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## **Civic Markets: Alternative Value Chain Governance as Civic Engagement**

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### **Introduction**

Both conventional and organic farmers face an increasingly challenging marketing environment. The commodity-based marketing system of the past generally presented farmers with the choice of a few stable market outlets. Today, however, markets have become more diverse, fragmented into market “niches.” As a result, farmers are finding that — on top of all their other hats — they need to become market strategists. Even the organic market niche is fragmenting into several sub-niches. Understanding how markets work has become as important to organic farmers as understanding soil fertility. Meanwhile, the challenge is growing; the growth of large-scale industrial organic agriculture has left smaller farmers with diminishing access to the major mainstream markets, since supermarkets prefer to deal with larger firms (24,36,43). In other words, even though the market for organic food may be expanding, smaller organic farmers are increasingly unable to gain access to the mainstream buyers that represent an increasingly large portion of the growing market.

Some of these farmers are therefore turning to alternative markets. Direct marketing, farmers markets, Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs), etc., are frequently mentioned as marketing alternatives. More recently, localized and ethical or “fair-trade” markets have also emerged as potential alternatives. While these markets do not always involve organically-grown commodities, they are often main channels for smaller-scale organic production. As alternative markets expand, they have become a key factor in organic farmer marketing strategy — as well as for extension officials and others interested in rural economic development marketing assistance programs — to increase smaller and mid-sized farm income (12). Yet, these alternative markets are particularly diverse and the dynamics of these markets are poorly understood. Consequently, those seeking new organic marketing outlets need to have a clear answer to the question, “What makes organic markets work?”

Many see markets as “free,” as private and non-social, moving buyers and sellers away from bureaucracy and regulation. From the free-market perspective, consumers and producers emerge from their own private worlds to meet, one-on-one, in the market. However, finding a new market is more than discovering a consumer looking for a new kind of cheese or carrot. Also, in most cases, farmers cannot just show up at a farmers’ market with crates of produce. Even such straightforward buyer-seller arrangements are codified by rules concerning who can participate in the market and what sort of practices they can undertake. These rules are created through dynamic processes of social interaction without which a market simply cannot exist (21).

Social scientists have begun to study the socially-interactive rulemaking around markets which they refer to as market “governance.”

There are a number of social scientists who study organic and alternative market governance, and their work can be useful to farmers looking to expand these markets. This paper will provide an overview of this research as it might contribute to a better understanding of alternative markets in organic agriculture. To provide real-life examples, the discussion will include illustrations from the author's own personal experience observing the creation of alternative market governance structures ([Endnote 1](#)). The article will also highlight some areas of alternative market governance in need of more substantial and rigorous research.

### The Nature of Governance

According to John Humphrey and Hubert Schmitz of Britain's Institute of Development Studies, governance is "the inter-firm relationships and institutional mechanisms through which non-market co-ordination of activities in the [marketing] chain is achieved" (29). In other words, "market" here does not necessarily mean just buyers and sellers, it also means a network of other actors that affect the exchange of commodities along the value chain, including government (both as regulators and as rural development policymakers), NGOs, business and citizens lobbying groups, and consumers, organized or not. Also, "governance" according to their definition involves both structure (the rules) and process (the ways in which these rules are determined through relationships and social coordination). Therefore, this overview of alternative market governance will include both a consideration of rules and of the social interactions necessary for the creation of these rules.

Needless to say, the actors that get to formulate the rules are often those with the greatest amount of power in the network. Humphrey and Schmitz (29) and Kaplinsky and Morris (31) discuss the types of control or power that large buyers have over the system, which enable these actors to gain most of the value (profit) from the system. These authors describe the many transactions between buyers and sellers as a market "chain." Much of their research focuses specifically on what they call the "value chain": how actors gain more or less of a commodity's value, or profit, based on the amount of power they exercise over the market chain. In particular, many of these studies note the increasing supermarket control of food purchasing in conventional value chains, which enables these actors to have increasing control over profits. For example, ten large food retailers are responsible for half of all food sold in the United States today, and these large economic actors are increasingly calling the shots in the purchase of fresh produce (30). Value-chain studies, therefore, look at the ways in which some actors "call the shots" in the formulation of mainstream market governance, generally with negative consequences for smaller, less powerful actors in the chain.

