

Research Paper

**Discourse analysis of an organic network: A practice perspective**

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**Abstract**

Many organic farmers markets have positioned themselves as an alternative network to the global industrial food system. These markets are now active online in order to promote their activities and products, including the Ottawa Organics Farmer's Market (OOFM), the case for this study. The aim of this research is to provide insights into how organic farmers, as a community of practice, operate discursively online in order to better understand some of the opportunities and limitations they have to influence the greater discourse around food. To do so, we drew on the discourse analysis literature (Nicolini, 2012; Gee, 2011; Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000) to gain knowledge into the market's discursive and representational practices online. Practice theory was specifically mobilized for our discourse analysis. We found out many of the ways that the OOFM constructs and derails the organic food discourses of "organics as technics", "organics as commodity" and "organics as equity".

Keywords: alternative food networks, organic food, farmers markets, discourse analysis, online communications, practice theory

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### **1. Introduction**

According to the renowned scholar Manuel Castells, we now live in a network society (Castells, 2004). This network society has evolved out of the serendipitous coincidence of economic, social, political, and cultural factors that led to the emergence of a new form of social organization. More specifically, this kind of society came out of the interaction between three originally independent processes: the crisis of industrialism, the rise of freedom-oriented social movements, and the revolution in information and communication technologies (Castells, 2004, p.22).

In terms of social movements and aggregations, Castells states that the network society can trace its roots back to the social movements of the 60s like the Free Speech Movement in Berkeley and the environmental movement. The former took a strong stance to create a "culture of personal freedom and social autonomy, both vis-à-vis capitalism and statism, challenging the conservative establishment, as well as the traditional left" (Castells, 2004, p.18). The Free Speech Movement put into question the family, state, church and corporate values of the networks of domination at the time. The environmental movement also put into question the

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hierarchies of power that sustained the "self-destructive logic of global capitalist development" (Castell, 2004, p.19) based on an exploitative economic growth imperative. Many of the members of these movements or aggregations embraced a view that fostered a "going back" to the land as well as an organic farming practice (Reed, 2010, p.73), thus evolving into the alternative networks now found online, including the current iteration of the organic food network. This alternative food network, like other networks, is part of the movement for global justice flourishing in this said-to-be network society.

Moreover, according to Castells, this network society, which encompasses all networks including the organic food network, is composed of three different domains that present us with different value propositions that are in tension depending on who holds power and what their beliefs are. These realms include the global financial market, the military industrial complex and the media. The networked media, that is, the Internet, is the ultimate technological ground of the network society. It is composed of multi-media, electronic hypertext, and increasing interactivity as opposed to one-way messages to mass audiences (Croteau & Hoynes, 2000). It is in this new virtual space, that alternative food networks nowadays partially operate. How this alternative network acts on the communication network can influence how it can reconfigure it to achieve the aims it values (Castells, 2004, p.12). This also "depends on the pattern of power present in the configuration of the network" (Castells, 2004, p.12).

In order to understand how it can influence the greater network (i.e. society), looking at the way the organic food network operates through its discursive representations online appears crucial. By doing so, I have been able to highlight how more specifically its alternative food discourse is constituted. Currently, the two most prominent normative discourses of alternative food networks analyzed in the literature "where market exchanges are performed in an ethical manner to create fair and sustainable communities" (Touri, 2016, p.2), are the

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ones on 1) “organic food” and 2) “food sovereignty”. The discourse on “organic food” has been evolving since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Reed, 2010) while the one on “food sovereignty” came into prominence in the late nineties (McKeon, 2015). There are several important norms of the so-called food sovereignty movement, including that it “places priority on food production for domestic and local markets based on peasant and family farmer diversified and agroecologically based production systems” (McKeon, 2015, p.243). The actors involved in the construction and evolution of these macro alternative food discourses, the organic and food sovereignty discourses, have been converging into what is now called “alternative food networks”.

It is within this macro discursive and social context that local organic farmers markets find themselves. In fact, these markets as alternative food networks are both constructed by and playing an important role in the evolution of the alternative food discourse (Turner & Hope, 2014; Ashmore et al., 2000). These types of alternative food networks are now also active online on social media platforms like Facebook (FB), the most prominent social networking site (Statista, 2017). This is the case for the farmers market that was looked at in this study: the Ottawa Organic Farmers Market (OOFM), which uses FB as its most active channel online. Its page on this platform is rich in content and therefore was assessed and analysed to understand how this alternative food network operates discursively in somewhat real-time through the seasons.

In order to understand how this alternative food network is discursively materialized online, we adopted a lens that focuses on both practices and processes (i.e. pragmatic view). Specifically, tools from Nicolini's "toolkit for zooming in" (2012, p.220) were mobilized to

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better grasp the main features that are constitutive to organic food network discursive practices and in this case more specifically, to the OOFM. Practices are defined herein as:

Coherent and complex form of socially established co-operative human activities through which goods internal to that form of activity are realised in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and practically definitive of, that form of activity, with the results that human powers to achieve excellences, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended (MacIntyre 1981, p.187, as cited in Nicolini, 2012, p.84).

More specifically, looking at the FB page of the OOFM throughout the year as a whole, through individual posts as tokens of discourse, has helped us underline the discursive processes involved in the constitution of this alternative food network from a practice perspective (Schatzki, 2000). It also informed us on the ways macro discourses are shaped around the broad term “alternative food”. Furthermore, it showed us empirically how the discursive practices and the macro discourses were recursively intertwined (Putnam & Fairhurst, 2015) and sometimes in tension (Nicolini, 2012).

The findings of this research are relevant to those engaged in building an alternative food system, like organic farmers, who are often actively curating the discourse around alternative food online, while also being actively engaged in practicing alternative agriculture per se. By better highlighting how their discursive practices operate online – and how these might influence their practices in the long run -, these farmers can be more reflexive about their own practices in order to achieve concrete real changes throughout the network.

This research thus contributes to the literature on alternative food networks, as it appears to be one of the few discourse analyses produced on an organic farmers market's online representation. It also helps in the appreciation of their discursive practices that have

yet been analyzed from a practice theory perspective. Practice theory was mobilized specifically because it is a theory that focuses on both the micro and the macro perspective of discourses, a space that I argue best reflects where the organic food network is situated. It is in this space (of action) that the discourse is truly evolving and therefore most relevant to look at in order to better appreciate how it could further grow. This theoretical framework is also aligned with how the network society can evolve according to Castells. In fact, according to this author, "structures do not live by themselves, they always express, in a contradictory and conflictive pattern, the interests, values, and projects of the actors who produce the structure while being conditioned by it" (Castells, 2004, p.24).

Accordingly, it was by looking at the constitutive and discursive ways an organic food network operates that we were able to stress how it influences the dominant discourse around food. Following our analysis, it was possible to define opportunities and limitations of this alternative food network in terms of having a greater impact on the network society and the current evolution of its dominant practices related to the food system. This was done after performing a review of the literature that helped situate our research theoretically and discursively, and to help subsequently define our methodology. Let us therefore turn our attention to the review of the literature before delving deeper into our methodology and analysis.

## **2. Review of the Literature**

### **2.1. Macro alternative food discourses**

When reviewing the literature on the discourse of organic food networks, several studies focused solely on the big "D" discourse of this alternative food network. The main variations of these big "D" discourses can be appropriately categorized as "organics as technics", "organics as commodity", and "organics for equity" as suggested by Rochon (2010,

p.144). According to this author, these main circuits (i.e. translations) are seen as oppositional to the "neoliberal order", each proposing a different alternative food system (p.143). In the following, I will explain in more detail how these main circuits of discourse are typically conceptualized.

### **2.1.1. "Organics as technics"**

"Organics as technics" shows the practice of organic agriculture as being mainly a problem of science and experts. It doesn't present the movement as being part of a social movement for greater social equality. From this point of view, the organics discourse belongs more to the "scientific community" and agricultural experts as a constitutive component of a social practice. There is thus a vast scientific and popular literature on the environmental and health impacts of organic food that would fall within this first perspective, including those taking the "food security" angle (Hopma & Woods, 2014). From a communication perspective, "Organics as technics" becomes more of a technical debate where the communicative aspects are only another element to take into account to tackle this "problem".

### **2.1.2. "Organics as commodity"**

"Organics as commodity" tends to show organic food as a commodity problem. According to Garner (2015), when objects like food are turned into a commodity, "people objectify and quantify the value of things and forget underlying social relationships that are covered up by the artifice of objectivity" (p.188). Hence, in the case of food, the abstraction that commodification brings tends to hide the link to the workers who farmed the food. From a Marxist perspective, power and action can be projected onto commodities and can disguise human relations (Radin, 1996, p. 81). In the realm of communications, "organic food"

translated in such a commodity becomes just another product for which appropriate marketing techniques can be applied in order to perform onto the market. This is where the role of certification processes and products comes in as a marketing tool for this "retail offer". At its most oppositional end, "organics as commodity" is simply an "ethical option for consumers" (Reed, 2010, p.144). From this perspective, "farmers' markets and online sales... supply a cachet to the supermarket system" that can only be afforded by the Western and other wealthy consumers. These consumers become "playthings" for the marketers (Reed, 2010, p.145). Generally, within this perspective of the discourse, consumers do not have a role as partners nor does the state (Reed, 2010, p.145). The literature on the marketing of organic food or that places its discourse analysis within this "organics as commodity" frame is vast (eg., Shaw Hughner et al., 2007; Bauer et al., 2012; Nasir & Karakaya, 2014). From a discourse analysis perspective, some studies have framed "organic food" as a commodity, while looking from a micro perspective at the way discourse operates within that frame (Cook, 2009; Mazzacano, 2015).

