TOWARD A RELATIONAL AGRO-FOOD SYSTEM: THE CASE OF THE BLUE RIDGE WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE HIGH COUNTRY FARM TOUR

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ABSTRACT

TOWARD A RELATIONAL AGRO-FOOD SYSTEM:
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Since the early 20th century and particularly since WWII, the 'conventional' or industrial agro-food system has drastically altered and deteriorated natural and social landscapes from local to global scales. Despite the many detrimental socio-ecological impacts of this type of agriculture, disconnection between production and consumption in this now-global food system obscures awareness, understanding, responsibility, and care. Understanding all socio-ecological impacts of the conventional food system to be related, born from the same modern cultural assumptions of science and technology, progress and rationality, and dominance over nature and human and nonhuman others, this dissertation targets socio-cultural issues related to connection, community, place, gender, and care. Exploring these themes within the conventional agro-food system, the study also examines the potential of agricultural alternatives to restore relationships among people, community, place, and the more-than-human world through a feminist ethnographic study of the Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture High Country Farm Tour in Western North Carolina.

Following the introduction, Chapter 1 emphasizes the relationship between place and agro-food systems. Theorizing place as meaning, connection, attachment, and emotion, it explores the place-related impacts of the conventional agro-food system. Bringing together literature from scholars of place, agro-food studies, education, and tourism, this chapter employs

farmer interviews and visitor surveys to investigate the role of place in local food systems as well as the potential of agricultural places to serve as important educational spaces via farm tours.

Chapter 2 situates agro-food disconnection and reconnection within frameworks of ecofeminism and care ethics and engages with experiences of consumers participating in the High Country Farm Tour using participant-driven photo elicitation interviews (PDPE). The findings suggest that embodied emotional experiences in caring agricultural spaces can foster agricultural and ecological literacy and deepen consumer relationships with producers, agricultural practices and processes, and the more-than-human world. The findings also illustrate that PDPE can serve as a valuable window into experience, emotion, and meaning, affirming the method's value for feminist, agro-food, and other critical researchers.

Chapter 3 expands on the relationship between community and food systems, explores the relationship of women farmers and civic agriculture, and investigates community-based farm tours as a strategy for civic agriculture. Employing focus groups as a participatory action research methodology to bring women farmers together, it presents the impacts and challenges associated with participation in the tour. The chapter concludes that community-based farm tours, especially those highlighting women farmers, hold ripe potential as a creative civic agricultural mechanism and should continue to be implemented by more communities in the U.S.

The conclusion overviews each prior chapter and ties them together within a relational feminist framework of place and care. Challenges associated with the High Country Farm Tour, limitations of the study, and future research pathways are also discussed. The overarching findings of this dissertation indicate that place, care, and gender are crucial elements of a thriving civic agriculture and support community-based farm tours as an innovative strategy for moving toward a relational agro-food system.

For women farmers and those who care.

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INTRODUCTION

For all our human history, we have been shaped by nature, while shaping it in return. But in our industrial age, we are losing the stories, memories and language about land and nature. These disconnections matter, for the way we think about nature and wildernesses fundamentally affects what we do in our agricultural and food systems.
–Jules Pretty, 2002

What is lacking is the sense of the abiding connection between ourselves and our worlds; because of this disconnection we cannot exercise the virtues of love…that would enable us to be the caretakers of the world and ourselves that we should be. Our love, in other words, has become abstract, cut off from a deep (and practical) immersion in and commitment to place and community.
–Norman Wirzba, 2004

Research Overview

What is called today's 'conventional' agro-food system is from many perspectives not conventional at all. Rooted in 'rational' tenets of productivity and efficiency via science, technology, controlling nature, and other modern doctrines, our now-globalized, industrialized, and corporatized food system emerged – from particular places and particular cultural assumptions – little more than three centuries ago, representing a departure from more localized agricultural systems governed and restrained by natural cycles and processes for thousands of years prior. While agriculture as human intervention has been manipulating the natural environment since its development more than 10,000 years ago, modern farming since the Industrial Revolution and particularly since the mid-20th century has "been marked by a high degree of brute force and exploitation of natural resources and their local societies" (Sage, 2012, 68). In this short amount of time, the conventional food system has pushed well beyond natural limits and dramatically altered social and natural landscapes and human and more-than-human communities from local to global scales, arguably in a way that no other set of practices and processes has before. This study examines such changes in socio-cultural contexts of place, care, gender, and rural communities in the U.S.

In the U.S., the rise of the conventional agro-food system began with a shift from what was referred to as an agrarian system, which understood farmers to be 'natural' people; in their rural settings they were considered to be wise and moral[1], particularly as compared with urban residents (Danbom, 1986). This perspective began to shift around the middle of the 19th century, as enactments such as the Morrill Land-Grant College Act, which allowed for the creation of agricultural or land-grant colleges, and the Homestead Act of 1862, granting land to settlers to

[1] Race, gender, and indigenous relations significantly complicate and challenge this conceptualization, issues to be directly and indirectly addressed throughout this dissertation.

produce food for industrial workers in cities (Jordan & Constance, 2008), accompanied and gave rise to a new set of assumptions about agriculture tied to science and technology rather than to farmers and the land. Farmers were cast as unproductive and backward, and farms and their rural areas became places from which to escape as the urban became increasingly associated with progress and upward mobility.

Previously endowed with knowledge and solutions, farmers were now diagnosed with problems to be addressed by so-called objective science and agricultural experts, increasingly derived from land grant extension programs championing a top-down reductionist approach that "assumed that farming systems could be studied scientifically by reducing them to the component parts" (Jordan & Constance, 2008, 8). Increasing agricultural output, or productivity, was top priority and lauded as universally beneficial, and the consequential decline of farmers was justified in the name of efficiency – farmers who left did so because they were not 'good' farmers (Danbom, 1986). Thus, since the early 20th century, small-farm agriculture has declined, displaced by an industrialized agro-food system. By the end of the 20th century, only two percent of the national population continued farming, a drastic decline from the one-third of Americans who lived on farms just 100 years before (Lobao & Stofferahn, 2007).

The remaining farmers, growing "increasingly trivial to agriculture and food" (Lapping, 2004, 143), have been tied to technologies yielding prosperity for a few at the expense of many (Lyson, 2004). Farms are larger, specialized, mechanized, reliant on synthetic chemicals, structured for national and global markets, and disembedded from their surrounding communities and regions. The same trend can be seen in countries around the world as modern notions of progress and efficiency, exacerbated by capitalism and neoliberal reforms, have restructured economies to produce for, or import from, the global market. While upheld by some as a triumph

of science, technology, and 'rationality' that has allowed us to 'feed the world,' from other perspectives our global agro-food system appears completely irrational, rapidly deteriorating social and environmental landscapes around the world (Araghi, 2001).

Since the end of WWII the world has witnessed massive agricultural changes, linked to a surge in food production, population, and political, economic, and socio-cultural shifts around the world. The doubling of food production since the mid-20th century has been possible only through "a six-fold increase in nitrogen fertilizer, a three-fold increase in phosphorous fertilization, and a substantial increase in the area under cultivation" (Moran, 2006, 73). If food production doubles again, as it is expected to do, we will see a "three-fold increase in nitrogen and phosphorous fertilization and an increase of 18 percent in cropland cultivation" (Moran, 2006, 73), resulting in further eutrophication of ecosystems and major biodiversity losses. Already, the global expansion of agricultural land has destroyed major areas of habitats characterized as the "most biologically diverse and productive biome" (Sage 2012, 102). Native biodiversity within cultivated systems is replaced by uniformity as modern varieties of seeds, aimed at maximizing productivity, are increasingly employed. And genetically modified organisms (GMOs) are a great source of fear for many who link them to health-related consequences and the further decline of our already weakened biodiversity (e.g., see Shiva et al., 2007).

Other major environmental impacts surround both soil and energy. As conventional agriculture has increasingly relied on nitrogen fertilizers that deplete the soil, farmers are linked to a "chemical treadmill" (Sage 2012, 46) on which they must apply more and more fertilizer at the expense of soils and the broader environment. When crops are harvested, nutrients are extracted from the soil, which must be replenished in order to maintain soil fertility. The

conventional agricultural system does this synthetically via the massive application of nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium. As Sage (2012) explains, "up to half of the macro-nutrients added to the soil are lost, finding their way through a number of pathways into the wider environment" (95). This is linked to the greenhouse gas nitrous oxide emission, which together with methane[2] are two major contributors to climate change, both more powerful than carbon dioxide. Nitrate accumulation in groundwater is also a major concern, linked to cancers in humans and the killing of fish and other animals.

Furthermore, an enormous amount of energy is demanded by the globalized conventional agricultural system. Natural gas is used to provide feedstock for fertilizers, and oil fuels farm machinery. Petrochemicals are employed to supply packaging materials for processed foods, and fossil fuels transport food globally via "the ever-lengthening supply chain that brings foods from all over the world to our local supermarket" (Sage, 2012, 4). As our supply of fossil fuels, once perceived as cheap and unlimited, dwindles and becomes increasingly problematic, farming systems reliant on mechanization and global transport are called into question. Globally, we face major challenges for food production, including climate change, freshwater depletion[3], peak oil, and rising global demand for meat (Sage, 2012). Other significant concerns include the expansion of large-scale Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations, linked to environmental as well as social deterioration and spurring major ethical debates concerning animal rights and welfare (Jordan & Constance, 2008).

Socio-cultural issues associated with the conventional agro-food system include labor exploitations; concerns over food safety, security, and sovereignty; health epidemics such as diabetes and obesity; widespread hunger and poverty; displacement and dispossession;

[2] Associated with livestock and wetland rice production.
[3] 86% of global freshwater is used for agriculture.

deterioration of rural communities and the restructuring of social landscapes; and a decline in consumer awareness and care. Understanding each of these issues to be related, this dissertation focuses on impacts related to community, place, and care. Many studies have assessed the impacts of industrial farming on communities, beginning in the U.S. with the well-known 1940s USDA study by anthropologist Water Goldschmidt. Goldschmidt was the first to document adverse effects of large-scale farming in terms of numerous community indicators: "(R)elative to the family farming community, the industrial farm community had a smaller middle class, more hired workers, lower family incomes and higher poverty. There were poorer quality schools and public services and fewer churches, civic organizations and retail establishments" (Goldschmidt, 1978, in Lobao & Meyer, 2001, 103). These findings have proven to be resilient; Lobao and Meyer (2001) determined in a comprehensive overview of more-recent studies that they overwhelmingly reported "all or some detrimental impacts" on communities associated with the presence of industrial farming.

Accordingly, food production, distribution, and consumption have been linked to "the environmental, social, spiritual, and economic well-being of the community" (Feenstra, 1997, 28). Industrial agriculture shatters these linkages, perpetuating community degradation, 'thin' places (Casey, 2001), and the 'stretching' (Massey, 1994) of relations:

> The geography of the modern food system reveals that, as food chains become stretched further and in more complex ways across space, we experience both the physical and psychological displacement of production from consumption, and all of the other disconnections and disembedding which follow in that stead – loss of rural agricultural resilience and diversity, degradation of the environment, dislocation of community, loss of identity and place (Feagan, 2007, 38).

Indeed, as the links between food and where it comes from are stretched and increasingly obscured, a loss of awareness, understanding, responsibility, and care emerges amongst food consumers. As we no longer see or understand where our food comes from, the result is "the

economic and social 'distancing' and delocalization of agriculture from food consumption" (Lapping 2004, 142). Wiskerke (2009) has referred to three dominant processes characterizing dominant trends in this food system: disconnecting (producers delinked from consumers), disembedding (the disappearance of a local/regional character of food products, what might be called 'placelessness') and disentwining (previously intertwined production/distribution systems now take place in distinct spheres of activity). The effect is "that goods and services are increasingly exchangeable, and places are increasingly interchangeable" (371).

Such trends are rooted in modern divisions between humans and nature, between reason and emotion. Ecofeminists dispute such divisions and take as their starting point the "interconnections among *all* systems of unjustified human domination" (Warren, 1990, 2); Employing gender as a lens from which to see the shared foundations of power, inequality, and domination over women and human/nonhuman others, ecofeminists trace the subordination of these groups back to the same Enlightenment-originating binaries of power. As Griffin (1995) put it, "(u)nderneath almost every identifiable social problem we share, a powerful way of ordering the world can be detected, one we have inherited from European culture and that alienates consciousness both from nature and from being" (10).

This European culture is one originating in 16th-century Cartesian and Newtonian thinking that was used to conquer and exploit places around the globe during the age of European imperialism. Such a culture, spread across space and time, has led us to the twin crises of the deterioration of nature and society; often understood separately, ecofeminists maintain that these are in fact interconnected: "The alienation of human society from nature has led to many different kinds of destruction, not the least of which has been the fragmentation of consciousness" (Griffin 1995, 9). The binaries of domination veil the reality of what Griffin

terms ‘commingling’ and embodiment. For in fact, we are all interrelated, all connected – the very opposite of what our culture tells us. Nature and human, man and woman, human and nonhuman – we have a “radical dependency on the Other” (Plumwood, 2002, 4).

Recognizing and restoring relations are at central to a feminist ethic of care, which brings principles of disconnection and individualism into question and proposes an alternative “social ontology of connection” (Lawson, 2007, 3). Held (2006) defines care as both practice and value, centered on emotion and “on the compelling moral salience of attending to and meeting the needs of the particular others for whom we take responsibility” (10). Cuomo (1998) articulates the notion of ‘flourishing,’ meaning the well-being of individuals, species and communities:

> Since nonhuman communities and entities are necessarily, intrinsically bound up with human life and interests, the well-being of nature is implied, to at least a minimal degree, in human flourishing. Some degree of nonhuman flourishing is instrumentally necessary for human flourishing (63).

Interrelations are indeed the major emphasis of care; Popke (2006) states that a care-centered perspective is “premised on a *relational* conception of subjectivity, which stands opposed to the autonomous rational subject of individual rights and responsibilities” (506). An ethics rooted in care, alternatively, would stress interconnectedness, cooperation, mutual obligations, trust, and interdependence. We must understand and

> continue to develop ways of thinking through our responsibilities toward unseen others, and to cultivate a renewed sense of social interconnectedness … a feminist-inspired ethic of care can assist in developing such a sensibility, as can various pragmatic strategies for turning our ordinary moral dispositions – as consumers, as citizens – toward more just and sustainable ends (Popke 2006, 510).

As consumers become increasingly aware of the many detrimental socio-ecological impacts of the conventional agro-food system, such strategies are emerging, referred to collectively as ‘alternative’ agriculture. Beus and Dunlap (1990) defined the alternative agriculture system in opposition to the conventional agriculture system; while the conventional

system is rooted in the 'dominant social paradigm' detailed above, some believe that the rise of alternative agriculture represents the beginning of a paradigm shift – a move from the industrial agricultural model to 'a new environmental paradigm.' While conventional systems are characterized by centralization, dependence, domination of nature, specialization, and exploitation, alternative systems are concerned with decentralization, independence, harmony with nature, diversity, and restraint. Alternative approaches vary, termed 'natural,' 'organic,' 'local,' 'sustainable,' 'fair trade,' etc., but Beus and Dunlap (1990) see them as sharing the same core philosophy: a belief in natural practices as well as "smaller farm units and technology, reduced energy use, greater farm and regional self-sufficiency, minimally processed foodstuffs, conservation of finite resources and more direct sales to consumers" (594).

Other scholars, however, see different foundations between alternative practices; Watts et al. (2005), for example, distinguish between 'weak' and 'strong' alternative food systems and networks. Weaker systems are based on their engagement with, or potential to be co-opted by, conventional food systems operating within the global neoliberal paradigm, while stronger alternatives are characterized by horizontal networks, a short food supply chain, and an alternative paradigm. Gillespie (1995) posits that different "sustainable agriculture" approaches have multiple definitions rather than a common root, dividing alternative models into different frames with varying emphases (environmental, social or efficiency). She argues that while models fitting into the dominant neoliberal paradigm are most likely to prevail, there is hope for other models "as consumers become increasingly suspicious of the safety/security of the current food system and as society becomes increasingly environmentally conscious" (185); there is also increased hope if social and environmental frames are united together rather than remaining fragmented. When ecological and social issues are falsely separated, the result is a competition

between values that results in an increasingly confusing and fragmented food landscape, making it more susceptible to corporate co-optation and 'greenwashing.'

Thus, caution and reflexivity is called for as an increasing awareness continues to spur alternative agro-food options; we must distinguish between different kinds of approaches and continue to seek holistic, inclusive, and caring alternatives. I join other agro-food scholars in arguing that the strongest alternatives are those rooted in community and place: "(I)n this environment of concern, territories, regions, places and communities are evinced as spaces of resistance through which agency and local institutional efforts can manage change in ways which more closely meets their needs" (Feagan, 2007, 32). Local food systems are thus deemed by many to be the strongest agro-food alternative; yet even local food systems have the potential for co-optation, particularly when unreflexive, exclusive, or rooted in location rather than place – relying on definitions of 'local' based on food miles or state boundaries, for example, as in the case of local food campaigns increasingly prevalent in corporate giants such as Wal-Mart and Kroger. Employing only territory-based conceptions of place in our understanding of local leaves behind considerations of community, farm scale, and sustainable practices, while an understanding of place as territorially bound can result in exclusion with the potential for "reactionary politics and nativist sentiment" (DuPuis & Goodman, 2005, 360). Accordingly, some scholars explicitly call for integrating local food and place-based practice: "Without an emotional, a spiritual, and a physical glue to create loyalty, not to a product, but to layered sets of embodied relationships, local will have no holding power" (Delind, 2006, 126).

Emphasizing relations, Thomas Lyson (2004, 2005) has famously coined the term 'civic agriculture,' which embodies the same dedication to environmentally sound practices as 'sustainable agriculture' but goes further to emphasize community. A civic agriculture is

characterized by "alternative production systems of direct-marketing projects that seek to bring farmers and consumers closer together…to expand the knowledge and understanding of how foods are produced, and to increase the economic viability of farmers" (Lapping, 2004, 143). Civic farmers prioritize community, sustainability, and care for others; their imperative to earn a profit is filtered through and embedded within such more-than-economic goals (Lyson, 2005; Lapping, 2004). Women farmers are particularly linked to such goals in the literature (Jarosz, 2011; Allen & Sachs, 2007; DeLind & Ferguson, 1999; Trauger et al., 2009), yet they have been historically marginalized or invisibilized in their productive roles and dismissed as producers of agricultural knowledge (Allen & Sachs, 2007; Saugeres, 2002; Trauger et al., 2008; Lobao & Stofferahn, 2007; Pini, 2002). A thriving civic agriculture, then, is largely dependent upon the support and empowerment of women farmers through civic agriculture organizations (CAO), horizontal networks, and innovative strategies (Trauger et al., 2008).

For non-farmers, participation in community-based food systems can foster 'agricultural literacy,' transforming passive consumers into "active food citizens" (Lyson, 2005, 97). An agrarian vision of a civic agriculture does not maintain that all people must return to farming, but rather that

> all people, because they eat and drink, should be aware of food responsibilities and take a more active role in promoting food safety and security. Food security is grounded in regional food production. Food responsibility begins with becoming educated about the food industry, learning about those products and processes that promote health and vitality for the entire neighborhood … The best way to accomplish this education is to form relationships with food providers, as can be done when we purchase from farmers directly, at farmers' markets or through community supported agriculture (CSA) projects. The key is to become involved participants in food production wherever we can (Wirzba, 2004, 15).

Consumer motivations that are not only economic, then, but are grounded in awareness, participation, and social embeddedness (Sage 2007) are crucial to potentially transformative

alternatives. Spaces and strategies for civic agriculture such as farmers' markets and consumer supported agriculture (CSA) offer both spatial and social alternatives, the common feature being "that they serve to reconnect food producers and consumers in a new and direct way, a relationship largely severed in recent years by the dominance of corporate multiple retailers" (Sage 2007, 3). Consumers can – but must not necessarily – shift from passive food consumers to "more proactive 'citizen-consumers' who intend to regain control over the ways in which their food is produced and provided" (Renting et al., 2012, 301).

The question of how to create strong agro-food alternatives rooted in relationships, care, community, and an open, inclusive sense of place remains a vital one in agro-food studies and practice, a particularly relevant topic in the field of human geography. Scholars exploring motivations and experiences of new civic spaces of producer-consumer and agro-food reconnection have found non-economic motivations related to care (e.g. Kneafsey et al., 2008), as well as a gendered nature of activism and participation (e.g. DeLind & Ferguson, 1999; Jarosz, 2011). While many such studies have focused attention on farmers' markets and CSA (e.g. Charles, 2011; Hayden & Buck, 2012; Jarosz, 2011; Sage, 2007; Schnell, 2010; Starr, 2010; Wells et al., 2009), this dissertation deeply examines the potential of an innovative and vastly under-studied[4] project of civic agriculture, community-based farm tours, pushing consumers beyond markets and CSA pick-ups and into spaces of sustainable agricultural production. Intending to investigate both this particular strategy for civic agriculture and to explore the role and potential of place, care, and gender in civic agriculture more broadly, I employ a feminist ethnographic case study of the Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture (BRWIA) 2014 High Country Farm Tour in Western North Carolina.

[4] While studies of farm tourism, or agritourism, are plentiful broadly, Spurlock (2009) has authored the only other known study on annual community-based farm tours. This paper offered a participant observation-oriented personal narrative of the phenomenon but did not engage other methodologies such as interviews, surveys, or focus groups.

Research Context

Despite national trends of agricultural consolidation and farm loss, agriculture remains economically important in the North Carolina Mountain region, and large-scale industrial farming has been kept somewhat at bay by the area's topography. Western North Carolina houses more than 12,000 farms producing fruits, vegetables, meat and dairy products, Christmas trees, tobacco, and nursery plants (Kirby et al., 2007). Tourism is the region's top industry, driven in large part by the scenic natural and agricultural landscapes. Yet such an image obscures the deeply felt impact of modern and neoliberal reforms on the area. Many of the cultural traditions that the North Carolina Mountains conjure have in reality declined or disappeared, as the landscape shifts from largely rural to suburban, consumption replaces production, and ever-encroaching development threatens the area's natural and cultural heritage (Owen, 2007). Amidst such assaults, grassroots nonprofit organizations and activism revolving around local agro-food systems, which lie at the intersection of natural and cultural landscapes, are readily found in the area, such as the Blue Ridge Seeds of Change Initiative, the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project, and, the focus of this research, BRWIA.

BRWIA is a nonprofit organization in Western North Carolina "dedicated to strengthening the High Country's local food system by supporting women and their families with resources, education, and skills related to sustainable food and agriculture" (brwia.org). Headquartered in Boone[5], they serve both producers and consumers in the High Country[6] by offering grants to female farmers, farmer mentor programs, workshops highlighting agricultural and sustainable living practices, farmer profile projects, consumer education programs, and their

[5] Boone is the county seat of Watauga County, home to Appalachian State University, with a population of 17,122 (2010 census).

[6] The seven northernmost counties in North Carolina are considered the High Country, including Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Mitchell, Wilkes, Watauga, and Yancey counties. Caldwell County (NC) and Johnson County (TN) are also within BRWIA's service area.

flagship event, the annual High Country Farm Tour. Working toward a vision of "an equitable local food system that protects the environment, strengthens the local economy, alleviates hunger and poverty, and improves community health" (brwia.org.), their long-term civic agricultural goals include:

1. Increasing the economic viability of farming and food processing, especially among women
2. Encouraging farmers to adopt sustainable farmer practices
3. Educating the public about sustainable food and agriculture
4. Improving food security

The BRWIA High Country Farm Tour is an annual two-day tour in which small-scale working farms[7] employing a range of ethical and ecological practices open themselves to visitors, providing experiential and sensual tours of their farms, homes, products, and practices that bridge human and more-than-human worlds. The goals of the tour as outlined by BRWIA are to connect producers and consumers, to provide farmers with economic opportunities, and to educate the public about sustainable agriculture and local food. The hope is that embedded relationships might be formed, awareness might be raised, and agricultural education might take place. In June 2014, 20 farms in two countries, Ashe and Watauga, participated in the eighth annual BRWIA High Country Farm Tour. The farms were 'open' to visitors from 2-6 p.m. on Saturday, June 28, and Sunday, June 29. Visitors transported themselves to the farms by car and were free to visit as many as they could over the two-day period, though they were advised to select three or four farms a day – descriptions and details of each farm and their offerings was provided to visitors along with their passes.

[7] Traditional as well as non-traditional agricultural spaces (e.g. community gardens, animal sanctuaries or rehabilitation centers, incubator farm programs, and off-the-grid homesteads) are included in the term 'farm.'

Broadly, this dissertation aimed to explore and understand the potential of this innovative and under-studied strategy for civic agriculture, and of civic agriculture more generally, through an overarching investigation of producer and consumer motivations, experiences, and impacts of participation in the BRWIA High Country Farm Tour[8]. Employing a relational framework, the findings presented here in the form of three self-contained articles, each with distinct research questions and methodologies, probe the role of place (Chapter 1), connection and care (Chapter 2), and gender (Chapter 3) in civic agriculture via a case study of the 2014 High Country Farm Tour. From May through September 2014, I employed a feminist ethnographic and participant action research (PAR) methodology in the High Country (see Appendix A for full research design), collaborating with BRWIA as they prepared for, implemented, and evaluated the eighth annual High Country Farm Tour.

Research Approach

Conventional approaches to research are grounded in notions of objectivity and rationality, rooted in the Enlightenment inheritance described above. 'Objective' science is linked to a belief in 'rationality' as delinked from emotion and based on the ability to fragment, measure, generalize, and quantify. These beliefs have come to be uncritically accepted as 'truth' and 'commonsense,' despite the fact that they were "shaped by the concerns and relevances of a relatively small group of powerful men" (Devault, 1990, 96). In such a worldview, white male Europeans were 'reasonable' and, through the power of binaries of domination and inequality, all others were by deduction 'unreasonable.' Such problematic binaries (e.g. human/nature, reason/emotion, mind/body men/women, researcher/researched, urban/rural, white/Other, European/Other) have "become built into the whole of western man's way of looking at things,

[8] Original guiding research questions included: What are producer, consumer, and organizational motivations related to the High Country Farm Tour? What characterizes producer and consumer experiences and perceived impacts?

including the whole of our science" (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, 28). The crux of feminist research is opposed to these binaries.

Feminists refer to the "cult of objectivity" (Bell, 1993), in which

> (i)f one passes beyond the line, speaks of self as feeling, interacting, or as an element in a relational field, one becomes 'subjective,' and one's work is no longer 'good science.' It bears the stamp of the observing-participating self and hence is biased, interested and partial, all terms that are paired with women in a gender-inflicted dualism…of post-Enlightenment rationalist thought (29).

Thus, women's participation in science has (historically and contemporarily) been largely prohibited, marginalized, or discredited – "classified as sensitive, intuitive, incapable of objectivity and emotional detachment and as immersed in the business of making and sustaining personal relationships" (38), women were barred from participation in knowledge production defined by objectivity and detachment.

Despite varying epistemological conceptions (e.g. feminist empiricism, standpoint theory, situated knowledge)**,** feminist research is united in its interrelation of injustice, ethics, and the exposure of power and 'givens' in positivistic, empirical science. As a useful point of summary, Reinharz (1992) offers ten key tenets of feminist research: the inclusion of the researcher as a subjective person and, similarly, the researched not as an object but as a person; the aim of social change; the transcendence of binaries and disciplines; the engagement of feminist theory; the critique of non-feminist scholarship; the possibility for relationships between the researcher and the researched; multiplicity and partiality.

