

WELLBEING AND NATURE-CONNECTEDNESS FOR CUSTOMERS AT MID-
MICHIGAN'S FARMER'S MARKETS

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ABSTRACT

Farmer's markets provide myriad benefits, including access to fresh produce, community building, opportunities for emotional exchange, and knowledge sharing (Alia et al., 2014; Joseph & Seguin, 2023; Warsaw et al., 2021). They can also provide an accessible entrance to the natural world by providing opportunities to interact with seasonal produce, land workers, and an even plant and animal life (Dowler et al., 2009; Morales, 2011). Moreover, the experience of being outdoors and shopping in a more leisurely manner can contribute to eudemonia and improved psychological health for some consumers (Joseph & Seguin, 2023; Russomanno & Jabson Tree, 2021). Independently, these outcomes are all worthwhile contributions to human health and wellbeing. But recent literature suggests that farmer's markets might also contribute to a more holistic kind wellbeing, which honors the mutual flourishing between humans and the natural world. Tied to nature connectedness and rooted in the innate human desire to connect with nonhuman nature (Capizzi & Kempton, 2023; Kellert & Wilson, 1994; Wilson, 1983), this social-ecological approach to wellbeing is a foundation of sustainability attitudes and action. But little empirical work has explored the intersection of wellbeing and nature-connectedness at farmer's markets.

This project investigates the impact of the farmers market experience related to nature-connectedness and eudemonia- which describes the ways humans flourish (Jenkins et al., 2022) at three farmers markets in the greater Lansing area: The Allen Farmer's Market, Abbott Park Farmer's Market, and Meridian Market. Using interviews and observations, this study investigates: (1) the impact of the market experience on customer connections to the food system, nature, and/ or the community; (2) customer perceptions about the relationship between their market attendance and personal wellbeing; (3) the intersection between nature-connectedness and wellbeing at the farmer's markets. This project contributes to scholarly dialogue about nature-connectedness and well-being related to farmer's market attendance.

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INTRODUCTION

Research demonstrates that farmer's markets can impact customer wellbeing across physical, social, and emotional dimensions (Hammon & Goralnik, 2024; Joseph & Seguin, 2023; Turner & Hope, 2014; Warsaw et al., 2021). Farmer's markets support physical wellbeing by connecting customers to local produce and increasing the intake of fresh fruits and vegetables (Hammon & Goralnik, 2024). Studies show that farmer's markets also contribute to increased community connections, which support emotional wellbeing (Berto & Barbiero, 2017; Dowler et al., 2009; Leavell et al., 2019; Morales, 2011). Running into friends or forging new connections increases feelings of community embeddedness (Joseph & Seguin, 2023), heightening feelings of joy and safety (Leavell et al., 2019). In this way, farmer's markets contribute to eudemonic wellbeing (EWB), which describes how humans experience health while leading meaningful lives (i.e., flourishing) (Jenkins et al., 2022). Recent research ties farmer's markets to additional EWB outcomes like personal growth, reflection, and flourishing by granting customers opportunities to socialize and experience the present moment (Aktary et al., 2020).

Beyond impacts on customer wellbeing, farmer's markets can also provide an accessible entry to nature experience through the outdoor setting, seasonal schedule, and in some cases, encounters with suburban wildlife (Dowler et al., 2009; Turner & Hope, 2014). Because research suggests humans have an innate passion for life-like sounds and visuals (Salingaros, 2019), Leavell et al. (2019) explain that a customer's "soft fascinations with nature" are enacted at the farmer's market. Engaging with nature-like visuals and sounds can create a pathway to increased nature connectedness (also referred to as nature relatedness in the literature), which describes the level of closeness one feels to the natural world (Capizzi & Kempton, 2023; Richardson, 2023). Research has made concrete links between nature-connectedness and eudemonic wellbeing (Capizzi & Kempton, 2023; Jenkins et al., 2022; Leavell et al., 2019).

These findings are essential in light of recent studies that show the disconnect that has formed between people and the natural world (Capizzi & Kempton, 2023; Richardson, 2023), and in particular, the impacts of modern food processing, which leads customers to prioritize convenience at the expense of a connection with food as a product of the land, i.e., nature-relatedness (Richardson, 2023). Some scholars argue this is reflected through adopted values that treat food as an object, not a living entity deserving of care (Delind, 2006; Richardson, 2023). Among other cultural shifts, the degraded relationship between humans and the natural world has

resulted in decreased wellbeing and misguided worldviews that fail to acknowledge the interconnected system in which humans are just one part (Dowler et al., 2009; Howell et al., 2011; Richardson, 2023). Local food systems, like farmer's markets, may represent a pathway towards closing such divides (Richardson, 2023).

Nature experiences occur in many contexts (Richardson, 2023; Salingaros, 2019), and the literature details numerous ways people encounter nature, deepen nature relationships, and experience eudemonia (Capizzi & Kempton, 2023; Hartig et al., 2014). Recent research on nature relationships suggests simply being outdoors in natural areas can positively impact perceived well-being and care for the natural world, though little work has focused on how farmer's markets may serve this purpose (Capizzi & Kempton, 2023; Mackay & Schmitt, 2019; Salingaros, 2019). Community spaces that function as accessible entrance points to nature experience – like farmer's markets – can positively impact human and non-human relationships (Richardson, 2023), even for customers who might not seek out embedded nature experiences, e.g., natural areas, outdoor recreation, etc. Reexamining food's role in nature-connectedness through farmer's market experiences provides an opportunity to restore relationships with the natural world for broad audiences and cultivate awareness about the interwoven dynamic between humans and natural systems.

Farmer's markets, as outdoor and social events organized around the seasons, can provide customers with opportunities to slow down and take notice of their surroundings. Past scholarship suggests a link between slowing down and mindfulness experiences that can expand ethics of care to include the non-human world (i.e., soil, land, plants, and animals) (Dowler et al., 2009). Attuning to the natural world in this way can foster a sense of individual wellbeing by encouraging pro-social behavior and empathy while becoming a gateway to sustainability mindsets (Keltner, 2023; Smith et al., 2013). Therefore, when threaded together, these outcomes support holistic wellbeing where humans and nature are recognized as one living system (Dowler et al., 2009; Joseph & Seguin, 2023).

While the literature supports the capacity of farmer's markets to contribute to sustainable food systems that enhance both environmental and human health (Joseph & Seguin, 2023), these outcomes are often presented as separate rather than interconnected. The potential of farmer's markets to foster holistic wellbeing—one that honors and supports the mutual flourishing of humans and the natural world—remains understudied. Recognizing the link between human

health and environmental health is vital (Keltner, 2023). When viewed separately, it can foster a dualistic perspective that divides nature from people (Matson & Clark, 2016). This becomes problematic as human health and environmental health are intertwined and depend on one another for lasting wellbeing (Matson & Clark, 2016; Richardson, 2023). This project examines the customer experience at three farmers markets in the greater Lansing area - Allen Farmer's Market, Abbott Park Farmer's Market, and Meridian Market - to investigate impacts related to wellbeing, nature connectedness, and the intersection between the two.

Research Questions

RQ1: In what ways do the farmer's markets function as sites of connection-building to the community, the natural world, or the food system for consumers?

RQ2: In what ways do the farmer's markets support customers' perceived wellbeing?

RQ3: In what ways are wellbeing and nature connectedness connected in the customer experience at the farmer's market?

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Wellbeing

Definitions of wellbeing are dynamic, evolving, and culturally embedded (McGregor, 2014; Smith et al., 2013; Wiseman & Brasher, 2008). Western descriptions of wellbeing characterize it as a reflection of both subjective measures (e.g., emotional states, personality traits, external stressors), referred to as *eudemonic wellbeing*, and objective measures (e.g., income, life expectancy, nutrition), referred to as *hedonic wellbeing*. There is no mention of nonhuman nature in Western definitions of wellbeing, except in the ways that nature contributes to the human experience. However, Indigenous Blackfoot and Buddhist philosophies situate drivers of health inside and outside the individual (Capizzi & Kempton, 2023; Whyte et al., 2016) and understand the wellbeing of humans and non-humans as dependent and interrelated. Within this, humans are responsible for caring for and protecting the natural world (Capizzi & Kempton, 2023).