### **2.1.3. "Organics as equity"**

"Organics as equity" is a discourse stream that intertwines the organic food discourse to social justice goals. For instance, this angle of the discourse can focus on organic food cooperative organizations for production and retailing or small-scale production. This angle of the discourse on organic food is closely tied to the discourse of "food sovereignty" for which there is also a vast macro perspective discourse analysis literature (McKeon, 2015; Hospes, 2014; Hopma & Woods, 2014). The food sovereignty discourse tends to emphasize social justice goals and puts emphasis on the importance of putting the control of the food system

in the hands of all farmers, including small-scale family farms and local food providers (McKeon, 2015). This stream of the discourse, which is constitutive of the "organics as equity" discourse also emphasizes resistance to the dependency on remote and unaccountable corporations (Food Secure Canada, 2007). It also tends to reject market hegemony over our food supplies without necessarily ruling out markets as one of several mechanisms for food distribution. It affirms that food is a right and that we need to rethink the food system as a commons (Patel, 2009). This way of thinking could lead alternative food networks to create new organizations that complement the roles of the market and the state (Rundgren, 2016, p.117). After all, according to this perspective,

We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect. The food system is a life support system and should be based on the principles of living systems, not on the perceived efficiency of the industrial model. We should instead see the plants and animals we eat as our symbionts, companions, for which we have responsibility (Rundgren, 2016, p.117).

## **2.2. Tendencies in tension**

Reed (2010) has argued that the above three macro streams of discourse about organic food are currently in tension. This has yet been demonstrated in a more grounded way and how it is inscribed in discursive practices in the literature. However, it is known from practice theory that "at any point in time, actors operate at the intersection of a number of discourses, social identities, and goals carried on the scene by discourse and other mediational tools" (Nicolini, 2012, p.202). "Each action can thus extend one of more circuits of discourse (what Gee calls "Discourses"), or it can problematize them, interfere with their reproduction and, in extreme cases, derail them" (p.202). Understanding more specifically

how discourse “in action” evolves and shapes its communities can therefore help organic farmer's markets understand their own activities by providing them with a reflexive account of their online practices. This leads us to the following research questions:

*1) What are some significant discursive practices of the OOFM online and how are they shaping the macro discourse of the alternative food network?*

*2) With a better understanding of these practices, what are some of the opportunities and limitations to influence the greater discourse around food?*

### **2.3. A micro-macro perspective on alternative food networks**

In contrast to a practice approach where activities of people are central, most studies in the literature on discourse have focused on the macro aspect of alternative food networks by putting the emphasis on the socio-political and historical context (Reed, 2010; McKeon, 2015; Hospes, 2014; Desmarais & Wittman, 2014; Lee, 2013). Other studies focused on tokens of discourse (i.e. micro) have looked more narrowly at texts and discursive traces in depth but have barely made the link to the broader context and big "D" discourses (Cook et al., 2009; Mazzacano et al., 2015). Alvesson and Karreman (2000) would situate these types of discourse analyses along a continuum of those ranging from the more “grandiose” to the more “myopic” (p.1130).

It is therefore in the “middle” of these theoretical boundaries (i.e. meso perspective) that our study situates itself in order to better capture the co-construction of the "big D" streams of the organic food discourse by showing how small “d” in practices occur. Nicolini (2012) envisages this continuum of discourses through practices because "all actions are in fact part of circuits of discourse that extend in space and time and that circulate in the moment of the action" (p.202).

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More precisely, it is thus by mobilizing a theoretical framework inscribed in practice theory as discussed in Nicolini (2012) that our analysis was completed. This theoretical framework helped us to mitigate an "alternative and a corrective to extreme forms of textualism that reduce organizations and the world to texts, signs and communication" (Nicolini, 2012, p.6).

Through situating ourselves theoretically as we do, our study enriches our understanding of how an organic food market constructs and represents itself through mediated actions and representations. This pragmatic perspective helps us create a link between "what is local" and "what is global" within the organic food movement. In fact and as Nicolini (2012) suggests, "the radical project of practice theory (whether theoretical, political, or both) is less about providing a toolkit for zooming in on the local practice and more about making a connection between what is local and what is global" (p.121). Thus, the local discursive practices of a local organic market like the OOFM can impact the global discourse and vice versa, both in limited and complex fashions. This perspective also resonates with Castells theoretical perspective as a local farmer's market can act as a local network of resistance online by becoming a node in alternative global networks. By becoming a node, this network can influence the global network, even though it might also be overwhelmed by such a system (Castells, 2004, p.23).

Although it has been argued that it is a challenge to account for both orders of discourse in the same study, scholars such as Alvesson and Kärreman (2000, p.1134) and Cooren, Brummans & Charrieras (2008) have encouraged such efforts. Discourse indeed is not only emergent and locally constructed but also finds itself within a more macro social context that is not fully understood, in flux, and affected by local discursive practices:

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"between the artificially-isolated fragments of discourse and the ambiguously-global argumentative fabric, there is a middle ground of social situated activity" (Engeström, 1999, p.173 as cited in Nicolini, 2012, p.201).

Besides positioning discourse studies on a macro and micro continuum, Alvesson and Karreman (2000) have also another way of conceptualizing discourse. They suggest that discourses can be situated along a theoretical continuum in which at one extreme, discourse and meaning are collapsed and at the other, discourse and meaning are unrelated (p.1130). Alvesson and Karreman (2000)'s distinctions are helpful, in terms of inscribing our study within the debate on the meaningfulness of discourse. In fact and as mentioned before, our study is positioned at the middle so to speak of both of these extremes by taking into account both aspects (i.e. meso).

One reason why we opted for this middle ground angle is due to the limitation of online representation of practices, practices being defined in Nicolini (2012, p.84) as embodying reality in only limited ways. Applied to a mediated phenomenon – even if we envisage all social phenomenon as being mediated whether they are online or not -, these representations only partially show those practices curated by farmers for online viewing. Therefore, the discourses presented online are only a partial picture of the full reality of the practices of farmers, a representation that does not exhaust the complexity and richness of actual practices. Cautious and critical thinking toward the underlying relation between discourse and action is therefore required for this study. Nevertheless, by looking at a specific case of how a local organic farmer's market operates discursively online, we were able to better appreciate how this type of community of practice operates discursively. Discursive representations can indeed inform us on what we call “practices in action” and on

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how these practices are represented, that is, made present again (Benoit-Barné & Cooren, 2009). Let us now turn our attention to the methodology mobilized for this research.

### **3. Methodology**

In order to look at the practices of the OOFM in action online, we adopted a discourse analysis using Nicolini's (2012) theory-method package. The "meditational" means that what we looked at included tools, texts, and other semiotic resources, and the habituated body (Nicolini, 2012, p.203) as mediated online on social media. By mobilizing practice theory, we have assumed that "the relationship between humans and their environment is... always mediated by some cultural means such as signs and artefacts (material devices built by humans)" (Vygotsky in Nicolini, 2012, p.106). We also argue that language as a "tool of tools" plays a fundamental mediatory role (Vygotsky in Nicolini, 2012, p.106). "Signs and symbols" found in texts and other artefacts were also viewed as mediation and as working to shape and transform mental processes (Nicolini, 2012, p.106-107).

Specifically, in order to conduct our qualitative analysis, these four foci in the palette that allows for "zooming in" proposed by Nicolini were mobilized: 1) "sayings and doings", 2) "tools, artefacts and mediation work", 3) the "interactional order" and 4) "the tension between creativity and normativity" (p.220). Such a conceptual apparatus gave us material about the macro discourse formation of the organic food network from the three circuits of discourse identified in the literature: "organics as technics", "organics as commodity" and "organics as equity".

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Nicolini's toolkit for zooming in defines in the table below the various lenses from which we analyzed the discourse of the organic food network as uncovered on the FB page of the OOFM.