Feminist approaches to research, then, embrace what has been rejected – participation, complexity, partiality, plurality, diversification, emotion, reflexivity, and self. In the vein of other critical thinkers, feminists call into question "the supposed triumph of science and rationality" in order to produce "an array of diverse and divergent conceptions of knowledge" (Bentz &

Shapiro, 1998, 1). Methodologically speaking, a range of methods are embraced, including life histories, interviews, focus groups, case studies, participatory methods and even, for some, surveys and statistics (Geiger, 1986) – plural methods are encouraged to cultivate diverse ways of knowing. Reinharz (1992) and others promote triangulated evidence from a variety of sources, mixing method and interpretations. Multiple methods reflect the "multifaceted identity of many feminist researchers" (202). My feminist ethnographic study of BRWIA and the High Country Farm Tour was comprised of mixed methods, including survey, in-depth and participant-driven photo elicitation interviews, focus group, and participant observation (see Appendix A for full research design), all conducted as I lived, worked, and actively engaged with civic agriculture in the High Country.

Before beginning my fieldwork, I attended and volunteered at the 2013 High Country Farm Tour in order to conduct preliminary research, after which I approached BRWIA about my desire to conduct my dissertation research on the Farm Tour while also helping to meet and advance organizational needs and interests. During a fall 2013 board meeting, BRWIA voted to allow me to collaborate with them during the following year's tour. This process points to the need for time, investment, and the approval of 'gatekeepers' in order to gain access for meaningful ethnographic work.

Prior to the 2014 tour, I attended BRWIA staff and board meetings, collaborated with the organization to market the tour, sold weekend passes at three area farmers' markets[9], and conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the 20 participating farmers. During the tour, held from 2-6 p.m. on June 28 and 29, I volunteered at one of the participating farms[10] on the first day and attended the tour as a visitor the second day, conducting participant observation

[9] Watauga County Farmers' Market, Ashe County Farmers' Market, and the Blowing Rock Farmers' Market.
[10] I served as a BRWIA volunteer at Fog Likely Farm in Boone, NC.

and experiencing the tour firsthand. After the tour, I distributed surveys to both visitors and farmers to gain insights on their motivations, experiences, and impacts, and I conducted participant driven photo elicitation (PDPE) interviews with 14 tour visitors. I also recruited farmers to participate in a focus group to delve more deeply into benefits/impacts and challenges related to participation in the tour. The focus group, held in August with eight farmers from seven of the participating farms, also functioned as PAR aimed to bring women farmers together for horizontal information exchange and networking.

Each of these methodologies served both to inform my research and to enhance BRWIA's capacity and further their mission. Activities such as attending BRWIA meetings and marketing the tour allowed me to be more fully immersed into the workings of BRWIA, deepening my understanding of the organization and the tour. Selling Farm Tour tickets at area markets allowed me to interact with consumers, to experience the High Country's civic agricultural spaces, and to recruit participants for my PDPE project. Interviewing all 20 farmers served my research purposes of understanding producers' histories, philosophies, practices, and motivations for participation in the Farm Tour, while the data I gathered also informed posts that were published on the BRWIA High Country Farm Tour Blog (http://farmtour.brwia.org/blog/category/2014-featured-farms), used by BRWIA to market the tour and provide summaries and snapshots of each participating farm. The farmer and visitor surveys were developed in collaboration with BRWIA, intended to fulfill both BRWIA's and my data collection needs. Survey data were compiled into reports and delivered to BRWIA. The focus group, jointly facilitated by the BRWIA program coordinator and myself, served both to address my research goals and to inform BRWIA's future tour planning.

Finally, I spent the duration of my data collection period living and working at Lily Patch Farm, owned by one of the participating Farm Tour farmers, Susan Owen. I worked for approximately 10 hours each week in Susan's greenhouses in exchange for a reduced housing cost, allowing myself to become an active member of the local farming community during my fieldwork. The culmination of living and working on a farm, engaging personally and actively in the local agro-food system, visiting each of the participating farms for interviews, and collaborating with BRWIA resulted in a solid feminist ethnographic and PAR foundation upon which to base my research.

My fieldwork and data analysis led me to narrow my original guiding questions to more specific research questions, which serve to structure the following three chapters. Each chapter is intended both as a stand-alone article for submission to peer-reviewed journals – complete with a distinct problem statement, research questions, literature review/theoretical framework, methodology, findings, discussion, and conclusion – and as an integral component of the larger dissertation project, to be reflected on collectively in the conclusion chapter. Each chapter revolves around themes of relations, returning again and again to the need for alternative agro-food systems centered on connection in multiple senses.

Outline of the Dissertation

Chapter 1[11] emphasizes the relationship between place and agro-food systems. Theorizing place as meaning, connection, attachment, and emotion, this paper explores the impact of the conventional agro-food system, representing structures of modernity, on community and place. Bringing together literature from scholars of place, agro-food studies,

[11] This chapter is a revised version of a paper published in April 2016 in the Journal of Sustainability Education, co-authored by Gary Schnakenberg, committee chair, Michigan State University, and Nicholas Perdue, University of Oregon. The contributions of Gary Schnakenberg have been minimized and indicated, and Nicholas Perdue is credited for having authored Figure 1.

education, and tourism, this chapter investigates the role of place in local food systems as well as the potential of small-scale sustainable agricultural places to serve as important educational spaces via community-based farm tourism, restoring relationships between food, agriculture, and place. Employing in-depth farmer interviews and visitor surveys, this chapter delves into the philosophies, practices, and stories of participating farmers and explores consumer motivations for and impacts of participation in the tour, revealing passionate sustainable producers firmly rooted in place in multiple senses and making a strong case for community-based farm tourism and other environmental tourism projects as an avenue for embedded place-based education, community resilience, and sustainability across scales.

Chapter 2[12] situates agro-food disconnection and reconnection within frameworks of ecofeminism and cares ethics and engages with experiences of consumers participating in the BRWIA High Country Farm Tour using PDPE. PDPE interviews are employed to explore the kinds of connections being made, addressing calls for more studies on the experiential and emotional aspects of agro-food reconnection. The findings suggest that embodied experiences in caring agricultural spaces can foster agricultural and ecological literacy and deepen consumer/individual relationships with producers, agricultural practices and processes, and the more-than-human world, shifting cultural perceptions toward consciousness of relationships and interconnectedness. Additionally, the findings illustrate that PDPE can serve as a valuable window into experience, emotion, and meaning, affirming the method's value for feminist agro-food researchers and others concerned with reconnections and care "for others, the environment, and the world as a whole" (Cox, 2011, 127).

[12] This paper is intended for publication in Agriculture and Human Values, the journal of the Agriculture, Food and Human Values Society (AFHVS).

Chapter 3[13] expands on the relationship between community and food systems touched on in Chapter 1, explores the relationship of women farmers and civic agriculture, and investigates community-based farm tours as a strategy for civic agriculture. Employing focus groups as a PAR methodology to bring women farmers together, I present the impacts and challenges associated with participation in the tour as discussed by farmers from seven of the 20 participating farms. The data indicate that connections and relationships, fostering consumer education and awareness, and renewal, enjoyment, and appreciation were among the major benefits of the tour for participating farmers, reflecting more-than-economic goals and civic values particularly characteristic of female farmers. The paper concludes that the innovative strategy of community-based farm tours, especially those highlighting women farmers, holds ripe potential as a creative civic agricultural mechanism and should continue to be implemented by more communities in the U.S. Furthermore, the facilitating role of BRWIA illustrates the importance of CAOs in supporting women farmers and strengthening sustainable community-based food systems. Finally, this chapter affirms the importance of focus groups as PAR aimed to strengthen networks of women farmers, creating space for them to share stories and experiences, to exchange and develop solutions, and to form or renew relationships.

The conclusion overviews each prior chapter and ties them together within a relational feminist framework of place and care, noting the contribution of the study both to agro-food studies and to the discipline of geography. Challenges associated with the High Country Farm Tour, limitations of this study, and future research pathways are also discussed. The overarching findings of this dissertation indicate that place, care, and gender are crucial elements of a thriving civic agriculture and recommends community-based farm tours as an innovative strategy for moving toward a relational agro-food system.

[13] This paper is intended for publication The Journal of Rural Studies.

CHAPTER 1
PLACING LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS: FARM TOURS AS PLACE-BASED SUSTAINABILITY EDUCATION

Abstract[1]

Place can be understood as space endowed with meaning, evoking notions of difference, connection, attachment, and emotion. As processes of modernity and globalization have increasingly homogenized cultural and natural landscapes, place is said to be 'thinning' or lost, linked to widening rifts between social and natural worlds. Such homogenization globally has sparked concerns, as people perceive landscape loss and increasing socio-ecological injustices. One such system of homogenization and unsustainability is 'conventional' agriculture, a system that has shifted smaller scale, place-based, and diverse food systems to a global, mechanized one, devastating ecosystems, disrupting communities, and altering place.

Yet, as consumer awareness increases and people desire to know where their food comes from and who produced it, inclusive place-based food systems hold potential for reconnections amongst producers, consumers, community, and the more-than-human world. This paper, stemming from research in Western North Carolina, brings together literature from scholars of place, agro-food studies, education, and tourism to investigate the role of place in local food systems as well as the potential of small-scale sustainable agricultural places to serve as important educational spaces via community-based farm tourism. To better understand such potential, I draw on a case study of the Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture High Country Farm Tour, an annual tour of small-scale sustainable working farms in the North Carolina High Country. Delving into participating producers' philosophies, practices, and stories reveals passionate sustainable producers firmly rooted in place in multiple senses, while exploring consumer motivations for and impacts of participation makes a strong case for community-based

[1] This chapter is a revised version of a paper published in April 2016 in the Journal of Sustainability Education, co-authored by Gary Schnakenberg, committee chair, Michigan State University, and Nicholas Perdue, University of Oregon. The contributions of Gary Schnakenberg have been minimized and indicated, and Nicholas Perdue is credited for having authored Figure 1.

farm tourism and other environmental tourism projects as an avenue for embedded place-based education, community resilience, and sustainability across scales.

Introduction

Human geographers understand place as space endowed with meaning, evoking notions of difference, connection, attachment, and emotion (Cresswell, 2004; Tuan, 1997). But as modern processes such as globalization, industrialization, and development have increasingly homogenized cultural and natural landscapes, place is said to be 'thinning' (Entriken, 1991), 'stretched' (Massey, 1994), lost or obsolete (Agnew & Livingstone, 2011). This has been linked to widening rifts between social and natural worlds and the loss of meaning, attachment, connection, and community.

Such processes globally have sparked concern and alarm, as people perceive losses of unique natural and cultural landscapes as well as increasing social and environmental destruction. One such system of homogenization and unsustainability is the industrial food system, termed 'conventional' agriculture. Today's modern agricultural system has shifted smaller scale, place-based, and diverse food systems to a global, mechanized one, devastating ecosystems, disrupting communities, and altering place. Yet, as consumer awareness rapidly increases and more people desire to know where their food comes from and who produced it, inclusive place-based food systems can provide reconnections amongst producers, consumers, community, and the more-than-human world.

This paper, stemming from research in Western North Carolina, brings together literature from scholars of place, agro-food studies, education, and tourism as a lens from which to investigate the role of place in local food systems as well as the potential of small-scale sustainable agricultural places to serve as important educational spaces via community-based

farm tourism. After briefly reviewing and synthesizing these bodies of literature, I turn to the case of the Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture (BRWIA) High Country Farm Tour, an annual tour of working farms employing a range of sustainable practices in multiple counties in the North Carolina High Country, asking: 1. How is place articulated, understood, and practiced in small-scale sustainable farming? 2. Is community-based farm tourism fostering place-based sustainability education, and, if so, what types of learning are taking place? To address the first question, I explore the tour-participating producers' (farmers) philosophies, practices, motivations, and stories, informed by in-depth farmer interviews and surveys. To answer the second question, I investigate consumers' (visitors) motivations for and impacts of participation in the tour, drawing on visitor survey data.

The data explored here reveal passionate ecologically and ethically oriented producers rooted firmly in place at multiple scales, as well as the potentially transformational impacts of their interactions with visitors via farm tours – including shifts in awareness, deepened dedication and care, intended behavioral changes, and connections to place in multiple senses. This research thus makes a strong case for community-based farm tourism as a model of relational place-based learning, extending from particular places to an 'open' (Larsen & Johnson, 2012) or global sense of place (Massey, 1994) and contributing to vibrant local food systems, sustainable communities, and socio-ecological resilience more broadly. The paper concludes with a call to expand conceptions of and approaches to education, suggesting farm tours and other community-based environmental tourism projects as potentially transformative avenues toward place-based education and sustainability across scales.

Review of the Literature

Place and agro-food systems

The prominent concept of place, a broad and abstract term, is a central one for human geographers. While theorizations among scholars of place differ – neo-Marxist scholars such as Harvey, Lefebvre, and Smith emphasize power and economic relations of production in the construction of space and place, for example, while humanist thinkers such as Tuan and Casey align place with emotion, experience, and attachment – broadly, place can be understood as space endowed with meaning, understood as a "meaningful connection between humans and the world" (Harris, 2010, 360). If we understand place in this way, then the loss of place equates with the loss of uniqueness, meaning, and connection (Harvey, 1996), a topic of increasing concern as globalization contributes to an increasing homogeneity or 'placelessness.' The restructuring of landscapes according to particular views and practices of progress, development, and modernity has disconnected people from place and the particular. Such processes globally have sparked concern and resistance as people experience the loss of unique natural and cultural landscapes, as well as increasing social and environmental destruction. One such system of homogenization and centralization, wrought with issues of socio-ecological unsustainability, is industrial agriculture.

The belief in agricultural productivity via mechanization and technology, part and parcel of the tenets of our dominant social paradigm (Beus & Dunlap, 1990), defines what is called the 'conventional' food system. This approach is characterized by industrialization, corporatization, mechanization, specialization, centralization, and large-scale production. The social and environmental impacts of such agriculture are numerous: dependence on fossil fuels, soil depletion, emissions of greenhouse gases, air and water pollution, social exploitation, violation

of animal rights and welfare, issues of food security and sovereignty, and the decline of rural communities (Harris, 2010), among others. The food products lining grocery store shelves now come from around the world, linking distant places, humans, and more-than-humans that are unknown, obscured, (Lyson, 2004) or forgotten. Indeed, industrial agriculture could be considered synonymous with placeless agriculture, as "everywhere the same methods, technologies, varieties, and breeds (are imposed) without respect to place" (Berry, 2012, 74).

Modern farming methods delink farms from communities and tie farmers to a set of technologies that yields prosperity for a few at the expense of many (Lyson, 2004). Rural communities, now characterized by fewer and larger farms of an industrial categorization, have seen a declining middle class, more hired workers, lower family incomes, and increased poverty (Lobao & Meyer, 2001). Accordingly, food production, distribution, and consumption have been linked to "the environmental, social, spiritual, and economic well-being of the community" (Feenstra, 1997, 28). Industrial agriculture shatters these links, perpetuating 'thin' places (Casey, 2001), community degradation, and the 'stretching' (Massey, 1994) of relations:

> The geography of the modern food system reveals that, as food chains become stretched further and in more complex ways across space, we experience both the physical and psychological displacement of production from consumption, and all of the other disconnections and disembedding which follow in that stead – loss of rural agricultural resilience and diversity, degradation of the environment, dislocation of community, loss of identity and place (Feagan, 2007, 38).

Yet, as consumer awareness rises, such processes are fueling concern, resistance, and alternatives. People are increasingly becoming aware of growing socio-ecological degradation, health crises, and the undemocratic nature of global capitalist governance (Watts, Ilbery & Maye, 2005). To employ Wendell Berry's observations:

> …more and more consumers are now becoming aware that our supposed abundance of cheap and healthful food is to a considerable extent illusory. They are beginning to see

> that the social, ecological, and even the economic costs of such 'cheap food' are, in fact, great. They are beginning to see that a system of food production that is dependent on massive applications of drugs and chemicals cannot, by definition, produce 'pure food.' And they are beginning to see that a kind of agriculture that involves unprecedented erosion and depletion of soil, unprecedented waste of water, and unprecedented destruction of the farm population cannot by any accommodation or sense of fantasy can be called 'sustainable' (30)…consumers are increasingly worried about the quality and purity of their food, and so they would like to buy from responsible growers closer to home. They would like to know where their food comes from and how it is produced (Berry, 1995, 22).

Indeed, the continued rise in popularity of mainstream media coverage, books, and documentaries on agro-food issues (e.g. *The Omnivore's Dilemma; Cooked: A Natural History of Transformation; Fresh; Food Chains; Fat, Sick, and Nearly Dead; Vegucated; Food, Inc.)* is testament to the fact that consumers are increasingly becoming aware, demanding increased transparency and sustainability in the food system. In response, players in the conventional food system have made attempts to become more 'green,' some of which are noteworthy. Many such efforts, however, are little more than corporate greenwashing, resulting in a shallow and confusing 'sustainable' food landscape. Alternative food systems are thus deemed to be weaker based on their engagement with, or potential to be co-opted by, conventional food systems operating within the global neoliberal paradigm. Horizontal networks, a short food supply chain, and a truly alternative paradigm, on the other hand, characterize stronger alternatives (Watts, Ilbery, & Maye, 2005).

I join others in arguing that such qualities are best embodied in local food systems. As Feagan (2007) related, "in this environment of concern, territories, regions, places and communities are evinced as spaces of resistance through which agency and local institutional efforts can manage change in ways which more closely meets their needs" (32). Yet even local food systems have the potential for co-optation, particularly when unreflexive, exclusive, or

rooted in location rather than place – relying on definitions of 'local' based on food miles or state boundaries, for example, as in the case of local food campaigns increasingly prevalent in corporate giants such as Wal-Mart and Kroger. Employing only territory-based conceptions of place in our understanding of local leaves behind considerations of community, farm scale, and sustainable practices, while an understanding of place as territorially bound can result in exclusion with the potential for "reactionary politics and nativist sentiment" (DuPuis & Goodman, 2005, 360). In reference to local food as a rational and quantifiable initiative, DeLind (2010) argues that "the public-at-large is not being asked to re-connect to context – to soil, to work (and labor), to history, or to place – but to self-interest and personal appetite" (279). For her, local food means engagement in "the continual creation, negotiation, and re-creation of identity, memory, and meaning" (279). She explicitly calls for integrating local food and place-based practice: "Without an emotional, a spiritual, and a physical glue to create loyalty, not to a product, but to layered sets of embodied relationships, local will have no holding power" (Delind, 2006, 126).

To ensure a more progressive relocalization, many agro-food scholars maintain that we must move toward a sense of place that is both embodied and embedded. Larsen & Johnson (2012) theorize an "embodied awareness of place" that shifts awareness and consciousness "through deep relationships with other human and nonhuman beings" (632). Rather than exclusive or particular, an "open sense of place" (633) involves such relationships that extend to places both near and far through an understanding of interconnectivity and interdependence. As Feagan (2007) articulated, "places, scales and identities ought to be understood not as discrete things but as events or processes that are embedded within one another and are in constant relationship, movement and interaction" (35). Harris (2010) similarly argues for a move from

"defensive localism" to "diversity-receptive localism," which "acknowledges both the heterogeneity of local places and the constitutive nature of their relations to other places, and can build a reflexive politics that is able to critically assess the roles that local places play in extra-local networks" (365). In such an interpretation of place as relational, Massey (1994) argues that:

> what gives a place its specificity is not some long internalized history but the fact that it is constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus … And this in turn allows a sense of place which is extroverted, which includes a consciousness of its links with the wider world, which integrates in a positive way the global and the local (155).

Thus, truly sustainable agro-food alternatives are dependent on embedded reconnections and re-education in place. This paper aims to explore in greater depth the role of place in local food systems as well as the opportunity for place-based sustainability education via community-based farm tourism. I turn now to a brief discussion of place-based education and tourism before introducing the case study, the BRWIA High Country Farm Tour.

Place-based education and environmental tourism

Place-based curricula have emerged in U.S. schools and classrooms over the past decade and a half (Leslie et al., 1999; Martusewicz & Edmundson, 2005; Gruenewald & Smith, 2008; Martusewicz et al., 2015). As defined by Sobel (2004),

> Place-based education is the process of using the local community and environment as a starting point to teach concepts in language arts, mathematics, social studies, science and other subjects across the curriculum. Emphasizing hands-on, real-world learning experience, this approach to education increases academic achievement, helps students develop stronger ties to their community, enhances students' appreciation for the natural world, and creates a heightened commitment to serving as active, contributing citizens. Community vitality and environmental quality are improved through the active engagement of local citizens, community organizations, and environmental resources in the life of the school (7).

Such experiences can indeed be transformational for students. Yet, while 'education' certainly includes the institutions of formal schooling so present in contemporary Western society and

exported to the rest of the world (Prakash & Esteva, 1998), it must not be seen as defined in such narrow terms, not should it be limited to educational institutions or students in the traditional sense. As Illich (2011) stated, "(m)ost people acquire most of their knowledge outside of school...Most learning...seems to happen casually and as a by-product of some other activity defined as work or leisure...[most learning is] the result of unhampered participation in a meaningful setting" (12-13, 39). Thus, informal spaces for education apart from the institutions of formal schooling must be created, maintained, and supported in order to make it truly transformative[2].

The idea as tourism as educational, even transformational, is one that is currently gaining traction in tourism studies; beyond pleasure, self-satisfaction, and voyeurism, Di Chiro (2000) explains that "primarily western, middle-to upper-middle class tourists are seeking a real-world travel experience not simply to gawk, but to ask questions and to find answers: How did we get ourselves into this ecological conundrum, and how can we learn from the environmental knowledge of the indigenous [or alternative] cultures of the world in order to create solutions?" (277). Tourism can then shift from a one-dimensional consumer product, understood to change or undermine place, to a cultural activity that can in fact reconstitute place (Coleman & Crang, 2002), raise awareness, teach, and produce progressive social change.

Many such tourism schemes center on the environment, the idea being that witnessing will lead to action, activism, and new perspectives. Thus, tourism spaces can become innovative and progressive political places, using traditionally capitalist spaces for alternative, progressive goals. Whyte (2010) labels this phenomenon environmental tourism, defined as "any tourism practice the purpose of which is to engage directly with some aspect of a local community's relationship to its environment" (75-76). If conscious of important elements such as consent,

[2] This paragraph was contributed by Gary Schnakenberg and edited by the author.

inclusion, and direct participation of the community, environmental tourism may hold transformational potential, moving us toward "a world in which we learn about the purpose and meaning of our life, a world that gives way to new values of ecological awareness, empathy for others, non-violence, human rights, and equality" (Reisinger, 2013). One such type of environmental tourism is farm tourism.

Community-based farm tourism

Agritourism broadly is farm-based tourism that includes a range of activities, from food-focused cultural festivals or "u-picks" to volunteer stays (Schnell, 2011), reflecting heightened tourist demand to experience place and region (Lopez & Martin, 2006) and offering farmers an avenue for diversification (Marsden, 1986), enhancing farm income, linking farm and non-farm community members, and educating or sensitizing the public to agricultural issues in order to gain both economic and political support (Brodt et al., 2006). While research in agritourism broadly is beginning to become more prevalent in the U.S., the unique phenomenon of community-based farm tours is understudied and holds potential for transformational place-based awareness and environmental education (Spurlock, 2009). In the only known study of an annual farm tour, Spurlock (2009) argues that, for threatened communities and lifestyles in the rural US,

> food-centered advocacy tourism…figures as an act of cultural and historical remembering, of commemorating that which has been lost to development and/or economic pressures, and of re/making and complicating the relationship with body and land that are lost or devalued to the 'progress' narrative of neoliberal development and the destructive forces of global capital (Spurlock, 2009, 7).

Farm tour participants, according to Spurlock's first-hand observations, bear witness to "wounded places" as they simultaneously co-perform "in narratives of healing and sustaining" (8). Rather than writing these tours off as "little more than an opportunity for city folks to play farmer for a day or two" (8), she argues instead that this embodied experience can plant "the

proverbial seeds of change" (8): "To experience this tour is to experience those values toward the land, labor, and community through shared storytelling, discussion, and sensory-based exploration and discovery that invite connection and self-reflexivity" (12).

This paper expands from such personal observations of a community-based farm tour to explore in-depth participating farmers' stories and visitor motivations and impacts, asking broadly: How is place articulated, understood, and practiced in small-scale sustainable farming? Is place-based sustainability education occurring via community-based farm tourism, and, if so, what types of learning are taking place? To begin to answer these questions, I turn now to the case of the BRWIA High Country Farm Tour.

Case Study: The Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture High Country Farm Tour

This research centers on an innovative project of agro-food reconnection – the Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture High Country Farm Tour – in Western North Carolina. The Mountain Region of North Carolina consists of 23 counties in the Appalachian Mountains, comprised most prominently by the Blue Ridge and Great Smoky Mountain subranges. The seven northernmost counties, in the Blue Ridge Mountains, are known as the High Country: Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Mitchell, Watauga, Wilkes, and Yancey (see Figure 1). Centered around Boone[3], the area is widely known for its natural beauty and deep cultural traditions. Despite the impact of national trends of agricultural consolidation and farm loss, agriculture remains economically important; Western North Carolina houses more than 12,000 farms producing fruits, vegetables, meat and dairy products, Christmas trees, tobacco, and nursery plants (Kirby et al., 2007). Tourism is the region's top industry, driven in large part by the scenic natural and agricultural landscapes.

[3] Boone is the county seat of Watauga County, home to Appalachian State University, with a population of 17,122 (2010 US Census).

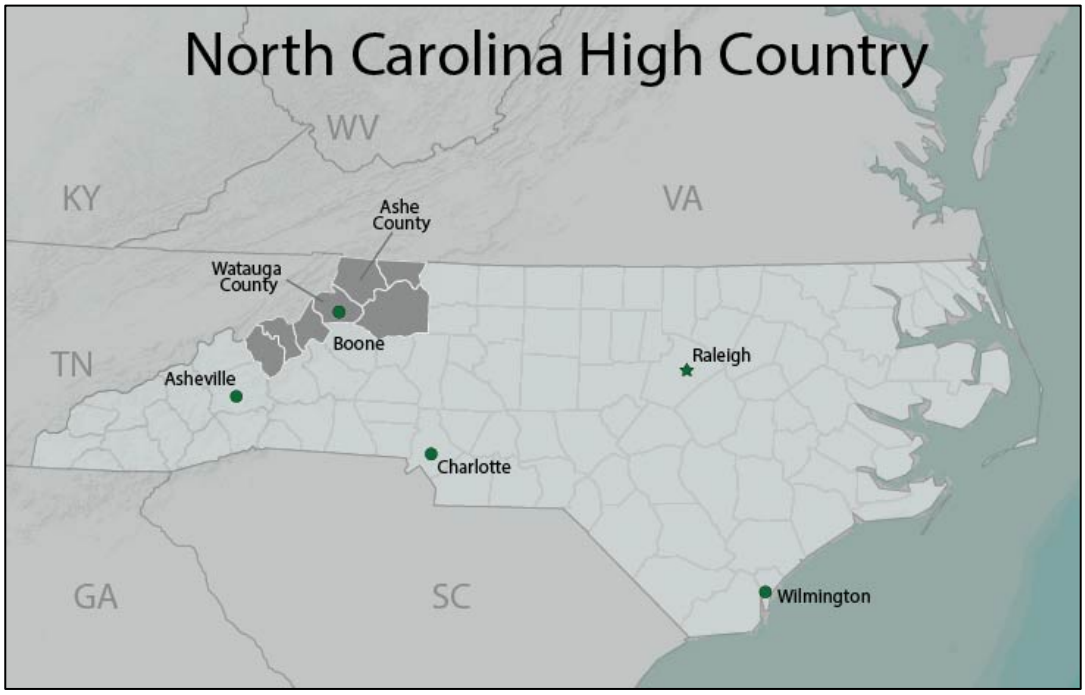

Figure 1: The North Carolina High Country. *Map by Nicholas Perdue.*

But such an image obscures the deeply felt impact of modern and neoliberal reforms on the area. Many of the cultural traditions that the North Carolina Mountains conjure have in reality declined or disappeared; Owen (2007) documented a landscape transforming from largely rural to suburban as consumption replaces production and ever-encroaching development threatens the area's natural and cultural heritage:

> Land use is … changing as construction projects now must climb out of the valley onto the fragile slopes of surrounding mountains because land on the valley floors has been developed already. Consumption has replaced production in a region that was once a multi-livelihood, agricultural-based community economy where self-reliance, reciprocity, and a rural 'commons' supported a relatively high-quality and stable way of life. … In the past three decades Boone, North Carolina … has changed from primarily rural and forested to a suburban landscape. This pattern is accelerating. But not only the land has changed; the mountain culture is also under assault. In the context of sustainability, paradigms of economic development are called into question as these changes intensify, altering land-use patterns and increasing levels of material consumption (3-4).