Eudemonic and Hedonic Wellbeing

Eudaimonic wellbeing, emerging from the word “true self,” is characterized by experiences such as flourishing, meaning, purpose, and self-discovery (Jenkins et al., 2022; Laurent et al., 2021; Kruger, 2011). According to the literature, eudaimonic wellbeing is best fostered through activities an individual finds personally meaningful and fulfilling. While it may not always feel pleasurable, eudaimonic wellbeing contributes to one’s sense of development and does, therefore, have a positive impact on one’s life (Jenkins et al., 2022). When pursuing eudemonic wellbeing, one may actively forgo pleasurable moments (i.e., hedonic wellbeing) to live in a way that aligns with their value system, e.g., immersion in something one perceives to be more significant and important than the individual self (e.g., feeling held by and contributing to community). Recent scholarship suggests those who find meaning in life experience higher rates of gratitude, care, and compassion (Jenkins et al., 2022).

Hedonic wellbeing, conversely, is driven by subjective sensory experiences such as pleasure and pain (Jenkins et al., 2022) and is characterized by intense – but unsustainable – moments of joy or happiness. Therefore, hedonic wellbeing is not generally associated with lasting or ongoing flourishing (Jenkins et al., 2022), though the pursuit of pleasure-seeking behaviors associated with hedonic wellbeing can temporarily lower stress and anxiety (Jenkins et al., 2022).

The two forms of wellbeing that characterize Western scholarship are comprehensive with regard to the human experience, but they fail to acknowledge the ways human wellbeing may be impacted by or integrated with the wellbeing of nonhuman others, a condition many people recognize in their own experience and that is reflected in some non-Western notions of wellbeing. This absence entrenches a problematic human/nature dualism that has consequences for sustainability ethics and action (Matson & Clark, 2016; Richardson, 2023).

Indigenous Wellbeing Philosophies

Indigenous philosophies, including Buddhist and Blackfoot approaches to wellbeing, emphasize a version of eudemonic well-being rooted in personal development and values-centered action that also places nonhuman relationships as central to a flourishing life (Harvey, 1998). At their core, both approaches present the wellbeing of humans and the natural world as interdependent and reciprocal. Nature takes care of us and in return we have a responsibility to care for it, now and into the future.

Holistic wellbeing, or mutual wellbeing between people and nature, is best illustrated by the Blackfoot Nation and Buddhist epistemologies. They describe wellbeing as inclusive of humans and the natural world that “exists beyond the sum of pleasures” (Laurent et al., 2021; Wiseman & Brasher, 2008). All beings are “dependent, interrelated, interconnected, and interdependent” upon each other (Laurent et al., 2021). Holistic wellbeing is anchored by knowledge of, connections to, and care about the natural world (i.e., nature-connectedness). In Non-Western philosophies, this affinity for the natural world characterizes one’s relationships with food, animals, people, flora, and fauna (Richardson, 2023; Whyte et al., 2016), all of which (i.e. plants, animals, and natural systems) possess agency, just as humans do. Honoring this agency is central to living a meaningful life. In this way, Turner & Hope (2014) describe, compassion and empathy for nature provide a gateway to pro-sustainability behavior, which in turn contributes to mutual flourishing. This worldview supports health when care aligns with social responsibility (Atkinson et al., 2002; Whyte et al., 2016).

Nature-Connectedness

Literature shows that nature experiences can catalyze eudemonic wellbeing and deepen interspecies connections (Capizzi & Kempton, 2023; Gunnarsson & Hedblom, 2023; Jenkins et al., 2022). Nature is shown to support physical, emotional, and spiritual healing (Capizzi & Kempton, 2023; Hartig et al., 2014). In his seminal work, Gesler (1992) examined extraordinary

spiritual and emotional encounters in nature. He found that events such as witnessing profound beauty can positively shape psychological wellbeing by increasing feelings of wonder, joy, gratitude, and contentment (Bai et al., 2017). Recent literature associates these kinds of sublime nature experiences with awe, described as a state of being that encourages moments of mindfulness and reflection (Bai et al., 2017; Keltner, 2023). In addition to positively impacting personal wellbeing, research shows awe experiences can also increase care for the natural world (Bai et al., 2017; Keltner, 2023, p. 36) and, thus, support holistic wellbeing.

While profound nature encounters are infrequent, nature-connectedness tied to more mundane encounters with the natural world can also foster eudemonia and pro-sustainability mindsets by sparking intimacy with and care for the natural world (Mackay & Schmitt, 2019; Gunnarsson & Hedblom, 2023; Chang et al., 2016). These moments, too, Keltner (2023) argues, provide “limitless opportunities to experience awe” and can teach people to attune to the natural world by slowing down, which in turn is a pathway to wonder and empathy (Bai et al., 2017).

Nature-connectedness as a scholarly description of people’s connection to the natural world reflects the biophilia hypothesis, which is the idea that humans are born with an affinity for the natural world (Gunnarsson & Hedblom, 2023), or, as Capizzi & Kempton, 2023 cite Fromm (1998), a “passionate love for all that is alive.” Contemporary scholars refer to biophilia as a “soft fascination with nature” (Leavell et al., 2019; Salinger, 2019) and explain that people feel this attachment to nature regardless of whether or not they identify as a “nature person” (Richardson, 2023, p. 9). Creating spaces that foster these types of connections – i.e. through biophilic design – can have a meaningful impact on wellbeing.

Bai and colleagues (2017) explain that attuning to the natural world improves eudemonic wellbeing by “shrinking default selves that reign too strongly of anxiety, self-criticism, and rumination” (p. 33). The impact of this activity leads to “the diminishing of the self,” whereby the ego retreats as one looks beyond the self to appreciate the complexity of the natural world (i.e. interconnectivity), creating an opportunity for holistic – or reciprocal - wellbeing. Studies across disciplines demonstrate that a sense of interconnectivity with the natural world can deepen care about the natural world and, in some cases, can support intentions to act on behalf of the natural world (Chang et al., 2016; Goralnik & Nelson, 2017; Mackay & Schmitt, 2019).

Farmer's Markets and Wellbeing

Community Building

Research shows that farmer's markets can increase feelings of community embeddedness; in some cases, this feeling has also been connected to pro-social behavior (Joseph & Seguin, 2023; Warsaw et al., 2021; Alia et al., 2014). For example, Farmer et al., (2011) found that in addition to connecting communities to local and fresh food, farmer's markets create bonding opportunities that strengthen social fabrics. The authors observed that ongoing casual encounters between farmers and customers, or among customers, contributed to lasting relationships, and opportunities to spontaneously run into neighbors played an important role in participants' sense of community embeddedness and emotional wellbeing. These outcomes became especially salient during the recent COVID-19 pandemic, as many farmer's markets remained open during other retail shutdowns, providing a critical sense of normality and connection (Klisch & Soule, 2020). Scholars refer to persistent vendor and customer relationships as "loyalty behavior" (Farmer et al., 2011), an activity that indicates customers are drawn to the market not just for quality products, but for the emotional connections they find there (Joseph & Seguin, 2023). Both farmers and vendors describe market relationships as important contributions to their social-emotional wellbeing (Farmer et al., 2011). The social impacts of farmer's markets have contributed to their proliferation across the U.S. (USDA, 2024).

The outdoor atmosphere and slower pace of farmer's markets facilitate these kinds of social interactions that are intimately connected to food and the land (Russomanno & Jabson Tree, 2021). Referring to food and weather as "non-human facilitators" of social interaction, Alia et al. (2014) explain that at the market, "sharing food, cracking jokes, and sharing space" contributes to the friendly market climate. The weather, too, the authors continue, can boost sociability and feelings of inclusion, "including cold, hot, and rainy weather (p. 5)." Finally, Alia et al. (2014) found that the informal setting also facilitated knowledge sharing. As customers converse, they share information about farming techniques, landscape features, and the health benefits of different foods. The leisurely setting is especially important for new customers, the authors explain, because it provides opportunities for low-stakes interactions and conversation. Other scholars have noted similar benefits for customers who experience chronic anxiety and

depression (Joseph & Seguin, 2023), further demonstrating the beyond-grocery reasons that customers value and visit the farmer's market (Russomanno & Jabson Tree, 2021).

Human-Nature Relationships

Studies have found that interactions with land workers, seasonal foods, and the outdoor setting at the farmer's market can reconnect customers with natural systems and foster care for the mutual flourishing of humans and nonhuman nature (Dowler et al., 2009; Turner & Hope, 2014). By organizing social events, such as eating and gathering, around ecological patterns, marketplaces provide pathways to increased ecological knowledge and interspecies respect, and by participating in these social events that center ethical consumption patterns, such as seasonal eating, the customer is encouraged to have a greater respect for land, soil, animals, and other humans (Turner & Hope, 2014). Moreover, experiences such as "taking time for shopping, talking to producers, preparing food, eating seasonal food, and sharing with others" reshape the materiality of food and what it means to live well as a community system (Dowler et al., 2009).

