EMERGENT ECOLABELS IN THE US MARKET: CONTRIBUTIONS TO POLITICAL CONSUMERISM EFFORTS AND A STUDY OF NICHE CONSUMER VALUES

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ABSTRACT

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Ecolabeling schemes, with their focus on environmental, social and other ethical criteria, can contribute to political consumerism efforts in the food system. Following the successes of USDA Organic and fair trade ecolabels, a number of new ecolabeling programs are rapidly emerging in the US. New labels have the potential to benefit smaller farms and to provide consumers more opportunity to express their ethical values in the market. To better predict which emerging labels would see the most commercial success, a more thorough understanding of consumer values related to preferences is needed. Through a series of focus groups, this study explores self-enhancing (egocentric) and self-transcendent (altruistic) values of natural food store shoppers and retail cooperative members in Michigan, as related to seven emerging ecolabel criteria. While self-enhancing values were quite influential in both consumer groups, self-transcendent values were more influential for co-op participants than for natural food store participants. To reach a broad consumer market, farmers could participate in labeling programs that emphasize self-enhancing attributes in addition to self-transcendent attributes. Through marketing and consumer education, retailers and labelers could include a wider range of values for labels in order to generate more interest in participating in political consumerism efforts.

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CHAPTER 1

Political Consumerism Through Ecolabeling

Ecolabels, with their focus on production processes, can act as powerful devices of political consumerism, or efforts to use purchasing power as a form of civic engagement (Micheletti 2003). Through the attention given to social, environmental, political and other ethical issues, ecolabels can help mitigate these problems and offer consumers product choices that incorporate a wider range of human values, beyond conventional market values of quality and price. Two ecolabels, USDA Organic and Fair Trade have achieved significant market growth in the United States in recent years; however, they are criticized for not adequately fulfilling their ethical goals. As a result of these dominant labels' successes and failures, new ecolabel programs are rapidly emerging in the food sector with an attempt to broaden and diversify the political consumerism efforts of labeling schemes. Whether emerging labels succeed in fulfilling their ethical goals through markets depend, in part, on a thorough understanding of consumer values. If ecolabels properly attend to values relevant to consumers, they stand a greater chance of gaining a following and contributing on a large scale to political consumerism efforts.

Labeling as a strategy

In a contemporary market setting, consumers are limited in the information that is available when choosing products. Beyond the price, brand, nutrition facts, apparent quality and experiential knowledge of the product, consumers typically receive very

little information about the processes of production (Nelson 1970). Concerns with these processes, however, are becoming more widespread as a reaction to globally expansive and increasingly homogenized agro-food systems (McMichael 1994). Many of these concerns stemmed from the differing paradigms of conventional and alternative agriculture such as dependence vs. independence, specialization vs. diversity, competition vs. community, and domination of nature vs. harmony with nature (Beus and Dunlap 1990). Because capitalist market economics tend to externalize social or environmental costs, and because consumers cannot ascertain process attributes directly, ethical values are largely ignored.

To counter predominant market forces, product labeling has become a popular method of translating green production processes, or other credence attributes, to consumers (Stø et al. 2005). Early on, many products that did address these issues remained primarily in niche markets and therefore could not adequately attend to their ethical goals on a wide scale. In recent years, however, USDA Organic and fair trade ecolabels (which attend to primarily to ethical and social goals, respectively) have achieved great successes with mainstream consumers throughout the United States (Raynolds 2000). Sales of USDA Organic food products increased annual sales at rates approaching 20% from 1990 to 2008 and now account for more than 3.7% of all US food sales (Howard and Allen 2010, Organic Trade Association 2010). By 2000, mainstream conventional supermarkets had eclipsed natural food retailers as the largest selling sector of organic food, which has contributed to this label's continued growth (Dimitri and Greene 2002). Fair trade product sales are also seeing tremendous growth in

mainstream channels and niche markets alike. In 2010, sales of Fair Trade products grew by 24% in grocery stores nationwide with fastest growth rates in conventional markets, outpacing natural and specialty food grocers (Fair Trade USA 2011).

This growing shift toward ecolabels points to a powerful form of political consumerism that engages consumers in expressing their values in a highly individual and democratic manner (Micheletti 2003). By embedding social and environmental values into consumer products via labels shoppers can essentially vote with their dollars for desirable issues signaling a profound shift in the way consumers buy goods in neoliberal markets, one that seeks to de-fetishize commodities (Allen and Kovach 2000, Barham 2002). In other words, ecolabels reduce the fetishization, or concealment, of the social relations behind the production of commodities. As a result, they help transform market functions, based predominantly on monetary transactions, toward more progressive values. Such alternative economies, with sustained success, could potentially embed themselves into the conventional market system, thus forming a more human-centered economy (Barham 2002; Polyani 1944).