Amidst such assaults, grassroots nonprofit organizations and activism revolving around local agro-food systems, which lie at the intersection of natural and cultural landscapes, are

readily found in the area, such as the Blue Ridge Seeds of Change Initiative, the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project, and, the focus of this research, Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture (BRWIA), headquartered in Boone. Offering year-round educational workshops, networking events, and grants for sustainable women farmers and their families with the goal of strengthening the High Country's local food system, the annual High Country Farm Tour is their flagship event. The tour aims to highlight those farmers and community members who are fighting for the community economy, preservation of natural and cultural landscapes, sense of place, and sustainable agriculture.

The High Country Farm Tour is an annual two-day tour in which small-scale working farms[4] employing a range of deeply ethical and ecological practices open themselves to visitors, providing experiential and sensual tours of their farms, homes, products, and practices that bridge human and more-than-human worlds. The goals of the tour as outlined by BRWIA are to connect producers and consumers, to provide farmers with economic opportunities, and to educate the public about sustainable agriculture and local food. The hope is that relationships (economic, ecological, socio-cultural) might be formed, awareness might be raised, and agricultural education might take place.

In June 2014, 20 farms in two countries, Ashe and Watauga, participated in the eighth annual BRWIA High Country Farm Tour. The farms were 'open' to visitors from 2-6 p.m. on Saturday, June 28, and Sunday, June 29. Visitors transported themselves to the farms by car and were free to visit as many as they could over the two-day period, though they were advised to select three or four farms a day – descriptions and details of each farm and their offerings was provided to visitors along with their passes. Weekend passes cost $25 per carload, sold by

[4] Traditional as well as non-traditional agricultural spaces (e.g. community gardens, animal sanctuaries or rehabilitation centers, incubator farm programs, and off-the-grid homesteads) are included in the term 'farm.'

BRWIA prior to the tour at Ashe and Watauga counties' farmers' market, local stores, and online. They could also be purchased for $30 from BRWIA volunteers during the tour at any of the farms, or visitors could purchase a one-farm pass for $10. Money raised from ticket proceeds each year covers BRWIA's cost of facilitating the tour – any additional proceeds support BRWIA programs.

While farmers had been provided with BRWIA materials offering tips on giving farm tours, each farm was predominantly free to interact with their visitors as they wished. Some farms scheduled on-the-hour tours or provided special workshops on topics such as seed saving or biodynamic agriculture, while others gave more-informal tours once a group gathered, engaging in unstructured conversations with visitors, or allowing them to explore the place on their own in the meantime. Some farms had activities particularly for children or provided special workshops on topics such as seed saving or biodynamic agriculture. Some sold produce, meat, and other products during the tour, and some provided take-home educational and marketing materials on topics such as sustainable agriculture, pastured meat and animal welfare, permaculture, or community supported agriculture (CSA) programs, for example.

Study Methodology

From May through September 2014, I employed a feminist ethnographic and participant action research methodology in the High Country, collaborating with BRWIA to market the tour, sell weekend passes at local farmers' markets, interview participating farmers, and collect survey data from both producers and consumers. Analysis for this paper employs data generated from in-depth farmer interviews, farmer surveys, and visitor surveys during this research period.

In-depth, semi-structured on-farm interviews were conducted with all 20 producers prior to the tour to compile farm profiles and to understand their histories, philosophies, practices, and

motivations for participation in the tour. Interviews were voluntary and lasted between 30 minutes and four hours. While the interviews often veered in various directions based on the nature of conversations, pre-determined questions asked to all producers included those surrounding their farm histories, philosophies and broad farming motivations, agricultural practices, connection to the High Country, outlets for their products (farmers' markets, farm stands, CSAs, local restaurants, etc.), and motivations for participating in the tour. Data generated from these interviews were analyzed thematically according to broad-topic and emergent-fine codes. The data were used both for the purposes of this research and to inform posts on the BRWIA High Country Farm Tour Blog.

A follow-up survey was also distributed to farmers via email the week after the tour, aimed to more broadly assess their Farm Tour motivations and goals as well as to understand individual experiences and perceived impacts of the tour, along with questions aimed to collect specific data desired by BRWIA to improve future tours. Surveys were distributed to all 20 farms, incentivized with a $50 Visa cash card, and 16 surveys were returned (80% response rate). Farmers were asked to respond to multiple choice, five-point Likert scale, mark-all-that-apply, and open-space questions. Survey data were analyzed with descriptive statistics, and open-ended data were analyzed qualitatively using broad and emergent fine codes.

Visitors also received a follow-up survey via email the week after the tour, aimed to broadly understand their motivations and impacts, along with specific information desired by BRWIA needed to improve future tours. Of the 448 visitors who attended the 2014 High Country Farm Tour, contact information was collected and recorded from 163 visitors; at least one person from each carload was asked to provide this information, and others in the group were given the option as well. Of these 163 visitors, 121 expressed willingness to complete a follow-up survey

delivered by email. Of these 121 surveys distributed, 67 responses were returned, a 55% response rate. Visitors were asked to respond to multiple choice, four-point Likert scale, and open-space questions pertaining to their motivations for participation, on-farm experiences, and impacts of the tour, along with questions aimed to collect specific data desired by BRWIA to improve future tours. The survey was incentivized with the chance to win one of four $50 Visa cash cards or one of four High Country Local First Rewards Cards[5]. Visitor survey data were analyzed with descriptive statistics, and open-ended data were analyzed qualitatively using broad and emergent fine codes.

This paper draws from data obtained from farmer in-depth interviews and farmer surveys, focusing particularly on themes of place and sustainability; and visitor surveys, overviewing motivations for and impacts of their participation in the tour. Relevant demographic data for both groups is also overviewed.

Findings

High Country Farm Tour farmers

Twenty farms in Ashe and Watauga counties participated in the 2014 High Country Farm Tour, nearly all (17) returning from previous years' tours. The farmers ranged in age from early 20s to mid-70s, and while most were female-male couples, participating farmers also included single women farmers (7) or female-female couples (1), reflecting the national rise in women farmers who have been shown to espouse community-oriented, caring, and more-than-economic motivations (e.g. Jarosz, 2011, Delind & Ferguson, 1999). All but two farms were first-generation, again illustrating a growing number of female and young farmers (Trauger, 2007),

[5] High Country Local First is a non-profit organization that aims to strengthen the local economy by supporting locally owned, independent businesses and farmers through education, promotion, and networking. High Country Local First Rewards Cards can be purchased to receive discounts at local businesses in the High Country.

and, reflecting the demographics of the region, all farmers were white[6]. Most participating farms sold their products – including vegetables, fruits, meat and dairy products – at local farmers' markets, CSA programs, restaurants, and cooperatives.

Participating farmers owned, rented, or worked land ranging from .5 to 157 acres and employed a variety of self-described sustainable practices, such as certified or non-certified organic, biodynamic, permaculture, mindful, ethical, natural, educational, and agro-ecological. Their practices were deeply intertwined with their philosophies and motivations, which were overwhelmingly non-economic. Rather, when asked in their interview to describe their goals and motivations for farming, themes centered on community and place, connection and relationships, care and love, awareness and consciousness, sustainability and self-sufficiency, lifestyle and culture. Similarly, nearly all of the farmers (88%) reported in the survey that their primary motivations for participation in the Farm Tour were not economic; rather, their goals centered on themes of education and awareness, support and sharing, relationships and connection, in addition to secondary economic-related goals such as visibility, exposure, and sales.

While the amount of time spent farming and living in the High Country varied, all farmers espoused a strong connection to and love of their place, which took on a variety of conceptions and scales. Many were drawn to their farms and to the High Country by the rural landscape, agricultural heritage, beauty, and/or a simpler, self-sufficient, or 'good' way of life. Holly and Andy of Against the Grain Farm, for example, grew up in North Carolina's Piedmont region but were inspired to re-embrace their family's mountain agricultural heritage. After farming rented land in the High Country for a few seasons, Holly and Andy were compelled to 'put roots down' in a place of their own:

[6] The 2010 US Census reported that 92% of Boone's population is white, while 3.5% of the population is black, 3.3% is Hispanic or Latino, 1.6% is Asian, and 0.2% is American Indian.

We realized that...we wanted more of a long-term commitment to really invest in the soil and soil building and cover crops and compost, and we really wanted to be able to invest in a place and put roots down. And so we started looking for farms and we looked for awhile not so seriously and then pretty seriously, and we found this place and just felt right away like it was home...We feel that this is our place, and we know this is our place, and we're not going anywhere.

This connection to place informed Against the Grain Farm's practices, which Holly described as organic and biodynamic agriculture – a holistic approach to farming that understands the farm as a living organism or actor:

It's almost like the farm has a will in a way, and we have a will as people living on the farm, and we're a part of the farm, we're influenced by that will if you will, like it's got agency. I feel like places have kind of a feel to them, they have a spirit to them in a way, whatever that is to you, to anybody, it's just like going to your favorite place that you like to hike, you just like it because it has a certain feeling, like a connection in some way, and this farm really resonated with us. So it's just engaging in farming with a little bit of that perspective in mind.'

David and Susie of Fog Likely Farm came to the High Country in the 1960s in part as a rejection of suburbia and development, craving instead self-sufficiency, sustainability, and a simple and beautiful life. As Susie recalled:

Figure 2: David and Susie of Fog Likely Farm. *Photo by author.*

I grew up in boring suburbia in a town I couldn't wait to get out of ... I was into spinning and weaving and making pottery and you know learning old-time string band music, and I wanted to live in the mountains, I wanted to live like I was born in the late 1800s you know, on a farm. So that was my motivation, and...all I could think of was a place that was beautiful, and so I got this place, and I thought it was beautiful...And this is I think what I want to share, is that this place, even though it had nothing, it was a shell and 6/10 of an acre (at the time), it had beauty, it had soul I think. And it had a place for a garden, I could get firewood if I needed it, you know,

we're sustainable here. We've got oil lamps, we've got wood stoves, we've got the hoophouse, the greenhouse, two springs….I think that's why I wanted to be on the farm tour is just to kind of share that. It's like an art exhibit...I mean I planted that apple tree right there, it was this big, and now it's an old apple tree. And there's just no other place that I want to be.

While many of the participating farmers shared such stories of their journey to the High Country from elsewhere, some were natives to the area. Lisa from Woodland Harvest Farm, an off-the-grid permaculture homestead farmed with her partner, Elizabeth, is originally from the North Carolina Mountains and viewed her return to the land as coming 'full circle':

Figure 3: Lisa of Woodland Harvest Farm. *Photo by author.*

I grew up in these mountains just two counties over from here, and you know the landscapes and ecosystems are the exact same as they are here, and so this is like home to me and coming home. …This has been just the absolute most healing, beautiful place to be. But so yeah I grew up in these mountains, and I went to school at Appalachian and got my undergraduate degree in planning but didn't want to go on to be a town or county planner, and I started working for a non-profit in the area and decided to stay in the area and then went on to grad school and kept building up my education and getting degrees and learning about the environment and you know all different kinds of things about how we should be living, but it wasn't until I moved here and started living this life that it was the full circle, full connect.

Several of the farmers also shared stories of acquiring more land over time in order to insulate and protect their place from encroaching development. Susie and David of Fog Likely Farm, for example, grew their land over the last several decades from .5 acre to 12 acres, about three of which are in certified organic production.

We gradually acquired more land and more land...We mostly did it with the idea of sort of protecting the place and not having other people build.

Similarly, Carol from Heritage Homestead Goat Dairy explained that while they could bring more of their land into production, they consciously choose to use it minimally and lightly:

> *I mean this is a beautiful spot, and we could have cut all the woods, there's five springs behind us and we could have cut all in there and made that pasture and then we would have been eligible for government funding to fence the goats...But we know that the best way is to leave it wooded over the water and it stays clear, I mean we know that. And I think again because we're not driven by money, we just want enough to live a good life.*

Many farmers articulated connections between home, community, food, and farming. As Holly from Against the Grain explained:

> *I just think it's so important to really be connected to your food...like we as farmers are really connected to our farm and have that sense of home here, which I think is really awesome, and for communities and people to start to have that, even if it's just a little bit, to some food that they eat I think is a really powerful thing...And I think as humans we just gather around food…we get together for potlucks, we get together for holidays, we eat you know, and when that food is not only fresh but connected to where we live…fresher, healthier, more connected, then it just makes the whole experience that much more, it adds so much to it.*

Kathleen of Waxwing Farm expanded from the farm and community to situate her place-based contribution within a wider regional context:

> *The environmental aspects of it are really important to me and wanting to be a good steward of the environment, hopefully actively enriching the land that I'm living on and building my life on instead of just taking from it. Thinking about my management of my small piece of land in the larger context of the holler or my valley or whatever...it's hard to do you know, like it's hard to keep feeling like you're making any sort of impact when everything around you is so not conscious of its*

Figure 4: Kathleen of Waxwing Farm. *Photo by author.*

environmental impact. But we still feel like it's really important work, even if we're just all maintaining these small plots and building some sort of connection regionally of environmental stewardship.

Finally, expanding from local and regional scales, farmers also understood their work within national and global contexts, drawing connections across scales. Kathleen of Waxwing Farm explained that she initially became interested in agriculture through her passion for social justice, drawing connections between environmental and human systems both locally and globally:

> *My entry point to agriculture was the farm workers' rights and farm worker justice on large industrial sized farms… people shouldn't be subjected to these kind of conditions as workers trying to grow food for others, and you know it's important what we eat but it's also important that we not exploit the people that are growing for us, and you know being a small farmer is interesting also to figure out how to grow food and not be exploiting yourself or the people that are working for you. That is something that drives me is to figure out how we make that a good system…Making agriculture good for the planet and also good for people… I really would like to see vibrant local economies, and agriculture's definitely a part of that.*

Similarly, Corey from New Life Farm was inspired to farm sustainably in part as a solution to the problems created by the industrial food system:

Figure 5: Corey of New Life Farm. *Photo by visitor.*

> *Initially I just wanted to do this so we could eat well and experience the nutritional benefits … but then I started learning about the economic, environmental, social implications of our industrial food system and that really just broadened my perspective. I kinda classify myself as a problem solver, so the way I perceive our industrial food system is as a problem, but it requires a big solution, and I knew that I single-handedly couldn't solve this big problem, but I wanted to be a small part of it, I felt that pursuing the establishment of a small family farm that could use sustainable agriculture principles would make me feel satisfied that I was contributing to the solution to that problem.*

And Lisa of Woodland Harvest Farm explained that sustainability via awareness and consciousness is what motivates them to share their farm both on the High Country Farm Tour and through year-round workshops and community events:

> *We want to share what we're doing so that people can see that it's not impossible to have a really low impact, to live with not a lot of money, not a lot of dollars flow in or out of the farm, and just the people that continue to learn about our footprint in this world and the resources that we consume and how maybe we can start to shift all of our collective consciousness and mindset around how we view what we need to live in this world, because you know Americans, yeah we're consumers, and that's how we're bred to be, but we don't have to be that way, so we're out here sort of as a beacon of something completely radical and different that can be done.*

High Country Farm Tour visitors

Survey data reported that 448 visitors attended the tour with an average of 77 visits per farm and a total of 1,540 farm visits. A total of 107 weekend passes were sold, and 64 single-farm visits were sold on-farm, making a total of 171 carloads that visited at least one farm.

Drawing on the results of the visitor survey, nearly three-quarters (72%) of visitors were North Carolina residents; of these in-state visitors, another three-quarters (73%) reported that they lived in the High Country. Other visitors' home states included Florida (9), Tennessee (2), South Carolina (3), Virginia (2), Illinois (1), Maryland (1), and Pennsylvania (1). More than a quarter of survey respondents (33%) indicated that they have second homes in the area. Overall, nearly all visitors were from the area or visited frequently.

Nearly three-quarters (74%) of survey respondents were female, reflecting a predominantly female-driven participation pool, and nearly all respondents were white (88%), again reflecting the area's demographics. The average adult visitor age was 52, with a range from 23-75 and a median of about 50. More than three-quarters of visitor respondents indicated that there were other adults in their group, and more than a third (34%) reported that there were

children (under 18) in their group, addressing the increasingly prevalent call to provide children with agricultural and environmental education. Most visitors learned about the tour at Ashe or Watauga counties farmers' markets (41%), word of mouth (33%), a news article (30%) or signs around town (21%).

Most visitors reported that prior to the Farm Tour they already considered themselves healthy eaters (76%), grew some of their own food at home (70%), were concerned with agro-food issues (67%), and considered themselves advocates of local food (60%) and sustainable agriculture (46%). Yet despite the high level of reported dedication to agro-food issues, just 20% of visitors considered themselves active in their local food community: Less than half of visitors had visited farms before (37%), and 19% had farming in their background. A third of visitors (34%) said they visited farmers' markets at least once a month, while 30% reported they visited them occasionally, and a quarter (27%) said they did weekly. Less than a quarter of visitors (19%) said they'd participated in CSA, and just 9% had been involved with a community garden.

The average number of farms visited over the weekend was 3.7 farms, with a range from 1-10, a mode of 5 and a median of 3. Finally, for more than three-quarters (76%) of visitors, this was their first time participating in the Farm Tour, and the majority (79%) of visitors purchased products during the tour, such as pastured meat, honey, produce, herbs, dairy products, baked of fermented goods, lotions and salves.

When asked to select motivations for participation in the 2014 High Country Farm Tour that best describe those of their group (see Figure 6), 70% selected 'to learn more about local food,' and 'to do something fun,' linking education and entertainment. More than half selected 'to learn more about sustainable agriculture' (64%) 'to become more connected to my community (57%),

and ‘to get ideas for my own garden, farm, etc.’ (55%). Additionally, nearly (37%) selected ‘to see/experience scenic places.’

Figure 6: Visitor Motivations for Participation.

Visitors were then provided with open space to elaborate on their motivations for attending the High Country Farm Tour. Prominent themes included education and awareness, implementing or learning practices, relationships and networking, community and place. Some visitor comments related to the motivations of education and awareness included:

> *Farm tours are an excellent way to educate people about how their food is grown…(and about) the work and costs involved.*
>
> *Want to learn about farming and raising livestock.*
>
> *We are interested in learning more about sustainable agriculture and local food and what is available in the area.*

More specifically, many visitors attended the Farm Tour with the specific intention of learning sustainable agricultural practices. Some examples include:

We are teachers building a school garden and we are looking/were looking for additional education to build our school and personal gardens.

We are starting our own small backyard farm in Florida. Raising chickens mostly. I was interested to see how some of the farms raised chickens. Just wanted to learn.

… When we retire to the area, we may want to raise a few animals on our acreage.

…I also hope to have my own small home-farm in the future to produce some of the food for my own household.

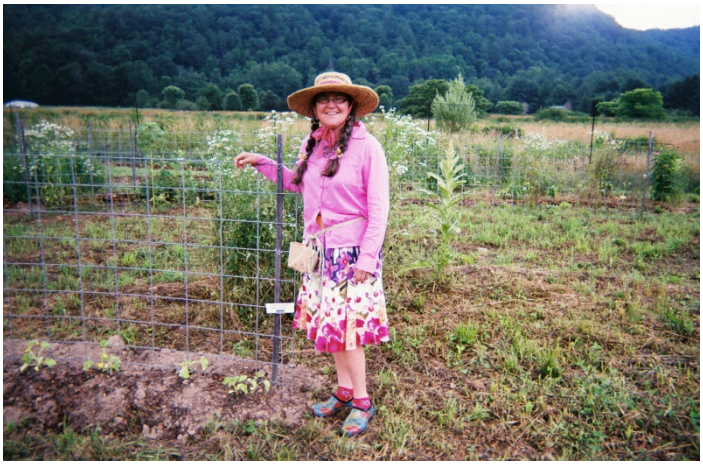

Figure 7: Susan of the F.A.R.M. Cafe Garden Spot. *Photo by visitor.*

We have a farm and have an interest in sustainable living. Looking to network and get new ideas.

And, broadening from food and agriculture, many visitors expressed a desire to know and become more connected to the High Country, experiencing places they had not seen before:

I wanted to know more about what we have going on in our area.

We wanted to be more familiar with the community and economy of the High Country.

We are very interested in the local area and it gave us an opportunity to see places we have never been, meet some of the farmers we see at the farmer's market and learn about the history.

To see places we had not seen and purchase local foods, particularly meats.

Next, visitors reported via four-point Likert scale questions ('definitely,' 'somewhat/maybe,' 'not sure,' or 'not applicable') on how their experiences on the Farm Tour impacted them, in terms of intended lifestyle changes or things they gained, learned, or experienced (see Figure 8). Nearly all of the visitors (91%) said they definitely learned something (broadly defined) they didn't know before, and more than three-quarters (76%) said

they definitely feel more connected to local food, farms, farmers, and agriculture generally. Just under three-quarters (70%) of respondents said they definitely intend to return to one or more of the farms/farmers that they visited on the tour (i.e. their booths at farmers' markets, farm stands, CSA programs, future educational farm visits, etc.), and more than two-thirds (65%) said they definitely have a better idea of where their food comes from.

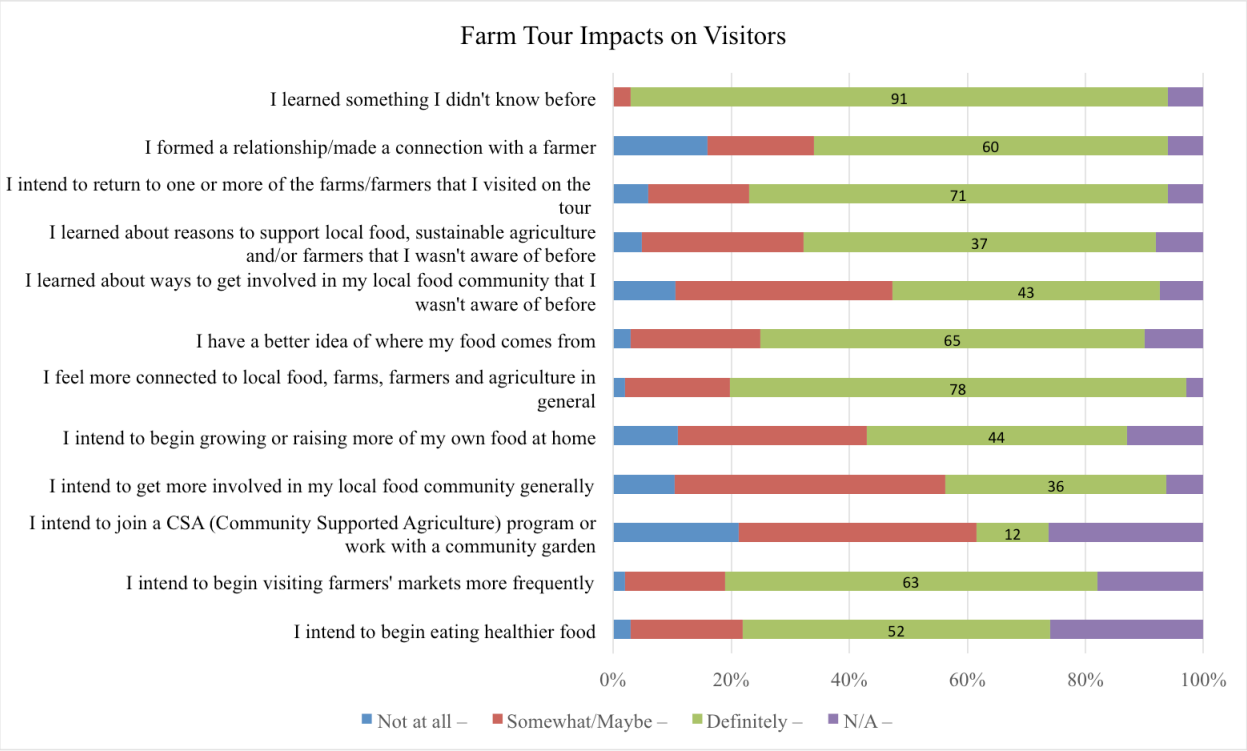

Figure 8: Farm Tour Impacts on Visitors.

More than half of visitors said they definitely intend to begin visiting farmers' markets more frequently (63%); that they definitely learned about reasons to support local food, sustainable agriculture, and/or farmers that they weren't aware of before (60%); and that they definitely formed a relationship or made an important connection with a farmer (60%). Almost half of respondents said they definitely learned about ways to get involved in their local food community that they weren't aware of before (43%), and more than a third (36%) said they definitely intend to get more involved in their local food community generally.

Finally, visitors reported via four-point Likert scale questions whether their dedication to certain aspects of the food system deepened, weakened, stayed the same, or had never been a concern as a result of participation on the Farm Tour (Figure 9). More than three quarters of visitors responded that their dedication to supporting farmers economically who employ practices they support deepened (76%), and nearly three quarters indicated that their interest in learning more about/getting more involved with local, sustainable food and agriculture deepened (72%). Over two-thirds of respondents said their dedication to having relationships with the people who grow their food deepened (69%), as did their dedication to the health and well-being of the environment (65%) and of animals/non-human beings (64%). More than half of participants reported deepened dedication to the health and well-being of their community (57%), and nearly half (48%) said their concern for social issues in the food system deepened.

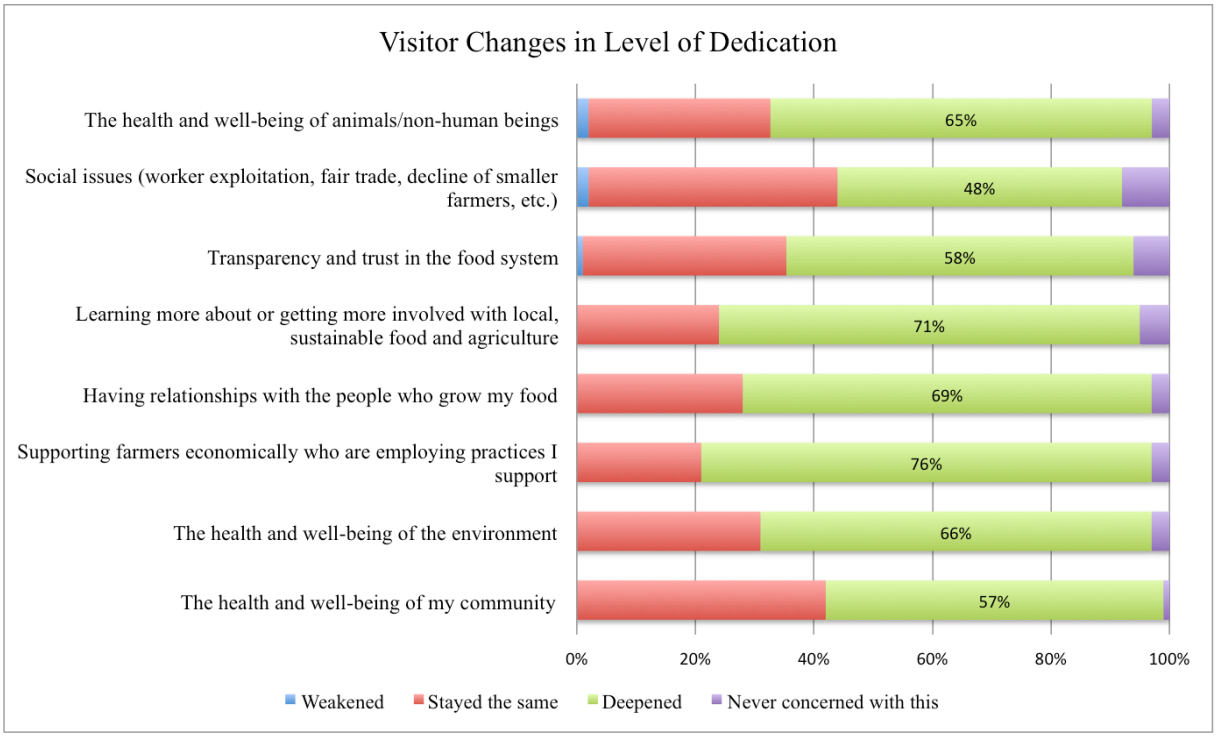

Figure 9: Visitor Changes in Level of Dedication.

