



Farmers, Solidarity and the Local Food Movement: A Waterloo, Ontario Case Study

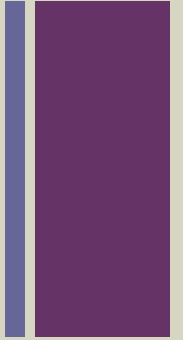


Meredith Davis, MSc. and John Devlin, PhD
University of Guelph

Contact: jdevlin@uoguelph.ca



THE LOCAL FOOD MOVEMENT AS A SOCIAL MOVEMENT



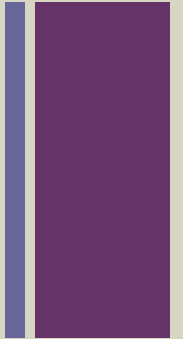
“Much is being made of local food. It is at once a ***social movement***, a diet, and an economic strategy – a popular solution to a global food system in distress.”



– DeLind, 2010



Indicators of a social movement



1. **Collective Action:**

diverse stakeholders acting together to send a message of common purpose and achieve broad societal change (e.g. protests, demonstrations, collective adoption of new behaviour, slogans & symbols)

2. **Social Solidarity:**

realization by diverse stakeholders of their common purpose; glue that binds a social movement together; identification *of* and *with* a collectivity; internal & external



+ A Typology of Solidarity

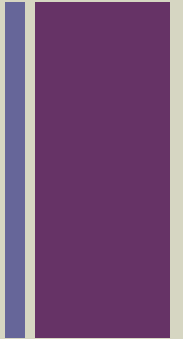
1. Internal Solidarity

Acting with a group to which you feel you belong
(collective action)

2. External Solidarity

Acting with / for a group to which you do not feel
you belong (financial support)

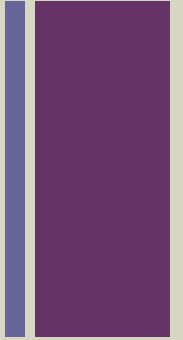
3. Non-solidarity



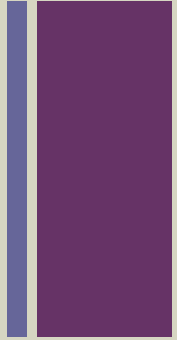


Initial Research Question

Does farmers' engagement with the local food movement indicate that they have solidarity with the local food movement?

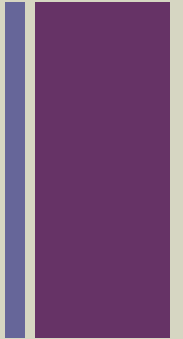


+ CASE STUDY: WATERLOO, ONTARIO



Waterloo Region is celebrated for its vibrant and diverse agricultural sector and its municipal, non-governmental, consumer and farmer-led initiatives to promote local food.

+ SAMPLING STRATEGY: RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

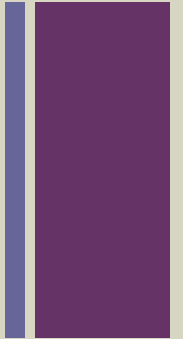


28 farmers on **21 farms** producing and selling food to the local market were chosen to represent a range of perspectives:

- Sector: livestock, vegetable, fruit, other
- Marketing strategy: CSA, farmers' market, pick-your-own, on-farm stand, value-added, wholesale
- Production: organic, conventional, hybrid
- Culture: Old Order Mennonite



WHAT FARMERS THINK OF THE “LOCAL FOOD MOVEMENT”