Criticisms

Tensions exist, however, between those who view ecolabels as a transitional tool for radical market transformation and those who see them as a strategy to patch problem areas within the existing market (Codon, Siriex, and Reardon, 2006). A critique of the former position is the dominant market system's primary goal of capital accumulation, which constrains the depth that eco-labels' ethical goals can effectively reach

(Heilbroner 1990). Following the growth of organic and fair trade labels, for example, much criticism posits that their purported social and environmental benefits have not been fulfilled, or have been coopted (Bacon 2005; Getz and Schrek 2006; Jaffee 2007; Jaffee and Howard 2010). Additionally, creating effective program standards to meet the labels' broad benefits proves problematic when faced with production-level realities and complex social and environmental processes (Bruce and Laroiya 2007).

Fair trade labeling's origins involved attempts to shortcut traditional commodity exchanges and create a more direct link between producers worldwide and consumers in the Global North (Raynolds 2002). With the rapid growth of fair trade labels, original ideologies have become vulnerable to re-absorption by capitalist markets, benefitting large corporations more than intended small-scale producers (Jaffee and Howard 2010). Major players in the trade of coffee, for example, have the resources and power to co-opt the label's public appeal while neglecting the initial movement's values of solidarity and equity for marginalized global producers (Renard 2003).

Similarly, the transition of diverse organic movements in the U.S. to a uniform governmentally regulated label brought profound shifts to organic's significance to producers. From the 1960s through the 1990s, organic labeled food served as a niche marketing technique for smaller producers who were finding it increasingly difficult to compete in mainstream markets. These products achieved greatest popularity in natural food grocery markets and retail food cooperatives. The consumers who frequented these retailers were interested in reducing agriculture's environmental impact, eating less processed foods, and contributing to community-based food systems (Gutknecht

2009). After organic became a national standard administered by the USDA in 2002, the label expanded more rapidly into conventional grocery markets and gained a wider consumer base (Dimitri and Greene 2002). The federal standards emphasized allowable and prohibited agricultural inputs but did not attend to broader organic ideals of local community orientation, harmonious human-nature relationship, or small-scale (Vos 2000). The diluted standards of the national label essentially allowed agro-industrial farms to easily gain a market edge over small and regional organic farms, thereby threatening the resiliency of these smaller enterprises (Guthman 2004; Jaffee and Howard 2010; Milestad and Darnhofer 2003). Small and medium sized organic farmers had once again found themselves on the margins of a movement that largely gained popularity as a result of their own grassroots efforts.

With the realities of market cooptation, it is debated whether ecolabels can effectively influence the ethical issues they strive to change. Other forms of political consumerism, like boycotts and demonstrations, may be more visible and harder to co-opt, but eco-labeling schemes are the most widespread form today (Vogel 2004). Additionally, US consumers largely prefer labeling as a practical method of obtaining ethical product information (Howard and Allen 2010). Despite current labels' failings and the confusion over their fundamental identity, ecolabels at their core represent a subversive challenge to conventional market norms and are able to politically influence production practices (Barham 2002). Even as 'big organic' goes corporate, the acreage of certified organic farmland and pasture continues to grow in the United States, adding over a million acres between 2001 and 2005 (Greene and Kremen 2003; Willer and

Klicher 2009). These trends show that business as usual does change, if only slightly, as product labeling brings previously hidden practices to the fore. If emerging ecolabeling schemes can learn from previous mistakes and carefully implement safeguards against cooptation (e.g. oversight by grass-roots organizations; creating and maintaining high standards), potential still exists to attract wide support and create new ways for farmers and consumers to mutually benefit (Conner 2004).

Emerging Ecolabels

In response to the market successes of organic and fair trade ecolabels, new niche labeling programs have expanded to incorporate a wide-range of ethical food system issues. Most of the labels hone in on one primary ethical issue and focus on this when developing their standards. One exception is the 'Food Alliance Certified' label, which simultaneously presents multiple ethical issues as their hallmark. At this time, the following labels are relatively unknown in the market, and few farmers currently choose to participate in the programs. Whether these labels will grow to reach similar popularity levels as organic or fair trade remains to be seen.

Many of the following labels, as well as USDA Organic, use third-party certification, which employs independent auditors to verify that producers are upholding label standards. The independent auditors, or third parties, do not have a direct financial stake in enforcing the label standards, thus reducing potential biases. Labels generally address credence attributes of products, meaning characteristics that consumers cannot directly ascertain in the marketplace. Third party certification

methods serve to ensure that the label is accurate thus bolstering consumer trust, which is tremendously important to label acceptance (Nilsson, Tunçer & Thidell 2003). While this method is useful from a consumer perspective, it also may exclude small and medium-sized producers who lack the resources to access certifying programs and meet their (often expensive) requirements (Hatanaka, Bain and Busch 2005). Peer certification, as used by the Certified Naturally Grown label (described below), has become an alternative verification method that utilizes participating producers to verify each other's practices. This method minimizes costs to producers while offering consumers a reliable labeled product.

The Food Alliance Certified label incorporates multiple issues in their standards such as sustainable agriculture, socially justice, animal welfare, and wildlife conservation. By attending to wide-ranging issues, this label creates a holistic approach to agriculture and ranching in a similar to early organic ideals. Standards speak to safe and fair working conditions for laborers, healthy and humane care for livestock, prohibition of hormones and non-therapeutic antibiotics, no genetically modified crops or livestock, reduced pesticide use, conservation of soil and water resources, and protection of wildlife habitat. Instead of setting uniform standards, farmers are encouraged to set goals for their practices that evolve, and gradually improve, as past goals are met. The creation and development of this label involved a diverse coalition of farmers, scientists, processors, distributors, grocers, farm worker advocates, environmentalists and consumers. According to the label's website, over 320 farms and

ranches in North America currently participate in this label and most are small to mid-sized family owned and operated businesses (Food Alliance n.d.).