When participating visitors were asked to elaborate on changes in their dedication to the local food system, their responses touched on themes of education and awareness, enthusiasm and inspiration, place and care. Some noteworthy examples include:

> *Learning how the farmers have so much compassion and love with what they do for all of us!*
>
> *Impressed on the efforts and methods used to keep plants healthy without the use of harmful pesticides.*
>
> *…The farmers were so friendly and wanted to help educate their local community to inform us about the process etc.*
>
> *I wish that the major sources of food in grocery stores treated their land, crops and animals like the small farmers do.*
>
> *Seeing an abused animal with no "production value" cared for at one of the farms was touching. It made me realize that some local farmers must approach this line of work as much from their heart as from a business perspective.*
>
> *By seeing the farms and the farmers, I want to be more supportive of them. Industrial farming is just too impersonal and is primarily concerned with profit.*
>
> *Honestly, if we were able to spend every summer weekend visiting our local farms (buying products from them, walking their farmland, learning something new), I would do it. I especially believe our connection to each other, our food, our community and our land would deepen and take root as would our personal well-being.*
>
> *I was inspired by their passion, touched by their dedication and am hopeful for a more sustainable future because of them.*
>
> *Overall, this experience was educational and left us with a deeper awareness of our local food - and how to expand our current efforts.*
>
> *Really enjoyed the tours at the different farms we went to, each reflected a different style and gave encouragement to those that have a backyard garden!*
>
> *I was impressed at the level of effort put into small scale farming. There was a good application of technical ability and concern for the quality of food produced.*
>
> *I thoroughly enjoyed meeting with the farmers and learned what they were doing.*
>
> *Thanks for your bring attention to farming in the High Country - a treasure we don't need to forget.*
>
> *Fantastic event - it adds depth and meaning to our local community.*

Finally, in the survey distributed to farmers following the Farm Tour, their experiences and perceived impacts matched those related by visitors. When reflecting on their experiences, farmers' espoused themes of visitor awareness and education, relationships and connections, fun and enjoyment. Farmers expressed their pleasure in sharing with people what they do and why they do it, and they told of witnessing altered consumer perspectives, deepened appreciation, new relationships, and strengthened sense of community and place.

Discussion

The snippets of farmers' stories explored here form a picture of love and care for place, revealing local agricultural producers and land stewards committed to beauty, simplicity, connection, community, the more-than-human world, and socio-environmental sustainability. Farmers articulated place-based lifestyles, deep connections to place and community, place-related sustainable practices, linkages between place and food, stewardship and protectiveness from encroaching development and exploitation. Their conceptions of place spanned local-to-global scales, from the home, local community, and region to the nation and the planet. For these producers, farming can be a pathway to (re)making place at each of these scales.

Figure 10: Visitors tour A Berry Patch Farm. *Photo by visitor.*

Participant responses reflected that they had indeed engaged in a true learning process contextualized in place, resulting in both altered perspectives and intended behavioral changes. The findings presented here make clear that community and place served as an important reason to participate in the Farm Tour, intertwined with education- and entertainment-related motivations. Additionally, survey respondents

illustrated that education and awareness indeed took place, and that relationships and connections were made, strengthening the local food system and the community simultaneously. Dedication to sustainability via place-based food systems deepened, and visitors articulated plans for behavioral changes such as more community involvement and support of local farmers, both economically and more-than-economically.

Collectively, these findings make a strong case for community-based farm tourism as a model of relational place-based sustainability education, in the context of local food systems and beyond. Place was a central element of the tour for farmers and visitors alike, both in motivations for and impacts of the tour, intertwined deeply with education, awareness, connection, and care – all vital components of sustainability. Just as farmers' stories illustrated connection to and care for place from local to global contexts, visitors reported not only a deepened care for the health and well-being of their community, but also a deepened care for the health and well-being of human and more-than-human communities more generally. This suggests that connections made were not limited to the particular places experienced on the tour, nor to the High Country, but could in fact extend to an 'open' (Larsen & Johnson, 2012) or global (Massey, 1994) sense of place, in which we grasp our embedded relationships and interconnectivity and respond with care for people, places, and more-than-human beings both near and far.

Thus, the findings of this study illustrate the important role of agricultural and environmental education in realizing the possibilities for creating a different relationship between consumers and producers, individuals and community, and humans and more-than-humans. Such relationships contribute to place attachment and awareness of interconnection and interdependence simultaneously, disrupting assumptions and worldviews that contribute to place deterioration and strengthening place ties across scales. Place-based education via community-

based farm tourism and environmental tourism more broadly should thus be further investigated and undertaken by communities across the country as a vibrant pathway toward sustainability. Creative agro-food projects such as the BRWIA High Country Farm Tour warrant considerable attention as a model of place-based education, and the potential of sustainable agricultural spaces as classrooms – and place-rooted producers as teachers – should continue to be explored in greater depth.

Conclusion

Processes of modernity such as the industrial food system homogenize, disrupt, and deteriorate places globally, linked to socio-ecological unsustainability and the loss of meaning, community, connection, and attachment. Small-scale sustainable agricultural spaces, as illustrated in this paper, hold important potential for relational place-based learning via community-based farm tourism. More generally, environmental tourism, defined as "any tourism practice the purpose of which is to engage directly with some aspect of a local community's relationship to its environment" (Whyte, 2010, 75-76), can serve as an important educational tool, illustrating the importance of expanding how we understand and approach education in the context of sustainability.

Figure 11: A child smells the flowers at Zydeco Moon Farm. *Photo by visitor*.

Returning to the first research question concerning the role of place in small-scale sustainable farming, the findings indicate that place is a prominent and central theme for producers engaging in this type of farming, ranging from the scale of the home or farm to that of

the planet. Such a relational sense of place sets the stage for deep socio-ecological sustainability rooted in interconnection and care for near and distant others, both human and more-than-human.

Findings related to the second question, concerning farm tourism and its potential for place-based sustainability education, indicate that such education did indeed occur on the High Country Farm Tour. Visitor surveys revealed a place-based educational process that resulted in awareness and understanding, relationships and connections, dedication and inspiration, intended behavioral changes and enhanced community engagement. Place attachments formed by visitors were both "place-located and bound into wider relational matrices" (Cloke & Jones, 2003, 212), tied not only to particular farming spaces and the local community, but also to human and more-than-human communities more broadly. This is a vital component of reflexive local food systems and of an extroverted or global sense of place rather than an exclusive or bound one, one that "can develop a consciousness of linkages and a positive integration of the global and local, building a 'global sense of the local, a global sense of place" (Massey, 1994, 156). Visitor experiences on the Farm Tour allowed them to place the role of agro-food systems in contexts that included and transcended their local communities.

Thus, this study helps to illustrate that place-based education need not, or must not, be limited to fostering attachment to particular places. Rather, place ties must expand to connect with human and more-than-human communities near and far, seen and unseen, if we are to achieve the awareness of interconnections so crucial for transformation and sustainability. While recognizing this interconnection may not necessarily lead to "a world which is immediately more co-operative and benign," it does allow us to "examine our interrelatedness" (Massey, 1994, 289) – a crucial first step in the cultural shifts needed to advance resilient communities and a more sustainable world.

The sustainable agricultural place, then, is an important transformational learning setting for adults and children alike that can teach embedded place attachment and convey the vital relationship between food, farming, community, and sustainability. As Jackson (2010) stated, "agriculture has the sole potential to provide the lead into a different relationship with our ecosphere" (15). Of relevance to both researchers and practitioners, farm tourism and environmental tourism more broadly should be advanced as an important place-based learning tool, further shifting our conceptions of and approaches to education.

CHAPTER 2
GLIMPSING AGRO-FOOD RECONNECTIONS: ENGAGING ECOFEMINISM, CARE ETHICS, AND PARTICIPANT-DRIVEN PHOTO ELICITATION TO EXPLORE CONSUMERS' FARM TOUR EXPERIENCES

Abstract

We are living in a time of severe social and ecological crises at a variety of scales, from the local to the global. Ecofeminist scholars argue that these seemingly diverse issues are best understood with a relational framework that acknowledges their shared roots within modern cultural assumptions that create structures of inequality and delink relationships among human and more-than-human communities. This perhaps abstract understanding can be made more tangible within the 'conventional' food system, in which human and more-than-human communities across the globe are simultaneously otherized, marginalized, and exploited, collectively contributing significantly to global crises. These realities are largely hidden in a global, industrial, and corporate food system that quite literally disconnects production from consumption, obscuring embedded relationships among people, place, non-human animals, and nature and holding serious implications for awareness, responsibility, and care. However, as consumer awareness rises, more and more people are desiring to know and move closer to the sources of their food, fueling localized agricultural alternatives. When endowed with an ethic of care, such alternatives can be transformative for individuals and communities from local to global scales. In order to better understand this potential, agro-food scholars are called to deeply examine emotional and reflexive spaces of 'reconnection.'

This paper situates agro-food disconnection and reconnection within frameworks of ecofeminism and cares ethics and engages with experiences of consumers participating in an annual community-based farm tour, an innovative and under-studied model of producer-consumer reconnection in caring agricultural spaces. Participant-driven photo elicitation (PDPE) interviews are employed to explore the kinds of reconnections being made, addressing calls for more studies on the experiential and emotional aspects of agro-food reconnection. The findings

suggest that embodied experiences in caring agricultural spaces can foster agricultural and ecological literacy and deepen relationships with producers, agricultural practices and processes, and the more-than-human world, shifting cultural perceptions toward consciousness of relationships and interconnectedness. Additionally, the findings illustrate that PDPE can serve as a valuable window into experience, emotion, and meaning, affirming the method's value for feminist agro-food researchers.

Introduction

We are living in a time of severe social and ecological crises at a variety of scales, from the local to the global. Understandings of these crises are often fragmented into separate realms, approaches to address them inappropriately segmented into discrete problems. Ecofeminist scholars argue that these seemingly diverse issues are best understood with a relational framework that acknowledges their shared roots within modern cultural assumptions that create structures of inequality and delink relationships among human and more-than-human communities (Warren, 1990). This potentially abstract understanding can be made more tangible within the 'conventional' food system, in which human and more-than-human communities across the globe are simultaneously otherized, marginalized, and exploited, collectively contributing significantly to global crises. Yet these realities are largely hidden in a global, industrial, and corporate food system that quite literally disconnects production from consumption, obscuring embedded relationships among people, place, non-human animals, and nature and holding serious implications for awareness, responsibility, and care. Sage (2012) referred to this trend as 'distanciation':

> Though lacking in elegance, this word suggests more than a high number of miles separates primary producers from final consumers within the contemporary agri-food system; rather, there is a lack of information, of knowledge, about the condition of production and the supply chain through which those products pass. Hiding such

> information, making traceability difficult to establish, serves the interests of those who intermediate on behalf of consumers; the large processing, retailing and food service companies. Leaving consumers ignorant and lacking capacity to take responsibility for their purchasing decisions may be a satisfactory state of affairs for some, but not for hundreds of millions of others who desire to know more about where their food comes from, how it was produced, and by whom (264).

Indeed, as consumer awareness rises, increasing numbers of people are desiring to know and move closer to the sources of their food, fueling localized agricultural alternatives with the potential to "to reconnect food producers and consumers in a new and direct way, a relationship largely severed in recent years by the dominance of corporate multiple retailers" (Sage, 2007, 2). When endowed with an ethic of care, such alternatives can be transformative (Kneafsey et al., 2008) for individuals and communities from local to global scales. In order to better understand this potential, agro-food scholars are called to deeply "examine the ethical, emotional, and reflexive spaces of 'reconnection'" (Kneafsey et al., 2008, 3) such as farmers' markets and community supported agriculture (CSA). While such spaces of agro-food reconnection offer opportunities for important relationships with farmers, food, and agriculture, the additional step of embodied experiences in spaces of agricultural sustainable production may hold potential to deepen these consumer connections and expand them to include understanding and care for the more-than-human world, moving toward a new ecological culture (Plumwood, 2002) that reunites those things that have been divided.

This paper situates agro-food disconnection and reconnection within frameworks of ecofeminism and cares ethics and engages with experiences of consumers participating in the annual Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture (BRWIA) High Country Farm Tour, an innovative model of producer-consumer reconnection in caring agricultural spaces. Participant-driven photo elicitation (PDPE) interviews are employed to explore the kinds of reconnections being made, addressing calls for more studies on the experiential and emotional aspects of agro-food

reconnection (e.g. DeLind, 2006; Kneafsey et al., 2008; Sumner et al., 2010). The findings suggest that embodied experiences in caring agricultural spaces can foster agricultural and ecological literacy and deepen relationships with producers, agricultural practices and processes, and the more-than-human world, shifting cultural perceptions toward consciousness of relationships and interconnectedness. Additionally, the findings illustrate that PDPE can serve as a valuable window into experience, emotion, and meaning, affirming the method's value for feminist agro-food researchers.

Review of the Literature

Disconnection and ecofeminism

Deeply embedded cultural disconnections are at the heart of ecological feminism, or ecofeminism, which maintains that "(u)nderneath almost every identifiable social problem we share, a powerful way of ordering the world can be detected, one we have inherited from European culture and that alienates consciousness both from nature and from being" (Griffin, 1995, 10). Ecofeminism begins by "noticing similarities and connections between forms and instances of human oppression" (Cuomo, 1998, 1); rather than an essentializing framework only about women and nature, as it is sometimes critiqued (e.g. Sargisson, 2010), ecofeminism in the sense that this paper employs the term uses gender as a lens from which to make visible, examine, and critique the foundations of Western culture that shape both human and more-than-human worlds. With roots in the European Enlightenment, this cultural foundation can be referred to as modernity; while far from a singular or static concept, ecofeminists and other critical scholars emphasize central cultural assumptions of modernity that delink humans from nature, reason from emotion, mind from body, men from women, and white European from 'other,' the former in each pair dominant over the latter.

Such binaries veil realities of interconnection and interdependence, perpetuating social and ecological crises evident everywhere in the world today. From the ecofeminist perspective, then, piecemeal or surface approaches to solving social and ecological problems will never be enough (Warren, 1990). Rather, we must understand that our deeply embedded cultural assumptions are flawed, that the "alienation of human society from nature has led to many different kinds of destruction, not the least of which has been the fragmentation of consciousness" (Griffin, 1995, 9). For, as Griffin (1995) explained:

> In the Western habit of mind…a forest exists for lumber. Trees for oxygen. A field for grazing. Rocks for minerals. Water for irrigation. Inch by inch the earth is weighted and measured for its uses and in the process the dimensions of the universe are narrowed. Consciousness has been diminished by this disenchantment (57).

These instrumentalist simplifications, quantifications, and rationalizations are rooted in the understanding that nature and more-than-human beings are separate from and inferior to humans, while in the same structures of mind humans not part of dominant groups are marginalized alongside nature. There is perhaps no better way to visualize the interconnections between such environmental and social exploitation than in the industrial food system, in which humans, non-human animals, and the environment are simultaneously oppressed.

Disconnection in the conventional agro-food system

Today's 'conventional' or industrial agro-food system is wrought with ecological, social, and ethical issues, rooted in disconnecting structures of inequality and modern assumptions of mastery over nature (Mann, 1990). Chemicals erode soil, water, air, and bodies. Monocultures and genetically modified crops devastate biodiversity. Global expansions of agricultural land destroy habitats and contribute to deforestation and climate change. Structural agricultural reforms disrupt local economies and communities. Modern tenets of efficiency, scale, and technology force non-human animals into appalling conditions, sparking concerns of welfare and

rights. And global supply chains rely on fossil fuels and exploited labor (Sage, 2012; Jordan & Constance, 2008; Moran, 2006). In this system, food and all that goes into its production is reduced to "a commodity like any other, to be produced at the lowest price and subject to corporate processes" (Sage, 2007, 3).

But for the everyday consumer at the supermarket, the realities of where food comes from is largely obscured, censored, blurred, or forgotten, as the "scale of the industry and the fact that it takes place behind closed doors allows producers – and consumers – not to dwell on these potentially unpalatable aspects of the industry" (Jackson, Ward & Russell, 2008, 19). As the rift between production and consumption widens and we no longer see or understand where our food comes from, we experience the disconnecting, disembedding, and disentwining (Wiskerke, 2009) of food systems and the relationships embedded within them. Such trends have serious implications for awareness, understanding, responsibility, and care, as disconnection occurs not only in structures and processes, but also in perceptions and imaginaries (Kneafsey et al., 2008). As Feagan (2007) wrote:

> The geography of the modern food system reveals that, as food chains become stretched further and in more complex ways across space, we experience both the physical and psychological displacement of production from consumption, and all of the other disconnections and disembedding which follow in that stead – loss of rural agricultural resilience and diversity, degradation of the environment, dislocation of community, loss of identity and place (38).

Yet, while the conventional food system obscures relationships between people, places, nature, and more-than-human beings, localized agricultural alternatives offer opportunities for reconnections. As people are increasingly becoming disenchanted by the industrial food system (Sage, 2007) and seeking more sustainable, equitable, and healthy models of food production and consumption (Kneafsey et al., 2008), community-based food systems can "provide opportunities to reconnect people with people and people with food, opening up spaces for 'ecoliteracy' to

develop through shared and reflective learning" (King, 2008, 123). New socio-spatial arrangements such as farmers' markets and community supported agriculture (CSA) programs can "serve to reconnect food producers and consumers in a new and direct way" (Sage, 2007, 2).

Spaces of agro-food reconnections and an ethic of care

As scholars have explored emerging spaces of agro-food reconnection, they have found non-economic and community-oriented motivations, particularly among women (Jarosz, 2011; Delind & Ferguson, 1999). To help explain this, scholars (e.g. Jarosz, 2011; Kneafsey et al., 2008; Cox, 2010) have identified an ethic of care, theorized to endow agricultural alternatives with radical, potentially transformative potential (Kneafsey et al., 2008). Indeed, Cox (2010) argues that food studies appears to be one of the most fruitful ways to conceptualize and employ care ethics:

> …discussions of food production/consumption have been particularly productive in showing care to exist beyond the private home and intimate relations, making links between care ethics, the natural environment and non-human others, as well as thinking about caring relations with distant and unknown humans (117).

The central focus of a care ethic, a particularly compelling framework for ecofeminists and other critical thinkers, is "on the compelling moral salience of attending to and meeting the needs of the particular others for whom we take responsibility" (Held, 2006, 10). Whereas structures of modernity and neoliberalism privatize and feminize care and care work – deemed irrational, subjective, unscientific, and women's work – a feminist ethic of care extends the reach and centrality of care in society. Contrary to the embedded forces that divide and disconnect, an ethics of care encourages instead a "social ontology of connection" (Lawson, 2007, 3), one that is relational and emotional rather than reliant on notions of the "autonomous rational subject of individual rights and responsibilities" (Popke, 2006, 506). An ethic of care aspires to propel the

reciprocal 'flourishing' (Cuomo, 1998) or well being of human and more-than-human beings, requiring that we understand and

> continue to develop ways of thinking through our responsibilities toward unseen others, and to cultivate a renewed sense of interconnectedness … a feminist-inspired ethic of care can assist in developing such a sensibility, as can various pragmatic strategies for turning our ordinary moral dispositions – as consumers, as citizens – toward more just and sustainable ends (Popke, 2006, 510).

While caring and becoming conscious of interconnections are seemingly most possible and "readily mobilized in places with which we are most familiar" (Lawson, 2007, 6), it need not be viable only for the local scale – indeed, in order for an ethic of care to permeate our engrained culture of severance, it must "move beyond the interpersonal, the near and familiar, to care for distant others" (Lawson, 2007, 6). Lawson (2007) challenges us to "think about care in terms of both human-human and human-nonhuman relations and to think about how caring, bestowing love, affection, or stewardship in places and upon animals (and indeed on subordinated people) also involves relations of power and domination" (6-7) and to "make choices that matter and that connect us to the lives of others" (6). Such choices are perhaps most tangible and readily available in everyday lives in the realm of food consumption.

In her study of CSA, Jarosz (2011) qualitatively examined women farmers' motivations and found that they expressed an "ethics of care that defines their work as centered upon nourishing themselves and others" (308). Other studies of CSA have similarly found evidence of caring motivations among both producers and consumers "that include caring about aspects of food production that affect the natural environment, people and animal welfare" (Charles, 2011, 367). And in their examination of motivations for participation in five different agro-food projects of reconnection, Kneafsey et al. (2008) found that care notions permeated producer and

consumer discussions of their involvement in alternative food schemes. While conceptions of care and the things cared about varied,

> the motives and practices of those involved can be understood within the context of a broad framework of care for close and distant 'others' (variously defined), which in turn provides discursive and material expressions of 'reconnection' with the potential to radically realign producer and consumer relationships through food (3).

Many such studies have focused attention on spaces of producer-consumer reconnection including farmers' markets and CSA (e.g. Charles, 2011; Hayden & Buck, 2012; Jarosz, 2011; Sage, 2007; Schnell, 2010; Starr, 2010; Wells et al., 2009). This paper examines an emerging, innovative, and under-studied[1] project of agro-food reconnection, annual community-based farm tours, which push consumers beyond markets and CSA pick-ups and into spaces of sustainable agricultural production. To explore the potential of this project, I engage with consumers' tour experiences through participant-driven photo elicitation (PDPE) interviews, understood as an important pathway into deeper understandings of emotion and experience.

Case Study: The Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture High Country Farm Tour

This research centers on a rarely studied project of agro-food reconnection, community-based farm tours, through a case study of the BRWIA High Country Farm Tour in Western North Carolina. The model of annual regional farm tours facilitated by grassroots organizations is a relatively new and innovative approach to agro-food reconnection that is becoming increasingly prevalent in states such as South Carolina, Florida, Virginia, Michigan, Washington, and Oregon. The phenomenon is particularly common in North Carolina, which offers annual

[1] While studies of farm tourism, or agritourism, are plentiful broadly, Spurlock (2009) has authored the only other known study on annual community-based farm tours. This paper offered a participant observation-oriented personal narrative of the phenomenon but did not engage other methodologies such as interviews, surveys, or focus groups.

tours in each of its three regions[2]. While tours take various approaches, in common the tours all partner with local producers who agree to host visitors on their farm for a day or weekend in order to share agricultural spaces, practices and philosophies, and the realities of farming with consumers.

In an effort to strengthen sustainable local food systems in the High Country[3] with an emphasis on supporting women farmers, the nonprofit organization BRWIA hosts an annual regional farm tour in which small-scale working farms[4] employing a range of ecological, ethical practices[5] host visitors, provide experiential and sensual tours of their farms, products, and practices. The event's goals, as articulated by BRWIA, are to provide farmers with economic opportunities, to educate the public about local food and sustainable agriculture, and to connect producers and consumers. The tour transports consumers beyond the farmers' market or CSA pick-up to experience spaces of sustainable agricultural production firsthand, offering the potential for deeper agro-food reconnections. This study aims to better understand what kinds of reconnections are occurring, aiming to access affective elements of consumer experiences through PDPE interviews.

In June 2014, 20 farms[6] in two countries, Ashe and Watauga, participated in the eighth annual BRWIA High Country Farm Tour. The farms hosted visitors from 2-6 p.m. on Saturday, June 28, and Sunday, June 29. Visitors transported themselves to the farms by car and were free

[2] Including the Piedmont Farm Tour, the Eastern Triangle Farm Tour, and the Upstate Farm Tour, facilitated by the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association; the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP) Farm Tour; and the BRWIA High Country Farm Tour.
[3] The seven northernmost counties of Western North Carolina, including Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Mitchell, Watauga, Wilkes, and Yancey, are known as the High Country.
[4] 'Farm' includes traditional as well as non-traditional agricultural spaces such as community gardens, animal rehabilitation centers, incubator farm programs, and off-the-grid homesteads.
[5] Farmer-described practices included certified or non-certified organic, biodynamic, permaculture, mindful, ethical, natural, educational, no-kill or rehabilitative, and agro-ecological.
[6] Despite BRWIA's overarching organizational focus on women farmers, any small-scale farm employing sustainable practices is invited to participate. Most participating farmers were female-male couples, but single women farmers and female-female couples were also represented. The farmers ranged in age from early 20s through mid-70s.

to visit as many as they could over the two-day period, though they were advised to select three or four farms a day – descriptions and details of each farm and their offerings was provided to visitors along with their passes. Weekend passes cost $25 per carload, available at farmers' markets, local businesses, and online. Survey data[7] reported that a total of 448 visitors attended the tour with an average of 77 visits per farm and a total of 1,540 farm visits. 107 weekend passes were sold, and 64 single-farm visits were purchased on-farm, making a total of 171 carloads that visited at least one farm.

Study Methodology

Participant-driven photo elicitation (PDPE) interviews

This study employs participant-driven photo elicitation (PDPE) interviews with tour visitors in order to understand what reconnections were made and to engage with dimensions of experience, emotion, and meaning. Such elements are difficult to access through traditional research methodologies, due not only to hierarchical researcher-subject dynamics but also to the difficulty of expressing such things. As Tuan (1977) wrote, "(i)ntimate experiences lie buried in our innermost being so that not only do we lack the words to give them form but often we are not even aware of them" (136).

Photo elicitation interviewing is a highly innovative yet little-used method (Loeffler, 2005) "based on the simple idea of inserting a photograph into a research interview" (Harper, 2002, 13). It can involve either the researcher presenting the subject with photos to elicit conversation, or, in what has been termed PDPE (Van Auken, Frisvoll & Stewart, 2010), the research subject is provided with a camera and takes the photos, which become the driver of the interview. PDPE allows for "deep interviews" (Van Auken, Frisvoll & Stewart, 2010) that can

[7] Survey data was collected by the author in collaboration with BRWIA to meet both research and organizational goals.

access more complex elements of human consciousness than words (Harper, 2002). The method was first used in 1967 by John Collier, who noted that photos "sharpened the informants' memory, and reduced the area of misunderstanding" (Harper, 2002, 14). It is particularly useful in terms of events of experiences, in that the photos can act

> as a memory anchor for the participant as he or she recalled the moment of the photograph, its intention, and the affective context surrounding it. Having that anchor set against the passing of time freed the participants to describe the meaning of their experiences … Participants used photographs to capture and preserve the sense of awe, mystery, beauty, tranquility, solitude and peace (Loeffler, 2005, 345).

PDPE's ability to access both tangible and intangible elements (Clark-Ibanez, 2004), helping respondents "communicate sensory experiences that are hard to verbalize and which, paradoxically, cannot be made visible" (Ortega-Alcazar & Dyck, 2011), is a potential revelation in feminist research, of particular importance in accessing deep understandings of emotion, care, and connection. A 'pleasurable' and collaborative methodology (Harper, 2002), PDPE also serves to 'decenter' the authority of the researcher and eliminate hierarchical dynamics, providing participants with freedom and agency (Ortega-Alcazar & Dyck, 2011).

Study overview

In this study, participant-driven photo elicitation (PDPE) interviews were conducted with 14 tour participants. When individuals purchased tickets at farmers' markets, they were offered the opportunity to participate in the PDPE project, incentivized with $20 credit at a local farmers' market, or, if they were not from the area, a $20 Visa gift card, in addition to a set of their photos to keep. Visitors purchasing tickets online were also provided with an option to express interest in the research study, in which case they were contacted by phone or email. The purpose of the study was explained as an attempt to better understand visitor experiences on the tour, and participants were asked simply to use a provided disposable camera to take photos of

anything they found meaningful on the tour, encouraged to use all or most of the 27 exposures on the cameras, and to return the camera to a BRWIA volunteer when they left their last farm of the tour. They would then be contacted to arrange a follow-up interview the following week.