Moments of pause and reprieve at the market can help widen customer worldviews to include other living beings, Dowler et al. (2009) found. In this way, farmer's markets can serve as "green events" that foster stewardship behavior in addition to being landscapes that build community (Zhao & Wise, 2019). Engaging in social practices that align food with ecological patterns can lead customers to develop more complex conceptualizations about what it means to eat and live well (Turner & Hope, 2014). Food is no longer valuable solely as a means to survival, nor is it simply an object to be discarded and used recklessly (Richardson, 2023). Rather, customers begin to see food as a living thing, deeply nested in nature, an experience that should be celebrated and shared (Turner & Hope, 2014; Dowler et al., 2009).

Physical Wellbeing

First and foremost, farmer's markets connect customers to fresh, local produce (Aktary et al., 2020; Joseph & Seguin, 2023; Warsaw et al., 2021) and scholarship suggests that they can lower barriers associated with accessing these foods for some consumers. Recent literature also suggests that the presence of markets increases the likelihood of fruit and vegetable intake (Aktary et al., 2020). In response to these findings, health practitioners have begun "prescribing" farmer's markets for their patients (Aktary et al., 2020; Leavell et al., 2019), acting on the belief that social interactions in a setting with abundant fresh food will serve as a gateway to healthy

eating and improved wellbeing (Caron-Roy et al., 2021; Aktary et al., 2020). These are exciting outcomes for many communities.

Barriers

Not all consumers feel welcome at or have access to farmer's markets, therefore some communities do not have access to the myriad benefits farmer's markets provide (Hammon & Goralnik, 2024; Russomanno & Jabson Tree, 2021). The scholarship shows five primary barriers to low-income and minority customer participation at farmer's markets: (1) transportation, (2) convenience, (3) price (real and perceived), (4) exclusivity, and (5) administrative burden. These barriers both limit the audience who benefits from the wellbeing impacts of the farmer's market experience and also re-entrench persistent health disparities and systemic inequities within communities (Hammon & Goralnik, 2024). In the context of holistic wellbeing and a discussion of healthy natural systems, it seems remiss not to point out that healthy systems support a multitude of diversities. Therefore, to actualize and scale the potential and realized impacts for holistic wellbeing through farmers market experiences, more attention to the diversity of market audiences – and barriers to farmers market access - is necessary.

METHODS

Interviews and observations were conducted at Allen, Meridian, and Abbott farmer's markets between May and August 2024. This study was deemed exempt by MSU IRB Study #00010619.

The three farmer's markets range in customer base, size, and setting no more than ten miles from East to West. Allen Farmer's Market is located on the west side of Lansing, in an urban neighborhood. The average household income in Lansing is approximately \$51,000 with 10.1% of the population being foreign-born (census.gov). Lansing has a history of food insecurity and, as a result, has invested deeply in local food systems (i.e., community gardens, veggie boxes, CSA programs, etc.). Meridian Market, located between a strip mall and a greenspace, is situated in Okemos with a historically upper-middle-class population. The average household income in Meridian Township is approximately \$97,000, with 23.7% of the population being foreign-born (census.gov). Abbott Farmer's Market is located near Michigan State University, with an average household income of \$43,000 (census.gov). The percentage of foreign-born residents in East Lansing is 10.8% (census.gov). Abbott Farmer's Market is centered in a community park and is abundant with greenspace. While all three sites are predominantly white, Lansing is more diverse in terms of racial/ethnic/gender diversity compared to the other two sites (census.gov).

Observations

I collected participant and non-participant observations at each of the three markets between May and June of 2024 to document customer demographics across the hours of operation. I took handwritten notes and used an observation protocol to focus my attention for one hour during the market on the physical setting, customer dynamics, and market dynamics (see APPENDIX B). When observing the market space, I would engage in descriptive notetaking (i.e., documenting a value-judgment-free description of the day). Following the descriptive note-taking process, I would reflect on what my observations could mean by re-reading the descriptive notes. I wrote my reflections immediately following the descriptive observation. Handwritten descriptions and reflections were then transcribed into a Word document within the week. Immediately following the transcription, I memoed the document, taking note of surprising observations and patterns (Saldaña, 2008).

Observations show customer demographics vary across the three farmer's markets. At Allen Farmer's Market, I found customer demographics shifted throughout the market day. Often, the first half of the market was slow and occupied by customers who appeared to be in their 50s-70s. Most of these customers appeared to be white and would arrive and depart alone. As time passed, younger customers of various ethnic/racial backgrounds arrived in pairs or small groups. During the last half of the market, I observed parents with young children. Overall, I found Allen diversified in terms of age, gender, and ethnicity as the afternoon progressed.

Meridian Market is a bustling market with a more diverse customer base than years prior. Increasingly, customers who appear to be Black, Asian, or of Indian descent attend Meridian. Still, the market is overwhelmingly white. Observing the increase in racial/ethnic diversity was surprising still, given that Meridian is situated in a predominantly white, upper-middle-class community. Unlike Allen Farmer's Market, Meridian's customer base did not fluctuate much throughout the day. In terms of age, the demographic base was more evenly comprised of young families with children, young couples, or older patrons visiting alone.

At the Abbott farmer's market, many customers appeared to be college-aged white women or young families arriving on bikes or on foot. Few customers would arrive alone. Customers who arrived alone often spent the least amount of time at the market and appeared to be white women in their 40s-60s.

Interviews

I used convenience sampling to select participants for the interviews, which is "a type of nonprobability or nonrandom sampling where members of the target population meet certain practical criteria, such as easy accessibility, geographical proximity, availability at a given time, or the willingness to participate" (Golzar et al., 2022). This was an appropriate choice because most market customers had their own agenda, and I had limited time. Customers were spending time with their family, running errands, or practicing self-care. The request for an interview was an interruption of their flow, and they needed to be able to say no or focus on their own needs. Willingness to participate drove who my sample included. For example, when I approached a woman at Meridian Market to request an interview, she had her baby in one arm and produce in the other. She expressed genuine interest in participating but also had a look of disarray on her face. It was important that participants felt calm and comfortable during the interview process, rather than research subjects, so I asked if she needed a moment to take care of her chores and

meet me at the picnic tables if she felt up to it. I gave her the space to participate on her terms. Ultimately, she did not meet me at the picnic tables, and I never had the opportunity to speak with her. While a busy mother's perspective would have been useful in the interview sample, the burden on the participant was too heavy. Allowing for flexibility was especially important in the diverse and low-income markets represented in this study (Fisher & Anushko, 2008).

Convenience sampling does have limitations (Golzar et al., 2022). I addressed these limitations in representation by conducting participant observations during the first two weeks of June to document demographics. In this way, I could be strategic in my approach to convenience sampling (see APPENDIX F). My observations informed recruitment. For example, I noticed one of the three markets was more diverse in terms of age, gender, and race. This observation guided who I approached for an interview. Though I felt I was profiling customers, and this was uncomfortable, my goal was to capture the market's customer base in the transcripts.

To recruit participants, I offered a five-dollar market voucher or an equivalent produce item when inviting customers to sit down for an interview. This allowed me to build relationships with customers and vendors and support the market. This recruitment strategy also aligned with my care for building community with action. For example, I had the opportunity to introduce first-time customers to vendors or introduce regulars to new or unfamiliar foods. I also gained deeper insight into the market experience, as one minority customer requested that I purchase her honey as compensation for her interview because "the bee people" had made her uncomfortable. I appreciated her candor and was glad to make that connection with her.

While I felt good providing a small token of appreciation for participants' time, compensating participants is potentially problematic (Fisher & Anushko, 2008), including the concern that compensation can coerce people to participate (Fisher & Anushko, 2008). I was mindful of this concern because I was collecting data across sites with varying levels of food security, socioeconomic status, and cultural demographics. Ultimately, I decided that the minimal compensation felt like enough to honor participant involvement in the study and also low enough not to force participation.

I conducted 10 semi-structured customer interviews in June, July, and August 2024 (n = 30 total). Interviews lasted between 15-30 minutes and explored motives for shopping at the farmer's market, experiences meaningful to their sense of wellbeing, and market qualities that affect their nature relationships (see APPENDIX A). To the extent possible, I conducted

interviews in a way that would flow like a conversation. This meant I did not ask all of the questions listed in the interview guide. Rather, I would begin our discussion with one question from the interview protocol and follow up on comments made by the interviewee thereafter. In this way, the participants lead the conversation in directions meaningful to them

All interviews were digitally recorded for accuracy and transcribed to text files with voice-to-text software on Microsoft Word. I cleaned the text files manually and removed all identifying information prior to analysis. To protect the integrity of the interviewee's language while also clarifying their points, I removed only natural pauses and repeated words from the interview transcripts in the data cleaning process. This means "salty language," and any potentially offensive verbiage was left in the transcript to preserve emotion (Saldana, 2013, p. 140).

