (new/old), “make do”
 - C. Substances/Chemicals/Inputs
 - Describe use of pesticides and other substances. Explore type, purpose, frequency, user(s)
 - Do you read labels, instructions, application guidelines? If so, do you follow them?
 - D. Preventative equipment used
 - Describe use of masks, kneepads, guards on machinery, gloves, etc.
 - E. Construction and Maintenance of Buildings, Machinery, Acequias
- VI. Health and Safety Practices
- A. Conditioning/Preparation of soil
 - Production – practices and risks
 - Machinery/Tools – practices and risks
 - Substances/Chemicals/Inputs – practices and risks
 - B. Planting
 - Production – practices and risks
 - Machinery/Tools – practices and risks
 - Substances/Chemicals/Inputs – practices and risks
 - C. Irrigation
 - Production – practices and risks
 - Machinery/Tools – practices and risks
 - Substances/Chemicals/Inputs – practices and risks
 - D. Growing
 - Production – practices and risks

- Machinery/Tools – practices and risks
 - Substances/Chemicals/Inputs – practices and risks
- E. Harvesting
- Production – practices and risks
 - Machinery/Tools – practices and risks
 - Substances/Chemicals/Inputs – practices and risks
- F. Offseason
- Production – practices and risks
 - Machinery/Tools – practices and risks
 - Substances/Chemicals/Inputs – practices and risks
- G. Marketing and sales. Explore transportation issues/risks
- VII. Health and Safety Awareness.
- Explore awareness/knowledge issues related to physical conditions (e.g. risks related to use of machinery/equipment, and their fuel, oil, etc.), environmental exposures (including weather), chemical exposures (e.g. risks related to the use of organic pesticides, other substances), ergonomics (e.g. repetitive motion, hand implements), other
- VIII. Health and Safety Beliefs/Attitudes.
- Explore beliefs/attitudes related to physical conditions (e.g. risks related to use of machinery/equipment, and their fuel, oil, etc.), environmental exposures (including weather), chemical exposures (e.g. risks related to the use of organic pesticides, other substances), ergonomics (e.g. repetitive motion, hand implements, use of tools not meant for job – old tools)), other (fatigue/stress)
- IX. Health and Safety-Related experience/events (Previously Three Years Only).
- Explore actual (self) and experience (workers, others) with events related to physical conditions (e.g. risks related to use of machinery/equipment, and their fuel, oil, etc.), environmental exposures (including weather), chemical exposures (e.g. risks related to the use of organic pesticides, other substances), ergonomics (e.g. repetitive motion, hand implements), other

Interview Guide: Workers

II. Introduction

A. Welcome

B. Confirm inclusion criteria

- 18 years of age or older
- currently working or volunteering in an organic farm
- minimum of 150 hours of experience in organic field work

C. Present informed consent

D. Obtain consent

III. Background

A. History

- Describe your role on this farm.
- Do you work exclusively on this farm?
- How did you become a farmer?
- How long have you been a farmer?
- Do you work exclusively in organic farming?
- How long have you been involved with organic farming?
- Why did you get involved in organic farming?
- Which tasks do you perform most often on the farm? Which do you prefer? Which do you dislike and why?
- How many hours do you work at a time? How many a day? How many per week?
- Do you decide which tasks to do, when to stop, when to take a break, or is your work schedule organized by someone else?

B. Education & Training

- Organic Production
- Machinery, Equipment and Tools
- Substances Used, Chemical exposure
- Health and Safety
- Fatigue and Stress
- Do you read publications, newsletters, magazines about organic farming practices or about health and safety in organic farming?

IV. Practices

A. Production

- describe a typical session (preparation, planting, growing, harvesting)
- describe a typical day (for each season)

B. Machinery

- Describe the use of machinery/equipment. Explore purpose, frequency (e.g. daily/weekly), user(s), other
 - Describe the type and condition of your equipment. Explore condition (new/old), “make do”
- C. Substances/Chemicals
- Describe use of pesticides and other substances. Explore type, purpose, frequency, user(s), other
 - Do you read labels, instructions, application guidelines? If so, do you follow them?
- D. Preventative equipment used
- Describe use of masks, kneepads, guards on machinery, gloves, ect.
- E. Construction and Maintenance of Buildings, Machinery, Acequias
- V. Health and Safety Practices
- A. Conditioning/Preparation of soil
- Production – practices and risks
 - Machinery/Tools – practices and risks
 - Substances/Chemicals/Inputs – practices and risks
- B. Planting
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 - Machinery/Tools – practices and risks
 - Substances/Chemicals/Inputs – practices and risks
- C. Irrigation
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 - Machinery/Tools – practices and risks
 - Substances/Chemicals/Inputs – practices and risks
- F. Offseason
- Production – practices and risks
 - Machinery/Tools – practices and risks
 - Substances/Chemicals/Inputs – practices and risks
- G. Marketing and sales. Explore transportation issues/risks

- VI. Health and Safety Awareness.
- Explore awareness/knowledge issues related to physical conditions (e.g. risks related to use of machinery/equipment, and their fuel, oil, etc.), environmental exposures (including weather), chemical exposures (e.g. risks related to the use of organic pesticides, other substances), ergonomics (e.g. repetitive motion, hand implements), other
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- VIII. Health and Safety-Related experience/events (Previously Three Years Only).
- Explore actual (self) and experience (workers, others) with events related to physical conditions (e.g. risks related to use of machinery/equipment, and their fuel, oil, etc.), environmental exposures (including weather), chemical exposures (e.g. risks related to the use of organic pesticides, other substances), ergonomics (e.g. repetitive motion, hand implements), other

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