Twenty individuals agreed to participate in the project, each provided with a disposable camera and simple instructions (Appendix B). Each camera was marked with a number associated with the corresponding participant's name and contact information. Of the 20 cameras that were distributed, 16 were returned after the tour, of which 14 PDPE interviews were successfully conducted. While participation in the project was offered to anyone purchasing a Farm Tour pass, 13 of the 14 participants were female, and all were white, reflecting visitor demographic data gathered in the follow-up visitor survey[8]. They ranged in age from 22 to 73 with a median age of 44.5. Half of the participants (7) lived in the High Country, one lived elsewhere in North Carolina, and six were Florida residents, of which all but one had vacation homes in the area[9]. Participants were at various stages of dedication to local food and sustainable agriculture – some were just beginning to become curious, some had home gardens, and most visited area farmers' markets with varying degrees of regularity. One had worked on a farm herself, and another participated in CSA.

Photos were developed at a local photo center, both in print and digitally. Digital photos were uploaded onto a password-protected Shutterfly site, each set of photos associated with the participant's first name and last initial. Participants were then contacted to arrange interviews, which could be conducted either in person or on the phone, thus not limiting the study to local participants. If the interview was conducted in person, the participants were given a choice of

[8] Nearly three-quarters (74%) of survey respondents were female, reflecting a predominantly female-driven participation pool, and nearly all respondents were white (88%), reflecting regional demographics. According to the 2010 US Census, 92% of Boone's population is white.

[9] Since the late 1980s retiree and second-home ownership in the North Carolina High Country has become increasingly prevalent.

using print or digital photos to guide the interview. If the interview was conducted on the phone, the Shutterfly site was used to structure the interview, using assigned photo numbers to associate photos with the interview content. Participants were then provided with the $20 incentive and a set of photos, if they desired, either in person or by mail. In-person interviews were conducted at a location of the participant's choosing, either their home or a local restaurant or coffee shop.

Interviews were conducted as casual conversations in which the research participant largely guided discussion by talking about their photos. Participants set the tone and the pace of the interviews, which lasted between 30 minutes and more than two hours. Before reviewing the photos, participants were asked to describe where they were from, their connection to the area, their prior relationship with local food and sustainable agriculture, their motivations for attending the Farm Tour, and their reasons for choosing the particular farms they chose to visit. After reviewing and discussing the photos together, I asked each participant to reflect on the overall impact of the tour. The data generated from these interviews were analyzed thematically according to broad-topic and emergent-fine codes. Data presented here focus on visitor experiences and revolve around emerging themes of care, love, trust, appreciation, relationships, and agricultural education or 'agri-literacy.' Overall impacts of the tour for visitors are also reviewed here.

Findings

Some of the most prominent themes in the PDPE interviews were related to witnessing and experiencing care and love. Katherine (60), for example, expressed enthusiasm and amazement at the love, care, and trust that she witnessed at Apple Hill Farm (Figures 12 and 13), a mountaintop alpaca farm in Banner Elk that welcomes year-found visitors in order to connect humans with animals.

(Figure 12) This was fantastic, how this one girl on the right, she's one of the girls that works with them, and you talk about love of animals, you know…it was amazing how she gave love to these animals, I just couldn't believe it you know. Well number one I couldn't believe that a place like that was there, it was really nice, and the kids really enjoyed this…But you know and she was saying how hard Lee works and doesn't have time for herself, but you know when people love what they do they love what they do. She has a big responsibility, that's a lot of animals to care for and love and feed and everything else you know. …(laughing) I know, well you know you can tell that the animals are happy too and they're loved, you know, that's for sure, and they're well-fed, there was no animal that I saw that looked despondent and … you come here to Florida and you hear so many sad stories of you know these people have all these horses and they're not being fed, and you know it's wonderful that people can do this with a lot of love.

Figure 12: Apple Hill Farm. *Photo by Katherine.*

Figure 13: Apple Hill Farm. *Photo by Katherine.*

(Figure 13) This girl got inside the fence, and you know these animals can really, really do some harm, and this one just came over and just you know got real close to her, and you know you could tell that they both trusted each other for sure, and it's so beautiful. And then the apple trees that they have in the middle, and you know they just get up there and just start getting their own fruit and it's really neat, the way that she did this to protect the alpacas. You know the way she had to learn how to protect them was amazing… it's wonderful how she has the farmland and the landscape to give them shade and also to give them nourishment, I mean this lady is something else, she really is.

Similarly, Erica (23) photographed Tim, farmer at Highland Meadows Cattle Co. in Lansing, offering his cows molasses (Figure 14). She remarked on elements of trust, care, and mindfulness that she felt would be impossible in the industrial food system:

Figure 14: Highland Meadows Cattle Co. *Photo by Erica.*

(Figure 14) Again that's the trust that I was kind of talking about earlier, you know…seeing Tim call the cows and the cows come running up, and I guess he was feeding them molasses, they like molasses, so (they came) up, and you know just seeing that they have this

bond too, so it's something that…I just don't think outside of small family farms is really achievable…And hearing about the fact that these cows really do enjoy a really nice life and you know are slaughtered but with the full, I don't know, mindfulness by Tim, of who these cows are and the lives that they lived. I think you know what I'm saying, it's not mechanical, it's not a machine doing it, and the cows just they have a really great life and I think are treated really humanely and live on these great pastures with their guard donkeys and obviously really like Tim and the family and get very excited when the gator comes around, so that was really cool to see.

Kristin (32) visited several farms with her partner and their four children, their favorite of which was Mollie's Branch, a no-kill animal farm in Todd. She expressed themes of compassion, kindness, and sweetness, emphasizing their children's hands-on interactions (Figures 15 and 16):

Figure 15: Mollie's Branch Farm. *Photo by Kristin.*

(Figure 15) We looooved it, our favorite stop, they were wonderful, so incredibly sweet and warm, and I mean you felt like you were part of the family, like you could show up at her house at any time and she would be welcoming, she was so eager to share I mean with our kids especially, yeah she was real sweet with them. This is a picture of all of them, they were digging for worms to feed the chickens. …And that's just a demonstration of what you can tell she puts into it, and you can feel it. I think that was one of the things too for us because we're all animal lovers, being a no kill, you could feel that, you could just feel compassion and kindness, it was just sweet.

Figure 16: Mollie's Branch Farm. *Photo by Kristin.*

(Figure 16) That's just a picture of the girls digging for more worms to feed the chickens. They actually did find some and did feed the chickens…This is one of her chicks that she had gone in and brought out just so the kids could hold it and touch it, and it was just sweet, it was just hands-on and again just another picture of kindness, and she brought Lily into the pen with her and let them pick up the chicks from the pen, and then she and Lily brought the chick out for everybody to touch. It was sweet.

Many visitors also expressed admiration for the love, passion, and efforts of the farmers they met on the tour. Katherine (60), for example, was deeply inspired by the dedication and cooperation of the farmers at FIG (Farm Incubator and

Grower) Farm in Valle Crucis, which offers beginning sustainable farmers access to land and shared equipment and resources (Figures 17 and 18).

Figure 17: FIG Farm. *Photo by Katherine*.

(Figure 17) And I liked the fact that you know you're out there and they were certainly very in love with what they're doing. And I really enjoyed this one and the fact that they are really trying so hard to do the best that they can with what they have…I love the fact that they're really into the medicinal herbs, but yeah you know one had flowers, one had lettuces and one had vegetables, and you know so that was pretty cool for me. Very, very neat... But that was really neat how they share everything there, you don't have that around here.

Figure 18: FIG Farm. *Photo by Katherine.*

(Figure 18) This picture is more of their lettuces but it also showed that back behind where these trees are there's going to be even more of these trees and add on to the property…I think they were going to add more medicinal herbs back behind there, but for me it was just, you know it was enormous, I think it's an enormous job and what they're doing is just fantastic. It gives you some sort of inspiration that there is a way you could figure it out you know. Oh I loved this, yeah.

Similarly, Erica (23) linked the passion, dedication, and care evident at Nelson Family Farm in Zionville to her deepened appreciation of the farm's products (Figure 19), which were endowed were meaning by witnessing and understanding the "whole process:"

Figure 19: Nelson Family Farm. *Photo by Erica.*

(Figure 19) OK well this is at the Nelson Family Farm…we'd gone around seeing part of the farm, and this is where we were at the end deciding to buy some of their food, then it just seemed a lot more meaningful to purchase it having seen the whole process, so we got two things of sausage and eggs…We had met them and heard about the way everything was raised, and the folks there were just so passionate about what they did and their plans for the farm and their plans for the land, and it was just a really good feeling knowing that we were supporting them actively and that the food was more humanely raised and would be better for us…It was just, we just had a great time, it was really meaningful and also just really

entertaining…But this picture to me is like, this is what knowing your farmer is really about, and this is what buying local really is, you know, buying direct from somebody that has produced this food, so that was picture.

Like Erica, other visitors discussed the impact of witnessing and experiencing holistic processes and cycles, both farming and biological. At FIG Farm, Kyndy (49) was struck by the sight of sunflowers in the earlier stages of their life cycle (Figure 20) and made connections between the cycles of life and death, growth and decay on the farm (Figure 21):

Figure 20: FIG Farm. *Photo by Kyndy.*

(Figure 20) I think with these what I liked was the fact that they hadn't opened up yet, normally when I see sunflowers it's just the big yellow sunflower and they're tall and they're bright yellow and you see them from a distance so, honestly I don't think I've ever looked at a sunflower that (was in the) bud stage or whatever you call it, not bloomed out yet, and so I was attempting to get a good picture of it close up but it got blurry, but anyway that's why I took it just because I thought it was kind of cool seeing it at that stage. …It's the growth, which is kind of cool, not just the end product. ...But lots of them weren't open so it's like the butterfly that's coming out of the caterpillar.

Figure 21: FIG Farm. *Photo by Kyndy.*

(Figure 21) I'm not around pigs much so it was kind of exciting to be able to see the pigs and then it was feeding time. And it's just kind of the cycle of leftover stuff on the farm maybe that they're not selling or whatever goes to them, and then of course they'll be slaughtered and they'll be part of the meat that's sold, part of the farm.

Other visitors recalled similar experiences of making connections between food 'products' and their natural origins. Karen (46), for example, photographed a pear tree, remarking on the rareness of seeing fruit beyond supermarkets (Figure 22).

Figure 22: Highland Meadows Cattle Co. *Photo by Karen.*

(Figure 22) Oh yeah that's a pear. Just pretty. And something too, if you've never seen anything like that, and even we went hiking just the other day and we came in this pasture and there was an apple tree and it's just covered in all these little tiny

apples, and I'm like that's just super cool, probably people up here are like duh it's an apple but we never see that. It's kinda cool looking (laughing), apples don't come in a bag at the supermarket they come on a tree! It's kinda cool! (laughing)

Kristin (32) photographed what appeared to be an 'untended' part of FIG Farm (Figure 23) and related it to the farmer's discussion of the medicinal properties of plants, many of which are often removed and considered to be weeds:

(Figure 23) Yeah this picture's kind of interesting because this would have been the part of the farm that you kind of overlook, you might have thought it was untended…(The farmer) walked around what somebody might think of as a big pile of junk and explained each plant and what it's used for and what it will cure and what it will help with and what you shouldn't mix it with, she was very, very informative…So I thought she was just really, really neat to watch her go through and talk about the different plants and the different uses that they have, you know, and also pointing out that…we tend to rip the weeds out of our garden and really don't stop to think about the things that they do and how they're beneficial to us and to our plants.

Figure 23: FIG Farm. *Photo by Kristin.*

Agricultural learning, or 'agri-literacy,' was a theme for other visitors as well. Kyndy (49) photographed plant diversity within a small space and described what she had learned about companion planting (Figure 24):

Figure 24: FIG Farm. *Photo by Kyndy.*

(Figure 24) This is just showing the contrast and stuff, and I think that there was…a story about what's kind of planted next to what, there's a little bit of method to the madness, as far as what they're planting next to each other. So yeah this was just to try to get an aerial view just to show how much was growing and how many different things in the rows.

Both Catherine (61) and Kristin (32) learned agricultural practices that they planned to implement in their own lives. Catherine had been trying to grow sweet peas and learned at FIG Farm that they needed to 'climb up something' (Figure 25), while Kristin's experience with the creative method of planting on cardboard at the

F.A.R.M. Café Garden Spot in Valle Crucis inspired her to possibly bring the practice to the elementary school where she teaches (Figure 26):

Figure 25: FIG Farm.
Photo by Catherine.

(Figure 25) I remember taking that too, that was at the FIG Farm, that was, I have the sugar peas, sweet peas, and I didn't realize they need to climb up something. So I need to do something like this, I have bamboo which I brought up I have a lot of bamboo in Florida and it's kind of like a nylon netting that they did, so I said oh we can do this that' easy to do, as a matter of fact I need that picture. Because I remember the reason why I took that picture and I still haven't put them on anything.

Figure 26: F.A.R.M. Cafe Garden Spot.
Photo by Kristin.

(Figure 27) This was really neat, so the last one we thought was super interesting because this really showed that you could plant something anywhere because you just need a base and some good soil and you could really plop a couple of these in the yard and you could plant something, and so I kinda wanted to bring this back to school so we could plant pumpkins for our kids because we cant put a pumpkin everywhere you know, but this was a good way to put up temporary garden plots where we could have pumpkins growing for the season.

Finally, the process of talking about their photos allowed for conversations to emerge on the overall impacts of visitors' experiences on the Farm Tour, which illuminated themes of awareness and education, appreciation and encouragement, support and involvement, connections and relationships, attitude and behavioral changes, hope and inspiration, trust and transparency, care and love. Visitors articulated shifts in perspectives relating to new or deepened awareness of the hard work, dedication, and care demonstrated by the farmers, and they expressed an enthusiastic desire to support these processes, either through implementing similar practices into their lives, getting involved in similar work in their communities, and/or supporting local food and sustainable agriculture via changes in their consumption habits.

Finally, visitors linked the connections made to elements beyond the food system – to processes, life cycles, and relationships with humans and more-than-human beings.

When asked to reflect on the overall impact of the tour, Erica (23) expressed a deepened appreciation for the realities of farming, citing her impressions of producer fulfillment and passion:

Well it was just really inspiring…you know I don't want to romanticize farmers or farming, that's something I've realized a lot of people do, and it's really hard work, and what they do is something that I don't think a lot of people get, I myself don't think I understand the complexity or the full scope of what they're doing, but it just seemed like…there is such a sense of fulfillment, and it's such a calling. And I think that's what I came away with, the way Amy interacted with and talked about her animals…and you know it's just this sense of calling, there's this sense of like taking care of other people, and there's this real sense of passion.

Catherine (46) similarly noted themes of inspiration and appreciation of the work the farmers do:

Oh yeah, oh yeah, I mean it's inspiring, it was seeing the dedication and the hard work, you saw you know the battles that they have to fight, the bugs, the weeds, you know, the animals, and the reward. It is rewarding.

And Katherine (60) tied her appreciation of the farmers to issues of food security and resilience:

I think it's fantastic because you know, what if we don't do this? We're not going to have food, we're not going to have anything because you know I don't think we're in for a really good time coming up. To watch people be so involved and love what they do, this was fantastic.

Karen (46) discussed the value of connection and relationships with farmers, which she related to gratitude, mindfulness, and a heightened desire to support them economically due to the understanding that "this is somebody's:"

But I will tell you, the thing about the Farm Tour…is making that connection about buying from a person, putting a person's face with it and spending that extra money…I was always more, 'oh my god this stuff's so expensive,' you know, and not really participating a whole lot in it. But now I'm changing my attitude from that…You really are a lot more mindful and grateful and thankful for what you eat because you have that connection. And I was writing back to some of my friends in Florida and telling them about the Farm Tour, and they all know I'm super frugal, but I said I would happily pay extra for Cory's tomatoes or the Faith Mountain, those little kids (laughing), their honey, and those sort of things, it does change your attitude. Because you see

this is somebody's…If you're gonna spend your money, support someone and something and not just these huge corporations that mass produce things.

Ryan (31) similarly emphasized the value of producer-consumer relationships, adding that 'America needs to get back to that' and away from the prevalence of corporate agricultural systems:

But you know after meeting the farmers that's really the true story, it's just the people you know, I mean just all so down to earth, just good honest people, you know they're people…You form a personal relationship with people that are growing your food, and I think that a lot of things in America need to get back to that, we need to get away from you know Wal-Mart and Costco…Instead of having all your fruits and vegetables in shipping containers coming over from wherever with all kinds of diseases I'd rather be able to walk down and talk to Cory, talk to Holly, and get you know get food from there. (Ryan, 31)

Michelle (22) expressed similar sentiments, addressing the dangerous cultural assumption that food comes from the grocery store, and that a cheap economic cost is the only consideration in deciding what food products to purchase:

We've been so conditioned, grabbing things off of the shelf and comparing prices and not understanding that this product, so much goes into that thing being there on that shelf… hen that price goes down, that cost is being absorbed by someone else in some other community, or by the environment. So to have that appreciation people will be more willing to support their farmers…because when you know that person as a human, as a person, you're like, you're doing such a huge favor for me, I am doing this other thing, I don't have time to grow the food, but you are growing the kind of food that I want to put in my body, and it's with love, and so we want to show you the appreciation... But that's one of the spaces where we need to catch up in our understanding.

She continued that for her, farm tours provide deeper possibilities for connections than those of farmers' markets, as they offer open spaces for experiential connections with animals, plants, soil, life cycles, and human relationships to them:

(Farmers' markets) are still about the sale of it, which is great, the farmers' market is a really great I think transitional step in having people coming out there and to even make it more of a social atmosphere…but to actually go out and see what they're doing, like go to the farms I mean, then you understand the relationship that you have not only with the growing community but with the food itself and the biological relationship that you have with it. You see like OK, it actually works like a whole system, like understanding compost or how the pigs will use the scraps and clear the land you know.

Finally, Michelle offered her reflections on the value of the Farm Tour in its ability to shift perspectives and behavior through these sensual and affective experiences in agricultural spaces, by bearing witness to passion, dedication, care, and love:

That's what the beauty of the Farm Tour is, to actually go there and learn where it comes from and how it's living…I just would definitely encourage everyone to do this and have this experience because I see how much it can impact and change people's way of relating to their food and to the community of people that produce that and lead to a more holistic sort of relationship as a community itself, making decisions about how to make this easier and more accessible for people to do… Having the experience or creating these relationships with the growers will impact I think a lot about how we choose to live and we'll end up with happier, healthier societies.

Discussion

The process of sharing participants' photos created space for meaningful and affective elements of experiences on the Farm Tour to emerge. Conversations with participants revolved around themes of love and care, admiration and appreciation, awareness and understanding, trust and relationships. The snippets and stories shared here illustrate that tour participants made or deepened connections with farmers, food, agricultural practices, non-human animals, plants, soil, and cycles of growth and decay. Participants recalled experiences of awe and joy as they witnessed demonstrations of care and love for more-than-human beings. They expressed sincere admiration and appreciation for the hard work and dedication of farmers as realities of agricultural processes were uncovered, indicating that awareness and relationships translated into deepened appreciation for food origins – where it comes from and what is involved in its production – and a strengthened desire to support local food and farming. And they made clear that agricultural as well as ecological literacy occurred, as participants acquired information through all of the senses that informed their own practices or fostered understanding of the more-than-human world, deepening their dedication to those committed to its care and helping them become "responsible consumers who now more honestly appreciate the costs and requirements

associated with living" (Wirzba & Kingsolver, 2004, 94). These findings suggest the potential of embodied experiences in caring agricultural spaces to shift perceptions toward consciousness of relationships and interconnectedness.

Additionally, PDPE interviews did indeed allow for deeper and more particular elements of experience, emotion, and meaning to emerge than would have in traditional interviews. Study participants conveyed their overall enjoyment of the process of taking and talking about their photos; one visitor remarked that, for her, "taking photographs and sharing them afterward is a natural way to complete an activity and to relive and refresh memories." Reviewing the photos allowed participants to recall and reflect on their experiences in ways they might not have otherwise. Participants were able to hone in on details that had been blurred in the entirety of the experience and think through them more carefully, relating and situating them. One visitor explained that the photos were "essential" in their ability to talk about their experiences, while another related that "having the camera did perhaps make or encourage you to look deeper than you might have otherwise," confirming PDPE's potential to spur reflexivity and lead subjects to make meaning that they had not before (Ortega-Alcazar & Dyck, 2011; Loeffler, 2005).

Other participants affirmed that taking photos was a natural component of the tour experience, as they would have taken them regardless of their participation in the PDPE project given the nature of the event. As one visitor explained, "I didn't feel distracted because my whole family was taking photos that day." However, another visitor explained that taking photos at times distracted her from listening to what farmers were saying. Additionally, taking photos on disposable cameras created issues for some visitors, as they juggled with multiple cameras, felt confined in the limited number of exposures, or were unable to know whether or how their photos had turned out. While most photos came out successfully, there were a few instances of

undeveloped, unintentional, or cut-off photos. Additionally, some photos were not taken by the participant, which impaired the ability to discuss the personal meaning behind the photos. Finally, the technology required to develop disposable cameras became increasingly inaccessible at photo centers during the course of the project, in some cases requiring the cameras to be sent to a lab at increased cost. While disposable cameras were useful in their affordability and ability to expand accessibility of the project to all potential participants, these issues point to the need for further investigation in ways to implement PDPE with digital cameras, phone cameras, and/or social media sharing.

And while PDPE indeed allows for meaningful understandings of experience, the process of reducing lively, dynamic conversations to text, coding and fragmenting them, continues to limit full expression. Words on the page are unable to convey meaning that was made through the participants' direct recounting of their photos, their expressions, tones of voices, points of emphasis, the holistic nature of their remembering and relating. Yet, while PDPE can never capture a complete picture, it nonetheless allows for deeper 'glimpses' or insights than more traditional methodologies, serving as a valuable tool for feminist agro-food researchers interested in exploring dimensions of experience and emotion.

Finally, the gendered nature of participation both in the PDPE study and in the Farm Tour supports the link between women and an ethic of care in alternative agro-food systems; yet, while female participants may have led the way into the tour, in many cases they were accompanied by male partners who experienced impacts as well. Catherine (61) said that her husband attended the tour because of her "coaxing," and Karen (46) explained that she was "kinda dragging (her husband) into all this." Yet both women noted their husbands' positive experiences and noticed shifts in their perspective after the tour. As Karen recalled: "He's never

been really much involved…I think he had a bigger change from the Farm Tour…I've done a lot more reading about it and have a little bit more interest, so I think he's now, he definitely sees the difference."[10] Furthermore, Ryan (31), the one male participant in the PDPE study, held primarily economic motivations for attending the tour, as he was interested in discerning the economic viability of a local farm store in Avery County. Yet when reflecting on the overall impacts of the tour, he emphasized relationships and the need for a re-evaluation of values in the conventional food system. This suggests that affective agro-food experiences such as those made possible by the Farm Tour hold potential to shift singular or monologic masculinities to dialogic masculinities, characterized by less need for control over nature, different measures for success, and greater social openness (Peter et al., 2000).

Conclusion

Understanding the many social and ecological crises facing our world to be related, embedded within a cultural foundation that severs awareness of interconnection and interdependence, ecofeminist scholars and others call for a deep reconceptualization of how to be in the world (Warren, 1990). Substituting cultural assumptions of rationality, individuality, and domination, these scholars call for reconnections that move us toward a new ecological culture (Plumwood, 2002) that "makes a central place for values of care, love, friendship, trust, and appropriate reciprocity" (Warren, 1990, 143). While this approach can seem abstract, both disconnections and reconnections can be made more tangible within agro-food systems.

The conventional agro-food system quite literally disconnects production from consumption as corporate and industrial food products from around the world line supermarket shelves, removing any requirement that the consumer understand or care about their origins or

[10] Perhaps noteworthy is the fact that the author encountered both Karen and her husband at BRWIA workshops and events in the months following the June 2014 tour.

processes of production and distribution. Yet, rising awareness of the ecological, social, and ethical costs of this system is sparking new localized agricultural alternatives and opportunities for reconnection. Studies of these spaces of agro-food reconnection such as farmers' markets and CSA have suggested that "producers and consumers are prepared to think carefully about their relationships with others, human and non-human, close and distant," and that while "participation in 'alternative' food schemes might not save the world, at least not in the short term…it might help to build the knowledge and positive relationships that create the capacity for change" (Kneafsey et al., 2008, 177).

This paper reiterates this argument and puts forth the importance of creative and under-studied projects of agro-food reconnection such as the High Country Farm Tour that move individuals beyond markets and CSA pick-ups and into affective spaces of food production, deepening consumer-producer, agro-food, and human-nature relationships. For individuals in the process of shifting consumption habits toward local and sustainable products, who are interested in agricultural lifestyles, and/or who desire to learn more about food systems, the findings reviewed here indicate that community-based farm tours can provide a deepening of their understanding, dedication, and participation through embodied and sensual experiences of caring agricultural places that hold "tremendous potential for arational (emotional, aesthetic, and spiritual) values that ultimately compel our actions" (Lockwood, 1999, 365). As tour participants interacted with both farmers and their surroundings, they engaged in processes of agri- and eco-literacy, beginning or furthering the process of relearning how to care for the world and each other. While women predominantly led the way into these caring spaces, both women and men experienced shifts in perspectives and values.

Finally, as reconnecting via food and agriculture is an ongoing project of "doing and becoming" (Kneafsey et al., 2008), the importance of agro-food studies that can access affective dimensions of experience is clear; scholars increasingly call for "ways in which local food advocates and activists – academics, practitioners, policy makers, farmer and consumer organizations – can learn to see, record, and argue for the value of the emotive, the cultural, the spiritual…in support of local food" (DeLind, 2006, 127). This paper employed PDPE interviews with Farm Tour visitors as a way to look deeply into experiential processes of reconnection, glimpsing care in process. Despite the limitations associated with this methodology, described above, the findings of this study illustrate that PDPE is an effective way to access meaningful and emotional dimensions of experience, of great value to feminist agro-food researchers and others concerned with reconnections and care "for others, the environment, and the world as a whole" (Cox, 2011, 127).

CHAPTER 3
GENDERING STRATEGIES FOR CIVIC AGRICULTURE: THE CASE OF BLUE RIDGE WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE AND THE HIGH COUNTRY FARM TOUR

Abstract

Today's conventional agro-food system, rooted in systems and processes of industrialization, consolidation, and globalization, is linked to widespread negative socio-ecological consequences from local to global scales, one of which is the deterioration of small-scale family farms and rural communities. Since the early 20th century, farms in the U.S. have industrialized and become fewer, larger, and delinked from rural communities previously bound by agricultural ties. Civic agriculture seeks to re-establish these ties, prioritizing the creation of sustainable community economies via vibrant community-based food systems. While women farmers have historically been marginalized in their productive roles and dismissed as producers of agricultural knowledge, they are understood to particularly embody these values. Thus, a resilient and inclusive civic agriculture is largely dependent upon the support and empowerment of women farmers through gendered civic agriculture organizations (CAO), horizontal networks, and innovative strategies.

This paper addresses the important role of women in advancing visions of civic agriculture and explores the innovative and the under-studied strategy of community-based farm tours through a case study of the Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture High Country Farm Tour. Employing focus groups as a participatory action research (PAR) methodology to bring women farmers together, I present the impacts and challenges associated with participation in the tour as discussed by farmers from seven of the 20 participating farms. The data indicate that connections and relationships, education and awareness, and renewal, enjoyment, and appreciation were among the major benefits of the tour for participating farmers, reflecting more-than-economic goals and civic values particularly characteristic of female farmers. The paper concludes that the innovative strategy of community-based farm tours, especially those highlighting women

farmers, holds ripe potential as a creative civic agricultural mechanism and should continue to be implemented by more communities in the U.S. Furthermore, the facilitating role of BRWIA illustrates the importance of CAOs in supporting women farmers and strengthening sustainable community-based food systems. Finally, this study affirms the importance of focus groups as PAR aimed to strengthen networks of women farmers, creating space for them to share stories and experiences, to exchange and develop solutions, and to form or renew relationships.