**Table: Extract from Nicolini's (2012, p.220) palette for zooming in used for the discourse analysis of the OOFM as an alternative food network**

Focus	Sensitizing questions
Sayings and doings	What are people doing and saying? What are they trying to do when they speak? What is said and done? How do the patterns of doing and saying flow in time? What temporal sequences do they conjure? With what effects? Through which moves, strategies, methods, and discursive practical devices do practitioners accomplish their work?
Tools, artefacts and mediation work	What artefacts are used in the practice? How are the artefacts used in practice? What visible and invisible work do they perform? In which way do they contribute to giving sense to the practice itself? What connections do they establish with other practices? What sort of things do they carry into and make present in the scenes of action? Which type of practical concerns or sense do artefacts convey to the actual practising? What is the intermediation work they perform?
Interactional order	What sort of interactional order is performed by the specific practice? How does it differ from similar practices performed elsewhere? What positions does this specific practice

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	<p>make available? How are these positions negotiated or resisted? What type of collective interests are sustained and or resisted? What type of collective interests are sustained and perpetuated by the specific practices? How are asymmetries and inequalities produced or reproduced in the process?</p>
<p>Tension between creativity and normativity</p>	<p>How are the mundane breakdowns addressed? What are the main ways in which practitioners make themselves accountable in practice? What do they do? How do they talk about it? What discursive resources do they use to sustain the local regime of accountability? Where and how are the disputes between right and wrong played out? What are the contentious areas of the practice? Where are the main tensions? For example, are the tools and the practice actually aligned or are there conflicts and tensions between them? And what about the formal and informal rules? In which direction is the practice being stretched?</p>

**3.1. Data collection**

In order to analyze the online discursive practices of the OOFM, we collected their FB posts over a period of a year. This period presented us with a good picture of the discourse and representation used over a time period that includes all of the four seasons.

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This sample seemed like a significant material aspect connected to the farming practices represented online because:

Farmers' markets facilitate staged access to moments of 'naïve realism' in which food, the weather and seasons necessary for its production, asserts itself as a player in the lives of humans. Through farmers' markets, consumers who have become increasingly disconnected from food as a result of the international restructuring of agribusinesses throughout the 20th century, cannot only connect to the culturally-mediated, anthropocentric food system, but are also offered opportunities to rethink the system and engage with the non-human elements in new and productive ways (Sanderson, Gertler, Martz, & Mahabir, 2005, p.186).

The data for this case study was already publically available as FB is a public social platform. It is thought that the organizations and individuals participating on the page of the OOFM are aware of the public nature of the page, it being the public page of a public market. Also, from an ethical perspective, we think that the study can be of benefit to the greater community concerned with alternative food networks, including farmers themselves. Better appreciating the current state of the discourse of the OOFM can help them improve their discursive practices as well as comprehend where they excel (i.e., best online practices) or where greater efforts are required. This argument for our method was thought to be a sufficient ethical ground for this study after reviewing the Association of Internet Researchers' Recommendations (2016). The FB data of the OOFM is the largest bank of discursive information on this market currently available online. There were 202 posts collected in total, a substantive amount (Lillqvist & Louhiala-Salminen, 2014; Hunt, 2015) which included images, videos, links to other organizations, and discussions and comments. According to Gee (2011, p. 187) the type of digital content found on social media are considered "multi-

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modal texts" which can be composed of words, and still and moving images. Also, it can be argued, that beyond being only texts, these posts also present us with glimpses of many of the farms involved in the OOFM. In this way, they present us with mediated windows into the world on the farms, a world in action that is materially grounded in persons (bodies) and objects, not just mere representations.

## **3.2. Data analysis**

All of the data gathered was analyzed with the "spirit of sceptical reading" as required for a discursive analysis of this type of content (Gee, 2011). This form of sceptical reading required that we let go of our previously held assumptions as much as we can by looking at the material as if it was new. It was by making what was "natural to us -what is usually taken for granted-new and strange", that we were able to consciously think about and highlight the knowledge, assumptions, and inferences brought by communication (Gee, 2011, p.8).

It is with this theory-method package, and data collection and analysis framework that we can now perform our analysis.

## **4. Results and analysis**

### **4.1. "Organics as technics"**

Many of the posts on the OOFM FB wall seem to emphasize at first glance the technical aspects of organic food. In this way, these more technical posts can be seen as constituting tokens of discourse of the "organics as technics" macro discourse stream. However, after further analysis, it became clear that even the posts that seemed to constitute this macro discourse stream were also intertwined into the other streams of discourse around

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alternative food. We will demonstrate this by looking at two examples of these more technical posts through the lens of Nicolini's four foci that allows for zooming in on: 1) "sayings and doings", 2) "tools, artefacts and mediation work" and 3) the "interactional order" and 4) "the tension between creativity and normativity" (p.220). By looking through these elements, we will show how the "organics as technics" discourse was constructed through these posts but also how the online practices of the OOFM problematized, interfered and derailed this circuit of discourse.

The first example of a more technical post presented by the OOFM is about the debate on organic food and carbon emissions tied to the climate change issue, an important global environmental problem of our time. The following statement prefaced this post: "another reason to support your local organic farmer..." (OOFM, 2015a) and was followed by a linked article that presented the OOFM community with scientific evidence as to why organic farming helps solve climate change.

Specifically, the post came from a re-share of an article from Science China Press whose title was "Organic farming can reverse the agriculture ecosystem from a carbon source to a carbon sink" (Science China Press (SCP), 2015). This article stated that applying "organic manures" from animals as opposed to synthetic fertilizer could help address the climate crisis in a positive direction. It showed how organic manures can help sequester carbon in the ground and was accompanied by a graphic showing the sources and sinks of carbon emissions from organic farming from the three main greenhouse gases: carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide (SCP, 2015).

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The article from SCP specifically stated that: "Recent research showed that replacing chemical fertilizer with organic manure significantly decreased the emission of GHGs. Organic farming can reverse the agriculture ecosystem from a carbon source to a carbon sink" (SCP, 2015).

To give itself scientific credibility, SCP, in its article, quoted its main source as coming from research published in the *Science Bulletin*. This scientific journal is highly credible from a science perspective because Springer, a leading global scientific, technical and medical portfolio, publishes it. To bolster its scientific credibility, the article also stated that the research it quoted "was jointly funded by the Key Strategic Project of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (KSZD-EW-Z-012-2) and the National Science and Technology Support Program, China" (SCP, 2015). The article also gave credence to its scientific validity by mentioning: "Crop yield and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions were carefully calculated according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Guidelines for National Greenhouse Gas Inventories 2006". The IPCC is the international body that assesses the science related to climate change. It's an organization of hundreds of leading scientists globally that was set up by the World Meteorological Organization and of the United Nations Environment Program (International Panel on Climate Change, 2013).

By presenting us with such scientific "sayings", the OOFM clearly tried to bolster the scientific credibility of its organic farming practices. It "did" this by presenting us with what appears to be solid scientific evidence through a channel, SCP, who attempted to vulgarize that scientific information so that the "masses" can understand it better. The OOFM also propped up its scientific credibility by aligning itself with organizations that have credible scientific knowledge.

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The linked article and the scientific graphic presented are also forms of artefacts that lend the OOFM post publisher scientific credibility. For many page viewers, the graphic of greenhouse gas sources and sinks likely harkened back to the types of graphics found in past biology textbooks, authoritative sources of information for many. Also, the article and graphic presented appeared to be tools used by the OOFM to convince its page viewers that its practices are superior environmentally and that this is scientifically grounded.

However, it is also interesting to note that the linked article initially came from the FB page of the Canadian Organic Growers (COG), an organization whose mission is "to lead local and national communities towards sustainable organic stewardship of land, food and fibre while respecting nature, upholding social justice and protecting natural resources" (COG, 2011). Thus, by presenting us with a scientific post, the OOFM not only participated in constructing the "organics as technics" discourse but also by aligning itself with COG who also has a "social justice" mission, it perhaps also participated in constructing the "organics as equity" discourse at the same time.

Clearly the discourse presented in this post had multiple interactional orders, starting from the OOFM to COG, to SCP to the *Science Bulletin*, the later having the most scientific authority. Moreover, it is interesting to see from an interactional perspective how the post opened up a scientific discussion amongst the OOFM community directly on its page. This suggested a form of equal exchange amongst participants and took some of the power away from the OOFM member who published the post. This element of the discourse also situated the discourse more within the "organics as equity" discourse stream. The equal exchange, however, was also somewhat done, by continuing to confer scientific power to the scientific community. For instance, one of the followers of the page counter-criticized the findings of

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the article by stating: "grass-fed cows produce 40 to 60 percent more methane gas than grain-fed ones and use more water and land" (Arsenault, 2015). To bolster her argument, the page commenter shared a link to an article entitled "Pseudo-Sustainability: The Beef With Grass-Fed Beef" published by One Green Planet (2014a) which cited another scientific study published in another credible journal published by Springer: *Climatic Change*. Following this critical comment on the post were more critical comments discussing the shortcomings of the study presented in One Green Planet and a scientific debate was opened up on the page. Amongst the participants of the debate on the page was one of the animal farms of the OOFM. Clearly, this post did not end up convincing the community members of the OOFM of the scientific merits of grass-fed beef but certainly raised many questions and concerns and perhaps showed the level of engagement of the OOFM community in its desire to solve the climate crisis. It also showed that the scientific and technical debate is tense when thinking of "organics as technics".

Moreover and interestingly, the second article from One Green Planet presented by the commenter who started the debate, is from an online platform which states that its mission is to grow a "compassionate and eco-conscious generation" and which has the goal to "redefine "green," because, well, the earth needs a media company that's really got its back" (One Green Planet, 2014b)! From an interactional order perspective, this aspect of the discourse also pitted this source against other media sources that perhaps should not be trusted because they lack compassion and are more concerned with making profit. In this sense, One Green Planet projects that its credibility does not only come from science but from the fact that it cares, appealing to the pathos of the alternative food network. By concerning itself with creating a culture of compassion, it can be argued that One Green

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Planet also participates in creating the "organics as equity" discourse, and by association, so does the OOFM.