Analysis and Results

Participant Observations

Hand-written observations were typed into a Word document within a week of writing my reflections. This transcript was then holistically coded, which is an approach to meaning making that "seeks to grasp basic themes within the data" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 142). This type of analysis is often used when studies employ a variety of data sources, such as interviews and observations, and plan to triangulate results across the sources. To conduct this holistic coding, I "chunked" descriptions from the observations into broad topic areas that shared similarities. For example, observations describing nature interactions were lumped together, and observations related to customer wellbeing (e.g., observed social interaction) were lumped together. I could then look across the items in a single category to understand the diversity or breadth of the descriptions on that shared topic, and summarize each grouping as a distinct theme. I also began to get a sense of the interactions between the themes because of the ways the descriptions were nested or related to each other. The three holistic themes emerged from the observation data: (1) nature interactions, (2) leisure, and (3) grocery shopping. I also recorded demographic trends to inform my interview sampling protocol.

Interviews

The interview coding process included multiple rounds of reading and re-reading of the transcripts. Critical memoing was done after each read (Saldaña, 2013). Below the transcripts, I would write about vivid phrases and emerging patterns. On the transcript itself, I would highlight

recurring words or phrases which informed the study's codebook (see APPENDIX C). Each memo addressed especially salient themes, unexpected responses, and convergence/ divergence between the three farmer's markets. The memos were then condensed into a two-page reflection.

I cycled through both inductive and deductive coding rounds multiple times (Miles et al., 2020). First, I coded inductively. This means when initially reading the data, codes emerged organically from blocks of text in the participant's language. Following the initial readings, I re-read the transcripts and deductively applied my initial codes. From thereon, the codebook grew, and further entanglements emerged. For example, *community* emerged as an initial code. When I deductively applied this code during second-cycle coding, *human community*, and *natural community* arose. In this way, the inductive process was driven by concern and curiosity about the entanglements I could have missed. Meaning that I "went deep with the data," and following, I stepped back, revisited the data, and asked myself, *what if I got it wrong?* (Lareau, 2021, p. 209).

I used in-vivo coding, which "is a coding method that is driven from participant language" (Saldaña, 2013, p.64). Because this study seeks to honor the participant's voice, in-vivo coding, as opposed to applying codes from the literature, is the most fit coding method (Saldaña, 2013, p.64). After applying and reapplying the in-vivo codes, I examined how the codes felt similar or diverged (Saldaña, 2008). From there, I created categories by lumping codes together that shared a commonality. Theme development occurred during the third cycle of coding and was done in ATLAS.ti.

Through the coding process, I identified five categories and nine themes (see APPENDIX E). *Wellbeing* is characterized by several sub-themes that include *Community Connection*, *Emotional Health*, and *Leisure*. I distinguished between types of customer wellbeing as either eudaemonic or hedonic. Surprisingly, some customers would attend the market for a leisure experience and left having had a more transcendent wellbeing experience. *Health* is an additional category characterized by *Perceived Nutrition* and *Agency*. *Nature Connections* is an additional category comprised of two themes: *Embodied Experiences* and *Heightened Awareness*. Surprisingly, some customers did not attend the market to have an embodied experience but would leave having felt an intimate connection to nature. Others actively sought out nature connections at the farmer's market. *Sustainability Values* is a category in addition to a theme.

Lastly, certain customers (i.e., racially diverse customers) face barriers to experiencing a positive visit. *Barriers* is a category and a final theme.

DISCUSSION

Wellbeing

Many participants shared that they visited the market to integrate into their local community and provided examples of how the community connection contributed to their wellbeing. One participant shared: “Having that sense of community where everybody comes together [...] is awesome! And it all started at the farmer’s market]!... The market completely transformed my idea about what it means to be in a community....which greatly impacted my sense of social and emotional wellbeing.” In our conversation, she shared that she often experienced social anxiety in other settings but that her experience at the market over time had helped her transcend that.

For other customers, the market experience helped maintain previous community connections and also build new ones. Participants described the market as a “community touchpoint,” a place where they could “run into old friends” or “build new relationships within the broader community.” One interviewee shared: “I’ve bonded with other customers here. [...] We are a part of a community. Having the market here, where everyone is in a central place, helps maintain those old social connections. It also helps me build new connections [...] [s]ince it’s both a practical place to buy food and it’s an experience.” For some participants, the very shape of their community expanded to include non-human nature through interactions they experienced at the farmer’s market. One participant explained:

“Seasonal eating feels so much more connected to what’s happening in the human community and natureThe relationships I have with the people who made the food make me feel more embedded in my community. Not just the human community but also the natural community, the dirt, the soil, and all the animals [...] I value this sense of community deeply. I value the food I take home more because of this.”

Encounters with suburban wildlife were also impactful for some participants, as one participant shared: “The birds that live around the market are a part of our community, and we protect and feed them here. I love it! [...] We [humans and birds] live in this shared space.” For this interviewee, the farmer’s market- as an outdoor space- granted them an opportunity to engage with the non-human members of their community circle.

Other customers would share how the farmer’s market, with low-stress opportunities to engage with customers and farmers in combination with being outside, helped facilitate rest and

relaxation. Some customers would describe this experience as “zen,” “peaceful,” and as “something that has become a part of their mental health routine.” As one customer shared: “Part of my mental health routine has been coming to the farmer’s market every Sunday. It gives me calm. Being outside gives me calm. Unlike the grocery store where there are a lot of people and you don’t make a personal connection with growers. Here, you can go up and make a personal connection. So I feel calm and relaxed. It’s very much a different experience.”

For others, experiences such as these helped foster a sense of presence and mindfulness. One customer shared how the farmer’s market, “as [her] closest outdoor space,” helped her feel “present” and “mindful.” She mentioned how this aided in her ability to feel “more intuitive and grateful by granting [her] opportunities to slow down.” The farmer’s markets’ outdoor setting with opportunities to engage with the wider community fostered a sense of social and emotional wellbeing for some customers.

Nature Connections

In addition to connecting participants to their community, seasonal eating through shopping at the farmers market also fostered deeper nature connections for several interviewees. Seasonal food, in numerous accounts, was described as an expression of nature (see APPENDIX G). This was surprising in the way some customers would promptly discuss this as their motivation for shopping at the farmer’s market. When asked to describe how it felt to eat market produce, participants used language like: “wholesome,” “correct,” “cyclical,” and something that “reminds me of my relationship with nature.” As one participant shared: “We used to move with the sun and eat with the seasons. Eating seasonal food from the farmer’s market reminds me of our connection with nature.” The market experience contrasted with her experience at the grocery of which is “often disconnected from what’s happening locally where we can get the same types of food all year round. Food that is [...] way outside of where we are on the planet.” Another interviewee would share similar sentiments as they described:

“[f]ood is nature given a new expression. Everything is made from the entire earth. Nature runs through us, and food is an expression of nature. [...] You’re just turning it into a slightly different form. [...] If we were to recognize that food comes from nature, [...] we would feel harmony. [...] Eating seasonally is a way to remind us of this connection.” In a separate interview with a young Indigenous woman, she stated: “[n]ature never left the food we eat. [...] I think people just forgot. It [food] is covered in

dirt. It's seasonal and comes from the land we've walked on. It [nature] is under our ground right now; beneath layers of concrete, she's still there. [...] I think farmer's markets, just being here, is a good start helping connect people back to the land."

Other customers attend the market to connect with nature. This was also surprising. Some customer interviews revealed nature connections are deepened through the market's outdoors and loosely structured atmosphere, which was a primary motivation for attendance. Nature connections become especially strong in settings rich with visual and experiential encounters with the natural world (Gunnarsson & Hedblom, 2023). In this study, the market's outdoor setting served as an access point to nature. When asked to describe their experience in one word, some customers described the market as "natural," "nature-like," "green," and "outdoorsy." As one customer highlighted: "I'm definitely coming to the market to be outdoors." She continued: "I'm getting fresh air. I can breathe the fresh air. It feels amazing. I'm so glad. The outdoor setting is inviting. It's a different kind of experience. [...] It's a connection to what's happening in the natural world." An additional participant mentioned how the farmer's market was "[...] the biggest outdoor space and the closest to where [she] lives." She followed by expressing:

"I came here to be outside. It's nice. The open-air makes it [the market] feel like nature! And the flowers, too. The market feels more like a nature walk than the grocery store [...]. I feel connected [to nature] here." Towards this end, another interviewee shared: "[n]ature is so healing. It's so healing. I'm looking at the plants here today, and they're very healing to me. [...] It [the market] is a nice green space I like to visit." She went on to claim, "[f]or me, the market by definition is connected to nature. [...] That's partly why I like to come here. [...] To connect with people. [...] To connect with nature."