Introduction

Today's conventional agro-food system is rooted in systems and processes of industrialization, consolidation, and globalization (Lapping, 2004), driven by tenets of centralization, specialization, domination, competition, and exploitation (Beus & Dunlap, 1990). While these processes are dominant in many realms of global political economy, food is the sector in which the phenomenon of globalization is most apparent (Lapping, 2004), experienced routinely and across social classifications as the food we eat is largely derived from industrial and corporate structures with widespread negative socio-ecological consequences from local to global scales. Among these many impacts are environmental degradation, labor exploitation, violations of animal welfare and rights, health crises, and "the demise of family farms and rural communities" (Beus & Dunlap, 1990, 591).

As consumer awareness of such issues increases, an array of more sustainable agro-food alternatives are proliferating, such as the organic, fair trade, and food labeling movements. While many such alternatives hold great promise, others are perpetuated by or vulnerable to corporate co-optation (Watts, Ilbery & Maye, 2005). As a result, many scholars call for expanding the frameworks of 'sustainable agriculture' to a 'civic agriculture,' which includes many of the same the same socio-ecological emphases as sustainable agriculture but seeks to go further to re-embed food systems within communities (Lyson, 2005):

> The term civic agriculture captures the problem-solving foundations of sustainable agriculture. But civic agriculture goes further by referencing the emergence and growth of community-based agriculture and food production activities that create jobs, encourage entrepreneurship, and strengthen community identity. Civic agriculture brings together production and consumption activities within communities and offers real alternatives to the commodities produced, processed, and marketed by large agribusiness firms (96).

Indeed, since the early 20th century, farms in the U.S. have industrialized and become fewer, larger, and delinked from rural communities previously bound by agricultural ties. Farmers, previously holders and producers of agricultural knowledge, are tied to technologies yielding prosperity for a few at the expense of many (Lyson, 2004) and have become "increasingly trivial to agriculture and food" (Lapping, 2004, 143). Rural communities have seen a declining middle class, more hired workers, lower family incomes, and increased poverty (Lobao & Meyer, 2001), making evident the linkages between food systems and "the environmental, social, spiritual, and economic well-being of the community" (Feenstra, 1997, 28).

Civic agriculture seeks to re-establish these ties, characterized by "alternative production systems of direct-marketing projects that seek to bring farmers and consumers closer together…to expand the knowledge and understanding of how foods are produced, and to increase the economic viability of farmers" (Lapping, 2004, 143). Civic farmers prioritize community, sustainability, and care for others; the imperative to earn a profit is filtered through and embedded within such more-than-economic goals (Lyson, 2005; Lapping, 2004). Women farmers are understood to particularly embody these goals (Jarosz, 2011; Allen & Sachs, 2007; DeLind & Ferguson, 1999; Trauger et al., 2009), yet they have been historically marginalized in their productive roles and dismissed as producers of agricultural knowledge (Allen & Sachs, 2007; Saugeres, 2002; Trauger et al., 2008; Lobao & Stofferahn, 2007; Pini, 2002). Thus, a civic agriculture is largely dependent upon the support and empowerment of women farmers through

civic agriculture organizations (CAO), horizontal networks, and innovative strategies (Trauger et al., 2008).

This paper addresses the important role of women in advancing visions of civic agriculture and explores an emerging, innovative, and under-studied strategy that aims to empower female farmers and advance civic agricultural goals: community-based farm tours highlighting women farmers and their families. After overviewing the need for and the promise of civic agriculture, I expand on the important yet often marginalized contribution of women farmers, of particular relevance to civic agricultural aims, and the need for networks and strategies to support them. I then introduce Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture (BRWIA) as a gendered CAO that emerged from an identified lack of support for women farmers and evolved to focus on civic agricultural aims of producer-consumer reconnection, agricultural education, and socio-economic support for women in agriculture. Their annual BRWIA High Country Farm Tour, an annual two-day tour of small-scale sustainable farms in the North Carolina High Country, is overviewed as their flagship event.

Employing focus groups as a participatory action research (PAR) methodology to bring women farmers together, I present the impacts and challenges associated with participation the High Country Farm Tour as discussed by farmers from seven of the 20 participating farms. The data indicate that connections and relationships, education and awareness, and renewal, enjoyment, and appreciation were among the major benefits of the tour for participating farmers, reflecting more-than-economic goals and values particularly characteristic of female farmers. Challenges associated with participation are also overviewed, including questions of how to best structure individual farm tours and convey messages, the issue of uneven numbers of visitors and navigating between visitors' varying expectations, and finding ways to increase the tour's

accessibility. The farmers collaboratively brainstormed solutions to such issues and developed ideas for future tours, participating in horizontal knowledge exchange and networking that is crucial for civic farmers, particularly women (Stavaren, 1997; Pini, 2002; Trauger et al., 2008).

I conclude that the innovative strategy of community-based farm tours, especially those highlighting women farmers, holds ripe potential as a creative civic agricultural mechanism and should continue to be implemented by more communities in the U.S. Furthermore, the facilitating role of BRWIA illustrates the importance of CAOs in supporting women farmers and strengthening sustainable community-based food systems; such organizations should be better understood and actively incorporated as a crucial link between producers and consumers in future agro-food studies. Finally, following Trauger et al. (2008), this study affirms the importance of focus groups as PAR aimed to strengthen networks of women farmers, creating space for them to share stories and experiences, to exchange and develop solutions, and to form or renew relationships.

Review of the Literature

Impacts of conventional agriculture on rural communities

Industrial or 'conventional' agriculture, driven by tenets of centralization, specialization, competition, exploitation, domination, and dependence (Beus & Dunlap, 1990), is grounded in the belief that "the primary objectives of farming should be to produce as much food/fiber as possible for the least cost" (Lyson, 2004, 93). In this system, farmers are devalued as sources of knowledge and expertise, "reduced to workers whose primary tasks are to follow production procedures outlined from above. And farms are simply places where production occurs devoid of any connections to the local community or social order" (Lyson, 2004, 93).

Indeed, over the last century and particularly since World War II, farms in the U.S. have become fewer, larger, and disconnected from local communities, shifting from diverse food production for local and regional markets to industrial farming for national and global distribution, relying upon large amounts of synthetic pesticides and chemical fertilizers (Lyson, 2005). Whereas one-third of Americans lived on farms in the early 1900s, by the end of the 20th century only two percent of the population continued farming, resulting in "the abandonment of farming as a household livelihood strategy" (Lobao & Stofferahn, 2007, 104) and reflecting the increasing irrelevance of farmers to food and agriculture (Lapping, 2004). As remaining farms grew larger and more specialized, with hired labor replacing a family structure, communities previously bound together through agrarian linkages experienced a loss of resilience and well-being. This correlation was first predominantly identified by Walter Goldschmidt in a 1940s USDA report documenting poorer conditions in communities dominated by large industrial farms, lower family incomes, including a smaller middle class, poor public services, and low civic participation (Lobao & Stofferahn, 2007).

These trends have proved resilient – Lobao and Meyer (2001) found in a comprehensive overview that most studies overwhelmingly report "all or some detrimental impacts" of industrial farming on communities. Lyson (2005) argues that the neglect of rural communities and farm viability is "not surprising" in a food system "anchored to the neoclassical theory of economics" (94), built upon assumptions of rationality, productivity, and efficiency (Lobao & Stofferahn, 2007). While this system maintains that the small farmer is unproductive, within other frameworks protecting the small farms is a means to food security (Shiva, 2004) and community resilience.

Civic agriculture

As awareness of the numerous detrimental impacts of conventional agriculture rises, attention is increasingly shifting toward more sustainable practices and processes. Yet while many such efforts are aimed at instilling ecologically and socially appropriate practices into the existing food system, including the expansion of organic and fair trade products, scholars such as Lyson (2004, 2005) advocate for a turn toward 'civic agriculture,' which relies on the same "problem-solving foundations of sustainable agriculture" (2005, 96) but extends further to re-embed sustainable food systems within communities. In this framework, farming is understood as "an integral part of rural communities, not merely production of commodities" (96), characterized by direct contact between producers and consumers that "nurtures bonds of community" (96) and creates vibrant, resilient local food systems. Civic agriculture is defined as

> a locally organized system of agriculture and food production characterized by networks of producers who are bound together by place. Civic agriculture embodies a commitment to developing and strengthening an economically, environmentally, and socially sustainable system of agriculture and food production that relies on local resources and serves local markets and consumers. The imperative to earn a profit is filtered through a set of cooperative and mutually supporting social relations (Lyson, 2005, 94).

Agrarians such as Wendell Berry similarly advocate for a local food economy as an entry point for revitalizing sustainable community economies. Berry (1995) defines a community economy as one in which people "know that things connect – that farming, for example, is connected to nature, and food to farming, and health to food – and they want to preserve that connection" (17). The two defining aims of a community economy include "the preservation of ecological diversity and integrity, and the renewal, on sound cultural and ecological principles, of local economies and local communities" (18). A vibrant locally based food system, Berry argues, is an ideal starting point for the renewal of communities "because it does not have to be big or costly, it requires nobody's permission, and it can ultimately involve everybody" (21).

Gendering civic agriculture

But the notion that community food systems can "ultimately involve everybody" is a complex one. While the idea of "small, integrated communities using locally evolved norms and rules to manage resources sustainably and equitably is powerful" (Agarwal & Gibson, 1999, 6333), applying a homogenous imaginary of community in the absence of attention to its intricacies and complexities is problematic, as it "fails to attend to differences within communities" (Agarwal & Gibson, 1999, 633) and can illuminate the voices of the few or the elite. Women in particular can be left out, "finding themselves and their interests marginalized or overlooked in apparently 'participatory' processes" (Cornwall, 2003, 1325). While women are often underrepresented in processes of community development, their marginalization in the realm of food and agriculture is particularly noteworthy and understudied (Allen & Sachs, 2007; Peter et al., 2000). Though women's identities are strongly linked to food and food-related work, "they control few resources and hold little decision-making power in the food industry and food policy" (Allen & Sachs, 2007, 1). The agrarian ideology itself is often criticized for its subordination of women and perpetuation of patriarchal family farms:

> Focused on the nuclear family and the male farmer, agrarian ideology embodies traditional gendered roles and can pose a roadblock to raising issues of gender equality for both men and women… Women have long been rendered irrelevant in their roles as farmers (Allen & Sachs, 2007, 5).

Conventional agriculture, with its focus on technology and mechanization, is largely a masculine domain, its emphasis on domination over nature and non-human animals considered by some scholars to be linked to men's domination over women: "Men see themselves as tamers of nature, and that in their subjection of nature they also subjugate other human (and non human) beings…both women and nature are defined as belonging to a low order" (Saugeres, 2002, 375). Women in many cases are devalued as a source of agricultural knowledge and often do not

identify as farmers despite their roles in food production (Trauger et al., 2008; Lobao & Stofferahn, 2007).

Yet, while in some senses women involved in agro-food systems globally have declining choice and control (Barndt, 2004), in other senses they stand at the forefront of potentially transformative alternatives. Particularly in the global North, the number of women participating in agriculture continues to grow (Jarosz, 2011; Allen & Sachs, 2007), and scholars acknowledge a gendered nature of activism and participation (e.g. DeLind & Ferguson, 1999) as "the rise in the number of women in farming parallels the dramatic rise in the number of organic and sustainable farming operations and farming markets in the United States" (Trauger et al., 2009, 43).

Women farmers are particularly crucial to achieving a civic agriculture, as they are commonly motivated by more-than-economic goals such as community and care for others. In general, women play a prominent role in movements of social and environmental justice, in many cases emphasizing their traditionally nourishing roles "to legitimize the confrontational actions they take to protect their families' access to food, shelter, and a healthy environment" (Bell & Braun, 2010, 797). Expanding from the protection and care for their families, studies show that women extend care to human and more-than-human communities through their rising role in local and sustainable food systems. While both men and women are involved in sustainable and civic agriculture, "women are more likely to take on non-traditional productivist roles" (Trauger et al., 2009). According to Allen and Sachs (2007), "(w)omen farmers often lead the way for environmental sustainability and innovative entrepreneurship on farms…Women also lead broad-scale efforts to create healthy, environmentally sustainable, and socially just food cultures and systems" (13).

In order to better understand women's roles in civic agriculture, studies have focused on identifying motivations and goals associated with women's involvement in community-supported agriculture (CSA). DeLind and Ferguson (1999), for example, found that men largely participated in CSA for personal improvement, while aspects of community building primarily motivated female participants. Similarly, Jarosz (2011) found that women farmers involved in CSA expressed an "ethics of care that defines their work as centered upon nourishing themselves and others" (308). Rather than primarily economic motivations, their motivations center on "social goals and desires to live their lives and do their work in a certain way as well as having the political goals of contributing to both the awareness and the possibilities for creating an alternative food network that is not primarily motivated by large-scale industrial capitalism" (321). And Trauger et al. (2009) found that women farmers are redefining "successful farming in terms of providing services to their community, as well as in terms of profit and productivity," developing what these authors described as "a new model of entrepreneurship, one that subverts the ideologies of economic rationality and redefines profitability and success in terms of care, responsibility to the public, and connection to the farm" (53).

As the number in women in agriculture grows and the linkages between their participation and the aims of civic agriculture are increasingly understood, the support of women farmers and their families is crucial. Accordingly, women farmers in several states are currently engaging in forming "new types of networks for educational, social, and entrepreneurial support to empower women in sustainable agriculture and food-related business" (Allen & Sachs, 2007, 12). Such networks and organizations, referred to in this paper as CAOs, must develop and implement specific strategies that link economic and social imperatives in order to support and advance civic agriculture (Trauger et al., 2009). Common strategies include farmers' markets,

community gardens, and community supported agriculture (CSA) programs. Yet new and creative strategies that aim to reconnect producers and consumers, foster agricultural education, and support civic farmers, particularly women, warrant considerable attention.

The remainder of this paper presents a case study of the Western North Carolina-based nonprofit Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture (BRWIA) and their annual High Country Farm Tour as an innovative and under-studied[1] strategy to strengthen community food systems and support civic farmers, particularly women farmers. After introducing BRWIA and the High Country Farm Tour, drawing from my involvement with the CAO and the Farm Tour, I present data gathered from a focus group with participating farmers aimed to understand how they perceive the impacts of the tour, which is discussed in the context of civic agriculture and the role of women farmers.

Case study: Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture and the High Country Farm Tour

From May through September 2014, I employed feminist ethnographic and participant action research (PAR) in the High Country with the goal of better understanding the motivations, experiences, and impacts of individuals and organizations involved in civic agriculture. I was particularly interested in BRWIA as a women-focused CAO and the High Country Farm Tour as a creative mechanism for fostering agro-food and producer-consumer reconnections. During my fieldwork I collaborated with BRWIA to market the tour, sell weekend passes at local farmers' markets, interview farmers, and collect survey data from participating producers and consumers with the goals of informing my research while also meeting organizational needs and working to advance BRWIA's mission. I also attended BRWIA board meetings and gained insights into

[1] While studies of farm tourism, or agritourism, are plentiful broadly, Spurlock (2009) has authored the only other known study on annual community-based farm tours. This paper offered a participant observation-oriented personal narrative of the phenomenon but did not engage other methodologies such as interviews, surveys, or focus groups.

their history, motivations, goals, and programs. In August 2014 I attended a final board meeting, in which I presented my preliminary research findings and asked each board and staff member to share their perspective on the history and role of BRWIA and the High Country Farm Tour. This informal group interview with eleven BRWIA board and staff members, in addition to information from the organization's website, informed the data presented in this section.

BRWIA is a nonprofit organization in Western North Carolina "dedicated to strengthening the High Country's local food system by supporting women and their families with resources, education, and skills related to sustainable food and agriculture" (brwia.org). Headquartered in Boone[2], they serve both producers and consumers in the High Country[3] by providing grants to women farmers, farmer mentor programs, workshops highlighting agricultural and sustainable living practices, farmer profile projects, consumer education programs, and their flagship event, the annual High Country Farm Tour. Working toward a vision of "an equitable local food system that protects the environment, strengthens the local economy, alleviates hunger and poverty, and improves community health" (brwia.org.), their long-term civic agricultural goals include:

1. Increasing the economic viability of farming and food processing, especially among women
2. Encouraging farmers to adopt sustainable farmer practices
3. Educating the public about sustainable food and agriculture
4. Improving food security

[2] Boone is the county seat of Watauga County, home to Appalachian State University, with a population of 17,122 (2010 census).
[3] The seven northernmost counties in North Carolina are considered the High Country, including Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Mitchell, Wilkes, Watauga, and Yancey counties. Caldwell County (NC) and Johnson County (TN) are also within BRWIA's service area.

BRWIA began as a grassroots project by a small group of women farmers in 2003 with the aim of creating a supportive network for sharing information and resources. The participating women farmers had goals that differed from their male counterparts and felt a lack of validity and support within an agricultural system that was largely male dominated. As BRWIA founding member, executive director, and goat farmer Carol Coulter recounted:

> *There was a group of women who came together, actually half of the group had husbands who didn't really want to do what the women wanted to do in farming, so our support system wasn't there, so we kind of found each other, and the other (members) didn't have partners and wanted to (farm), and men were really holding back information, they wouldn't share with us and we got really mad. So we organized and formed BRWIA…for us it was very much about that community of women, it was social and it was a way we could get some needs met that we couldn't find, we just weren't getting any help.*

The group would meet informally at members' farms to discuss practices they wanted to learn, organize guest speakers with expertise in the practice, and invite the community to join them. The group's members would also exchange agricultural problems, such as access to capital, resources, and markets, and collectively develop solutions. As Carol explained,

> *We were all struggling with something and we would usually get to the farm and put our heads together and try to figure out whatever issue we were dealing with or connect to some kind of resources.*

Carol identified the major difference between male and female farmers in terms of economic vs. more-than-economic goals:

> *Women approach farming in a much different manner, it's much more about family and community and for men it's much more about bottom line, how do we make money…I think that sums up a lot, we were not in it for the money. We were attracted to something we wanted to try to get started but it wasn't about, I mean if we made money great, but I think we were all in positions where there was enough income coming in from other sources where it wasn't the driving factor, we were just really interested in how to grow food and grow good food.*

BRWIA obtained 501 (c) 3 non-profit status in 2004 in order to advance their mission of supporting women farmers and civic agricultural aims. Since then, the group's membership has

shifted from primarily farmers to Appalachian State University (ASU) faculty and staff who are passionate about sustainable agriculture, community-based food systems, and supporting women farmers. Nancy Brown[4], BRWIA board member and ASU professor, discussed this shift:

> *Another interesting and important part of our history is that transition…from when it was all farmers to just one or two farmers…we really had an identity crisis during that time where we were trying to figure out who are we if we're not the actual farmers, are we serving the farmers, are we serving consumers, and so I remember about that time is when we decided to incorporate sustainability into the mission statement, so we decided at that point that we wanted that to be about who we were too.*

Their mission has also shifted a bit from serving women farmers and their families to supporting and encouraging women involved in agriculture at a variety of scales. As Carol explained:

> *I think we want to serve women who want to farm, but we also want to serve the broader population of women who are very interested in having a goat, having a garden, having a sheep or a cow, or you know whatever it might be.*

Nancy Brown elaborated on the importance of expanding the term 'farmers' as their target population to include women and others interested in incorporating sustainability and self-sufficiency into their lives through food and agriculture:

> *We're mostly serving these women farmers who want to make a living from it because we're trying to figure out how can we make it viable for these people, but I also see a sliding scale in that we're interested in everyone on the spectrum….People who are more interested in self-sufficiency are also part of that continuum.*

Carol expressed her observations that women taking more prominent positions in agriculture has influenced the ways in which men approach farming, perhaps also linked to a renewed interest in agriculture among younger people:

> *I think women are influencing the men, I think the men are changing at least in some of the new farms, and I don't know again maybe it's because now it's attracting a different kind of person like we're attracting, but it's really interesting to talk to…younger, new farmers, they are much more open, and the gender (dimension) doesn't feel so strong as it does when you talk to an old timer…There were just roles (back then), guys did this and women were in the kitchen and cooked and that's just the way it was.*

[4] A pseudonym has been used for this participant at her request.

BRWIA also centers their mission on educating consumers and the broader community about agro-food issues and where their food comes from with the goal of fostering a vibrant community to support civic farmers. As Sandra Lubarsky, BRWIA board member and director of the Sustainable Development Department at ASU, explained:

> *I think a big part of the group has also been the education piece, a broad education to the public in order to be able to support farmers, (ensuring) that you have an educated public, and so hence the Farm Tour.*

The High Country Farm Tour, an annual two-day tour of small-scale working farms[5] employing a range of sustainable practices[6] in the High Country, is BRWIA's flagship event. Participating farmers provide visitors with tours of their farms, products, and practices. While BRWIA does not limit participation to only women farmers, remaining open to include farms working toward civic agricultural aims, most farms that apply are women-owned or co-owned farms. Amy explained that:

> *We've never been really selective, it just happens that the people who apply are people who generally we're happy with, and by chance it's a majority of women. When I looked at it a couple of years ago, 19 out of the 22 farms were women-owned or co-owned farms, and so that just happens magically too.*

Program coordinator Suzanne Fleishman confirmed that despite never specifying that the Farm Tour is open only to women farmers, most farmers who are drawn to BRWIA's civic agricultural aims are female:

> *When you get back to the official mission of women and their families inherently, I think there are very few farms that we work with that are single men.*

The goals of the tour as outlined by BRWIA are to connect producers and consumers, to educate the public about sustainable agriculture and local food, and to provide farmers with

[5] 'Farm' includes traditional as well as non-traditional agricultural spaces such as community gardens, animal rehabilitation centers, incubator farm programs, and off-the-grid homesteads.
[6] Farmer-described practices included certified or non-certified organic, biodynamic, permaculture, mindful, ethical, natural, educational, no-kill or rehabilitative, and agro-ecological.

socio-economic opportunities (brwia.org). The board members and staff elaborated during the August 2014 meeting to discuss benefits including awareness, empowerment, relationships, enjoyment, beauty, preservation, appreciation, and the ability to visualize a food system – each important components of civic agriculture.

In June 2014, 20 farms in two countries, Ashe and Watauga (Figure 27), participated in the eighth annual BRWIA High Country Farm Tour (Figure 28). The farmers ranged in age from early 20s to mid-70s, and while most were female-male couples, participating farmers also included single women farmers (7) or female-female couples (1). All but two farms were first-generation and, reflecting demographics of the area[7], all farmers were white. Most participating farms sold their products – including vegetables, fruits, meat and dairy products – at local farmers' markets, CSA programs, restaurants, and cooperatives. The farms were 'open' to visitors from 2-6 p.m. on Saturday, June 28, and Sunday, June 29. Visitors transported themselves to the farms by car and were free to visit as many as they could over the two-day period, though they were advised to select three or four farms a day – descriptions and details of each farm and their offerings was provided to visitors along with their passes. Weekend passes cost $25 per carload, sold by BRWIA prior to the tour at Ashe and Watauga counties' farmers' market, local stores, and online. They could also be purchased for $30 from BRWIA volunteers during the tour at any of the farms, or they could purchase a one-farm pass for $10. Money raised from ticket proceeds each year covers BRWIA's cost of facilitating the tour – any additional proceeds support BRWIA programs.

[7] The 2010 US Census reported that 92% of Boone's population is white, while 3.5% of the population is black, 3.3% is Hispanic or Latino, 1.6% is Asian, and 0.2% is American Indian.

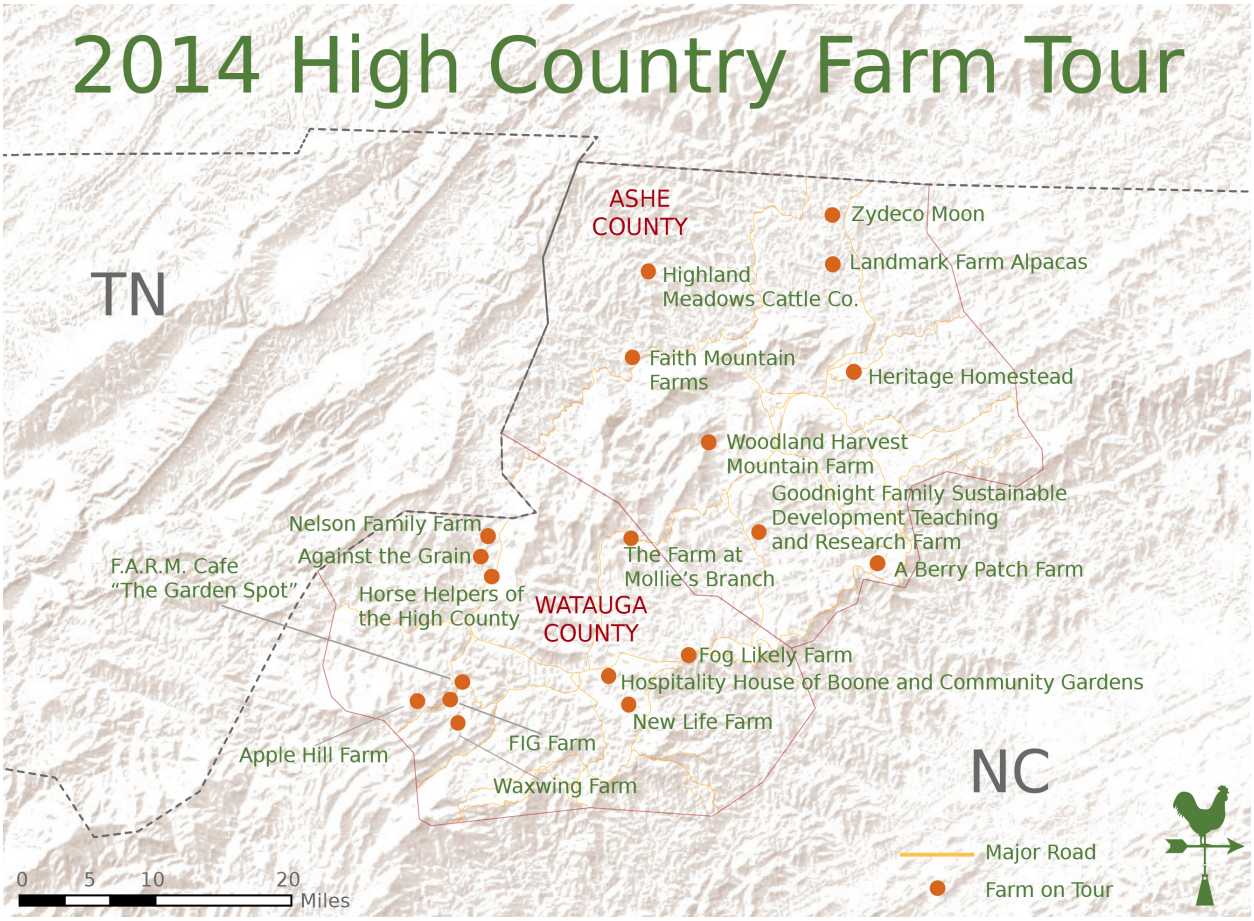

Figure 27: Location of 2014 High Country Farm Tour participating farms. *Map by Nicholas Perdue.*

Study Methodology

The data overviewed in the remainder of this paper was generated from a focus group with farmers participating in the 2014 High Country Farm Tour. Focus groups are defined as "a nonstructured group interview, a discussion really, on a given topic in a group of five to ten persons…The objective of working with a focus group is to generate hypotheses from the group interaction in an open, heuristic process" (Staveren, 1997, 131). Traditionally used in market-based research, focus groups can provide valuable insights for feminist researchers and serve as a PAR methodology, as they give voice to women's issues and ideas (Stavaren, 1997) and can empower women through networking (Pini, 2002). While women often engage politically through networks and communities (Delind & Ferguson, 1999), for women farmers such

Figure 28: 2014 BRWIA High Country Farm Tour poster.

networks can provide a "tremendous opportunity for creating and sustaining lasting cultural and economic change in agricultural communities" (Trauger et al., 2008, 438).