Rural development programs seeking to preserve small-scale agriculture often try to counteract these trends. One effort has involved trying to provide an amount of countervailing power to less powerful actors in the mainstream value chain, particularly farmers and consumers. This is probably most prominent in European Union rural development policy (15,17,38). In some cases, the efforts have been to enable small third-world farmers to gain access to EU markets (15,38). In other cases, policymakers are interested in protecting artisanal and territorially-based specialty food producers (6,7,38). For example, officials may work with smaller farmers to help them negotiate their access to supermarkets as an outlet for their production.

However, the most prominent approach has been to focus on the development of alternative market niches, helping smaller farmers develop strategies to make these markets work for them. In general, the idea is to create new "value chains" in which actors (both consumers and producers)

who have less power in mainstream value chains are able to gain more power and therefore gain more of what they want from their food system, whether that be greater income, better food quality, or protection of the environment. To fulfill these mandates, alternative value chains must formulate and follow different market governance rules.

Social scientists studying these alternative markets — such as organic, fair-trade, or local markets — have all come to one major conclusion: these markets are more “civic” in nature than mainstream markets. In other words, the vitality and growth of these markets depends heavily on democratic engagement, dynamic and interactive public conversations that are more social and more public (8,27,34,46), what Lyson calls “civic agriculture.” If one looks at the history of the national organic agriculture rules from a market governance perspective, one can see this public conversation taking place (46). I call these more democratically-engaged forms of market governance “civic markets.” Civic markets are the creations of public engagement over the way commodities are made and sold, in which “supply” and “demand” are the mutually-constituted product of these conversations.

The idea that civic engagement is a part of market governance combines two major sociological perspectives. First are the ideas prominently put forth by sociologists Robert Putnam (41) and Robert Bellah (9) that democratic societies cannot thrive without active and organized civic engagement. Second is the research of social scientists who have shown that markets are “embedded,” creations of their particular social and political context (21). The creation of market governance rules is therefore a social activity. Social scientists talk about a “public sphere,” a social arena in which people discuss possible social rules, including market rules, and implement them.

What studies of alternative markets have found is that these markets are even more civically engaged, more socially embedded, than mainstream markets. In these markets, there tends to be an ongoing — and never finished — public conversation about who wins and who loses from that market’s particular governance structure. This does not mean that these markets are intrinsically “fair” or equitable. For example, Reynolds has shown that organic farmers in the less-developed world are often faced with organic rules they had no role in creating (42). However, the question of fairness, equality, or social justice, while often seemingly invisible at any one moment (4), tends to re-emerge with marked regularity, whether in terms of public engagement with the institution of the National Organic Rules (46), the more recent National Organic Rule controversies over the Harvey Decision, or even more specific struggles over who gets defined as “local” in a local farmers’ market. Social scientists have tended to look at these struggles from a social justice perspective, asking whether the results of these civic conversations lead to more fair and equitable governance structures.

What do these questions about fairness have to do with farmers seeking alternative market outlets? From the civic markets perspective, the answer is “a lot.” Consumers participate specifically in fair-trade markets because they perceive them to be more fair. This is also often the case with local and other alternative markets, to the extent that people are participating as buyers in these markets in order to consume responsibly. However, even if consumers are only concerned about more personal issues such as health and taste, they are participating in alternative markets because they trust farmers are “dealing straight” with them on these issues. If the fairness of these markets becomes suspect, the future of the market itself also comes under question. Conversely, as consumers gain confidence in the fairness of alternative markets, it is more likely that these markets will expand and support a greater number of smaller-scale farmers. Therefore, questions of fairness have already and will continue to come to the fore in these markets,

whether farmers like it or not. Even more importantly, how actors in these alternative value chains deal with these questions of fairness will have a lot to do with the continued growth and vitality of these markets. Therefore, farmers who participate in these markets will thrive to the extent that they are willing to engage in these civic conversations. Farmers seeking to build new market links to consumers would do best to consider the possibility of doing so in a civically-engaged way. Interaction with consumers through food policy councils, described below, is one method of expanding markets through civic interaction.

In other words, civic engagement has been part and parcel of the creation of markets in general and alternative markets in particular. An additional implication here is that a number of potential new alternative markets — such as the new movement for farmers to sell to local school cafeterias (“farm-to-school”) — can come out of civic processes and can be part of initiatives to expand markets for organic farmers. However, there has been very little research looking closely at the ways in which sellers and buyers engage in a public conversation about the rules around organic markets. One possible arena of future research into understanding the civic aspects of alternative agricultural markets is to take a look at water and electricity markets, where the rules of transaction are set through public processes that are participatory and which have been widely studied (25,40).