Embodied Experiences

Embodied experiences with the natural world fostered a sense of comfort and relaxation. Sitting under nearby trees or on the lawn emerged as two experiences encouraging relaxation. As one customer shared on a sunny mid-summer day: "I feel a sense of being at peace because I'm outside. Being calm. I feel relaxed. [...] It's nice to be close to nature. I'm under a tree. I'm around people who are also enjoying a Sunday afternoon. I feel physically close to nature. I'm sitting on the grass. I'm sitting right next to a tree in the park. I tend to feel calmer and more relaxed when I'm around or in a natural place like this." Another interviewee at the same market experienced something similar and mentioned:

“I’m sitting under a tree. It feels peaceful. The design [of this market] and being outside make me feel like I can decompress. I can relax. I feel emotionally free. It [the experience] feels refreshing.” For others, experiences such as these felt comforting, as one interviewee shared: “I notice nature even if it’s minute and small. I always feel a sense of connection. Seeing anything nature-related gives me a sense of calm and peace. That sense of peace and calm is so because nature is all around. The farmer’s market-being outdoors and seasonal- does that for me. [...] That brings me peace.”

Some customers attended the market for leisure but would leave having had an embodied experience that connected them to the natural world. This is apparent as two customers explained: “We come here to relax. We like to listen to live music, be outside, and walk around. [...] It’s just a nice way to spend a Sunday.” When asked how it felt to be outside, one of the two shared: [...] It’s amazing to be outside, feel the rain, and breathe in the fresh air while listening to the live music.” She followed by saying, “It’s raining, but we don’t care! It’s lovely out here. [...] It [the experience] feels all-encompassing. I feel like I’m in a natural space with my community.” An additional interview with two sisters echoed similar sentiments as they recalled:

“We like to come here [to the market] to get snacks and listen to the live music.” [...]

“It’s nice to watch the bees, too. We like to do that when we’re here. I’m obsessed with bees. We talk about the bees and notice the bees while we’re eating on the lawn. [...] We watch them fly from clover to clover.” When asked how it feels to watch the bees, they would share: “It [watching the bees] feels calming.

Heightened Awareness

For some customers, seasonal eating helped cultivate awareness about shifting ecological patterns. Eating seasonally, in addition to fostering deeper nature connections, evoked a heightened awareness of shifting seasonal patterns. In an early fall interview with a former vendor, she began our discussion by noting: “I saw apples, which are early. Which is strange!” She continued: “It’s alarming because this is part of the uncertainty that there’s been hovering around our agricultural seasons [...]. So, it just leads to a little bit of alarm for me- a bit of doom. I’m worried about where things are gonna go in the future.” Another participant explained how the shifting seasons filled her with “dread.” She continued to elaborate how the changing seasons “signal the irrevocable damage we’ve done to our world. She recalled:

“Those strawberries were two or three, even 4 weeks earlier than they normally come. It doesn't seem like a huge deal unless you scroll back and look at the broader view of what that means [...]. She would say: “The average customer may not notice these changes in the environment. [...] They may not notice that strawberries were three weeks early this season. [...] We have to scale back and realize the damage it causes. [...] We have to change the way we consume.”

In this interview, the participant stressed the importance of aligning care for the environment with action if humans and nature are to thrive mutually. She encouraged the adoption of mindful consumption and local eating.

Sustainability Values

Some customers participate in their local farmer's markets to align their values for sustainability with action. For certain customers, patronizing farmer's markets provided an opportunity to align one's care for the community, labor, and the environment with action. This aligns with past research that claims farmer's markets present opportunities for individuals to uphold their ethical commitments towards people, animals, and the natural world (Dowler et al., 2009; Turner & Hope, 2014). As one customer explained: “When I'm at the market, I have an emotional exchange with the vendor. This not only feels good and builds connection, but helps me keep my small community strong.” For others, shopping at the farmer's market was a way to keep “the cycle of community care in motion.” In an additional interview, this participant recalls: “I don't necessarily need to give Meyer \$4.80 when I could give you [the vendor] \$3. The money stays in the community. It helps the community. It doesn't go to some giant corporation that may or may not be exploiting their workers. We're helping each other. I'm helping you [the vendor]. We're continuing an actual community system!” Additional interviews show shopping locally helps uphold ethical commitments towards land and animals. As one customer recalled:

“I think buying locally is one piece of being a good steward to the land and animals. Whether you realize it or not, you're making a difference by buying from people who know and care for the land. [...] The land and animals care for us. There are a lot of ethical ways to go about eating. There are also a lot of unethical ways to go about eating. [...] The market being here is a step in the right direction [towards ethical eating]. [...] Being here supports an underlying set of values about the natural world.”

Other customers visited the market for the social experience or function and adopted sustainability values in the process. This manifested through customers adopting a deeper appreciation for food and the labor needed to grow food. Customers would describe their market produce as something “special” and “relational” that feels like “a gift.” Dialogue with farmers aided in adopting a deeper admiration for food and land. One customer would describe how she would “feel guilty if [she] let [her] food from the farmer’s market go to waste.” She explained how this feeling of guilt is not felt to the same degree with food from the grocery store because “[she has] an affinity with the farmer.” She would describe how “it [food] feels like a gift because of the connection with the farmer.” Moreover, waiting for produce to come back in season also helped some customers adopt sustainability values. As one customer explained:

“I came here for melon! [...] I appreciate the food I take home more because I’ll wait all year for melon to come into season. I’ll miss it when it’s gone, then appreciate it when it comes back.” [...] “Because of this, I make seasonal food the star of the dish [...] nothing goes to waste. [...] I wouldn’t normally do this with food from my local grocery store because I can get what I like anytime.”

Health, Nutrition, and Agency

Eating local produce impacted perceptions about personal health. As one customer would share: “It feels good knowing that this [food] is directly from the source [farmer/land]. I would say I’m eating healthier. I feel healthier when I know the food is grown locally.” An additional participant would share similar beliefs as she mentioned: “I feel healthy when I eat lots of fruits and veggies. It [eating produce] makes my body feel good.” A college-aged woman shared similar perceptions about physical health as she described how she “feels better when [she] buys produce from the market.” She would continue to say, “I’ll take it home and make a meal, and that just feels better to my body. It’s actual food! It feels authentic!” Participants would also assume market produce, meats, and eggs are “better for the system and body.” As one customer would share: “I have the assumption at these markets the vegetables are going to be more and nutrient-rich. It feels healthier. It also tastes better.” Overall, customers perceived food from the market to be “authentic” or “real,” and this impacted perceptions about nutritional quality.

Some participants felt elevated levels of autonomy and decision-making power over their nutritional health. Having the opportunity to ask vendors questions about the animal rearing

process or produce growing process impacted empowered decision-making (see APPENDIX G). As one interviewee recalled:

“I feel like you don't always know how many animals are in the pack of ground beef you buy [from the grocery store]. I talked about that issue with the vendor. He told me sometimes, in large stores, there may be more than one animal per package. Whereas he only has one animal per package. The thought that ground beef could have a bunch of different animals makes me uncomfortable. It seems like a lot of different immunities [combined]. [...] I just feel like it [the food] is undefined. There's not enough clear info in a regular store [...], and that makes me feel uncomfortable. [...] The market is very front-facing. [...] That's the expectation.”

She would continue:

“I really care about my health, [...] and having this interaction between me and the vendor helps me make clear decisions [...] I feel grateful that I can have this kind of experience.” This was true for another customer as she expressed: “I very much care about where my food comes from. I hear it can be less nutrient-dense, depending on where it came from. I talked about that with the farmer. I asked, *is this grown with chemicals? What's the soil content like?* Taking to vendors lets me get a sense of what I want to buy. [...] I feel like I can take care of my health.”

These accounts suggest farmers can act as sources of information that empower informed decision-making.

Seasonal eating diversified the routine diets for some customers, helping them adopt mindful consumption patterns in the process. Some customers described this experience as a “form of discovery” that resembled “foraging.” As one interviewee recalled: “I like the small bits of discovery I'll have at the farmer's market. I'll go there, and I'll end up buying more than I really need. But I always work that into our weekly meals. We may end up having something we didn't expect. Something new. [...] Shopping at the market is like foraging because I take what I can find during that particular season.” An additional interviewee would share his appreciation for seasonal diversity by recalling: “There is a little bit of many of the things at the market—rather than a grocery store where you know what's going to be there. [...] They [the grocery store] are going to have the same stuff year-round. But there's verity here. [...] I try new things. The market has broadened out the things I eat routinely. [...] It [eating seasonally] helps me keep

that mindful attitude about how I eat, too.” Towards this end, in an early autumn interview with a graduate student, she noted how seasonal eating expanded her palate and helped her adopt a “mindful attitude” about eating. She would describe:

“[s]easonally, I love the variety that comes with it. Throughout the year, when I go to the grocery store, I buy the same thing every time [...]. But being creative with the smaller number of seasonal options is fun. [...] Eating with the seasons builds variety into my diet. It also forces me to seek variety and helps me keep that mindful attitude about how I consume. [...] I feel like I’m eating what the land gave me.”