Following the June 2014 High Country Farm Tour, all 20 farmers were invited by email to attend a focus group to discuss their tour experiences and impacts. Participation in the focus group was incentivized by $40 per farm and a meal, both to compensate farmers for their valuable time and to encourage a casual social atmosphere. Seven farms, represented by seven female farmers and one male farmer, agreed to participate, and a mutually convenient time that did not interfere with the farmers' busy schedules was determined. The focus group was held on August 20, 2014, at the Watauga County Agricultural Conference Center in Boone and lasted approximately three hours. Participants were provided with a broad itinerary (Appendix C) that included dinner, introductions, reflections on the farm tour benefits/impacts, and a discussion of farm tour challenges/obstacles. I facilitated the focus group with the help of BRWIA's program coordinator, Suzanne Fleishman. Participants included Amy Nelson of Nelson Family Farm, Susan Owen of the F.A.R.M. Café Garden Spot, Holly Whitesides of Against the Grain Farm, Pauleen[8] and Wayne Berry of A Berry Patch Farm, Caroline Hampton of F.I.G. Farm, Kathleen Petermann of Waxwing Farm, and Carol Coulter of Heritage Homestead Goat Dairy (also executive director of BRWIA).

Beyond understanding the benefits and challenges associated with participation in the BRWIA High Country Farm Tour for farmers, focus groups were employed as a form of PAR aimed to create space for horizontal knowledge exchange and to strengthen farmer-to-farmer networks, crucial for empowering farmers as producers of knowledge (Hassanein & Kloppenburg, 1995) and of particular importance for women farmers (Trauger et al., 2008). The data generated from the focus group were analyzed thematically according to broad-topic and

[8] A pseudonym has been used for this participant at her request.

emergent-fine codes. Data presented here overview the major benefits and challenges associated with participation in the High Country Farm Tour for farmers. The focus group as a forum for networking and exchange is also discussed.

Findings

Farm Tour benefits/impacts

The first topic for discussion was benefits/impacts of participation in the Farm Tour. The themes most commonly touched on during this portion of the focus group were connections and relationships, and education and awareness. On the subject of connections and relationships, Amy Nelson shared her experiences forming friendships and establishing regular customers via the Farm Tour:

> *I've developed some really strong friendships from the Farm Tour, especially this one girl whose husband's in the service, and she's a single mom (with three kids), and she doesn't have a lot of extra money, but the girl buys more meat from me than anybody else, and you know our kids do stuff together… A lot of customers that are really good repeat customers started out with the Farm Tour.*

Pauleen similarly touched on themes of forming relationships and repeat customers:

> *The benefits are obviously getting to know other people who then come and recognize us at the farmers' market and call us and say, 'when are you going to have more honey in the big jugs,' or when are you going to have whatever it was that struck their fancy. That was definitely a benefit.*

Kathleen Petermann also discussed the experience of having people who had visited her farm on the Farm Tour return to her booth at the farmers' market, particularly drawn to her as a young emerging farmer:

> *Yeah definitely from the Farm Tour to the farmers market there were a lot of people who came up and were like, 'it was so cool to see your farm,' and they were really excited to hear about a first-year farmer, there were people that brought their kids that were not much younger than me who are interested in agriculture, and they were really excited to see someone who is just starting out with no background in it really.*

Holly Whitesides explained that while she and her husband prioritize community connections, they struggle to find the time and the resources to offer regular on-farm experiences or opportunities given the busy nature of farming during productive seasons. The once-a-year nature of the Farm Tour allows for that connection:

> *One of the great things about the Farm Tour I think for us is that people will ask you know, do you do on-farm sales, or do you have a farm stand, or do you give tours, and it's really awesome just to be able to say no because we're a working farm and we're really too busy for that, but you should come to the Farm Tour, and all these other farms are on the Farm Tour too, and we do it once a year and here's a postcard. So that's a real positive kind of way to still connect people, bring people in, but not always feel like you're trying to field folks, because you want to connect with the community and offer your farm but it's hard when you're a working farm, not just an educational farm or whatever. So that for us is a really big benefit.*

The farmers emphasized consumer reconnections as another primary benefit of the Farm Tour, recounting their experiences of witnessing agricultural education taking place among visitors who are largely disconnected from food origins and processes in their everyday lives. Susan Owen emphasized processes of sharing and learning as a primary benefit of the tour:

> *It raises awareness. It's amazing because people who don't have the same kind of brains that we do, who grow things, have no idea, and it's so cool to get people in your garden or in your farm, and you have those questions posed to you, and you're like oh yeah, right, you don't know that do you, ok well let me tell you this. I don't know, it's pretty cool, I love those visitors because then you get to talking and you see that little light go on. And they get it. It's kinda cool.*

Carol Coulter agreed, recalling her experiences of sharing how her goat dairy produces cheese and witnessing 'light bulbs going off':

> *It's amazing how disconnected people are from how food is made or grown or where it comes from, it just shows up in the grocery store and you just get it (group laughing). Just by the questions they ask, you know they want to know process, how do you make cheese, what is rennet, what is vegetable rennet, you know, they just ask a million questions, it's how do you do this how do you do that, why do you do it this way. So it's really fun to share information, and you can see like you know things connecting and light bulbs going off.*

Carol continued that reconnecting with food origins and production processes increases appreciation and enthusiasm among consumers:

> *We spent a lot of time talking about…all the different components, there's pasture management, goat management, sanitation management, and this is how you make cheese, and when you make gouda you do this and then you do this and then you do this and then you do this, and then you know two months later you have product to sell. And they're like, wow, (group laughter), that's a lot of work, and they're much more appreciative, people actually said, 'now we understand why your cheese is more expensive than grocery store cheese.'*

Wayne Berry added that the Farm Tour educates visitors about ways they might incorporate farming into their own life for socio-economic purposes:

> *The one thing for us the tour is a chance to try to educate people on how they can supplement their income and have a better quality of life.*

And Kathleen Petermann explained that the educational component of the Farm Tour raises awareness about uncommon produce that consumers might otherwise be hesitant to purchase at the farmers' market:

> *I'm always trying to find like creative ways to sell things at the market, and I walked everyone past this bed of Daikon Radishes that went to flower, which I let them do, and got people to eat radish flowers, and people getting super excited to eat radish flowers is awesome for me, it's really exciting, I mean they were really pumped about the radish flowers (everyone laughing), so just stuff like that was probably one of the biggest things (benefits), just showing people different stuff like that.*

Participating farmers also reflected on the Farm Tour's ability to renew their passion for what they do, as they get to see their farms through fresh eyes. As Amy Nelson explained:

> *I think it's nice to see it through new eyes because I get just (to the point) where it's just an everyday mundane routine, nothing new you know. And then people are so excited, so it's nice to get that.*

The appreciation expressed by visitors for the farmers' hard work and dedication also provided renewal for farmers. Carolina Hampton described people as being 'touched' by their experiences visiting small passionate farms:

I think people were touched by our farms, there's been people who stopped at the farmers' market who said…we went to your farm and we went to this other farm, a bigger more established farm, and I was more impressed by your farm because of what you're trying to do, just you by yourself without a tractor.

Rather than a chore or obligation, farmers expressed sincere enjoyment of the Farm Tour. As Susan Owen articulated:

I have to say I love doing it. Because everybody who's on the tour is having so much fun, everybody wants to know what you're doing, I mean you've got a captive audience, they already think you're awesome or they wouldn't even be there right, they already are excited.

Farmers happily recalled stories of memorable visitor experiences on their farm. Amy Nelson, for example, told a story of taking a 'hike' with a group of children to find her goats:

Our goats has disappeared up on the hill…I'd been doing a farm tour and thinking I don't want to walk up there, all of them had gone, they usually come barreling down at me, and I had all these kids and they all wanted see the goats and I said, 'do y'all wanna go for a hike in the woods?' 'YES!!!' (laughing) And they just took off, they thought that was great, it started raining, they were falling down and getting in the briars, they thought it was wonderful.

Carol similarly recalled a story of children interacting with her goats:

We had some really great kid interactions with the animals; we had a little guy who was just beside himself because he got to milk a goat. We had a bag of peanuts, the goats like unsalted peanuts, so we let them all feed them, and they were pretty funny trying to feed the billy because they would sort of get close enough, drop the peanut and then be like, 'where'd it go!' (laughing). So they were having fun, so it's kind of fun you know, interactions and asking lots of questions…the questions they ask are really fun.

While on-farm sales were considered an impact of the tour, the farmers prioritized these more-than-economic benefits and impacts of the Farm Tour over direct sales. Holly Whitesides explained that in solely economic terms, the Farm Tour would not be worth the effort:

If we're going to try to equate the hours put in to preparing for the Farm Tour and even just setting up and sitting there, it wouldn't come close to compensating, I mean, (on-farm sales during the tour were) a fraction of what we made that morning at market. And it was great, I mean it was still some cash but it wasn't, for the effort of getting stuff out of the freezer and setting up produce…it probably didn't really pay for it, but there are so many other benefits that it's not exactly like an equation.

Farm Tour challenges and solutions

After a short break during which farmers had a chance to have informal conversations amongst themselves, we shifted topics to discuss challenges related to participation in the Farm Tour. This portion of the focus group evolved into more of a brainstorming and sharing session, in which farmers raised particular issues and concerns and other farmers shared their own strategies in overcoming them, or helped brainstorm solutions collectively. Some prominent challenges discussed by farmers were ways to best structure on-farm tours, convey messages, and educate consumers. For example, some farms aimed to hold structured tours beginning every hour on the hour but faced challenges in doing so. The farmers discussed amongst themselves their experiences and brainstormed solutions:

> *Amy Nelson: Last year I did tours on the hour and people showed up on the hour, a few minutes before, it was like clockwork, everything was super organized, it was great except for a few handful of unruly kids…everything was great. This year people just came in and I started a tour and they'd come over, and it was complete chaos, and so I don't know if that can be remedied or if it was just a function of the people that were there at the time.*
>
> *Kathleen Petermann: Did you say that you were having them on the hour? I thought I was going to do tours on the hour and that didn't happen.*
>
> *Carol Coulter: We tried to do that and it never worked, so we have a little place where they can gather, and we have one of the volunteers do a little spiel about the farm and homestead, and then she actually brought radios which was like a godsend because our farm's kind of spread out, so he'd be like Carol a big group is here so I knew to hurry up … so that helped by having something else to distract them for awhile…some people just tagged along.*
>
> *Amy Nelson: We ended up having people get on the end and then be like ok y'all need the beginning and y'all need the end.*
>
> *Holly Whitesides: We had the same problem, and one of the things I was sort of brainstorming was like, oh wouldn't it be cool (if) one of my helpers could draw a little farm map, and that way if people come and they don't want to wait for the next tour they can just take a little self-guided tour and some people would almost prefer that because they just want to come through and breeze through quickly.*

The farmers also raised questions of how to best convey effective messages and provide agricultural education in small amounts of time. Amy Nelson, for example, raised the issue of how to explain why her chickens cost more than those at grocery stores.

> *Amy Nelson: I have a challenge…(about) having a way to educate visitors…my friend goes, how can you compete with EarthFare[9] selling their chickens for 99 cents a pound and you're selling yours for $4 a pound.*
>
> *Holly Whitesides: They're $5 at our farm.*
>
> *Amy Nelson: Yes I'm cheaper than Holly! (everyone laughing) That's something that takes almost a seminar, you can't just say in three sentences why your chickens are $4 or $5 a pound. (general agreement)*
>
> *Susan Owen: They are so happy, that's why you're paying so much because those are happy chickens.*
>
> *Amy Nelson: I think that's getting used a little too much, the happy chicken.*
>
> *Susan Owen: But it's true.*
>
> *Amy Nelson: But I mean I think people have heard that so much that now that's not really…*
>
> *Susan Owen: But they can see it.*
>
> *Amy Nelson: I emailed EarthFare…and asked where their chickens were processed and some technical questions, and nobody ever answered me. And they were boasting about their certified humane standards, so I went on the website and looked at certified humane space requirements and my friend's like they've got a video on there so I looked and I'm like hmm they don't have any video of the inside of the chicken house… Yeah it's like .7 square feet per chicken, I could raise 4,000! (laughing).*

On the same subject, farmers identified the issue of navigating visitors' varied expectations. Some wanted in-depth information, for example, while others aimed for a quick overview. As Carol Coulter explained:

> *And that is the other hard thing is because there's such a range of people, there are people who want to get in really great depth about things and then you're (also) trying to deal with the group and the people are asking questions about things, you know the rest*

[9] Earthfare is an organic food supermarket with stores in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina and Tennessee

of the group doesn't want to know about the chemistry of cheese making, they just want to sort of know in general how does it happen, and you're trying to deal with these people who keep asking you these questions and it's like here's my card, call me, I cant talk to you right now. (agreement, chatter)

Solutions to such issues were proposed, such as providing take-home material so that visitors could learn more after the tour and holding workshops on particular topics:

Suzanne: Maybe we can work with you all if the people are interested, next year…we could have extra info packets, like there's some great graphics that describe certifications and explain it, so when you do get those questions you might not have time to go in depth but you can be like, here.

Also, something Against the Grain did this year that I thought was interesting was they were the ones that held workshops everyday at I think it was 5 (o' clock) one day, did y'all end up doing this…

Holly: Saturday people came and Sunday people didn't.

Amy: What kind of workshops?

Holly: Well we had our biodynamic mentor there and he offered a little tour through the biodynamic lens and talked about that, I think six people came for that, but some people just happened to come at that time and we were like oh we're offering this too or you can just walk around the farm with me, and so some people did that, and then Sunday we had like a seeds saving kind of tour like a specific tour focused on like walking around and looking at seed crops, but nobody came to that one.

Susan: Oh that's a great idea.

Participating farmers also pointed to the issue of uneven amounts of visitors to their farms. While some farms were overwhelmed with large groups, other farms experienced a low turnout. Weather was also discussed as a recurring and unpredictable factor in determining turnout. Carol Coulter, who experienced an overwhelming turnout on Saturday and a more manageable number on Sunday, recalled:

Saturday we were like oh my god…we had run out of cheese so we stayed up that night making more cheese because we had no idea, like, is Sunday going to be a repeat or what, of course it wasn't, we were thankful, but so (there's) no sense of what to expect because we'd run out and we did so good Saturday it's like OK it's worth it to stay up and go ahead and do it but…it's a crapshoot.

Possible solutions were discussed, such as restructuring the tour in future years to have farms on the tour for one of the two days. Ashe County farms would be highlighted on Saturday, for example, while Watauga County farms would be open for visitors on Sunday. But farmers raised the issue of bad weather ruining a farm's chance of having many visitors, which would be intensified as a risk if farms were open only one day. Some farmers preferred the idea of hosting visitors for one day rather than two, giving them back some of their weekend to attend to their many other tasks.

The time of year was also debated. Some farmers were unhappy with a June tour, as it's early in the season and they didn't have as much produce to show as they might have in a tour later in the summer. Yet other farmers felt that they would be tired later in the summer after the rigorous growing season, and that consumer connections made later in the season would have less likelihood of translating into regular market customers. Factors in determining the dates of the Farm Tour were linked to targeting dates with high numbers of visitors to the area, farmer preference, avoiding holidays and other community events, and BRWIA capacity.

Finally, ideas for future tours were proposed and brainstormed among the participating farmers, such as making note of farms that are children-friendly and easily accessible for people with limited mobility. The idea of renting busses to guide tours, perhaps with Spanish translation services available, was also proposed, expanding the accessibility of the tour to include non-native English speakers as well as people without personal transportation. In sum, the conversation was primarily focused on how to extend the Farm Tour mission to reach a greater number of people in an effective way.

Discussion

The focus group revealed that the major impacts of the Farm Tour for participating farmers included connections and relationships, education and awareness, renewal and enjoyment. The farmers discussed forming friendships and establishing regular customers, the unique ability to connect to the community, and witnessing agricultural education. They recounted seeing 'light bulbs go off' as visitors to their farms made agro-food reconnections. The farmers also explained that the Farm Tour allowed them to view their farm and work through new eyes, renewing their passion and dedication to what they do. And farmers expressed sincere enjoyment of their experiences on the Farm Tour, recalling stories and sharing anecdotes.

While on-farm sales were considered a bonus, direct economic goals were not the primary concern of these farmers. Rather, the farmers explained that if the purpose of participating in the Farm Tour were strictly economic, the effort would not be worth their time. The more-than-economic benefits outlined here – connections and relationships, awareness and education, appreciation and enjoyment – justified their participation. Such elements are important tenets of civic agriculture, characterized by direct producer-consumer connections that build community and creates thriving local food systems. For these farmers, economic imperatives were "filtered through a set of cooperative and mutually supporting social relations" (Lyson, 2005, 94). They understood the processes of education, awareness, and appreciation cultivated among consumers during the Farm Tour to translate into an increased willingness and desire to support them socio-economically. Furthermore, the gendered nature of participation in both the Farm Tour and the focus group supports links between women farmers and strong civic agricultural goals.

Challenges related to participation in the Farm Tour identified by the farmers during the focus group included identifying effective ways to convey messages and educate consumers, meeting expectations of diverse groups of visitors, balancing between too many and too few farm visitors, and locating the ideal time during the growing season to hold the tour. Farmers raised issues and discussed them amongst themselves, sharing insights and brainstorming ideas. Some of the potential solutions proposed during the focus group included holding workshops on particular topics to target visitors especially interested in specialized topics, providing visitors with take-home information to enhance the educational process, restructuring the tour so that each farm would be 'open' for one day rather than two to ensure higher visitor turnout and reduce farmers' time and effort, and potentially shifting the Farm Tour to slightly later in the growing season when produce is more mature. Finally, farmers made suggestions to expand the tour's accessibility to more people, such as including bus tours and language translation services.

Most importantly, such opportunities for horizontal knowledge exchange are key to empowering community-based farmers and civic agriculture. Rather than top-down knowledge imposed upon farmers, farming that embodies civic agriculture "should be seen as a process of social learning" (Pretty, 2002, 156). Horizontal networks can help de-marginalize and support women farmers in particular, as more traditional agricultural programs often exclude women's emphasis on alternative production methods (Trauger et al., 2008) and because women farmers "tend to trust other women farmers, as they have often not been taken seriously by their male peers or by male-dominated forms of hierarchical information exchange" (Trauger et al., 2008, 438). Farmers, however, often do not have the time or the resources to devote to facilitating spaces for such relationships to emerge. While CAOs such as BRWIA can help significantly by hosting events such as workshops, mentor programs, and potluck meetings, research studies

themselves can further this as a PAR aim. A research/activist tradition originating in philosophical traditions, PAR has been adopted by feminist social scientists "as a way to work toward social change among traditionally marginalized groups, particularly communities of women" (Trauger et al., 2008, 435).

In this case, the focus group as PAR was able to further the impacts of the Farm Tour by bringing farmers together to discuss their experiences, exchange ideas, and develop solutions. Farmers also took advantage of the opportunity to catch up with friends and to introduce themselves to new farmers, renewing and strengthening the network of producers so crucial to civic agriculture (Lyson, 2004). While sharing a meal and during the break, farmers talked, laughed, exchanged stories, and filled each other in on the latest news at their farms. Conversations about things such as poultry processing led to collaborative plans to share equipment, while tales of new farmers' struggles were met with lessons learned from more experienced producers. And at the end of the evening, farmers exchanged contact information, which was also provided on the focus group itinerary (Appendix C).

Conclusion

As the numerous detrimental impacts of conventional agro-food systems are increasingly understood, it is imperative that agricultural alternatives incorporate a deeper sense of community (Lyson, 2004). Over the last century, as farms industrialized and grew larger and fewer, rural communities previously bound together through agricultural ties suffered from a shrinking middle class, deteriorating public services, lower family incomes, and low civic participation (Lobao & Stofferahn, 2007). Civic agriculture aims to reverse these impacts through community-based food systems, which depend on producer-consumer reconnections and the support of local farmers who prioritize ecological and social well being in addition to

economic success. Though women have historically been marginalized and minimized in their productive roles, studies link strong civic agricultural goals to female farmers (Trauger et al., 2009; Jarosz, 2011). Thus, the support of women farmers should be prioritized in fostering sustainable community-based food systems, largely dependent on CAOs, innovative strategies, inclusive farmer networks, and horizontal knowledge exchange.

This paper highlighted BRWIA as a CAO that strengthens community-based food systems through programs fostering producer-consumer reconnections, consumer education, and socio-economic support for women farmers and their families, focusing particularly on their annual High Country Farm Tour as an innovative and under-studied civic agricultural strategy. Focus groups with participating farmers revealed more-than-economic impacts including education and awareness, connections and relationships, and renewal, appreciation, and enjoyment, each crucial to goals of civic agriculture. The focus group methodology, following Trauger et al. (2008), was employed as PAR that brought women farmers together to network, to share experiences and best practices, and to develop innovative solutions and ideas for the future, improving Farm Tour outcomes and further strengthening the producer networks so crucial to a civic agriculture.

Additionally, feminist ethnographic fieldwork provided insights into the history, evolution, and mission of BRWIA as a gendered CAO, answering calls to better understand gender relations in the food system. As Allen and Sachs (2007) argued, "We need to know much more about who women food activists are, their motivations, and their visions for the food system" (16). Reflecting the marginalization of women in agriculture, BRWIA began as a small group of women farmers aiming to create a supportive network for sharing information and resources, spurred by the recognition of gendered approaches and a lack of recognition and

support from male farmers. Today, the CAO aims to empower women in agriculture and their families through strategies such as the High Country Farm Tour, which fosters producer-consumer reconnections, consumer awareness and education, and socio-economic support for farmers.

This paper concludes that innovative civic agricultural mechanisms such as the High Country Farm Tour hold "potential to nurture local economic development, maintain diversity and quality in products, and provide forums where producers and consumers can come together to solidify bonds of local identity and solidarity" (Lyson, 2004, 7). When such strategies highlight women farmers, this potential is particularly ripe. It is recommended that the model of community-based farm tours be adopted by more communities as an innovative civic agricultural strategy, and that CAOs, particularly those targeting women farmers, should be more actively understood and incorporated as the pivotal "underlying structure that supports civic agriculture" (Lyson, 2004, 63) in studies of food and agriculture. Both CAOs and their innovative strategies are of vital importance in rebuilding linkages between producers and consumers, by which "communities throughout the United States will establish a foundation for a more socially and environmentally integrated food system" (Lyson, 2004, 7).

CONCLUSION

Insofar as we are primarily consumers of the world…we limit and distort our knowledge of it, and thus our ability to care for it properly. But as we take up productive roles, become active participants in the construction and maintenance of the flows of life – as when we grow food, become intentional about parenting, celebrate communal contributions, and develop a sense of civic responsibility – the claims and benefits of place will become more richly felt and appreciated. This is not to say that we will all cease to be consumers, or that we will all suddenly become good. Rather, we will become responsible consumers who now more honestly appreciate the costs and requirements associated with living.

– Norman Wirzba, 2004

The thing I care most about? For evolution to bust through. For consciousness to rise. And kindness to shine.

– Matt Cooper, Lively Up Farm[1]

[1] 2014 High Country Farm Tour participating farm.

Place, community, care, gender, and agro-food systems are each crucial topics in human geography. Lawson (2007) deemed geography a 'caring discipline:' "Many of us are in geography because we want to study society, ecology, place and landscape in order to make a difference" (9). She continued that the values associated with care are ones that can be "readily mobilized in places with which we are most familiar" (6). Such thinking about care resonates with Yi Fu Tuan's position that experience is most readily felt on 'smaller' scales, and the agrarian assumption that "we are less likely to misuse or abuse the membership we see benefiting us directly" (Wirzba & Kingsolver, 2004, 8). But this has also led to a critique of care as being viable only for the local (Lawson, 2007). The question, one particularly relevant to geographers, is whether an ethics of care can "move beyond the interpersonal, the near and familiar, to care for distant others" (Lawson 2007, 3). Here an understanding of relations both near and far is poignant.

Lawson (2007) made the case that if we think of space and place as "actively and continually practiced in terms of both human-human and human-nonhuman relations" (3) then we might understand our choices as linking us to "the lives of others" (6). Understanding space and place in terms of social relations is associated strongly with Massey (1994), who maintained that "a sense of place can develop a consciousness of linkages and a positive integration of the global and local, building a 'global sense of the local, a global sense of place'" (156). Geographies of responsibility have been fused with an ethics of care through relational understandings, as McEwan and Goodman (2010) argue that Massey has most clearly explained:

> Massey outlines a politics of connectivity, based on the mutual constitution of distant places, through which we may feel a sense of responsibility for places to which we are not directly connected … Massey develops a relational understanding of ethics and responsibility that is able to bridge these different scales, arguing that the global should be approached through the local so that a sense of connectivity and responsibility across distance can be fostered (106).

The conventional agro-food system alters, disrupts, and destroys both social and natural landscapes from local to global scales, and the socio-spatial 'stretching' and 'distancing' between food production and consumption contributes significantly to the obscuring of these impacts, contributing to weakened understanding, awareness, responsibility, and care. Consumers at the supermarket do not have to think of the chemicals absorbed by ecosystems, the exploitation of laborers, the suffering of animals, or the fossil fuels of global transport embedded within their food selections as they fill their shopping carts. Yet this does not mean that relationships do not exist, but rather that they have become unhealthy and detrimental to all beings in the name of profit, masquerading as rationality and progress.

Restoring an understanding of relationships should be a major point of focus in alternative agriculture. Cox (2010) argues that alternative agro-food schemes allow "consumers to think about, and care for, non-human others and the natural environment as well as about unknown, and perhaps distant others" (118). Yet many alternative strategies are rooted in the same modern and neoliberal paradigms as conventional agriculture, inserting fragments of social or ecological responsibility here and there. Organic agriculture, for example, makes strides in decreasing the use of synthetic chemicals but does not necessarily speak to scale, labor, or connection to community and place. Fair trade products target decreasing producer exploitation, but a plethora of certifications, some meaningful and some not, and the distance between production and consumption make this a potentially confusing and 'weaker' option, offering the opportunity to 'care at a distance.' And even local agriculture has been embraced by corporations – giants such as Wal-Mart and Kroger now prominently incorporate local food sections, photographs of 'family farmers' proudly displayed throughout the produce section. While this alternative succeeds in moving food production and consumption spatially closer together, it

again does not touch on farm scale, agricultural practices, or treatment of labor and animals, and, defined in terms of location rather than place, it fails to re-embed agriculture into community and place.

I argue that civic agriculture, rooted in place, care, and community, is the strongest of the many agro-food alternatives, holding implications for human and more-than-human flourishing both near and far. In such an agriculture, producers connect to and value place and community as they are motivated by responsibilities from local to global scales. Consumers understand the implications of their food choices and re-develop relationships with food, agriculture, community, place, and the nonhuman world. A civic agriculture, then, has implications for rural communities, for food security and sovereignty, for socio-ecological sustainability, and for consumer awareness, dedication, and participation.

This dissertation aimed to deeply explore these potentials in civic agriculture, finding an entry point in examining an annual community-based farm tour – the BRWIA High Country Farm Tour – an emerging, innovative, and largely under-studied civic agricultural strategy aimed to reconnect producers and consumers, to foster agricultural education, and to support civic farmers. **Chapter 1** illustrated the prominent and central theme of place and community for small-scale sustainable farmers; producers' conceptions of place ranged from the home to the planet, conveying a relational sense of place that sets the stage for deep socio-ecological sustainability rooted in interconnection and care for near and distant others, both human and more-than-human. Linking these producers to consumers via agricultural and environmental education holds possibilities for creating and restoring relationships – between producers/production and consumers/consumption, between individuals and community, and between humans and more-than-humans.