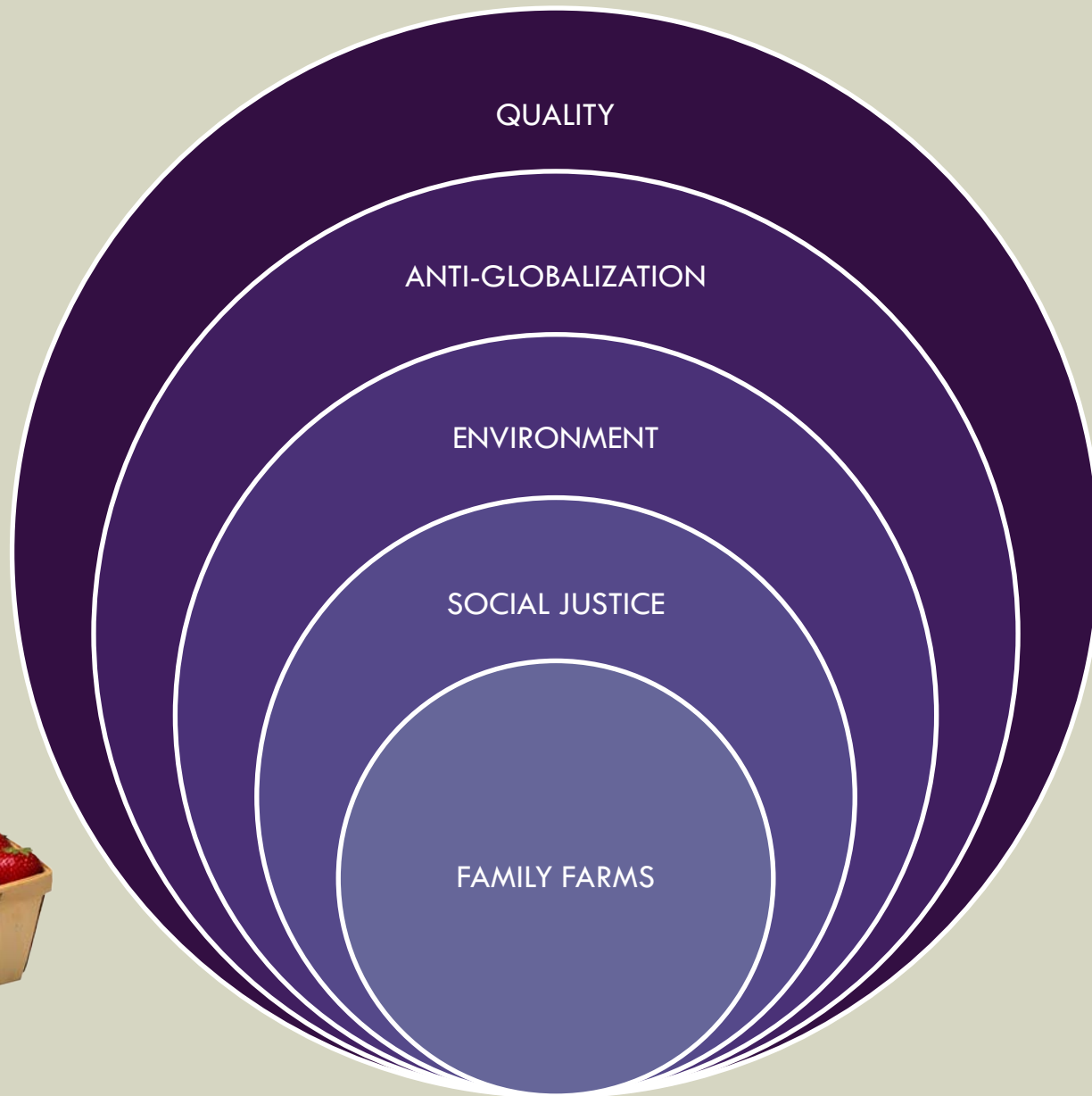
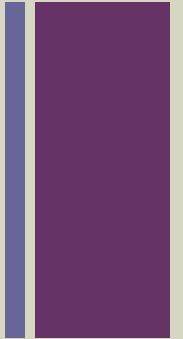
Farmer-participants agreed that there is a local food movement and all identified it as a consumer movement

In effect they “externalized” the local food movement

While mostly sympathetic farmers remain focused on their farm operations and thus appear external to the movement which appears urban- and consumer-focused.



+ A stereotypical “urban” frame



+ A typical farmer's frame

Prices and Sales

Product Quality

Farm Livelihood

Family Farm Survival

Environment

Anti-Globalization

Social Justice

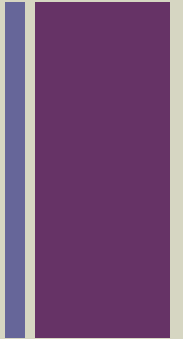
+ Different value alignments

- Family farm livelihoods and survival are important to local food consumers but tend not to be central to their value frame.
- Family farm livelihoods and survival is overwhelmingly important to producers
- Buying local food consistently and at prices that support viable farms is an act of consumer solidarity.



+ Refocus on the family farm

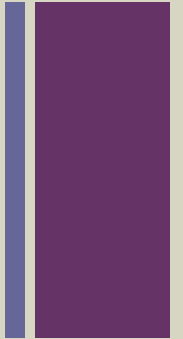
- If we put family farm survival at the center of the local food movement
- Then farmers working for the survival of their farms are central to the movement.
- Farmers have “internal” solidarity with other farmers
- Consumers show ‘external” solidarity with farmers through the purchase of local food consistently and at prices that support viable livelihoods





Lessons For Local Food Activists

1. Tap into farmers' unique local food frames: economic viability, independence, strong and healthy rural communities, quality of production, customer loyalty and continuity of a family agricultural legacy.
2. Appeal to farmers' entrepreneurial sensibilities – demonstrate economic benefits of local food production. It is not realistic to ask farmers facing intense financial pressures to make economic sacrifices to the local food movement.
3. Stress the concept of consumer solidarity



+ Local food is a “consensus” movement

“a set of organizations and individuals working towards the same general social change goals.”
(Michaelson, 1994)

“those organized movements for change that find widespread support for their goals and little or no organized opposition” (McCarthy & Wolfson, 1992)

Much of what is now recognized as “consumer activism” has this consensus movement quality.