Finally, the post was also interesting because it presented us with an example of the tension between creativity and normativity that can occur amongst a community of practice such as the OOFM. In fact, interestingly, from a technical perspective, greenhouse gas emissions are not addressed in the Canadian organic standard (Canadian General Standards Board, 2015), the main normative tool used by organic farmers. Therefore, by having a discussion about the benefits of organic farming on the climate, the OOFM pushed the boundaries of the normative discourse of its community. It sort of entered new grounds, most likely a terrain that it knows its community and audience cares about.

A second post was also a good example of how the OOFM constructed the circuit of "organics as technics" discourse because it presented us with the technical issue of how animals are raised. Specifically, the post discussed the raising of grass-fed animals as a technical issue and included a shared article entitled: "The Real Difference Between Factory-Farmed and Grass-Fed Meat" (Poblete, 2016). It was shared on the wall of the OOFM from the page of a local organic farm that raises animals on pasture and that sells its products at the OOFM. Interestingly, in this case, a member of the producer community was viewed as an expert voice on the technical matter presented instead of a member of the scientific community like in the previous post about organic food and carbon emissions. The concept of farmer as agricultural expert somewhat fits the construction of the "organics as technics" discourse but it also straddles the discourses of "organics as equity" and of "organics as commodity" by presenting us with an expert as both small farmer and marketer.

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Also, the post by the local farm was one of a link to an article from Thrive Market. This is "a membership community that uses the power of direct buying to deliver the world's best healthy food and natural products to [its] members at wholesale prices, and to sponsor free memberships for low-income American families" (Thrive Market, 2017a). Again, even though the sayings presented in the post appeared at first glance to only be technical, it became apparent that by associating themselves with a source such as Thrive Market, that the OOFM also participated in the "organics as commodity" discourse. However, because it also associated itself with an organization that appeared through its sayings to be concerned with the well-being of low-income families, the OOFM crossed the implicit line into the "organics as equity" discourse formation territory in this post.

Moreover, unlike the first post example, which was clearly more scientific in nature, the article linked to this second post was presented in the form of an interview in which artistically stylistic fonts were used. The interviewer and writer for this article presented was Dana Poblete (2016). To find out more about this author, a link was provided to her biography written in a very informal style in the article. In fact, by reading Dana's biography and by seeing her photo, two relevant artefacts, we found out as much about the author's love of surfing than about her credentials as an expert on food. Her bio stated: "Dana's love for all creatures under the sun (bugs, too) drives her in her advocacy for ethical eating, environmental sustainability, and cruelty-free living. A natural born islander, she surfs when she can, and writes, always" (Thrive Market, 2017b). With these sayings, it was unclear how the writer was truly a technical expert on the subject. However, the style of the bio, perhaps helped build trust with the alternative food network by presenting the author in a personable way. Also, by stating that she is an "advocate for ethical eating, environmental sustainability,

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and cruelty-free living", this helped put the interviewer and writer in the camp of the caring (and hopefully well-informed because of this) activist on these issues. By presenting the writer as-if "anyone who cares about the technical issues about food can be trusted authoritative sources" connected to the "organics as equity" discourse. This contrasted with the purely scientific and faceless organizational names quoted in the previous post and provided the alternative food network with an expert "face" with which it could connect in a more socially relational way.

Also, a significant element of the discourse presented in this post's linked article was that the person interviewed by Dana was a grass-fed meat farmer and was presented as the expert that can explain to the community of the OOFM the difference between factory-farmed and grass-fed meat. This farmer was presented as being a credible technical source because she "she was raised above a Bavarian dairy barn" and had worked on different farms. Apparently, the community should have been convinced that the person interviewed was "well-versed in all types of sustainable food" because she had "worked with Sicilian cheese makers, Bolivian llama farmers, elderly vanilla growers in Madagascar, and the only indigenous people in Europe making dried reindeer meat" (Poblete, 2016). Traditional on-the-ground expertise here was what was presented as valuable and credible. In fact, this farmer, Anya Fernald, mentioned a very technical statement when she said:

Factory-farmed, grain-fed meat has lower nutritional value and often contains more total fat, saturated fat, and calories than its grass-fed counterparts...Grass-fed and -finished beef tends to have higher concentrations of vitamins A and E, antioxidants such as carotenoids and conjugated linoleic acid (which has been shown to reduce body fat, improve the immune system, and prevent certain types of cancer), as well as fewer calories and total fat than their non-sustainable counterparts. Omega-3 fatty acid levels in grass-fed beef can be up to five times higher than in feedlot beef. (Fernald, 2016)

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Nowhere did she specify where this knowledge came from and from which scientific research studies. It seems like the community should simply take her sayings at face value because she was presented as the expert.

The interactional order of this post contrasted with the first post presented above on how the development of the "organics as technics" discourse operates in that it further pushed the discourse into the "organics as equity" territory. In this case, it was not done by showing the members as engaged in a scientific debate and using scientific sources. In fact, the post did not make any references that give power to scientific artefacts but instead presented farmers and engaged journalists as authorities to be trusted. In this post, they were presented as having the "knowledge power". The OOFM showed that agricultural expertise is clearly a complex phenomenon that cannot simply be explained as belonging to the scientific community. It showed us this tension within the organic discourse well through this example.

Moreover, this post also showed us how there is tension between creativity and normativity within this discourse formation of the OOFM. This could be seen with how organic animal raising practices were represented herein. To illustrate, the main artefacts used in this post to construct this technical element of the organic food discourse was the photo of a cattle feedlot with the title of the article attached to it entitled "Here's the real difference between factory-farmed and grass-fed meat". In the photo of the feedlot, the cattle appeared crammed behind fencing and on a brown ground devoid of grass (Poblete, 2016).

This photo from the article was preceded by the following text on the post:

Our customers at the Ottawa Organic Farmer's Market are blessed to have available to them Certified Organic grass fed and finished beef, lamb and goat, as well as pastured pork, which is impossible to find in a supermarket. The taste is

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incomparable. And we are blessed to have such loyal and faithful customers who truly appreciate the hard work and commitment this kind of farming entails (Hollanbec Farm, 2016a).

This photo was seemingly meant to shock the OOFM community by presenting them with a symbol (the feedlot) of what most would perceive as where "factory-farmed meat" comes from. No information about where the photo was taken is presented except that the name of the photographer was provided without a link for more information in this case.

This photo could also be contrasted to many of the other photos on the OOFM page that often showed animals on pastures. Such photos often presented animals such as pigs and chicken roaming freely on grass (eg., Hollanbec Farm, 2015).

By showing the photo of the feedlot within this visual context of many images of pastured animals, the OOFM perhaps attempted to solidify the cultural belief of the alternative food network that there are two shades of agriculture, one that is from unhealthy feedlot practices, and another from healthy practices that emphasize the pasturing of animals.

This element of the discourse could lead the uninformed community member to equate "organic" with "grassfed" when that is not completely the case. In fact, there are many shades of grey of what constitute organic meat. Although the organic standard does specify technical conditions that farmers must follow in terms of animal welfare, such as "access to outdoors" and "rotational pasture" (Canadian General Standards Board, 2015, p.23), it does not specify that animals should never be on feedlots. Furthermore, the animals farmed organically often end up in the same abattoirs as their conventional counterparts.

Conceivably, by speaking about "certified organic grass-fed" and by showing us the contrasting images of animal raising practices, the OOFM, however, was attempting to

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demark itself as vanguards of the organic movement. It appears that the farmers of the OOFM were pushing the technical boundaries of "organic" by presenting us with what could be the "best practices" of those that are organic. However, the debate was not openly presented on this post. The community member was simply left in the dark about what "certified organic" actually means. It is not clear whether this was also a marketing technique on the part of the OOFM. It is easier to sell a product by presenting the consumer with a window into its positive aspects only. By blurring the line between technical expert, producer, and marketer, it seems difficult to tell to what extent this post publisher constructed the "organics as commodity" discourse but it noticeably crossed the line into that territory of the discourse.

From an "organics as technics" perspective, the post also touched on further technical and scientific elements such as on health and nutritional benefits. Again, by presenting us with technical information about these topics, the OOFM stepped outside of the bounds of its standard practices. In fact, the technical elements of health and nutrition do not form a specific part of the organic standard (Canadian General Standards Board, 2015). Although the standard states that "organic agriculture should sustain and enhance the health of soil, plants, animals, humans and the planet as one and indivisible" (Canadian General Standards Board, 2015, p.ii), it also mentions that: "neither this standard nor organic products produced in accordance with this standard represent specific claims about the healthiness, safety and nutrition of such organic products" (Canadian General Standards Board, 2015, p.ii). This contradiction is possibly at the heart of the organic standard because there are different camps within the organic community. Some of these are like the OOFM community and seemingly trying to push for a stronger technical and scientifically based health standard for

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organics while others do not. Perhaps it is true that there are different shades of organic practices that lead to different health outcomes, with those practicing the most "grass-fed practices" outside of feedlots bringing better outcomes. Or it can also be the case that the science about the health benefits of organic and grass-fed are not as strong as was purported in this post but this appears beyond the scope of this research. Clearly, however, there is a tension between what seems to be desired by this alternative food network and what the norms of the organic community are.