Fun

For others, farmer’s markets function as a fun way to spend a weekend morning. Especially for young families looking for a moment of calm, market events provide opportunities for children to explore independently while parents relax (Aktary et al., 2020; Joseph & Seguin, 2023; Wardle et al., 2023). While some customers may experience and deeper sense of connection to people and nature, others simply revel in the festivities. This sentiment is echoed by attendees, including mothers of young children and single college-aged women, who described the market as “fun,” “cute,” and an “ideal way to spend a Sunday morning.” In an interview with a young mother of three, she shared:

“The market is really fun! Especially when they have activities. We could spend hours here. They [the market] had animal rides in the past. The kids enjoy the animals a lot. The pony rides are a huge hit. They also had a little petting zoo that they loved! It’s great for the kids to see lots of friends from school, too!”

She continued:

“So, we come less to buy food for the week and more to be outside and meet friends as well. Also, it’s a chance to get some exercise on the way here and have time outdoors. They enjoy playing on the playground. [...] We like to bike here.”

Snacks and treats also contributed to the market’s fun and playful atmosphere. This felt enjoyable as a customer recalled: “This is not very farmer’s market of me, but I am addicted to the stone circle salt pretzel sticks! Also, the vendor who bakes the bread- his wife is selling ice pops- which was lovely on a hot day!” A young mother also spoke about the enjoyable variety of snacks as she recalled: “They [the kids] really look forward to the pretzels. That’s what gets them out the door. Having ready-to-eat snacks is nice! I’m a mom of four kids. and this is a fun way to

spend a weekend morning. We get snacks.” When interviewing a young college-aged woman, she expressed excitement over how the market “seems really cute!” She followed by saying, “I bought a cinnamon roll. I’m excited to try it!” Enjoyable interactions such as these still prove fruitful for individual health (Bell et al., 2018). Even the most fleeting moments of joy can contribute to an overall sense of relaxation and wellbeing in the moment (Cattell et al., 2008).

Barriers

Not all customers experience the same levels of community inclusion. While some customers feel welcome and invited into the broader market community, others do not. If markets are to support the holistic community system, diverse stakeholders need to feel comfortable. This is illustrated by a customer mentioning: “I wanted you to buy me some honey from those honey vendors because the first time I went, they were not very friendly. I would say I was the only person in line they were not very friendly to.” She would recall how this manifested through the vendors “not making eye-contact with [her]” when they were so clearly doing so with other white customers in the line. She stressed the importance of treating every customer with the same level of respect. She recalled: “If [farmers] want to come and work at the farmers market, [they] should know every person deserves eye contact, and every person deserves a firm handshake. [...] [T]his is a community space. It’s not just a space for [vendors] to sell goods.”

Growth persists in the market’s ability to advertise its acceptance of EBT and other food assistance programs. In the same interview above, this customer recalled how “members of [her] community are unaware of the market’s SNAP and EBT programs.” She would say:

“The market needs to be able to reach the wider Black community. Many Mothers, for example, are unaware they can make this [the farmer’s market] their one stop for fresh veggies. With food assistance, this can be one of the stops that they make where they only spend \$30.00, and it’s the entire week of produce. That means something! [...] These days, households have to go to several grocery stores to make it work. The market can be one of them.”

LIMITATIONS

There are limitations to this study as qualitative research, which does not allow for much generalization beyond the results articulated above. Customer accounts in this study are context-dependent. This means customer narratives and the findings can only be understood in a particular space at a particular time. Ethnography of this kind is insightful, still, as it provides a nuanced understanding of community issues (Ejimabo, 2015). Results in qualitative research should vividly describe a particular phenomenon and be driven by participant experience (Ejimabo, 2015). Nonetheless, the results are not generalizable to other farmer's markets beyond the communities involved in this study.

The sample population also brings up limitations. Convenience sampling posed a few limitations for this study. Firstly, those who agreed to participate in an interview already had the spirit to do so and, thus, were most likely to share positive narratives. Moreover, numerous customers shared similar values for nature and sustainability. This means the study lacks insights from others with diverse value systems and opinions about sustainability and wellbeing through local food systems. To more holistically capture the human experience, future directions of this research should include narratives from individuals who shop at corner stores or typical grocery stores, for example.

Moreover, most customers who participated in interviews identified as white women in their 20-30s. Though capturing experiences from Black and Indigenous customers began to speak to the market's growth capacity, the remaining interviews do not entirely reflect areas of improvement. Though I tried to interview a diverse array of customers in terms of age, gender, and ethnicity, they were more prone to reject an interview. My positionality as a young white woman may have influenced who was willing to give an interview. Though I did my best to mask potential power dynamics and ease discomfort, the majority of the transcripts do not wholistically reflect the market's areas for growth and limitations.

CONCLUSION

To varying degrees, the farmer's markets in this study linked customers to the broader community, local food systems, and the natural environment. Strengthening human and nonhuman relationships through interactions with seasonal foods, agricultural workers, and the outdoor setting enhanced feelings of community, relaxation, and calm for some customers. In some instances, such interactions also sparked a deeper sense of care and responsibility for others and the natural world. Additionally, as a space that connects customers to local foods and farmers, the market fostered feelings of agency and empowerment regarding one's health. Consequently, the findings from this study are beneficial in three ways.

First, the farmer's market is valued for its experience. The literature suggests that farmer's markets provide myriad benefits to wellbeing, both functional and experiential (Joseph & Seguin, 2023; Warsaw et al., 2021). Beyond the fundamental food access needs, the farmer's market grants customers opportunities to experience emotional and social wellbeing (Wardle et al., 2023). In the context of this study, the farmer's market, for some customers, provided an avenue to connect with friends, farmers, and family. Some customer accounts show this helped them feel socially and emotionally integrated into their communities. Connecting with farmers, in particular, provided some customers with opportunities for emotional exchanges that also connected them to the natural world. Feeling connected to nature was also catalyzed by the market's outdoor setting and opportunities for embodied experiences. However, obstacles (i.e. feeling discomfort) hinder positive market experiences for diverse customers. If markets are to foster holistic wellbeing, they must be inclusive of the wider community system.

Second, the outdoor setting, vendors, and seasonal produce helped certain customers develop deeper nature connections. Learning about the growing process, eating seasonally, feeling the natural climate, and interacting with local wildlife all emerged as market experiences connecting customers to the natural world. Attending the market to connect with nature was both a motivation for some customers and an unexpected outcome for others. Across all three sites, seasonal eating emerges as a significant pathway to nature-connectedness. Other sites, namely Abbott and Meridian, fostered nature connections through their location being in or near natural areas. Across accounts, connecting to nature felt conducive to emotional health by encouraging moments of pause, comfort, or relaxation. Therefore, this is significant along three avenues. First, moments of pause emerged as experiences enhancing emotional wellbeing. As the

literature suggests, slowing down and taking notice of one's surroundings facilitates mindfulness and relaxation (Howell et al., 2011; Laurent et al., 2021). Second, the market's experience (i.e., gathering around the seasons, eating seasonal foods, and talking with farmers) helped certain customers adopt a mindful attitude about seasonal eating and its associated impacts on sustainability. Others came to the market to align their care for land, labor, and animals with action. Lastly, findings such as these begin to suggest a link between the market's design and connection to nature. Gillis & Gatersleben, 2015 outline how biophilic design- known for its emphasis on curating spaces rich in nature-like qualities- can deliberately connect humans to the natural realm (p. 948). Therefore, designing farmer's markets that more intentionally connect customers to nature via the setting and experience may prove fruitful in deepening a sense of nature-connectedness and wellbeing.