New forms of private market contracting have also arisen, making farmers become producers of custom products for particular purchasers. These are basically private contract systems tend to be arranged on a bilateral, one-on-one basis. The term “civic markets,” on the other hand, describes the more public forms of exchange in which the rules are transparent and are generally open and negotiable by a larger group of buyers and sellers. From this perspective, it is possible to see that each civic market has its own form of governance; that is, each follows a distinct set of rules, including rules for public deliberation. Each kind of market governance has its own civic dynamic.

Social scientists are just beginning to study what makes alternative markets thrive and grow. A major challenge to alternative markets is managing their co-existence with mainstream markets. Government regulation of mainstream markets, particularly those protective of sanitation, often apply to alternative markets as well and can make it difficult for alternative markets to remain competitive. In my own work on the industrialization of dairy agriculture, I looked at the role of sanitation and other regulations in the decline of more artisanal forms of dairying in the United States. This continues to be true for raw milk, artisanal cheeses, and other highly perishable products. This research indicates that there needs to be a larger civic conversation about how we keep food safe while giving artisanal enterprises the opportunity to survive and grow.

What I also found was that dairy market governance systems had a strong influence on how farmers were able to use their land resources. In particular, milk marketing orders and land-use regulations worked against the sustainability of pasture-based dairying (13,16). On the other hand, recent research on the rise of artisanal dairying in California shows that (civically-derived) local environmental regulations conserving open space have recently facilitated the growth of pasture-based, artisanal dairies in those localities (23). Different market governance structures may support different agro-ecological practices, making the environment part of the public conversation about market governance, even when markets are not explicitly designed to meet environmental goals.

A further challenge from mainstream markets is the entry of mainstream buyers into markets for alternative products. While the expansion of demand for organic products from mainstream buyers is often welcome, it

can also threaten the continuation of alternative market chains. For example, work by British researchers Sonnino and Marsden shows that the entry of large food retail companies as buyers of organic production has had a negative impact on alternative marketing channels (45). Maintaining the civically-engaged aspect of alternative market governance processes could hold the key to their survival despite aggressive mainstream market competition.

The rest of this paper will review the social science literature that discusses a number of current alternative markets, including organic markets, and talk a bit about the governance structures of these markets. This overview will also indicate areas where more research about governance structures may provide insight into processes that increase trust and thereby strengthen alternative markets.

### CSAs

Most of the rules around CSA membership are based on a private contract between two parties. However, these contracts often involve rules of behavior that affect the entire membership of the CSA. Those rules are often set by the grower or informally between the grower and the members of the CSA. In addition, according to the report “CSAs Across the Nation,” 28% of all CSAs have a kind of governing board, generally called a Core Group (33). In other words, some CSAs are more “consumer-driven” while others are more “producer-driven” (37).

Whether CSA control lies primarily with consumers or with the farmer, the survival of the CSA depends not just on the writing of a check, but also on the creation and following of formal and informal rules. Some of these rules are part of a strict contract between the member and the farmer. Others tend to be more informal group expectations. For example, according to the CSA report mentioned above, more than three-quarters of all CSAs put together events that go beyond the provision of produce, such as festival days for members, tours, etc. Festivals are generally not part of CSA contracts. However, I can tell you from my own experience that if the farmer of my CSA in New York cancelled her strawberry festival without explanation, she would get an earful from her members.

More formal rules often involve things like whether or not a member is expected to put in labor hours on the farm or at the pickup points. There are also often specific rules of behavior for members at pickup points, in terms of maintaining cleanliness, controlling noise, and other things such as the ability to trade-off unwanted produce with others. In addition, approximately half of the CSAs have a subsidized share program so that low-income families can participate as members (33).

Member-farmer commitments to acquire land have also been a part of CSA governance in some cases. Because access to quality land is difficult and costly in many places, some CSAs have become increasingly involved in gaining access to land for the CSA farmer, and sometimes sharing in land costs. These “equity-based” CSAs involve, obviously, another layer of rules of behavior between the consumer-landowners and the farmer (33).

Consumer-driven CSAs usually have core groups actively involved in farm budget decisions, including farmer salary. In these governance structures, the annual membership fee pays the farmer a collectively-determined specific salary over the costs of growing. However, having participated in a core group of a CSA, I am very much aware, as long-time organic observer-journalist Steve McFadden notes, “if a core group has a say in the farm, the farmers can feel their lives are more complicated” (37). Exactly what fee would maintain membership at what adequate farmer salary was a constant source of worry in my core group. I still marvel that many farmers remain committed to CSAs, despite the poor income and benefits.