Many labels have emerged that attend to animal rights and livestock issues. These include American Humane Certified, Certified Humane, Animal Welfare Approved, American Grassfed, and Predator Friendly. American Humane Certified and Certified Humane are two competing labels that adhere to very similar standards. The former label has standards established by The American Humane Association, which requires producers to minimize animals' stress levels through a number of methods including access to clean food and water; allowing expressions of natural behaviors; and providing access to the outdoors. American Humane Certified is third-party audited, and requires producers to maintain online records and to participate in 24/7 live video monitoring (American Humane Certified 2010). Certified Humane standards, in addition to maintaining a high quality of life for livestock, prohibit the use of antibiotics and growth hormones. This label is also employs third-party certification. Both American Humane Certified and 'Certified Humane' standards require handlers to be knowledgeable about welfare techniques and competent in animal husbandry skills. Animal Welfare Approved standards require that animals receive more outdoor access and natural daylight than the former labels in addition to a focus on animal well-being (American Welfare Approved 2009). Additionally, only independent family or cooperatively owned farms are eligible to apply, and no fees are required for this third-party certified label. The American Grassfed label focuses standards less on animal welfare and more on pasture-based livestock operations. Standards require that

livestock forage on pastureland at all times, except during emergencies and inclement weather. Livestock diets must consist entirely of forage that has not passed its vegetative phase (i.e. corn and other grains in their vegetation phase is allowed), and sub-therapeutic antibiotics or hormones are prohibited (American Grassfed n.d.). Animal Welfare Approved conducts third-party certification for 'American Grassfed' producers at no charge. Finally, the Predator Friendly label seeks to strike a balance between the interests of conservationists and ranchers. The standards are ecologically specific and employ pasture management strategies, such as the use of guardian animals, fences, intensive observation and properly scheduled lambing and calving practices during times of low predator risk. Through wildlife education, certified producers promote maximization of both ecological and livelihood interests (Predator Friendly 2008).

Ecological agriculture and environmental conservation are other central focuses of labels such as Certified Naturally Grown, Demeter Biodynamic and Protected Harvest. The Certified Naturally Grown label uses peer certification to verify sustainable agricultural practices that adhere to natural biological cycles. Standards use USDA Organic standards as a baseline and require producers to additionally submit plant residue testing (Certified Naturally Grown 2011). Because of peer certification, paperwork requirements are minimal and fees are by donation only. Demeter Biodynamic employs holistic ecological and philosophical principles that attempt to manage the farm as a living organism. This label's standards also comply with USDA Organic standards and any additional requirements are site specific depending on the

unique characteristics of the farm (Demeter 2006). The Protected Harvest label uses the principles of integrated pest management to curtail pests, fungi, and other crop damaging organisms without complete reliance on chemical applications. Instead, beneficial ecological relationships are strengthened and techniques such as intensive observation and ecosystem restoration are utilized. Chemical applications are allowable but are tightly restrained by Toxicity Scores set by the labeling organization. Producers must use applications wisely to remain under a maximum level of Toxicity Units in order to maintain certification (Protected Harvest 2009).

Socially focused and local origin labels are also emerging including Buy Fresh, Buy Local (national), Select Michigan (statewide), FamilyFarmed.org, and domestic fair trade (no official label). Two locally oriented labels, Buy Fresh, Buy Local and Select Michigan, focus on products that are grown locally, regionally or statewide and benefit local producers, processors and the local economy. Buy Fresh, Buy Local, developed by Food Routes Network, is amenable to regions or states nationwide and assists grassroots organizations promote locally grown products within their region. The broader organization also provides organizational support, communication tools, and marketing resources to local and regional chapters (foodroutes.org 2009). The Select MI program is available to Michigan producers and processors statewide and is managed by the Michigan Department of Agriculture. Fresh produce must be 100% grown in Michigan and processed products must possess at least 51% Michigan grown ingredients (Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development 2011). Due to recent budget cuts, the Select Michigan logo is on hiatus and currently unavailable to

new applicants. Previously authorized users can continue to use the logo. FamilyFarmed.org certifies family-owned and operated farms in the Midwest that can access the Chicago market. Farms must utilize sustainable methods, be small to mid-sized and family members must provide a significant amount of the labor. Livestock must additionally have access to pasture, cannot be given hormones or non-therapeutic antibiotics. Additionally, certified producers make a commitment to invest economically and socially in their communities (FamilyFarmed.org 2010). The domestic fair trade movement has begun to develop as a domestic counterpart to international fair trade movements, though no official label currently exists. The Domestic Fair Trade Association (DFTA) maintains a membership program connecting North American producers, processors, retailer, and consumers to form healthy and enduring network relationships. DFTA's principles include equality, democratic ownership of small and family scale farms, farmer-led initiatives, sustainable production practices, safe and fair labor rights, and rights for indigenous populations (Domestic Fair Trade Association 2010).