Third, eating seasonal foods, in addition to helping customers form deeper nature connections and sustainability values, contributed to a sense of nutritional health and empowered decision-making. Farmer's markets are shown to foster healthy eating habits (Aktary et al., 2020). Health practitioners across the literature consider markets as a pathway toward healthier eating (Aktary et al., 2020; Caron-Roy et al., 2021). This was mirrored in the study's findings as some customers acknowledged how seasonal eating broadened the types of produce they ate regularly. They also expressed deep concerns for nutritional health and found the market congruent with their sense of nutritional wellbeing by having the opportunity to engage with vendors over local products.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Date:

Location:

Time:

Positionality of interviewee:

Positionality of the interviewer:

- a) Why do you come to the market?
- b) What do you do here?
 - a. Walk me through a market day, beginning from when you decide to go and ending during the last few hours once you return home.
 - i. Can you share an example of an ideal market day with me? What happened? Who did you interact with? What did you eat, purchase, or observe? What did it feel like?
 - ii. To what extent have you had less spectacular days at the market? Can you share an example of one of those?
 - b. To what extent have you learned about food, the land, or nutrition at the market? Walk me through this.
 - i. Was that learning useful to you?
 1. Was that learning facilitated or experiential?
 2. Did you appreciate that experience? Was it obtrusive?
- c) To what extent do you like to spend time outside?
 - a. What do you like to do there?
 - b. Please walk me through your relationship with the natural world.
 - i. Can you share a story that describes how you feel about or spend time in nature or outdoor spaces?
 - ii. To what extent has your connection with the natural world intersected with your experience at the market?
 - iii. What would the market be like if it was not outside?
 - iv. How does it feel to eat produce from the market?
 - c. Do you participate in the local food system in other ways?
 - i. Do you know farmers?
 - ii. Do you grow food or flowers?
- d) What role does community play in your life?
 - a. Can you share a story that captures your connection to your communities and/or your idea of what community is? Who or what is included in your community?
 - i. To what extent has your sense of community intersected with your experience at the market?
- e) What does wellbeing mean to you?
 - a. How would you describe your wellbeing?
 - b. To what extent has your market experience impacted your wellbeing?

Provide closing remarks, and contact information, and express gratitude for their time in the form of a market gift card.

APPENDIX B: OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Table 1: Observation Protocol

Research question for the day: _____

Market Timeline	Question	Observation
Prior to starting market	Describe the location.	Weather: Design: Entertainment: Products:
During the market	Who is visiting the market?	
	What type of interactions? How are they handling the products? Is there a sense of “pause”?	
	Noise? Music? Conversations? Animals?	What did I hear? What did I not hear?
	How long are customers staying at the market? What are they leaving with & how are they leaving with them?	
After the market	Reflection	How did I feel? What stood out to me? What was missing?

APPENDIX C: CODEBOOK

Table 2: Codebook

Connection: Nature, Community, Memories, Place

Community Building (to people and nature)	Feeling a sense of community and connection to people or other species in one's circle. Experiencing community embeddedness.	<p>All4: The relationships that I have with the people who made the food, made me feel more embedded in my community. Not just the human community but with the natural community, and the dirt, and the soil, and all the animals around there.</p> <p>A7: It's [the market] an easy way to spend time with people. We just show up without having to make a plan in advance. We'll likely bump into friends. and before we lived in East Lansing, we came here and met some people that are now our friends. I would say we have met some new friends here.</p>
Connection (to people and nature)	The level of interconnectivity the individual feels with people, the food system, and nature.	<p>A6: I feel connected! yes connected. connected to people. Connected to nature.</p> <p>M5: We're disconnected with nature. We're disconnected with each other you know. I was over there, and this is kind of judgy, but I was over there, and I was watching a mom and a dad and a little girl. and they doing everything but pay attention to her! they were on their phones. I think the phone and social media are really destructive. However, the market, to me, is a way to connect back to nature and connect back to people. You know?</p> <p>M3: It's raining but we don't care! I mean it's lovely out here. Buying things that are from this area- you're kind of connected with nature in a way. I mean I know it's like a big pavilion, but it feels all-encompassing!</p>

Table 2 (cont'd)

Seasons/ Seasonality	Feeling tied to the flow of the changing seasons. Connecting to nature through the seasons.	<p>All2: The market can change our relationship with nature. We were talking about the seasonality of food, right. In the summer there's more fresh produce, eggs, and meat. Then in the winter there's a lot of baked goods, roots, and frozen meats. Some frozen fruits and vegetables too, right. I think the market's seasonality naturally ties us back to the seasonality of life!</p> <p>A2: It feels more cohesive and seamless to eat seasonally. It feels more aligned with nature and it feels more authentic. Almost like <i>back to the basics</i>, you know?</p>
Nature/ Outdoors	The level of closeness one feels to nature through the market experience and setting.	<p>M2: The open air definitely makes it feel like nature! And the flowers, too. The market feels like a nature walk more than going to the grocery store with the fluorescent lighting. I feel more of a connection to nature for sure!</p> <p>A4: The market is a chance to be outside.</p> <p>A3: I think we're interacting with it [nature] all the time. I think with the way we're producing food lends itself to interacting with the natural world, and the way we're sitting here in the park right now. It's all connected.</p>
Nostalgia (for family, labor, and joy in nature)	Connecting to sentimental moments in nature, gardens, or local food systems.	<p>M4: being here always reminds me of those days where I would be out helping my dad pick beans. Or when I was bringing in corn on the cob. Or harvesting lettuce. My father was very, very big into being outdoors and appreciating where food came from.</p> <p>M2: The market reminds me of those moments picking blueberries in nature with my dad. We were hiking and stumbled upon a patch of wild blueberries! It was amazing.</p>
Local/ Connecting to Place	The desire to support one's community and local food system. Caring about the locality of food and labor.	<p>A2: The vendors are probably coming from somewhere close enough to where they could drive their own car today. like I'm grateful I could walk two minutes and obtain this.</p>

Table 2 (cont'd)

Sensory Experience	Embodiment.	<p>M2: Basil everywhere! there's so much basil here. I love basil. I think it's kind of like an embodied experience- The smelling and feeling. The basil's amazing.</p> <p>M2: The farmer's market feels like a nature walk.</p>
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Health: Physical, Emotional, Spiritual

Relaxation	The level of calm and peace one feels.	<p>A2: when I walked in it, was so quiet. Just zen. There's music going yeah, just very peaceful.</p> <p>A3: But it's just a nice outing. and especially if the weather is good, and it's low stress it makes the experience great. because I get a little bit of anxiety sometimes. So yeah. it's nice to not have any pressure at all. To just to be able to come and see people but not like be pressured for a big interaction.</p> <p>A1: I think people often feel a lot of pressure to get things done. The modern weekend is all about getting things done. And without a lot of pressure, I'm getting things done here. Relaxing is also a thing that needs to get done. But people don't think of it that way. It's like "oh I'm going to do that," you know. When I'm going to just be? So, this is my place to just be.</p>
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Table 2 (cont'd)

Self-Care/ Healing (increased emotional wellbeing)	Strategies for ongoing personal well-being.	<p>A2: I was also like, <i>go outside and like take a walk, because you've been doing this for a few hours. and you're getting kind of dizzy.</i> the computer screen does not feel great. it's Sunday. I saw people walking up and down from the market from my window. So definitely the farmer's market is part of my motive for coming out today. To just take a break and practice self-care and health.</p> <p>M3: I try to take good care of my mental health because I do have depression and anxiety. so a sense of community here- being friendly, and interacting with people in like a low pressure kind of way, you know. you it's safe. it's you know, quick interaction, and it makes me feel really good when I leave. So it feels fulfilling.</p>
Good for You (increased physical/ nutritional wellbeing)	Food that conducive to physical health.	A2: I think 've always heard if the animals are living or breathing in the same geographic region as you, and growing nearby, that it's better for your system when you eat it and digest it. You always just hear that farm meat is better. If you needed to grab some beef or chicken to make dinner, or you didn't have any, you could walk to target. And you don't know what you're buying from target!
Making Healthier Choices	Opportunities to make healthy choices.	A10: I feel like because it's more readily available to have fresh homegrown and homemade food, it makes me drawn to the produce. whereas when I go to the grocery store, I could pick a tomato, or I could pick a granola bar. I feel like I'm more drawn in a grocery store setting to the processed food. But in a farmers market setting, I'm more drawn to the produce and homemade foods.
High Quality/ Healthy	Perceptions about the food's authenticity and nutritional value.	M1: I was like <i>oh my god! They have bitter melon!</i> They have a sign that says <i>helps lower insulin like high in vitamin A&K and all the nutrients.</i> I took a picture of it. Then we all shared it. I pulled up the picture and saw all the health benefits of it. This is why it's so great.

Heightened Awareness

Table 2 (cont'd)

Presence/ Aware	The act of taking notice. Or, become aware of larger human and non-human interactions.	All3: Wow...look at what the world around me has made! All6: I feel more aware of what's in season and what's going on in my community.
Awareness of Cycles and Patterns	Awareness of patterns and relationships between people and nature.	All6: Those strawberries were two or three even 4 weeks earlier than they normally come. It doesn't seem like a huge deal unless you like scroll back and look at the broader view of what that means. It can be horrific.