Clearly, health care and the need for a secure retirement are issues that CSA farmers want to address with members but often can't.

In these various cases, decision-making, especially in subscription CSAs, is often by "exit or voice" (29). In other words, members "vote with their feet" and leave the CSA or they choose to stay and voice their concerns and hope the farmer listens. Farmers, in turn, if they cannot achieve their goals of health or income security, or have other management issues with members, also shut down their farms or move to other types of farm markets (37). In addition, numerous smaller issues are a constant topic in newsletters (written by farmers or by core group members), with or without various forms of sanction ("please remember to ... or we may no longer be welcome here as a pickup point next year").

More information needs to be collected on exactly how CSAs create and implement governance structures. The issue of whether or not to have a core group, and the extent to which that group has decision-making ability, continues to be a topic of conversation in relation to CSA governance (37).

### Farmers' Markets and Farm Stands

On the Central Coast of California, where I now live, the turn to local markets is a mantra among small organic farmers who tell us they are losing access to larger mainstream outlets. It's important to note that market strategy in California has historically been oriented to out-of-state export. The organic sector has been no exception, even for smaller farmers. However, even mid-sized organic farmers in California speak of increasing difficulty finding mainstream market outlets. In many cases, these farmers are seeking access to local farmers markets (or are starting additional CSAs). In Santa Cruz County there are now nearly a dozen farmers markets. Yet, those additional local farmers now turning to home markets often find that local outlets are already at a saturation point.

On the other hand, in many other places, farmers' markets are looking for farmer participants to create the critical mass necessary to attract consumers. In these cases, the challenge is to attract and keep farmers. Needless to say, the governance issues in "thin" vs. saturated markets are very different and governing boards face significantly different issues under these two scenarios. However, except for one very good practical survey by the National AgLaw Center (26), farmers' market governance issues have not been heavily researched and are generally not well understood. This is a potentially very rich field of study. In part, the richness comes from the sheer variety of rules set by municipalities, business associations, etc., around farmers' market governance. For example, some markets have rules about how far away a farm can be from the market (another issue to be addressed in the market localization section) and what can be sold. Others certify whether or not the farmers produce all the products they sell in the markets. Organic-only farmers' markets rely primarily on a farm's organic certification for compliance with organic rules, but may certify the farm's "producer-only" status. Unlike CSAs, most larger farmers' markets have governing boards, which can be made up of farmers, consumers, local business members and others. However, there has been no comprehensive survey of these practices (10,26).

The National AgLaw Center report on farmers' markets gives us the most comprehensive view of these organizations to date (26). The report shows that who controls farmers' market rules and rule-setting processes differs from one market to the next. Farm market "owners" include farmers, non-profits, chambers of commerce, states and municipalities, and others. Also, "some markets are dictatorships and some are democracies" depending on the governance structure of a particular farmers' market. More research

needs to be done on how more or less democratic farmers' market governance structures deal with controversy and change.

In places with many well-established farmers' markets with a stable pool of farmers, new entrants can find it difficult to get space (26). Farmers' market governance structure in saturated markets often limits access to additional entrants, especially those who wish to sell the same produce sold by other farmers in the market. This can result in the rise of less formally-organized farmers' markets. For example, here in Santa Cruz, over and above our two Saturday morning state-certified markets, we also have an informal downtown market that is more of a hodgepodge of food, crafts and community activities. We also had for a few years what was sometimes referred to as the "guerilla" farmers market which set itself up outside of one of the local bakeries. The issue of access to farmers' market spaces will continue to be a contentious issue; however, according to the National AgLaw Center report, "market associations can benefit from talking openly about the issues" (26).

The number of direct-marketing farm stands has also risen in my region, particularly along Central Coast Route 1, which has a great deal of tourist traffic. The governance structure of these farm stands is probably the closest to "Wild West" standards. Hand-painted signs on the highway make claims about organic or "no spray" fruits and vegetables, although evidence of certification of claims is often slim. The general governance system appears to be "let the buyer beware." However, farm stands do fall under direct marketing regulations, which can be either state or county regulations. These stands can also be under various rules about zoning, sanitation, and other city rules that apply to local businesses.

My current work aims to fill out the picture of farmers' market governance by examining the ways in which farmers' markets create and maintain governance structures and processes that deal with issues pertinent to these markets. I hope to examine both communities with saturated markets as well as those with thin markets, to understand how governance structures differ in these two situations.