Consumers who are likely to first become acquainted with these labels are shoppers of retail food cooperatives and natural food stores, like those who initially contributed to the growth of organic and fair trade in the United States (Gutknecht 2008; Nicholls and Opal 2005; Renard 2003). These niche consumers have the power to decide the success or failure of many of these emerging labels. After understanding the values of the label organizations and their certified producers, developing an understanding of consumer values and preferences is crucial to labels' success.

Consumer preferences for ecolabels

Multiple factors contribute to consumer purchases of ecolabeled products. The attitude-behavior gap can be defined as the dissonance between environment or other ethical knowledge and awareness and the actual behavior that follows that awareness. This applies to ecolabels, in that many consumers may possess at least a little knowledge or awareness of issues that ecolabels address, yet their purchasing behavior may not reflect it. Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) find that the factors contributing to this gap can be grouped into three major categories: demographic factors (i.e. primarily gender and years of education), external factors (i.e. institutional, economic, social and cultural factors) and internal factors (e.g. motivations, values, attitudes, environmental awareness, emotional involvement, and responsibility and priorities). In this thesis I focus on internal factors, and more specifically on consumer values, because of their high level of influence in food purchasing behavior (Kahle and Kennedy 1989; Sheth, Newman and Gross 1991; Thøgerson and Ölander 2002; Vinson, Scott and Lamont 1977).

Values for emerging ecolabels have received insufficient attention in the academic literature, as many of these labels have been newly established, but values for organic and fair trade labels have been studied more thoroughly. Food safety, personal health and environmental concerns have been found to contribute greatly to organic purchases (Blend and van Ravenswaay 1999; Durham 2007; Wilkins and Hillers 1994; Goldman and Clancy 1991; Loureiro, McCluskey and Mittlehammer 2001). More frequent consumers of organic foods share these concerns, but also hold deeper values

of inner well-being, altruism, and ecological harmony (Zanoli and Naspetti, 2002). For fair trade products, altruistic values toward human welfare were necessary for consumer interest (Loureiro and Lotade 2005). The dualistic characteristics between altruistic (i.e. self-transcendent) values and egocentric (i.e. self-enhancing) values are present in consumers' preferences for predominant ecolabels and are likely to be relevant for emerging ecolabels as well.

A better understanding of values for emerging ecolabels is needed to make predictions of which labels will overcome the attitude-behavior gap and become commercially successful. This information can aid farmers in choosing the label with the widest appeal while assisting retailers and labeling organizations in marketing the values that are most relevant to consumers. Additionally, a better understanding of how consumers apply their values to ecolabels can contribute to an understanding of their effectiveness as political consumerism devices.

Ecolabels as political consumerism devices

Emerging ecolabels have the potential to attend to a range of ethical food system issues on a broad scale and more so if they can overcome corporate cooptation. Labeling devices have become a breakthrough strategy representing political consumerism efforts that have the ability to break into markets that may be tightly controlled (Barham 2002). To maintain integrity, emerging labels must proceed carefully and intentionally (Conner 2004). The examples of organic and fair trade labels in the dominant market teaches that labeling standards must build barriers against corporate

control and be maintained vigilantly by the founding grassroots organizations. This is undoubtedly a difficult and complex task as market principles will largely dictate labels' success and will enact great influence on the ability of the label to fully achieve political consumerism goals. As ethical values for the processes of production become integrated into commodities, consumers will have greater control in expressing these values and thus driving change in food system practices. By understanding consumer values and how they are applied in the market, labeling organizations can better prepare for the risks to integrity that comes with market success.

In Chapter 2, which is written as an academic article, I present my empirical research on consumer values for emerging ecolabels. This research focuses on the impacts that self-transcendent and self-enhancing values have on the broader consumer value systems involved in ecolabel preferences. Focus groups were utilized to understand Michigan natural food store and retail food cooperative consumers' preferences and values. Chapter 3 then expands on the study's results for each of the emerging ecolabel issues presented and provides implications for new ecolabels entering the market.

CHAPTER 2

Self-enhancing and Self-transcendent Values Underlying Preferences For Emergent Food Ecolabels: A Study of Food Cooperative Members and Natural Food Store Consumers in Michigan.

Abstract

The market successes of USDA Organic and Fair Trade labeled food products have spurred the emergence of a variety of new ecolabels, which focus on wide-ranging criteria. While research has begun to pinpoint consumer preferences for these new criteria, an understanding of the values underlying consumer motivations for these preferences is largely unknown. A combination of self-enhancing (egocentric) and self-transcendent (altruistic) values play a role in consumer motivations for organic labeled food, but to what extent are these value dimensions involved in preferences for emerging eco-labels? This study explores the values and preferences of consumers through focus groups conducted with natural food store shoppers and retail cooperative members in Michigan. Self-transcendent values were more influential for co-op participants than for natural food store participants, but importantly, both groups primarily expressed self-enhancing values. Participants conveyed multiple value types for the most preferred labels (organic, local, and the humane treatment of animals), while less preferred labels elicited fewer value types. Farmers, retailers and marketers can apply these results to better meet consumer demand by participating in ecolabels that already appeal to both self-transcendent and self-enhancing value dimensions, or by attempting to emphasize the potential self-enhancing attributes of other emerging ecolabels (domestic fair trade, pasture-raised, integrated pest management and family

farmed) to consumers.