In sum, by looking at the two posts above through Nicolini's toolkit for zooming in, which presented us with technical matters that pertain to organic food farming practices, it was possible to see that the OOFM, as an alternative food network, does contribute to the "organics as technics" macro discourse in several ways like when it confers authority to the scientific community. However, the OOFM also shows that technical issues are presented and constructed in a more complex manner than as would be expected in the "organics as technics" macro discourse. In fact, we saw that this macro discourse stream is much more complicated and intertwined with the other streams of discourse around alternative food. For instance, depending on where the OOFM placed power and agricultural expertise complicated the "organics as technics" discourse stream. Clearly, there is a tension between whether the power and authority of the technical matters around food belonged to scientific and agricultural experts, to the media, to the community at large, or to the OOFM farmers themselves, the ultimate practitioners of agriculture. There also appeared to be a tension between the technical agricultural practices of the organic farmers and the organic standard as exemplified by the posts related to climate change, animal raising practices and health outcomes above.

Now that we have looked at how the "organics as technics" discourse was actually grounded within the practices of the OOFM and how its actual practices were more complicated than what its big D discourse stream might suggest, let us look at how the "organics as commodity" discourse was built in the online discursive practices of the OOFM so that we can better understand these practices. Again, the same four elements in Nicolini's toolkit for zooming in were mobilized during our analysis in order to help us see and describe the practices.

#### **4.2. "Organics as commodity"**

When looking at the FB page of the OOFM throughout the year observed, it became clear that many local organic farms were prominently displayed on the posts. They often demonstrated their practices through the artefacts of photos and videos, and often spoke in their own voice on the page of the market. Therefore, unlike what would have been expected in a macro "organics as commodity" discourse, we cannot assert that the OOFM completely abstracted the underlying relationships that produced the food. Rarely, in fact, was the food solely presented as a commodity, and when it was, ties to how it was produced and by whom were often mentioned.

Furthermore, rarely did the OOFM members abstract the food by a price point on its FB page in our sample. One of the images that we could see of a commodity showed an image of bacon and was accompanied by the following comment: "Freshly smoked nitrate free bacon and pork jowls ready for the Ottawa Organic Farmers Market on Saturday. Also uncured side pork, and a great selection of pork cuts. All from certified organic pastured pigs" (OOFM, 2015c). No prices were mentioned in this post. The animals that were raised

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to make this final meat product, in this case, were not represented in the image. However, this post was also directly shared from the farm from where the meat was produced and the name of the farm was made known as well as a link to the farm FB page. Furthermore, the post specified how the meat was produced, that is, it mentioned that the practices used to produce the pigs were "certified organic". Therefore, the community members of the market could know through this post that the practices used to produce the bacon met the organic standard (Canadian General Standards Board, 2015). The post also stated that the pigs were raised on pasture. This information on the agricultural practices used presented as text helped bring a voice to the farm and helped create a link between the potential consumer and the marketer, in this case, the OOFM farm member. This potentially created a real bond to the farm based in materially significant practices and relationships, not what would be expected by commodification. In fact, through these types of discursive practices, it appeared that the OOFM was somewhat resisting commodification. Also, by presenting information on FB, which allows for potential contact and exchanges between producer and consumer through comments, this also potentially contributed to resisting commodification to some extent. However, the platform itself of FB is not without its complexities when it comes to the issue of commodification. In fact, some argue that this new media platform, as a social networking site, is part of the new public space (Castells, 2004) while others think that FB "does not signify a democratization of the media toward a participatory or democratic system, but the total commodification of human creativity" (Fuchs, 2010, p.192). The mediation of the relationships of the OOFM through FB did therefore problematize further the organics discourse when it comes to the construction of the "organics as commodity" or "organics as equity" discourse circuits.

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Regardless, the type of potentially more horizontal interactional order presented by the direct communication of OOFM farmers to consumers through FB potentially stretched the normative practices of the food marketing industry, often supermarkets, by providing the opportunity to the consumer to gain a lot of information and a potential connection to the farmer that grew the food, or at least, the farm owner. This is contrary to just finding a food product in the grocery store that might be certified organic (or not) but for which perhaps a brand name is only associated. However, even though this type of discursive practice was often used by the OOFM, nowhere were farm workers and the labour they've put in, mentioned in any of the posts of the year investigated on the wall of the market. It is as-if either none of the farms employ farm workers or none of them think to or want to mention them. This aspect of the discourse resembles any other form of discursive practice in which commodification is happening.

Also, an interesting observation that could be made while looking at the OOFM wall was that abstract economic costs were rarely mentioned. Was this in order to partake in the de-commodification of the food or was it simply because the prices were high and therefore not attractive to be mentioned online to the general public? Or perhaps, not mentioning the price was a discursive practice used to increase the appeal for the more affluent consumers who can afford to pay premium for organic food? This is, after all, a common tactic used to attract affluent clients in marketing luxuries in general (Writers for hire, 2010). Similarly to this form of marketing, therefore, perhaps rarely mentioning prices on the OOFM wall didn't defy the commodification of the food.

However, in one rare post, the price list was provided. Accompanying the price list was the following text from the farm:

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Planning to do a Little Stream GLUTEN FREE order in time for this Saturday. Because I am only purchasing on order I have reduced the prices a bit. Let me know by Tuesday night if you want anything for Saturday (OOFM, 2015b).

This post showed that a partnership between the consumer and the farmer could lead to a win-win outcome for both. In this sense, this practice stretched commodification by allowing for a form of "participatory pricing" based on the relationship with the customer. Furthermore, the link with the farmer being direct far from abstracted the relationship as would be expected in a scenario in which commodification is the norm.

Another example of a post that used the kind of tactic that aims to create a greater connection between the farmer and the consumer was one in which a picture of pigs was accompanied by the following text: "Growing disconnect between consumers and their food encourages unhealthy and inhumane conditions on factory farms". This picture was preceded by the following comment from the OOFM:

Proud to say our customers are VERY connected with the farms that feed them. Because of that we are able to produce humanely raised food that is good for you, good for the environment and good for the economy because it supports a small family business (OOFM, 2015g).

Interestingly the OOFM shared this post from the page of Food Inc. and the post initially came from the Organic Consumers Association. Food Inc. is a documentary about the crises facing the US food system. On its FB page, which was also linked to the OOFM page in this post, this organization states that the US "food supply is now controlled by a handful of corporations that often put profit ahead of consumer health, the livelihood of the American farmer, the safety of workers and our own environment" (Food Inc., 2008). The Organic Consumers Association, who also was linked to the page, on the other hand, is an organization whose goal is to:

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To promote healthful, organic and regenerative food and farming systems that contribute to good health, protect and improve the environment, and combat global warming. We do this by educating and advocating on behalf of consumers, by engaging consumers in marketplace pressure campaigns, and by advancing sound policy through grassroots lobbying" (Organic Consumers Association, 1998).

By associating itself with these two organizations, the OOFM seemingly wanted to portray itself as interested in producing food that has qualities that go beyond only making money but that also have positive attributes for human health and the environment. It also indirectly positioned itself as an advocate for these goals. However, by associating itself with a "consumer" organization, it also reinforced that the relationship between farmers and others at the farmers market is partially one of producer and consumer as would be expected by commodification. However, it also went beyond that by aligning itself with an organization like the Organic Consumers Association that incites those same "consumers" to be engaged as grassroots citizens in the political process. Such type of discursive practice both aligns with the "organics as commodity" discourse and diverges from it by going beyond it and by turning food into a political issue. Also by referencing Food Inc., which speaks up against the corporate control of the food system by few players, the OOFM began to also construct the "organics as equity" discourse by pitting farmers, the protectors of the environment and workers against corporations through this type of discursive practice. This type of practice, in fact, called on the alternative food network to resist corporate power.

Despite the ways the discursive practices of the OOFM sometimes seemingly defied commodification, were OOFM farmers (the marketers) also using marketing techniques that advantage their own bottom-line? Were consumers also manipulated with spin and treated as "playthings"? This is unclear from what we know. For instance, one of the videos presented

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in one of the posts of the OOFM clearly attempts to show organic as being better than conventional food. This type of discursive approach was similar to many of the posts on the wall of the market, in fact. Was this being done out of conviction of the technical truth of the matter or was this simply a good sales tactic? The “truth” probably lies somewhere in between. Regardless of the motivation of farmers which is beyond the scope of this research, let us look in more detail at a post in which it was unclear whether somewhat intentional deceptive marketing techniques were being used by the OOFM or whether misguided information was being presented in order to put organics in a good light.

In the example post, the video showed how those practicing industrial agriculture use chemical pesticides. The image frames presented in the video presented large monocultures of fruit and vegetables being sprayed with chemicals by machines (WIFEY, n.d.).