Visitor surveys revealed a place-based educational process that resulted in awareness and understanding, relationships and connections, dedication and inspiration, intended behavioral changes and enhanced community engagement. Place attachments formed by visitors were both "place-located and bound into wider relational matrices" (Cloke & Jones, 2003, 212), tied not only to particular farming spaces and the local community, but also to human and more-than-human communities more broadly. This is a vital component of reflexive local food systems and of an extroverted or global sense of place rather than an exclusive or bound one, one that contributes to a global sense of place. Visitor experiences on the Farm Tour allowed them to place the role of agro-food systems within contexts that included and transcended their local communities. Such relationships contribute to place attachment and awareness of interconnection and interdependence simultaneously, disrupting assumptions and worldviews that contribute to place deterioration and strengthening place ties across scales. This chapter's findings indicated that place-based education via community-based farm tourism and environmental tourism more broadly should be further investigated and undertaken by communities across the country as a vibrant pathway toward sustainability.

Chapter 2 elaborated on the restoration of understandings of care and relationships through an ethic of care. Its findings suggest the potential of embodied emotional experiences in caring agricultural spaces to shift perceptions toward consciousness of relationships and interconnectedness. These encounters allowed for consumer (re)connections with farmers and food, with agricultural practices and life cycles, and with nature and nonhuman animals. Farm Tour visitors revealed in participant-driven photo elicitation (PDPE) interviews their experiences of awe and joy as they witnessed demonstrations of care and love for more-than-human beings. They expressed sincere admiration and appreciation for the hard work and dedication of farmers

as realities of agricultural processes were uncovered, indicating that awareness and relationships translated into deepened appreciation for food origins and a strengthened desire to support local food and farming. And they made clear that agricultural as well as ecological literacy occurred on the tour, as participants acquired information through all of the senses that informed their own practices or fostered understanding of the more-than-human world, deepening their dedication to those committed to its care and helping them become "responsible consumers who now more honestly appreciate the costs and requirements associated with living" (Wirzba & Kingsolver, 2004, 94).

This chapter also made clear the importance of agro-food studies that can access affective dimensions of experience in the pursuit of relational food systems. This paper employed PDPE interviews with Farm Tour visitors as a way to look deeply into experiential processes of reconnection, glimpsing care in process. Despite some limitations associated with this methodology, the findings of this study illustrate that PDPE is an effective way to access meaningful and emotional dimensions of experience, of great value to feminist agro-food researchers and others concerned with reconnections and care "for others, the environment, and the world as a whole" (Cox, 2011, 127).

In addition to examining the relational potential of civic agriculture, it was also the intention of this dissertation to specifically examine the strategy of community-based farm tours such as the BRWIA High Country Farm Tour. While chapters 1 and 2 both addressed this potential, **Chapter 3** made evident that the tour helped participating farmers advance their more-than-economic goals related to connections, relationships, education, and awareness while providing renewal and enjoyment, each crucial elements of a thriving civic agriculture. In the focus group, participating farmers discussed forming friendships and establishing regular

customers, the unique ability to connect to the community, and witnessing agricultural education. They recounted seeing 'light bulbs go off' as visitors to their farms made agro-food reconnections. The farmers also explained that the Farm Tour allowed them to view their farm and work through new eyes, renewing their passion and dedication to what they do. And farmers expressed sincere enjoyment of their experiences on the Farm Tour, recalling stories and sharing anecdotes.

Chapter 3 also served to illustrate the important role of women farmers in civic agriculture and the importance of their connection through networks and horizontal network exchange. Though women have historically been marginalized in their agrarian roles, studies link strong civic agricultural goals to female farmers (Trauger et al., 2009; Jarosz, 2011). Thus, the support of women farmers should be prioritized in fostering sustainable community-based food systems, largely dependent on CAOs, innovative strategies, inclusive farmer networks, and horizontal knowledge exchange. The focus group methodology, following Trauger et al. (2008), was employed as PAR that brought women farmers together to network, to share experiences and best practices, and to develop innovative solutions and ideas for the future, improving Farm Tour outcomes and further strengthening the producer networks so crucial to a civic agriculture. Finally, Chapter 3 allowed for glimpses into the motivations and role not only of civic farmers but of CAOs such as BRWIA. It is recommended that CAOs, particularly those targeting women farmers, should be more actively understood and incorporated as the pivotal "underlying structure that supports civic agriculture" (Lyson, 2004, 63) in studies of food and agriculture. Both CAOs and their innovative strategies are of vital importance in rebuilding linkages between producers and consumers, by which "communities throughout the United States will establish a foundation for a more socially and environmentally integrated food system" (Lyson, 2004, 7).

Each chapter finds community-based farm tours to be an effective and meaningful practice for consumers, providing a deepening of relationships – with farmers, with food and agriculture, with community and place, and with the more-than-human world. The findings overviewed here suggest that the experience holds real potential for deepened awareness, responsibility, dedication, and care, translating into dedicated support for civic farmers, enhanced agro-food and civic participation, and perhaps even altered consciousness necessary for a cultural shift toward real sustainability. Rather than understanding the Farm Tour as just another agritourism scheme, it is recommended that this innovative project be understood as a unique strategy for advancing civic agricultural goals of producer-consumer reconnection, consumer education, and socio-economic support for producers.

For dedicated farmers who wish to connect more deeply with their community but do not have the time, resources, or perhaps desire to incorporate ongoing on-farm experiences into their practices, this project offers a creative avenue for connection, allowing civic farmers to advance their more-than-economic goals. And unlike some agritourism projects critiqued for inauthenticity and the romanticization or sanitization of agriculture, surveys and interviews with visitors indicated that in fact the Farm Tour for some served to de-romanticize and de-sanitize farming. In discussing, witnessing, and even participating in the realities of farming, consumers gained rare insights into the hard work, dedication, and passion of farmers; the benefits of ecological and ethical agro-food practices for nature, animals, and humans alike, especially as contrasted with conventional agriculture; and the rationale behind the higher cost of local, sustainably produced food. Collectively, visitors were immersed, however briefly, in the plethora of relationships severed by the conventional agro-food system and, more broadly, by our culture of modernity.

Yet the High Country Farm Tour was not without challenges and limitations. A few visitors reported on the survey that at some farms they did not make direct contact with a farmer, and that while they enjoyed the places themselves, they did not learn more about the process involved due to limited communication. Some visitors also struggled with locating the farms, a particular problem due to limited cellular reception in the mountainous and rural High Country, and thus were not able to spend as much time on the farms as they had hoped. The most common visitor suggestion was to extend the hours and/or days of the Farm Tour, reflecting a perhaps lingering misunderstanding of the many other obligations and needs of the farmers, such as Saturday morning farmers' markets, daily tasks, and rest. Similarly, for a small number of visitors, experiencing the un-sanitized realities of farming did not translate to a deepened understanding of farming realities but rather to mild distaste. During a PDPE interview, for example, one visitor remarked on a surprising number of weeds in a greenhouse:

> *The weeds were terrible, and I asked about that, I said do you weed, I mean if you have a garden you've got to weed, and he said well we're just short-handed, so that didn't present a really great picture…It was a surprise because you know I thought this was supposed to be ideal…But they're obviously producing and I've never bought from them at the market, next time I'll look for them.*

In this case, witnessing farmers' struggles did not necessarily translate to deepened appreciation but rather unproductively challenged preconceived notions of 'ideal' farming. Nevertheless, the participant still indicated her plans to support this farm in the future. And finally, a few visitors indicated that they were disappointed by the relatively small selection of on-farm produce to purchase during the tour, which they linked to the tour dates 'too early' in the season.

This was one of the issues discussed among farmers at the focus group as well. Some farmers were unhappy with a June tour, as it was early in the growing season and they didn't have as much produce to show as they might have in a tour later in the summer. Yet other

farmers felt that they would be tired in the later summer months after the rigorous growing season, and that consumer connections made later in the season would have less likelihood of translating into regular market customers. Factors in determining the dates of the Farm Tour were linked to targeting times with high numbers of visitors to the area, farmer preference, avoiding holidays and other community events, and BRWIA capacity. Other challenges related to participation in the Farm Tour identified by the farmers during the focus group included identifying effective ways to convey messages and educate consumers, meeting expectations of diverse groups of visitors, and balancing between too many and too few farm visitors. Some of the potential solutions proposed during the focus group included holding workshops on particular topics to target visitors especially interested in specialized topics, providing visitors with take-home information to enhance the educational process, restructuring the tour so that each farm would be 'open' for one day rather than two to ensure higher visitor turnout and reduce farmers' time and effort, and potentially shifting the Farm Tour to slightly later in the growing season when produce is more mature. Farmers also made suggestions to expand the tour's accessibility to more people, such as including bus tours and language translation services.

Furthermore, the study itself was not without limitations. While the multiple methodologies employed were able to successfully uncover and explore consumer motivations, experiences, and impacts, it is unclear whether these perceived impacts, articulated in the months immediately following the tour, did in fact translate into more tangible long-term outcomes. In order to evaluate whether such experiences do indeed result in altered consumer behaviors, further longitudinal studies are required. Similarly, the emphasis on horizontal knowledge exchange and networks among farmers could benefit from future longitudinal studies assessing the impacts of these networks and the spaces and strategies that help foster them. Other avenues

for future research might include a deeper examination of differences among farmers' experiences based on long-term vs. short-term connections to their place and community.

Collectively, this dissertation makes significant theoretical and methodological contributions to agro-food geographies and the discipline of geography more broadly. As the far-reaching detrimental implications of conventional agriculture are increasingly understood and the prevalence of alternative agro-food systems grows, studies illuminating the potential – both realized and not-yet-realized – of spaces of producer-consumer and agro-food reconnection are of crucial importance. This work answers pressing calls for more studies on cultural, experiential, and emotional aspects of agro-food reconnection (e.g. DeLind, 2006; Kneafsey et al., 2008; Sumner et al., 2010) and proposes the innovative strategy of community-based farm tours, which has thus far received little attention in academic studies. Substantially building upon Spurlock's (2009) first-hand observations of the phenomenon, the study employs innovative methodologies such as PDPE and focus groups as PAR to lend important insights into this emerging civic agricultural mechanism, providing a model for other agro-food researchers aiming to engage emotion and experience and to advance social change. Beyond the realm of food and agriculture, this dissertation makes important strides in examining the human-nature relationship underlying the discipline of geography, with implications ranging from land use to global sustainability. Engaging multi-scalar relations among humans and nature, humans and non-human animals, individuals and community, people and place, the work both theoretically and practically adds important contributions to relational and caring geographies.

This dissertation does not advocate for a return to a romanticized and problematic agrarian past, nor does it assume that an understanding of relations through food and agriculture will immediately and magically restore connections. As Massey (2004) put it,

> everything is related to everything else, and recognizing that – so the scenario occasionally runs – will lead to a world which is immediately more co-operative and benign. This is not what is meant here. Recognizing interrelatedness does not mean that we emerge, having seen the light of our interrelatedness, on to a happy sunlit plain where all relationships are positive. The point is not this. Rather it is that recognizing our interrelatedness enables us to examine our interrelatedness (289).

With this agrarians would agree. Berry (2012) explains that a commitment to an agrarian vision is "not a conclusion but a beginning of thought" (19), and Wirzba (2004) argues that agrarianism has thus far only been attempted:

> Agrarianism is this compelling and coherent alternative to the modern industrial/technological/economic paradigm. It is not a throwback to a never-realized pastoral arcadia, nor is it a caricatured, Luddite-inspired refusal to face the future. It is, rather, a deliberate and intentional way of living and thinking that takes seriously the failures and successes of the past as they have been realized in our engagement with the earth and with each other. Authentic agrarianism, which should not be confused with farming per se…represents the sustained attempt to live faithfully and responsibly in a world of limits and possibilities…Its full realization still awaits us (Wirzba, 2004, 4-5).

This not-yet-realized, truly progressive civic agriculture will be rooted in relations – between producers and consumers, production and consumption, people and place, humans and humans, and human and more-than-humans. Producer-consumer reconnection, consumer awareness and participation, and socio-economic support of civic farmers dedicated to socio-ecological sustainability across scales – especially female farmers – are each crucial elements in advancing agro-food systems rooted in connection, care, and an inclusive, open sense of place. This study of the 2014 BRWIA High Country Farm Tour made evident the potential for these dimensions within civic agriculture and supported community-based farm tours as an innovative avenue in moving toward a relational agro-food system.

Though this study focuses particularly on agro-food systems, it is the hope that this examination can be perceived and understood as a microcosm for what is happening in our world. The very many devastating social and ecological crises occurring around the world are

rooted in deep disconnection, divisions between things that are in fact related, and the resulting lack of awareness, responsibility, and care. Scholars such as McMichael (2000) and others have argued for the material and symbolic power of food to represent the often intangible and abstract flows and impacts of our larger global political economy. Not only can the study and practice of agro-food systems serve to illustrate and understand globalization, homogenization, unsustainability, and injustice, it can also serve to restore relationships and foster awareness, care, community, and a relational sense of place that allow for the flourishing of human and more-than-human worlds. As Plumwood (2002) posited, a new ecological culture

> involves a systematic resolution of the nature/culture and reason/nature dualisms that split mind from body, reason from emotion, across their many domains of cultural influence. The ecological crisis requires from us a new kind of culture because a major factor in its development has been the rationalist culture and the associated human/nature dualism of the west (4).

I have hope.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

FULL RESEARCH DESIGN

From May through September 2014, I employed a feminist ethnographic and participant action research (PAR) methodology in the High Country, collaborating with BRWIA as they prepared for, implemented, and evaluated the eighth annual High Country Farm Tour. Prior to beginning my fieldwork, I had attended and volunteered at the 2013 High Country Farm Tour in order to conduct preliminary research, after which I approached BRWIA about my desire to conduct my dissertation research on the Farm Tour while also helping to meet and advance organizational needs and interests. During a fall 2013 board meeting, BRWIA voted to allow me to collaborate with them during the following year's tour.

Prior to the 2014 tour, I attended BRWIA staff and board meetings, collaborated with the organization to market the tour, sold weekend passes at three area farmers' markets[1], and conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the 20 participating farmers. During the tour, held from 2-6 p.m. on June 28 and 29, I volunteered at one of the participating farms[2] on the first day and attended the tour as a visitor the second day, conducting participant observation and experiencing the tour firsthand. After the tour, I distributed surveys to both visitors and farmers to gain insights on their motivations, experiences, and impacts, and I conducted participant driven photo elicitation (PDPE) interviews with 14 tour visitors. I also recruited participating farmers to participate in a focus group to delve more deeply into benefits/impacts and challenges related to participation in the tour. The focus group, held in August with eight farmers from seven of the participating farms, also functioned as PAR aimed to bring women farmers together for horizontal information exchange and networking.

[1] Watauga County Farmers' Market, Ashe County Farmers' Market, and the Blowing Rock Farmers' Market
[2] I served as a BRWIA volunteer at Fog Likely Farm in Boone, NC

Each of these research methodologies served both to inform my research and to enhance BRWIA's capacity and further their mission. Activities such as attending BRWIA meetings and marketing the tour allowed me to be more fully immersed into the workings of BRWIA, deepening my understanding of the organization and the tour. Selling Farm Tour tickets at area markets allowed me to interact with consumers, to experience the High Country's civic agricultural spaces, and to recruit participants for my PDPE project. Interviewing all 20 farmers served my research purposes of understanding producers' histories, philosophies, practices, and motivations for participation in the Farm Tour, while the data I gathered also informed blog posts that I published on the BRWIA High Country Farm Tour Blog (http://farmtour.brwia.org/blog/category/2014-featured-farms), used by BRWIA to market the tour and provide summaries and snapshots of each participating farm. The farmer and visitor surveys were developed in collaboration with BRWIA, intended to fulfill both BRWIA's and my data collection needs. Survey data were compiled into reports and delivered to BRWIA. The focus group, jointly facilitated by the BRWIA program coordinator and myself, served both to address my research goals and to inform BRWIA's future tour planning.

Finally, I spent the duration of my data collection period living and working at Lily Patch Farm, owned by one of the Farm Tour farmers, Susan Owen. I worked for approximately 10 hours each week in Susan's greenhouses in exchange for a reduced housing cost, allowing myself to become an active member of the local farming community during my fieldwork. The culmination of living and working on a farm, engaging personally and actively in the local agro-food system, visiting each of the participating farms for interviews, and collaborating with BRWIA resulted in a solid

feminist ethnographic foundation upon which to base my research. My observations and experiences, both objective and subjective, were recorded in field notes and an ongoing research journal.

Farmer Interviews

In-depth, semi-structured on-farm interviews were conducted with all 20 producers prior to the tour in May and June to compile farm profiles and to understand their histories, philosophies, practices, and motivations for participation in the tour. Interviews were voluntary and lasted between 30 minutes and four hours. While the interviews often veered in various directions based on the nature of conversations, pre-determined questions asked to all producers included those surrounding their farm histories, philosophies and broad farming motivations, agricultural practices, connection to the High Country, outlets for their products (farmers' markets, farm stands, CSAs, local restaurants, etc.), and motivations for participating in the tour. Data generated from these interviews were analyzed thematically according to broad-topic and emergent-fine codes. The data were used both for the purposes of this research and to inform farm-highlighting posts on the BRWIA High Country Farm Tour Blog.

Farmer Survey

A follow-up survey was also distributed to farmers via email the week after the tour, aimed to more broadly assess their Farm Tour motivations and goals as well as to understand individual experiences and perceived impacts of the tour, along with questions aimed to collect specific data desired by BRWIA to improve future tours. Surveys were distributed to all 20 farms, incentivized with a $50 Visa cash card, and 16 surveys were returned (80% response rate). Farmers were asked to respond to multiple

choice, five-point Likert scale, mark-all-that-apply, and open-space questions. Survey data were analyzed with descriptive statistics, and open-ended data were analyzed qualitatively using broad and emergent fine codes.

Visitor Survey

Visitors also received a follow-up survey via email the week after the tour, aimed to broadly understand their motivations and impacts, along with specific information desired by BRWIA needed to improve future tours. Of the 448 visitors who attended the 2014 High Country Farm Tour, contact information was collected and recorded from 163 visitors; at least one person from each carload was asked to provide this information, and others in the group were given the option as well. Of these 163 visitors, 121 expressed willingness to complete a follow-up survey delivered by email. Of these 121 surveys distributed, 67 responses were returned, indicating a 55% response rate. Visitors were asked to respond to multiple choice, four-point Likert scale, and open-space questions pertaining to their motivations for participation, on-farm experiences, and impacts of the tour, along with questions aimed to collect specific data desired by BRWIA to improve future tours. The survey was incentivized with the chance to win one of four $50 Visa cash cards or one of four High Country Local First Rewards Cards[3]. Visitor survey data were analyzed with descriptive statistics, and open-ended data were analyzed qualitatively using broad and emergent fine codes.

[3] High Country Local First is a non-profit organization that aims to strengthen the local economy by supporting locally owned, independent businesses and farmers through education, promotion, and networking. High Country Local First Rewards Cards can be purchased to receive discounts at local businesses in the High Country.

Visitor PDPE Interviews

In the weeks following the 2014 tour, participant-driven photo elicitation (PDPE) interviews were also conducted with 14 tour visitors. Participants had been recruited prior to the tour; when individuals purchased tickets at farmers' markets, they were offered the opportunity to participate in the PDPE project, incentivized with $20 credit at a local farmers' market, or, if they were not from the area, a $20 Visa gift card, in addition to a set of their photos to keep[4]. Visitors purchasing tickets online were also provided with an option to express interest in the research study, in which case they were contacted by phone or email. The purpose of the study was explained as an attempt to better understand visitor experiences on the tour, and participants were asked simply to use a provided disposable camera to take photos of anything they found meaningful on the tour, encouraged to use all or most of the 27 exposures on the cameras, and to return the camera to a BRWIA volunteer when they left their last farm of the tour. They would then be contacted to arrange a follow-up interview the following week.

Twenty individuals agreed to participate in the project, each provided with a disposable camera and simple instructions (Appendix B). Each camera was marked with a number associated with the corresponding participant's name and contact information. Of the 20 cameras that were distributed, 16 were returned after the tour, of which 14 PDPE interviews were successfully conducted. While participation in the project was offered to anyone purchasing a Farm Tour pass, 13 of the 14 participants were female,

[4] While the author recruited most visitors, other BRWIA volunteers were also informed of the project and given information to help them recruit participants at other markets. They were provided with cameras and project instructions should individuals purchasing tour tickets express interest.

and all were white, reflecting demographic data gathered in the follow-up visitor survey[5]. They ranged in age from 22 to 73 with a median age of 44.5. Half of the participants (7) lived in the High Country, one lived elsewhere in North Carolina, and six were Florida residents, of which all but one had vacation homes in the area[6]. Participants were at various stages of dedication to local food and sustainable agriculture – some were just beginning to become curious, some had home gardens, and most visited area farmers' markets with varying degrees of regularity. One had worked on a farm herself, and another participated in CSA.

Photos were developed at a local photo center, both in print and digitally. Digital photos were uploaded onto a password-protected Shutterfly site, each set of photos associated with the participant's first name and last initial. Participants were then contacted to arrange interviews, which could be conducted either in person or on the phone, thus not limiting the study to local participants. If the interview was conducted in person, the participants were given a choice of using print or digital photos to guide the interview. If the interview was conducted on the phone, the Shutterfly site was used to structure the interview, using assigned photo numbers to associate photos with the interview content. Participants were then provided with their $20 incentive and a set of photos, if they desired, either in person or by mail. In-person interviews were conducted at a location of the participant's choosing, either their home or a local restaurant or coffee shop.

[5] Nearly three-quarters (74%) of survey respondents were female, reflecting a predominantly female-driven participation pool, and nearly all respondents were white (88%), reflecting the regional demographics.
[6] Since the late 1980s retiree and second-home ownership in the North Carolina High Country has become increasingly prevalent

Interviews were conducted as casual conversations in which the research participant largely guided discussion by talking about their photos. Participants set the tone and the pace of the interviews, which lasted between 30 minutes and more than two hours. Before reviewing the photos, participants were asked to describe where they were from, their connection to the area, their prior relationship with local food and sustainable agriculture, their motivations for attending the Farm Tour, and their reasons for choosing the particular farms they chose to visit. After reviewing and discussing the photos together, I asked each participant to reflect on the overall impact of the tour. The data generated from these interviews were analyzed thematically according to broad-topic and emergent-fine codes.

Farmer Focus Group

Following the June 2014 High Country Farm Tour, all 20 farmers were invited by email to attend a focus group to discuss their tour experiences and impacts. Participation in the focus group was incentivized by $40 per farm and a meal, both to compensate farmers for their valuable time and to encourage a casual social atmosphere. Seven farms, represented by seven female farmers and one male farmer, agreed to participate, and a mutually convenient time that did not interfere with the farmers' busy schedules was determined. The focus group was held at on August 20, 2014, at the Watauga County Agricultural Conference Center in Boone and lasted approximately three hours. Participants were provided with a broad itinerary (Appendix C) that included dinner, introductions, reflections on the farm tour benefits/impacts, and a discussion of farm tour challenges/obstacles. I facilitated the focus group with the help of BRWIA's program coordinator, Suzanne Fleishman. Participants included Amy Nelson of Nelson Family

Farm, Susan Owen of the F.A.R.M. Café Garden Spot, Holly Whitesides of Against the Grain Farm, Jeanne and Wayne Berry of A Berry Patch Farm, Caroline Hampton of F.I.G. Farm, Kathleen Petermann of Waxwing Farm, and Carol Coulter of Heritage Homestead Goat Dairy (also executive director of BRWIA).

Beyond understanding the benefits and challenges associated with participation in the BRWIA High Country Farm Tour for farmers, focus groups were employed as a form of PAR aimed to create space for horizontal knowledge exchange and to strengthen farmer-to-farmer networks, crucial for empowering farmers as producers of knowledge and of particular importance for women farmers. The data generated from the focus group were analyzed thematically according to broad-topic and emergent-fine codes.

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT DRIVEN PHOTO ELICITATION PROJECT: INSTRUCTIONS FOR RESEARCH SUBJECTS

BRWIA High Country Farm Tour Photography Project

Thank you very much for your participation in this project! My name is Laura Johnson and this is a part of a larger research project on local food, sustainable agriculture, and farm tours as part of my doctoral dissertation at Michigan State University. The instructions are simple – **use this camera to take pictures of things on the tour that you think are meaningful.** I will develop the photos and share them with you either via the Internet (digital form) or at an in-person meeting (developed photos). We will have a conversation (by phone, Skype or in person) about the photos you took and your experiences on the tour. Your pictures will not be evaluated in any way, but they and our conversation will enable me to gain a greater understanding of how visitors experience the farm tour. As a thank you, *you'll receive a $20 gift card to the farmers' market in addition to your set of photos.* Here are the directions in a little more detail:

1. **Use the disposable camera in this bag to take photos during the High Country Farm Tour.** You don't have to use all of the film, but try to take as many as you can, spreading them out so that you don't use them up all at once. **You can take photos of anything you'd like that you find meaningful.**

2. When you are done at your last stop on the farm tour, **leave the camera with the BRWIA Farm Tour volunteer.**

3. **I will pick up the camera, develop the photos, and arrange a convenient time to have a phone or in-person meeting – the choice is yours.** If we meet by phone I will share the photos with you in digital form, whereas if our meeting is in person I will provide you with a hard-copy set of your photos to keep. At the time of our meeting I will also provide you with a $20 gift card to the farmers' market (again, either by email or in-person) to thank you for your time. We will then go through the photos, discussing the things you took pictures of and why. This will be a casual, open-ended conversation!

4. If you have any questions or concerns at any point, please contact me at **704-519-7034** or **john3418@msu.edu.** Thank you!

Participant name: _____

Camera number: _____

Participant email: _____

Participant phone number: _____

Participant address/city:

_____

Gift card: Ashe County Market _____ Watauga Market _____ Visa card (out-of-town)

_____

Date/location purchased

_____

Notes

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX C

FARMER FOCUS GROUP ITINERARY

BRWIA High Country Farm Tour: Farmer Focus Group

Wednesday, Aug. 20 @ 6 p.m.
Agriculture Conference Center, Boone, NC
Facilitated by Laura Johnson and Suzanne Fleishman
Dinner provided by Stick Boy Kitchen

Thank you so much for your participation in this Farmer Focus Group, aimed to better understand your experiences and impacts of being on the High Country Farm Tour. Your feedback will help BRWIA improve the tour in future years and will contribute to a doctoral dissertation on agro-food reconnections.

Itinerary

- 6 pm – Arrive, help yourself to dinner
- 6:15 pm – Introductions
    - Laura and Suzanne welcome
    - Tell us: Your name, your farm, why you participated in the Farm Tour and how many years you've been on the tour
    - Notes:

      _____
      _____
      _____
- 6:30 – Farm Tour Benefits/Impacts
    - Suggested (but not required) topics drawn from the survey might include connections, new customers, relationships, networking, sales, awareness, exposure, appreciation/support, sharing stories, education…others?
        - Anecdotes to illustrate?
    - Notes:

      _____
      _____
      _____
      _____
      _____
      _____

      Break

- 7:15 – Farm Tour Challenges/Obstacles
    - Whether BRWIA can do anything about them or not!
    - From specific (sanitization, animals) to general (preparation, time commitment, date/time, volunteers, # of people, translating message, etc.)
        - Anecdotes to illustrate?
    - Notes:

      _____
      _____

_____
_____
_____
_____

Break

- 8:00 – Solutions and Opportunities!
  - How can we address some of these issues?
  - Notes:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Thank you!!!!

Meet someone new and want to stay in touch? Realize someone is knowledgeable about a practice you're hoping to learn or improve? Follow up!

- Attendees
  - Holly Whitesides, Against the Grain, atgfarm@gmail.com
  - Caroline Hampton, FIG Farm/Octopus Garden, octopusgardennc@gmail.com
  - Kathleen Petermann, Waxwing Farm, waxwingfarmnc@gmail.com
  - Jeanne and Wayne Berry, A Berry Patch Farm, muvboots@skybest.com
  - Susan Owen, The FARM Café Garden Spot, sparklinganvil@gmail.com
  - Carol Coulter, Heritage Homestead, coultercreek@skybest.com
  - Amy Nelson, Nelson Family Farm, amynnelson66@gmail.com
  - Suzanne Fleishmann, Suzanne@brwia.org
  - Laura Johnson, lbjohnso@gmail.com

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