Introduction

Despite the enormous successes of the USDA Organic and Fair Trade ecolabels within mainstream markets in recent years, they have received criticism for not truly fulfilling their intended ethical goals and leaving smaller scale producers on the margins (Bacon 2005; Getz and Shreck 2006; Guthman 2004; Jaffe 2007). As a result of these dominant labels' successes and failures, new ecolabels that address a variety of social and environmental criteria are rapidly emerging in the marketplace. Some of these seek to complement more successful ecolabels, while others more explicitly attempt to reach disenfranchised producers and disillusioned consumers. Although emerging ecolabels have the potential to attract consumer support on a broad scale, their efforts are thus far uncoordinated, not widely known, and few are driven by research on consumer demands. As a result, only a tiny minority of farmers currently participates in the growing number of certification programs. Research is just beginning to focus on consumer preferences and the potential demand for emerging eco-labels, which point to consumer interests for locally grown, humanely raised animals and environmentally friendly labels (Howard and Allen 2010, 2006; Loureiro, McCluskey and Mittlehammer 2001).

Underneath these preferences lie complex value systems, which have been extensively shown to guide consumer behavior, yet remain unexplored in the literature on emerging ecolabels (Kahle and Kennedy 1989; Sheth, Newman and Gross 1991;

Thøgerson and Ölander 2002; Vinson, Scott and Lamont 1977). Developing a deeper understanding of how consumers apply these values to newer labeling schemes can be essential to identifying those that elicit the most consumer interest, and thus will achieve greater success for food producers.

As popular devices of political consumerism, ecolabels allow consumers to engage in expressing their private and public values in a highly individual and democratic manner while aiming to challenge the structure of neo-liberal capitalist markets (Allen and Kovach 2000; Barham 2002; Micheletti 2003; Vogel 2004). By this definition, ecolabels appeal to altruistic values by garnering support for ethical or moral issues that usually do not immediately impact the consumer directly. However, labels that appeal only to altruistic values can be difficult to sell to mainstream consumers, who, in much of the literature on consumer values, appear to be solely concerned with self-serving interests (Kahle and Kennedy 1989; Lai 1995; Sneth et al. 1991).

In spite of the dominant consumer values literature's focus on self-enhancing (egocentric) values, self-transcendent (altruistic) values are also likely to play a definite role in sustainable consumption and likewise may influence consumer preferences for ecolabels (Schwartz 1996; Thøgerson and Ölander 2002). Little is known, however, about how these seemingly dichotomous value dimensions are negotiated to influence preferences. A pyramidal model used by a British retailer suggests that consumers must first fulfill basic personal needs before pursuing more altruistic goals (Lang and Heasman 2004). Yet more complex, overlapping goals may be involved, as evidenced in the literature on consumers of organic products. Multiple studies suggest these

consumers integrate both altruistic and egocentric values, specifically in terms of environmental welfare and personal health motivations (Durham 2007; Hughner et al. 2007; Wilkins and Hillers 1994; Zanoli and Naspetti 2002). This literature suggests that the most successful ecolabels will need to appeal to both self-transcendent and self-enhancing value dimensions so that consumers may pursue their ethical goals while also satisfying their more individualistic needs.

In this chapter, I review the literature on self-enhancing and self-transcendent value dimensions as defined by Schwartz (1996), as well as current knowledge on consumer preferences and motivations for established and emerging ecolabels. I then describe the methods used to explore consumer motivations and values for a variety of emerging ecolabel criteria, which involved focus groups with participants recruited from food cooperatives and natural food stores in three Michigan cities. The results that follow indicate that both types of consumers expressed egocentric values more often than altruistic values with respect to emerging ecolabels (although as expected, the co-op members were more likely to express altruistic values). In addition, the most preferred labels (organic, humane, and local) tended to elicit the largest number of value types. Finally, I discuss implications of these results for farmers, retailers and marketers, such as the need to emphasize self-enhancing values of health, food safety and high quality when promoting ecolabels to consumers.