Farmers' markets, like CSAs, are a form of food system relocalization and the section on relocalization will continue the discussion of farmers' markets.

### **Fair Trade and other Ethical Marketing**

Even though fair trade represents only a small fraction of global commodity chains, it is the arena in which civic markets are developing most intensively, both in terms of determining standards fairness and the fairness of processes by which those standards are set. The last ten years has seen the publication of some excellent social science research on fair trade markets (5,17,19,38,42,43,44). This work can contribute to the understanding alternative governance structures as civic processes.

Fair trade markets generally develop their own unique market governance structures. Because "fairness" is the prevailing idea behind these markets, civic engagement is generally part of the process. Who decides and who benefits from a fair trade market, however, differs from one system to the next. In many cases, consumers determine what the rules of fairness will be, and then work with farmers who are willing to work within those rules. However, as recent studies by the authors listed above have shown, a "fair" market is not easy to define and is therefore generally a constant topic of public conversation among actors in the market chain. Once again, actors participate through both "voice" and "exit" strategies; they either try to make a system that does not work for them more "fair" or they leave the chain and participate in other markets.

Much of the research in this area has focused on whether fair trade actually “helps” farmers. Issues of market governance are only beginning to come to the fore, particularly in relation to coffee markets. The [website](#) of the Center for Fair and Alternative Trade Studies at Colorado State University has a wealth of information on this topic.

### **Relocalization Strategies and Local Food Policy Groups**

Food Policy Councils (FPCs) have been the main institutional umbrella under which relocalization projects have taken place. FPCs vary greatly in their formal structure (sometimes being less of a “council” and more of a “working group”) as well as in their activities from one place to the next. They can be organized by state, county, or city (or sometimes all three). In many cases, however, FPCs have taken as a main mission the provision of local food to consumers through the expansion of markets for local farmers (49). Sometimes this involves initiating new farmers’ markets in underserved areas, starting or assisting “Farm-to-School Programs” in which farmers provide produce directly to school cafeterias (2), outreach and education, and other projects.

For example, my local Upstate New York FPC helped to start an extremely successful farmers’ market in an underserved community (Troy, NY). The group also published a widely-used directory of local farmers. We put on events that advertised CSAs, such as “sign-up days” that supported the farmer and other CSA farmers in the area. We also established a yearly “Harvest Dinner” that showcased the produce of local farms and (more recently) local chefs. There were never any formal rules that we were to take on these responsibilities, but the FPC’s activities did reflect informal rules of trust and mutual farmer-consumer acceptance of responsibility for creating the social interactions and engagements that maintained and expanded alternative markets in the region.

Relocalization efforts include the “Buy Fresh, Buy Local” advertising campaign, which has put a single “face” on the marketing of local food as a way to grow markets for local produce. Despite its national organizational status, “Buy Fresh, Buy Local” works in partnership with local FPCs or other relocalization groups (3). While not confined to organic markets, in many cases local organic farmers are featured in these campaigns.

As these examples show, FPCs are often involved in alternative market expansion activities through relocalization projects. Consumer movements concerned about the problems of the mainstream food system — obesity, decline of family farms/rise of industrial agriculture, environmental and landscape issues, etc. — often see relocalization as a way to deal with some of these problems. Social scientists are currently involved in a very intense debate about relocalization as a way to resolve concerns about the food system. Some are optimistic about the power of relocalization to create a new food system (e.g., 8,27,34). Others have been more questioning about equating “local” with “fair” (1,2,4,14,15,29,48).

### **Conclusion: Creating Reflexive Governance Structures**

As this overview demonstrates, how alternative market governance issues get resolved will have a significant effect on the future vitality and growth of organic markets. While this discussion has brought up many more questions than answers, existing social science research leads to some tentative conclusions. First, the social context that embeds alternative markets is very important and more attention needs to be paid to the civic interactions around organic markets to understand how and when civic processes and governance structures help or hinder organic market growth. Secondly, fairness is an important issue in the creation of civic market



governance structures. If people think governance is unfair, they may exit the system.

One of the most important unresolved questions involving fairness in alternative market governance is the definition of the term that separates the alternative from the mainstream market, such as “organic,” “fair-trade,” or “local.” Let’s take the definition of local as an example. As my work on milk market orders indicates, the definition of which farmers are in and which are out of the local market “milkshed” has been intensely political. Historically, people have vigorously defended their right to sell into city milk markets, to be defined as “local” (13,16). Similarly, local farmers’ market boards struggle over definitions of local. For example, what happens to the farmers 101 miles away from a city that puts in a 100 mile definition of “local” in the farmers’ market rules? Farmers attempting to preserve a highly risky and often marginal livelihood may question a farmers’ market board decision to give access to spaces in the local farmers’ market to some while excluding others. Hopefully, the more fair a decision-making process, the less conflict will occur.