The video stated that most food grown today is grown with pesticides that are not so good for the environment. The film also claimed that eating organic food can reduce the amount of insecticides, fungicides and plant growth regulators that people ingest. It attempted to demonstrate this by showing the results of urine samples of family members before and after starting to eat organic foods. In the “before” shots, urine samples were shown to contain 4 different types of synthetic chemicals whereas those chemicals are almost gone after eating organic food for 2 weeks in the after graphs (WIFEY, n.d.).

The video also went on to state that eating pesticides found in non-organic food is probably not so good for people's health. This was done by portraying a scientist in the video that stated that: "We know very little about the long-term effects of eating food treated with pesticides, especially if you consider that chemicals can be much more harmful when combined together than they are on their own" (WIFEY, n.d.). However, by not explaining

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that many organic chemicals (including certain insecticides, fungicides and plant growth regulators) are allowed in the organic standard and by showing a study based on the synthetic chemicals not allowed in the organic standard, it is clear that biased results were being presented. By omission, the consumer was almost left to believe that organic food never contains harmful chemicals. This is potentially misleading and benefits organic farmers. By creating the impression that organic food is better for the consumer's health, organic farmers stand to benefit economically. Clearly, a more nuanced debate on the wall of the OOFM would have been a better representation of the truth of organic standard practices. Although it is true that the standard omits synthetic pesticides, it also allows for a large list of permitted substances, some of which can be used to kill pests (Canadian General Standards Board, 2015). Presenting this type of information on its posts might be more accurate but it might not lead to more sales. Presenting potential consumers with an "easy better choice" makes it also easier to sell products and to justify the increased costs. This type of discursive approach could therefore be perceived as simply another form of good commodity marketing tactic. However, again, the motivations of the OOFM to present this video on its wall cannot be ascertained from this post. Perhaps, the technical aspect of their own farming is too complex for them to understand and properly represent and therefore they tend to keep to what they know (whether misguided or not) or what at least, doesn't disadvantage them while trying to continue to apply best practices. What is clear, however, is that this type of post blurs the line between all of the streams of the organic food Discourse. By presenting themselves as educators and experts about organic food by curating potentially educational content as the one shown in the WIFEY video on its page, the OOFM entered into the "organics as equity" discourse formation territory. Also, by presenting its public with highly

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technical information, they were also entering into the "organics as technics" discourse stream. Finally, they were also constructing the "organics as commodity" stream by upholding the complex marketing label of "certified organic".

Besides blurring the line between the "organics as commodity" discourse and other organic food discourse streams, it cannot be understated that all the discursive practices of the OOFM ultimately operate within a larger market with strong economic forces that make it difficult to withstand commodification. Under such pressures, the OOFM presents FB posts with such statements that "economic sustainability allows for all the other sustainabilities" (OOFM, 2016a). The post where this was stated was accompanied by a shared post by the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition which shared a post from the Farmers Market Coalition (OOFM, 2016a). The post was explaining the sustainability benefits associated with shopping at a local farmers market.

The type of economic tension that ties economic sustainability to other sustainabilities is an inherent constitutive aspect found at the heart of the environmental and social equity discourse in general. In other words, this type of statement about sustainability is almost as saying that the commodification of food can lead to greater environmental and social equity. At the same time, it is the commodification of food that is perhaps leading the food network away from those same sustainability goals. The tension between presenting itself as part of a more environmentally beneficial and socially just food system while also being a part of an economic system that tends to drive commodification and the exploitation of people and the environment is clearly one that made its way into the discourse of the OOFM. The OOFM farmers are caught in a double bind and this is represented in this type of discursive practice about sustainability. This is also true of the bigger organizations

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advocating for a better food system like the two organizations, the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC) and the Farmers Market Coalition (FMC) that were linked in the same post. Both these organizations advocate for the sustainability of the food system. The NSAC's mandate is to: "advocate for the long-term social, economic, and environmental sustainability of ag & food systems" (NSAC, 2017) while the FMC is to "sustain farmers markets in the long term, for the benefit of farmers, consumers, and communities" (FMC, 2017).

Economic logic and abstraction that can be considered to make up the "organics as commodity" discourse also finds its way into the discourse of the OOFM. For instance, a particular post shared on the wall of the OOFM is from the Canadian public broadcaster CBC which tends to be somewhat mainstream in its content. This post strictly presented us with a traditional economic analysis of food economics in Canada (OOFM, 2016c). The title of the article shared from CBC was entitled: "Global food costs fall 14.5%, while Canadians pay 4% more" and was accompanied by a picture of vegetables.

The CBC article stated that Canadians are paying more for food because of the low dollar, harsh climate and big travel distances. It stated that our population is so small that it makes it hard to transport food efficiently. The climate also makes it difficult to produce food efficiently during the cold periods of the year. By presenting us with this post, it was unclear what the OOFM was trying to do. It did not really give more importance to the work of the OOFM except maybe by ensuring that buying local reduces food transport and possibly cost because of this. Perhaps also it was trying to convince people to buy seasonally when food is available in Canada. Or perhaps it was trying to make the case that all food has become more expensive and that therefore shopping at the farmers market makes more

economic sense. In any case, whatever the underlying motivations of the farmers were, it was clear that this type of post included the OOFM as participants in the "organics as a commodity" discourse. Perhaps it also showed that the alternative food network is "overwhelmed" by global economic forces beyond its control.

As we have seen throughout the wall of the OOFM, the "organics as commodity" discourse development is complex. The OOFM as an alternative food network both resists, and participates in the commodification of food. As we have testified, it potentially resists commodification through building more horizontal, direct and more transparent connections between consumers and farmers and their practices, by possibly putting more emphasis on other food qualities besides price, by engaging in participatory pricing, and by aligning itself with organizations that are denouncing corporate power and that are engaged politically. However, it also participated in the commodification of organics by using a simplified non-transparent marketing standard, by potentially using biased marketing artefacts to its economic benefits, by not showing the work of farm workers and by upholding the producer and consumer dichotomy. Also, its practices showed that the OOFM is somewhat overwhelmed by global economic forces.

#### **4.3. "Organics as equity"**

After looking at the way that the "organics as technics" and the "organics as commodity" macro discourses were constructed to some extent by the discursive practices of the OOFM, we can now look at the way the "organic as equity" discourse pervaded the actions and representations of this alternative food network on FB during one year. This was done by zooming in on the wall of the OOFM FB page throughout the year under

investigation, by looking at the page globally and by looking at several examples of posts. These examples informed us about the elements that help us understand how the OOFM discursive practices contribute to the macro discourse around "organics as equity": the "sayings and doings", "tools, artefacts and mediation work", "interactional order" and the "the tension between creativity and normativity" (Nicolini, 2012).

For instance, when looking at the page globally over a year, it became clear that certain "sayings and doings" related to "organics as equity" tend to pervade the discourse of the organizations involved in the organic food network presented on the page of the OOFM. Some of these include discursive practices that tend to focus on local markets and farmers, family farms, and small-scale production. However, other considerations that we might have expected to make up this discourse such as allusions to "social justice", "fairness", "co-operative", "food sovereignty" or "equity" were never mentioned specifically in any of the posts. With this in mind, let us look in more detail at how the discourse of "organics as equity" was developed by the organic food network members by analyzing some of the key posts highlighted below.

One good example of a post that helps us understand how the "organics as equity" discourse was shaped by the OOFM is one that was shared from the FB page of COG, one of the key Canadian organizations involved in shaping the discourse around organic food in Canada whose mission we discussed earlier. In this post, the trailer of the film *Of the land* (Law, 2015), which was linked to the page, along with the accompanying text on the webpage of the trailer were the main tools that the OOFM used that formed its discourse (OOFM, 2015d).

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In the accompanying text to the trailer, there were clear sayings used to show that there is a tension between small farms and large corporations due to an uneven power field between them, with two main corporations, Monsanto and Syngenta, mentioned in particular. What was stated in this text specifically was that:

Large chemical companies (Monsanto and Syngenta as examples) own patents on their GMO technology and focus much of their efforts on suing smaller farmers for patent infringement. Traditional, organic farmers, have consistently been under attack by these large corporate farming interests, who seek to dominate the food industry and run family farms out of business (Soundview Media Partners, 2015).

The site of the trailer also explained that the movie *Of the land* looked at a variety of smaller, organic farming models, and traditional farming methods as options to combat the new "GMO dominated industrial revolution" (Soundview Media Partners, 2015). Clearly, by sharing a link to this kind of text, the OOFM was contributing to the discourse around "organics as equity". They did this by associating themselves with a film that represents organic farmers as counter-revolutionaries to the GMO industrial revolution in farming which was portrayed as undermining small farmers. In fact, as a matter of practice, the organic standard prohibits "all products of and materials from genetic engineering (GE)" in the production or preparation organic products (Canadian General Standards Board, 2015, p.1). However, it is not clear whether this is true for manure since the standard states that if non-organic manures are not "commercially available", that non-organic manures are permitted and that "a priority to use manure obtained from transitional or extensive livestock operations, not from landless livestock production units or from livestock operations that use genetically engineered (GE) ingredients and/or GE derivatives in animal feeds" (Canadian General Standards Board, 2015, p.14). Despite this slight apparent loophole in the standard, nevertheless, organic farmers tend to view and represent the use of any GMOs as bad

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practice as was demonstrated in this post, often because of the power imbalance that GMO patents represent.