Background

Consumer values systems

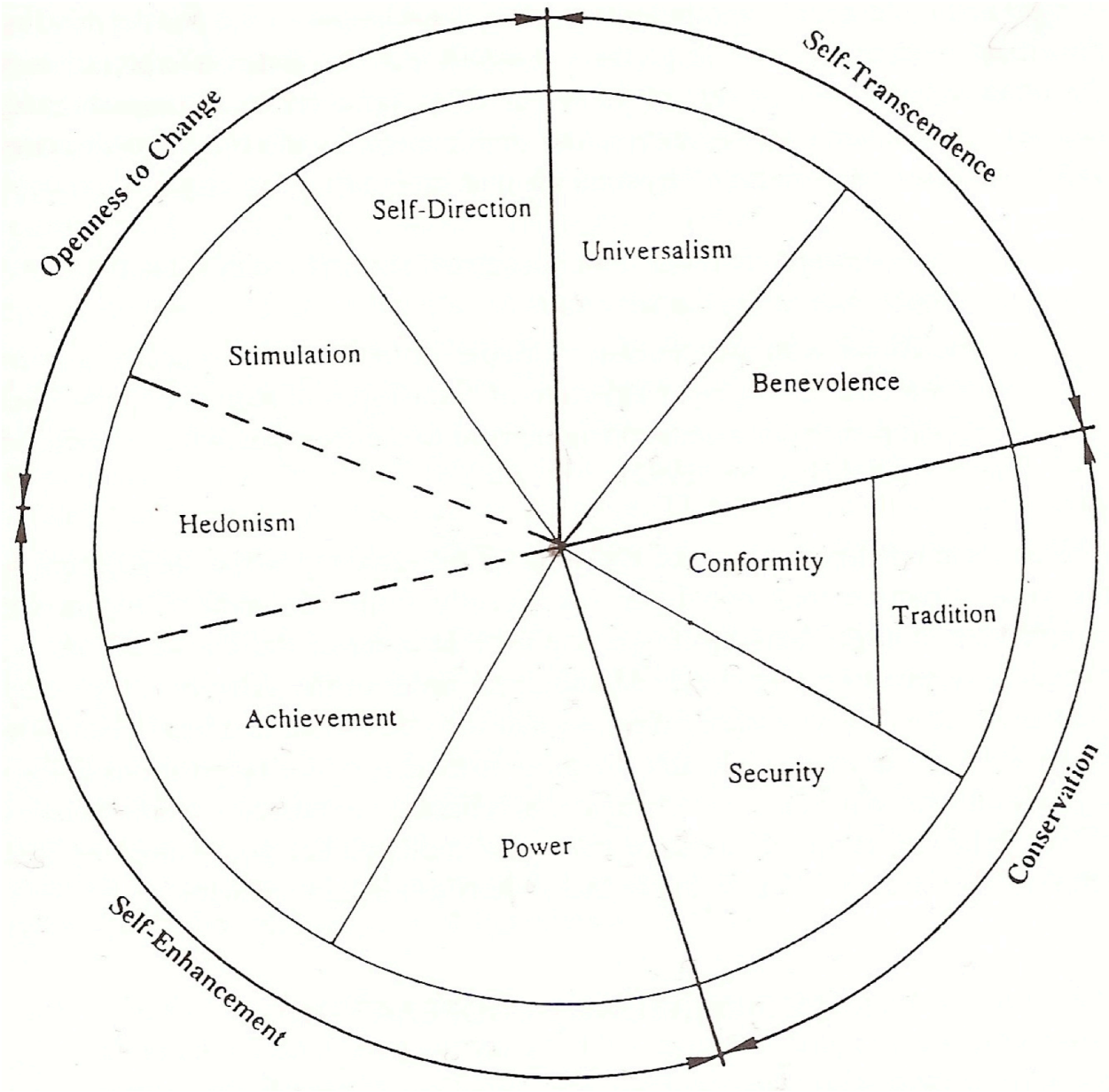
In the 1990s, Shalom H. Schwartz (who was influenced by the social psychologist Milton Rokeach), identified ten human value types that exist across 41 different countries worldwide (Rokeach 1973; Schwartz 1996). Schwartz (1990) describes values as:

> …people's conceptions of the goals that serve as guiding principles in their lives…Values are cognitive representations of three types of universal human requirements – needs of individuals as biological organisms, requisites of coordinated social interaction, and survival and welfare needs of groups (P. 142).

Humans cross-culturally experience values that Schwartz visualized as a continuum of self-enhancing to self-transcending dimensions (Figure 1, from Schwartz 1996:5). Of the ten value types that Schwartz identifies, some are more directly related to consumer values for eco-labels than others. Value types in the Self-Transcendence dimension include universalism (i.e. welfare for all people and nature) and benevolence (i.e. welfare for people within one's close community). The Self-Enhancement dimension includes value types of power and achievement. The hedonism value type (i.e. pleasure and gratification) straddles both the Self-Enhancement dimension and the Openness to Change dimension. The security value type (i.e. aspirations for safety, stability and health for family and society) falls within the Conservation dimension and on the alternate side of the Self-Enhancement dimension.

With a high degree of similarity across societies, values are not equally weighted, but hierarchically ordered by level of importance. Cross-nationally, benevolence and

Figure 1: Schwartz's (1996) continuum of human value systems illustrates the 4 value dimensions, which each includes more specific value types.



universalism values were found to guide people's life decisions most prominently (Schwartz and Bardi 2001). Since eco-labels intend to appeal to altruistic values (e.g.

environmental welfare or social justice), corresponding values for ecolabels would fall into Schwartz's self-transcendent dimension.