Exactly how to create fair governance structures about access to limited farmers’ market spaces is one of the challenges faced by the food relocalization movement. In some cases, questions that need to be asked are: Are the farmers who have access to the market representative of the diversity of farmers in the surrounding area? Or, do farmers’ market governing boards give access to certain less-than-representative groups of people? On the other hand, “the interests of the existing vendors who have created the market’s success must be considered, as well as any rights or expectations on the part of the vendors applying to participate” (26).

Many people talk about food localization as the creation of networks of trust. This is also true for organic and fair trade markets. However, as David Goodman and I have recently argued, “trust” tends to be “black boxed”; that is, everyone talks about trust but no one ever says directly what trust is and how you can recognize it when it exists (14,15). It is necessary to open up this box to understand how and when trust is made and, conversely, destroyed. Understanding market governance structures and processes can help all participants in alternative, civic markets maintain and grow trust with consumers. To this end, careful attention needs to be paid to how civic processes build trust in alternative market governance, including questions of openness, inclusion, and transparency. Those working to develop new alternative markets — whether organic, fair trade, or local — need to do so with the awareness that certain forms of governance may be perceived by others as being more fair. People have to approach these problems “reflexively,” that is, by being aware of potential unfairness in the ways decisions tend to get made. While no process can be totally fair, constant attention to issues of fairness is important, especially in situations where people define “fair” differently (14,15).

How do we design processes that are considered fair but also get the work done? That is a question that needs further social science research, most importantly through observing real people in real places. My own research includes understanding how my local food policy group is grappling with questions of fairness. The group has developed a kind of structured public discussion that grew out of a non-violent communication movement called the “World Café” forum. In our “Food Forums,” we have structured public conversation to try to give participants an equal chance to have their voices heard in a non-threatening environment which involves active listening and non-judgmental behavior. What has emerged from these conversations is a greater willingness for diverse groups to work together. Groups pursuing various local food projects attend the forums in order to gain input and support for their efforts. Nevertheless, participants in the group continually ask the question, “Will this process get the work done?”

In our interest to expand market opportunities for organic farmers, we therefore need to recognize that the expansion of local organic markets will require market-expanding governance structures that involve more public interaction between farmers and consumers. In many cases, the context for these civic interactions is place-based, with local consumers in food policy councils working with local farmers to create new local markets. Unfortunately, as someone who has been inviting farmers to local consumer events for years, I realize that, for farmers, going that extra mile to schmooze with consumers can seem like yet another stress on already overwhelmingly stress-filled lives. Farmers who are interested in growing their local markets need to talk to each other to learn how to interact with local consumers in ways that are not only sane but efficient and maybe even pleasurable. Consumers also need to figure out how to interact with farmers in ways that do not simply exhaust everyone. This may sound like an unimportant point, but I've sat at many consumer-led local food policy meetings in which farmers, glassy-eyed with exhaustion, were clearly wondering why they were there. Consumers in these organizations often have day jobs, too, and personal lives. We need to come up with processes that create governance structures that are straightforward and easy, while being respectful of both diverse views and limited amounts of time.

As this overview shows, social science research on alternative market governance could provide useful information for those seeking to expand organic markets. It is clear that the vitality of organic markets depends on maintaining their "civic" nature, that is, their openness to ongoing public deliberation about the goals achieved through the maintenance of alternative market standards. Otherwise, consumers will become doubtful as to why they are paying a premium for organic, fair-trade, or local products.

### Endnotes

1. I was on the founding board of the Farm and Food Project in Albany, New York; I participated in the Core Group of my New York CSA; and I have more recently worked closely with the Santa Cruz County Food Policy Working Group and with the UC Santa Cruz Student Environmental Center food policy group. This experience has brought me into contact and interaction with numerous farmers, activists, extension agents, local entrepreneurs and public officials involved in these efforts. I am fortunate to live in Santa Cruz County, which has one of the highest percentages of organic farmland under cultivation of any county in the US. Ironically, it also has one of the highest intensities of pesticide use. My home county, in fact, provides me with a great real-life laboratory in which to study the social context around the governance of alternative markets. [Back to text](#)

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