There were also specific sections in the trailer that showed us how Brian Law, the director of the film contributed to our greater understanding of the "organics as equity" discourse. For instance, one section showed a man in his living room (unnamed but that looks like an Indian intellectual because of his demeanour, clothes) that stated things like "it is our divine right and it is our constitutional right to feed our families that nature makes" (Law, 2015). Speaking of food as a "right" instead of a commodity showed that an element of the alternative food network wants to show that all humans should have access to food for fairness to abound.

In another section of the trailer, another commenter (also unnamed and unseen in the film) stated that "if we are to have freedom about some of those basic human needs, it warrants a very close look at how much those basic human needs can be impacted by small groups of people or companies" (Law, 2015). As this statement was said, first a farmer at the farmer's market was shown and then logos of large chemical multinationals (Dow, Syngenta, Dupont, Pfizer, BASF, Roundup, etc.) were shown. This type of discursive practice, again, helped us question the interactional order between small family farmers at local markets and large multinational companies in the agribusiness sector. There was a sense of power inequality that emerged from the juxtaposition of these sayings and symbolic tools.

In another section of the trailer, a man who looked like a politician (wearing a clean suit at a protest) was shown stating that "it's outrageous that America's farmers have to live in fear because Monsanto's GMO seeds will contaminate their crops" (Law, 2015). This shot of the man included a sign in the background that stated "food democracy now" (Law,

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2015)! This statement was presented along with shots that show signs that say that "American farms are under attack", and that "control food and you control people" (Law, 2015).

By presenting us with these artefacts and sayings, the OOFM was again showing that there is a power imbalance between large corporations and small farmers. They were also showing that there is a desire for greater power equality within the food system, especially by alluding to food democracy. More democratic control by more players would bring more equity to the food system, a creative solution to the business-as-usual scenario. Therefore, these sayings and images contributed to the discourse of "organics as equity".

Another example of a post that helped us understand how the "organics as equity" discourse was constructed by the OOFM is one in which the OOFM states: "Thank you to all the wonderful customers who support the Market farmers. You are what allows us to farm" (OOFM, 2016c)! In this post a photo is shared which shows a picture of an older happy farmer handing out a radish. On the photo is the following text:

If you stopped spending money at the grocery store next week they would never even notice you were gone. If you took a small fraction of that money and spent it at the farmers market you would help a local farmer pay the rent. You might even save his farm. Visit our project: [eatlocalgrown.com](http://eatlocalgrown.com) (OOFM, 2015f).

In this post, it showed that local farmers rely on the generosity of their customers in order to continue to farm. Their indirect call for help was made by appealing to the pathos of potential customers by presenting the face of a potential happy farmer who can continue to pursue his passion, farming and feeding people, into his older age. Also, here, the way that the discourse was presented was by representing local farmers markets as being different than grocery stores. In fact, "grocery stores" in this post were shown as representing the

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actors who do not play on a similar economic playing field as local farmers. In fact, by sharing this post, local OOFM farmers were almost begging for support from their customers in order to survive, a clear indication of the inequity of the food system in which they operate. In a sense, those who shop at farmers market perhaps help participate in a form of income redistribution to farmers. This post also perhaps showed that there is not an equal playing field between the consumers at farmers markets and the farmers themselves who are economically dependent on their clients. Although clients can choose to get food from different channels, farmers alluded to the possibility that they rely on the direct income from clients to survive. The tension between farmers markets as an alternative space VS the grocery store was presented here as well as the tension between consumer choice to support that alternative VS supporting grocery stores. This post demonstrated that the "organics as equity" discourse in action is embedded in a web of unequal relationships. As much as farmers can criticize the monopoly of capital by few players like in this case "grocery stores", they also depend on financial support to survive.

Another post that showed us how the "organics as equity" discourse is constructed by the OOFM is one that was shared from the page of Polyface Farm which contains a note from Joel Salatin. The note posted on the OOFM wall states that:

People routinely wonder why Polyface does not try to get into big retail stores and often think I'm small-minded to suggest we simply eliminate them. I encourage more transparent interfaces. If you haven't been following the recent brouhaha over the latest Whole Foods shenanigans, please take a minute to see what this counterfeit is up to. Remember, this is supposedly the gold standard of large integrity food markets. So how in the world could we possibly trust the others? Here at Polyface, we're attempting to build an entirely different food paradigm, and that starts with making and end run around the nameless, faceless, Wall-Streetified mega-supermarket retail interface. I will not lose sleep over the Whole Foods share value dropping. I will not lose sleep over McDonald's closing outlets. All of this disturbance shows two things: people don't like counterfeits and people are beginning to wake up (OOFM, 2015e).

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In this case, the post was shared from the FB page of one of the iconic family farms of the local organic food movement: Polyface Farm who is run by Joel Salatin. Joel Salatin is a super star farmer who has written 10 books on the subject of alternative food and is often a guest speaker at conferences. He is an evangelist for the local food movement and has a strong Christian libertarian ethos. Interestingly, he also considers himself a capitalist (Polyface Farm, 2017). On the FB page of his farm, it states that "We are in the redemption business: healing the land, healing the food, healing the economy, and healing the culture", and "Experience the satisfaction of knowing your food and your farmer, building community. We are your clean meat connection" (Polyface Farm, n.d.). Although his page does not directly appeal to equity, the call for "community" and "healing the economy" perhaps makes an indirect allusion to this. In the post itself, however, Salatin did make a bolder statement by using stronger language by pitting the local food movement against a "nameless, faceless, Wall-Streetified" actor, in this case, the Wholefoods grocery store. This kind of saying perhaps harkened back to the language used by the "Occupy Wall Street" movement, part of the movement for global justice, which was instrumental in raising the consciousness of the population regarding rising inequality caused by large monopolies and corporations. By creating true community connections, farms and local markets resist an economic model that estranges people from the land and the impact of their economic choices on their communities.

Besides putting an emphasis on the importance of the "local" farmer connection, members of the organic food network also sometimes describe themselves as opposed to "industrial". One such post shared on the wall of the OOFM (2016b) is one of a picture of a market stand with the following text on it: "It's time to get back to the way humans ate,

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before industry ruined food". This image is preceded by the following comment by the OOFM which states: "Get back on Saturday at the market! Lots of great food raised locally by passionate farmers" (OOFM, 2016b).

The term "industry" or "industrial" is generally loaded with a connotation of being corporate and large-scale. The term "industrial food system" is often equated with the production of poor quality food that is bad for the environment and for human health, hence the statement that "industry ruined food" in the post. By presenting themselves as being part of a group of "passionate farmers", the OOFM gave the impression that, unlike the people working for the industrial food system, that they produce food in a loving way as opposed to for-profit. Interestingly, the strong use of the sayings "great food raised locally by passionate farmers" VS "industry ruined food" in the post created a strong dichotomy between those who want to be perceived as the heroes against the industrial villains, a kind of David vs Goliath representation. The shades of gray of the movement were not represented by this kind of strong wording. In fact, some could argue that all agriculture is industrial to some extent. In fact, most local farmers use technology that could be considered industrial, including many of their inputs and machinery. Their production, being also for market, forces them to think of economies of scale, productivity and efficiency in order to survive and compete. Most local farms are also for-profit, including small-scale local farms. They are businesses and far from solely subsistence farms in the strict sense of the word. However, the image presented in the post above, was solely of a farmers market and did not show the industrial elements of local farms. By using the aesthetic of the chalkboard and wood containers, a kind of sentiment of greater authenticity was projected and perhaps also appealed to the sentimentality and nostalgia for the past when family farms were more

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abundant. However, perhaps many local farmers wish they didn't have to be part of an industrial system but by the forces of the market, feel forced to be if they want to survive, and this is why they use this kind of wording. There was a tension in the discourse between what is and what ideally could be if the forces of "industry" weren't so strong. There is a sense, in the OOFM discourse, that the food system was not moving in the right direction and that local farms were resisting against that in the best way that they can perhaps while living with the inherent contradiction of their industrial situation. This contradiction was actually brought to the fore by one of the community members of the OOFM on the wall of the market following the post that said "industry ruined food". This person stated "grow your own" (Ryder, 2016). With this comment, there was a sense that consumers who are ultimately also dependent on local farms or agribusiness to eat if they do not grow their own food also have become too disconnected from their own survival. This is a tension in the "organics for equity" discourse. Should all people grow their own food or depend on others to grow it for them as a business? Like Rundgren's (2014) mentioned, perhaps true regenerative production and consumption systems would involve co-production based on the "land as the commons" and make "categories such as producer and consumer redundant" (p.118). For now, the organic food network is more truly imbedded within a continuum of degrees of industrialization but doesn't always present itself as such.

As was seen in the posts described above, generally, the OOFM tended to describe itself as "local", "small", family-run and non-industrial in order to construct the "organics as equity" discourse. However, contradictions did arise in how the OOFM distinguished itself as an alternative food network as was explained in the case of the post described above. Another contradiction could be seen in another post as well. In this example, the OOFM was

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seen sharing a video that was preceded by the following comment: "Hats off to our customers who are making a difference" (OOFM, 2016d).