Another model of consumer values was developed by a prominent UK retail chain (Figure 2, from Lang and Heasman 2004:196) and resembles Maslow's hierarchy of human needs (Maslow 1970). Rising consumer aspirations are depicted in a pyramid, where consumer-centered motivations form the base and increasingly become more altruistic toward the peak. According to the retailer's study, consumers must first fulfill their need to source safe food, and, second, source food that is healthy and nutritious.[1] After these most basic needs are met, consumers can begin to move up to higher levels in the pyramid, which include eschewing unnatural production (e.g. genetic engineering, practices that can lead to BSE, a.k.a. mad cow disease) and mislabeling.[2] The most altruistic values form the peak of the pyramid with animal welfare, environmental sustainability and, finally, ethics. In other words, consumers can only begin to consider more altruistic values once the more basic levels have been satisfied. Schwartz's value dimensions can be loosely applied to this model, with self-enhancing values representing the base of the pyramid (e.g. security values as food safety concerns) and self-transcendent values representing the peak (e.g. universalism values as ethics).

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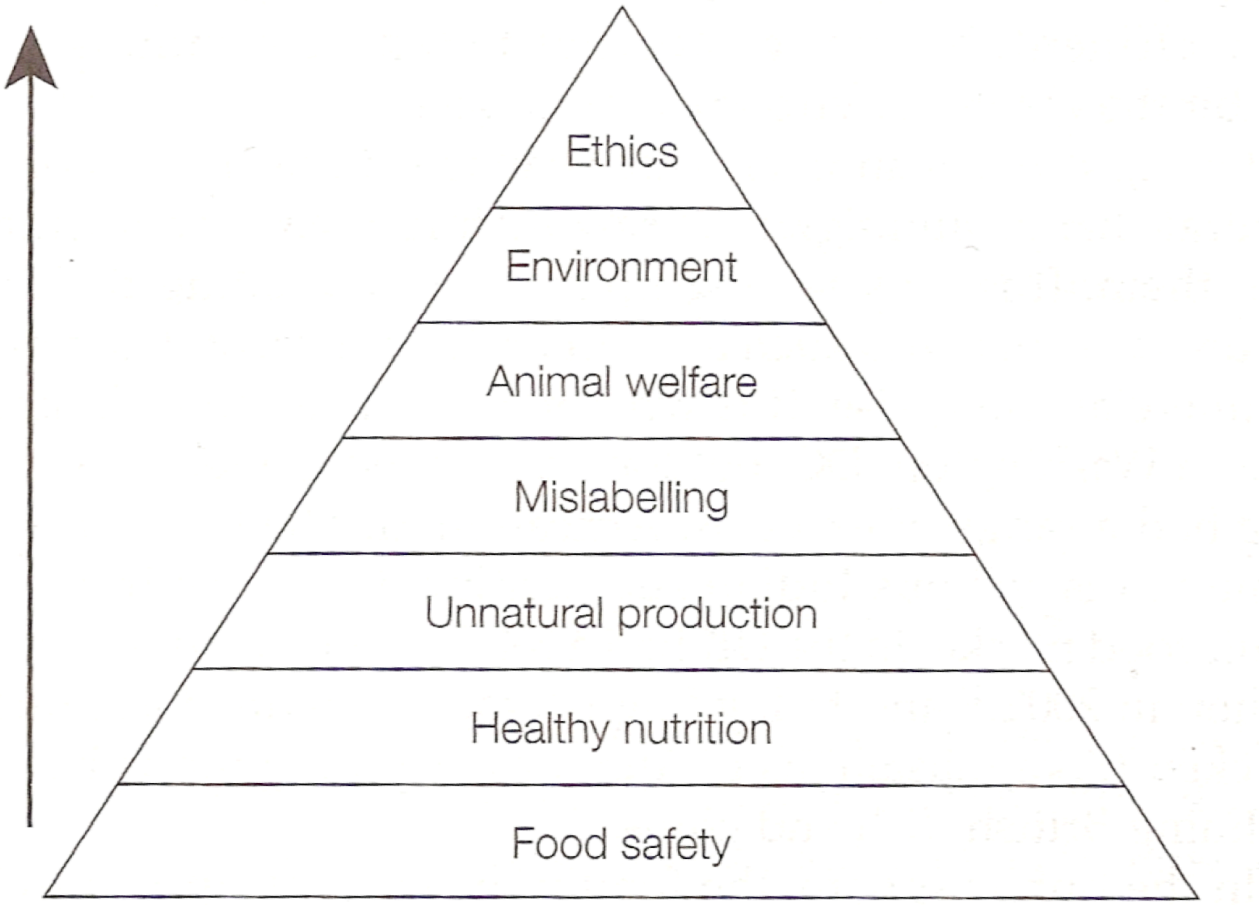
[1] Empirically supported by similar studies conducted in the United States (Howard and Allen 2006, 2010).

[2] Both unnatural production and mislabeling concerns are of greater public concern in Britain and Europe than in America.

Figure 2: Pyramid of rising consumer food aspirations, based on a prominent UK retailer's study. More basic, personal values must be met before consumers can consider more altruistic values in their food choices.