Value Perceptions

Respect for the Product	Intimate relationships with food.	All1: Given that I know where my food comes from, I feel an element of responsibility towards my food.
High Quality/ Healthy (Perceptions)	Perceptions about the food's authenticity and nutritional value.	A6: I think it also feels better to buy foods from the market. We'll take it home and make stuff. and that just feels better. It's actual food!

Safe, Welcoming Space

Consistent and Safe Presence	A sense of feeling held and cared for. Community anchor points.	All 4: I feel safe and held by my community. All1: Even though things change, I can rely on Allen Market always being here. It's always a place where you can come. It's a little piece of stability.
Welcoming	Feeling welcome in the market space.	A4: I feel welcome here, in this community. I was just welcomed into it. And I felt at home. I felt comfortable. And- and I talked to strangers All8: I felt so welcomed in the community. It was a great first impression.

Empowered Decision Making

Table 2 (cont'd)

Clear Information	The level of transparency about food, labor, and land practices.	<p>A6: There's not enough clear info in a regular store. The market is very front facing. Of course, when you come to the farmers market, that's the expectation.</p> <p>A2: I feel like you don't always know how many animals are in the pack that you buy [at the grocery store]. So that's one thing I talked about with the vendor. He told me sometimes in large stores, there may be more than one animal per package. Whereas he only has one animal per package. The thought that ground beef could have a bunch of different animals makes me uncomfortable.</p> <p>A9: I understand this is their crop and their food that they've grown. I understand where it comes from.</p>
Choice/ Freedom/ Empowered Decision Making	The sense that one has access to information and the power to make informed decisions about food and purchasing.	<p>A2: I also feel like it gives me of course that freedom and choice to buy from a different selection of products that I couldn't get if I walked to the closest place- which would be target.</p> <p>A2: I have the power to buy what I'm thinking is a really high-quality product that's going to be really good for me.</p>

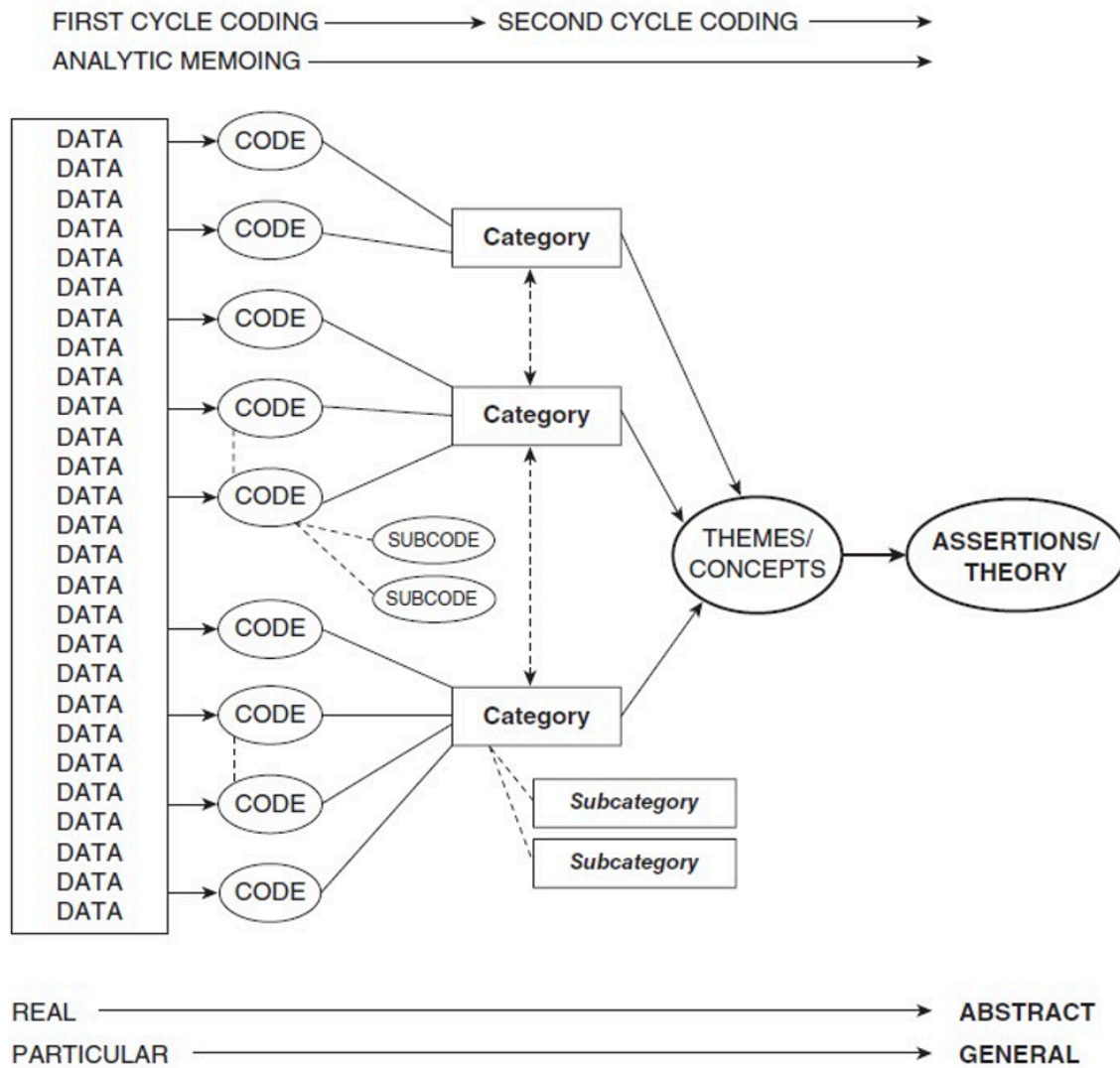
Fun

Fun/ Cute	Happiness. A family outing.	A7: I'm a mom of four kids. and this is a fun way to spend a weekend morning. We get snacks.
Care	Concerns for humane systems. Ethical commitments to food, land, and labor.	M3: the crops and animals are taking care of in a less invasive way as far as like chemicals or pesticides go. It feels good to know that somebody grew them right around here, took care of them, and brought them to me.

APPENDIX D: CODE-TO-THEORY MODEL

Figure 1: Code-to-Theory Model

Saldaña, 2008, p. 12



APPENDIX E: ROADMAP, CATEGORIES, & THEMES

Table 3: Roadmap, Categories, & Themes

Category	Sub-Category	Associated Themes	Definition
Wellbeing	<i>Eudaimonic</i>	Community Connection	Feeling a part of the local community and/or embedded in the larger web of human and nonhuman others, a feeling of interconnectedness, feelings of safety and security; both a motivator and experience at the market
		Emotional Health	The market's capacity to facilitate calm or relaxing experiences, self-care, spiritual well-being, increased mental health
	<i>Hedonic</i>	Leisure	An experience of the market focused on fun, family, social gathering, sharing food and activities, etc.; both a motivator for and an experience at the market
Health		Perceived Nutrition	Customer perceptions of nutrition or food quality
		Agency	The opportunity to make informed choices related to one's health, clear and transparent information products and growing processes, information-sharing about food that takes place at the market
Nature Connection		Embodied Experience	The sensory experience of the market; the ways the experience was felt, seen, or heard, market qualities that connect the customer to the present moment, taking notice of one's soundings (e.g. seasonal shifts); both a motivator and experience at the market
		Heightened Awareness	Feeling close to nature, attentive to seasons; or feeling intimately connected with the natural world, heightened awareness of human and non-human relationships
Sustainability Values			Ways that the market aligns with, has shifted or clarified, or presents an opportunity to act in ways that honor one's values; expressions of respect or care related to food, farms, labor, community, etc.
Barriers			Obstacles to market access and/or the benefits it provides; discomfort during the market experience

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW DEMOGRAPHICS

Table 4: Interview Demographics

Site	Gender	Age	Race/Ethnicity
1	Female (4) Male (3) Nonbinary (2) Prefer not to say (1)	20-30 (5) 31-40 (4) 41-60 (0) 61-70 (1)	White (8) Indigenous/White (1) Black (1)
2	Female (9) Male (1)	20-30 (6) 31-40 (1) 41-50 (2) 51-70 (0) 71-80 (1)	White (7) Southeast Asian (1) Black (1) Indian/Pakistani (1)
3	Female (8) Male (2)	15-20 (1) 20-30 (5) 31-40 (2) 41-50 (1) 51-70 (0) 70-80 (1)	White (9) White/LatinX (1)

APPENDIX G: IMAGES

Figure 2: Images



Figure 2 (cont'd)



Figure 2 (cont'd)