The video mostly raised the importance of supporting local farmers. It came on strong at presenting us with some of the arguments often raised by the alternative food network, that eating local is good for the economy, the environment and our communities (or "neighbourhoods").

The video explained that Canadian food imports have been increasing over time. It does this by presenting us with graphs that shows us that in a fifteen year period, food imports have been increasing by 160% while the population has grown by only 15% according to the sayings in the video (Hellmann's, 2009).

The video sometimes cleverly used produce to illustrate its points too. For instance, it stated that Canadians do not only import foods that we cannot grow in Canada. An example presented of this is one of the case of pears. In this segment, pears were literally used as an infographic to show us that 1 out of 700 pears are imported (Hellmann's, 2009).

After making the point that Canadians are importing way more food than they produce, the video stated that eating imported food has negative impacts on the economy, environment and neighbourhoods: "How? Well, for starters, many of our small family farms struggle to stay afloat while many of our grocery dollars end up in other countries so are cheap imports really worth it" (Hellmann's, 2009)? To demonstrate the potential negative impact on our local economy, the video presented a shot that showed money flowing from "local farms" to "foreign farms" (Hellmann's, 2009).

Interestingly, however, we find out at the end of the video that it is from a Hellmann's corporate campaign called "EatRealEatLocal.ca" (Hellmann's Canada, 2009). This fact is

also brought forward by one of the commenters on the post who states: "Absolutely!! Eat local, organic, non-GMO!!!! :) I think that this is a great video...but I can't help but wonder what Hellman's (aka Unilever) has to gain from it" (Mercer, 2016)?

By finding out that the campaign for this video comes from a large Fortune 500 multi-national corporation (Fortune Global 500, 2017), we could then look at it from a more critical eye and it became clear that not all of the facts presented about eating local were being shown in the video. For instance, the shot in the video showed that when eating local, our dollars go to local farms while when importing food, our dollars go to foreign farms. However, the multi-national investors, corporate executives and banks were left out of the graphic equation in this discursive practice of pitting local to foreign farms.

Moreover, when digging a bit more into the reasons behind the campaign, it becomes clear that Hellmann's stood to benefit from this campaign because it purchases Canadian eggs and Canola to make its mayonnaise (Only Here for the Food, 2009). Its discourse practice did not therefore likely really have an altruistic goal of levelling the playing field for farmers like much of the usual local food discourse but rather likely rode on the success of the discourse to sell more mayonnaise. In this sense, this video was kind of antithetical to the "organics as equity" discourse. In fact, Hellmann's, through its video, did not even participate in the "organics" discourse formation at all. For them, improving the environment is simply a question of reducing travel distances. This was illustrated again in a particular shot of the video by using an infographic of travel distances and by stating that the amount of kilometres the average distance travelled by an average common food eaten in Waterloo is of 4497 kilometres (Hellmann's, 2009).

The issue of travel distances, of course, is tied to greenhouse gas emissions and climate change. Although it does address this environmental concern, the video does not address many other environmental and health concerns often touted by the organic food network in its video like soil quality or the use of unhealthy chemicals for example.

Also, the video did not really present itself as being in favour of local food markets over grocery stores like the previous OOFM posts. For instance, it focused on how convenient buying local can be by stating that:

Let's help our farmers grow more of the food we eat here in Canada. How? Choose Canadian whenever and wherever possible. If you want to eat more Canadian food, you have to start looking for it, asking for it, filling your bag with it, enjoying fresh local food can be easy, start at [eatrealeatlocal.ca](http://eatrealeatlocal.ca) (Hellmann's, 2009).

This statement was followed by images of grocery stores, not of farmers markets (Hellmann's, 2009).

By presenting us with this video, the OOFM showed us that there are many voices involved in building the discourse around local food and that not all interests are necessarily aligned towards organic food or greater equity. Sure, supporting "Canadian" could help the small organic farmers of the OOFM but not necessarily. It could also benefit large multinational agrifood corporations like Unilever that are partially embedded in the local economy. This would most likely do nothing to really address some of the greater inequality questions raised by some members of the alternative food network. By presenting this video by Unilever, which has seemingly appropriated the "local food" discourse, the OOFM confused and moved away from the "organics as equity" discourse.

As we have seen in the posts above, the OOFM participated in the creation of the "organics as equity" discourse by emphasizing the local connection to farms of the farmers

market and by presenting organic farmers as the better smaller non-industrial alternative that can be trusted as a great food source. They did this by contrasting themselves to large multi-nationals in the agribusiness sector who they showed as siphoning profits, owning self-serving patents, providing low quality industrial products and generally overpowering the food system because of their scale. The OOFM, as an alternative food network, also highlighted the importance of family farms, food as a right and food democracy. However, sometimes, it appeared that the OOFM lost sight of the "organics as equity" discourse by aligning itself with the discourse of multi-nationals.

## **5. Conclusion**

In conclusion, looking at the discursive practices of the OOFM through Nicolini's (2012) toolkit for zooming in was very enlightening in terms of seeing how the macro discourse of the organic food network actually is constructed in real-time by the OOFM. As was expected from the theory, looking through that lens did reveal that macro discourses are often more complex in practice than in theory. Each action really often extends many circuits of Discourses, or problematizes them. In action, Discourses are much more nuanced and difficult to simply categorize. This was often seen in all the cases of the organic discourses streams of "organics as technics", "organics as commodity" and "organics as equity" in our case. Before delving deeper into our findings, let us explore some of the limitations of our research.

### **5.1. Limitations**

As we mentioned previously, our discourse analysis only looked at the actions of farmers as represented online on social media. Therefore, the discourses presented online

only showed us a partial picture of the full reality of the practices of farmers, a representation that does not exhaust the complexity and richness of actual practices. Therefore, it is important to remember that more research would have to be conducted onsite to fully grasp the complete picture of the practices of farmers. Also, another issue that arose from our research is that the motivations of the alternative food network's practices were not always clear. Perhaps delving deeper into those through more research would help us understand more clearly where the discursive practices of the OOFM stand in order to better suggest how progress could be made. Moreover, our research, although exhaustive and covering a year of online discursive practices, only represents one case of a local farmers market. Therefore, our findings remain specific to our case. Nevertheless, our research presented us with a good understanding of online representations of a local organic farmers market online.

## **5.2. Findings**

Despite the complexity of the discursive practices of the OOFM, surprising findings were made. For instance, farmers excelled, for the most part, at building an engaged connection with their community members through the use of FB. Often, their practices were transparent and seemed to demonstrate a great care for the animals, the environment and for people.

Where their practices became more problematic was when their discursive practices became contradictory or not as well founded in science as could be. This perhaps suggests that there needs to be more accurate unbiased information provided to the food network to continue to push the standard of excellence in the right direction. This could be done, in the case of organic farmers, through the organic standard or through other organizations. Clearly,

important issues like those related to human health, climate change, and animal welfare to name a few, could be points of clearer focus and action.

Furthermore, the tension between the "organics as technics" and the "organics as equity" discursive practices were clearly shown to complicate the issue of wanting to demonstrate accurate knowledge while also distributing power. This is a tension that would require more work for its goals to be fully realized. In other words, giving more power to people (as emblemized by the right to food or food democracy) and farmers is a laudable goal of the "organics as equity" discourse but it is also problematic in practice. Distributed authority without accurate knowledge does not necessarily lead to progress but can instead lead to confusion as was sometimes witnessed on the FB wall of the OOFM.

The OOFM also clearly showed that it is somewhat part of an alternative that is part of the greater network for global justice resisting commodification. However, it usually communicated this indirectly through its allies. This is understandable due to the tenuous economic nature of the work of small farmers, the limitations posed by participating in an actual market, and the tensions inherent herein to make a living while also pushing the network forward. However, at times, the alternative food network perhaps needs to be clearer about its goals for a fairer food system. It could also better consider how it represents itself and whom it allies itself with. For instance, there are now supersized family farms (The Wall Street Journal, 2017) that undermine the concept of "family farms" and massive corporations are also sometimes using the terms "local" to their advantage. Also, not all local farms necessarily have good farming practices regardless of scale. The problematic notion of what constitutes "industrial farming" VS small-scale farms needs to be better defined and explained. Furthermore, workers are still too often left out of the discursive practices.

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Ultimately, the larger market forces bear upon all in the alternative food network and are especially apparent in the farmer's market setting. As a space for action, this is therefore a limited space in itself. Grander actions outside of the market space should be considered to advance the alternative food networks aims. Here are, to conclude, some ideas to that effect from Rundgren (2016):

political actions, of many kinds, are needed. Some should be oriented to limit the harm produced by the current system, such as bans on pesticides and harmful practices or reallocating resources. Others should target the development of alternatives. This can range from re-allocating research funds from industrial farming models to regenerative farming, to revising tax codes to stimulate the numbers of people engaged in farming and facilitating emerging new economic relations. New institutions need to be created, or old one revitalized, for management of the food system, some of them might be organized by people directly, others by local or central government." (p.118)

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