These two theoretical devices, while similar, illustrate differences in the method by which consumers use values to approach their food preferences. In Schwartz's continuum, values for benevolence and universalism were found to be the most prominent life-guiding values, therefore, by simply providing consumers with access to more eco-labeled products, latent self-transcendental values will eventually become more consciously influential in consumers' purchasing habits (Schwartz and Bardi,

2001, Thøgerson and Ölander 2002). That is to say, as ecolabels become more accessible, the consumer market will grow with time, and especially for those labels that address the most self-transcendent values. In contrast, the pyramid of rising consumer aspirations requires consumers to meet basic and self-enhancing needs before more altruistic values can be realized and supported. In this case, ecolabels that promote the most self-transcendent values will experience the most difficulty in capturing a market and will remain small.

Both scenarios assume, however, that possessing certain values will lead to a preference for an ecolabel that markets a corresponding criterion. For instance, a value for benevolence (i.e. caring for others within a community) may lead to a preference for a locally grown labeled product by which community members presumably benefit. Some literature supports this claim: for fair trade products, values for human welfare are most prominent in consumers' motivations, and fair trade labels almost exclusively promote social justice in their marketing (Cordon, Siriex and Reardon 2006; Loureiro and Lotade 2005). With environmentally focused eco-labels, universalism values (i.e. concerns for the welfare of nature) must be present in consumer motivations in order to justify the purchase of an environmentally beneficial ecolabel (Thøgerson 2000; Thøgerson and Ölander 2002).

In practice, consumer behavior does not always follow this straightforward logic. Consumer values and their manifested motivations may not, in fact, correspond with the values of the ecolabeling organization. Initial research indicates that domestic fair trade labeled food products and fair trade labeled coffee appeal to people with

environmental motivations as well as human welfare concerns, although these labels focus most of their marketing on the latter (Howard and Allen 2008; Loureiro and Lotade 2005). With consumers of organic products, motivations for physical health and food safety (i.e. self-enhancing values) play a significant part in preferences for organic products, in addition to motivations for environmental welfare and other altruistic values (i.e. self-transcendent values) (Blend and van Ravenswaay 1999; Durham 2007; Goldman and Clancy 1991; Hughner et al. 2007; Loureiro et al. 2001; Wilkins and Hillers 1994; Zanoli and Naspetti 2002). However, the organic label originally grew out of a reaction to conventional agriculture's negative impacts on the environment and continues to promote claims of environmental benefits today. The USDA does not promote organic foods' potential contribution to improve human health, in part because such claims (e.g. higher levels of antioxidants) are still contested among scientists (Dangor et al. 2010; Faidon, Fotini and Zampela 2003; Williams 2002).

These findings indicate the complexity of value systems and require in-depth inquiry into the values elicited by specific labels. Importantly, people do not possess distinct and separate categories of values that always lead to corresponding outcomes. Schwartz's continuum of values points to the interrelated nature of human value systems, and through this lens, consumers' motivations for various ecolabeling issues can be more thoroughly understood.

Emerging ecolabels and consumers

Many labels have recently emerged that address various issues such as the Buy Fresh, Buy Local label and the American Humane Certified label. Often, labels include multiple criteria in their standards but tend to focus their marketing on a more singular aspect. One exception is the Food Alliance Certified label, which broadly markets wide-ranging criteria from social justice principles to sustainable agricultural practices in an attempt to capture piecemeal self-transcendent issues into one. But translating multiple, and often ambiguous, values via one label may lose consumers in the process by not targeting the most marketable issues.

Existing research on consumer preferences for emerging ecolabels has found that U.S. consumers would most prefer labels indicating local production and humane treatment of animals, followed by a living wage for workers, US grown products and small-scale production (Howard and Allen 2010, 2006). These same consumers were found to be most interested in food safety and nutrition, while also showing strong interest in the treatment of animals, environmental impacts and working conditions (Howard and Allen 2010). In another study, organic and ecolabel consumers were also found to hold motivations for food safety and environmental quality (Loureiro et al. 2001). This initial research suggests that, in terms of ecolabel preferences, consumers possess self-enhancing values for personal health as well as self-transcendent values for the well being of other people, animals and the environment.

Co-op and natural food store consumers

As niche consumers, retail food cooperative members and natural food store shoppers have both contributed to the success of ecolabels like organic and fair trade (Gutknecht 2008; Nicholls and Opal 2005; Renard 2003). Despite this similarity, inherent differences exist between them, to be described below. A better understanding of value differences between these two groups with respect to specific eco-labels can lead to implications for broadening the consumer base for eco-labeled products.

Many, if not most, retail food cooperatives today sell mainly organic and natural foods due to the preferences of co-op founders and members who seek to "build a better food economy" (Gutknecht 2008:n.p.). Altruistic and relational values are reflected in retail food cooperatives' ideological features of organizational participation and democratic decision-making (Brown 1985) despite these structure's potential hindrances to economic viability (Cotterill 1983). Studies suggest that co-op shoppers tend to place high priority on self-transcendent values, though self-enhancing values are still vigorously influential. Co-op members were found to prefer seasonal and locally grown foods more strongly than nonmembers, for example, due to motivations including natural resource conservation (Wilkins 1996). Additionally, co-op members and shoppers show strong support for organic agriculture and are highly concerned with environmental issues, though the concern for pesticide residues on produce is a significant contributing factor to preferring organic and more frequent purchases of organic products (Goldman and Clancy 1991; Wilkins and Hillers 1994). While self-transcendent values for environmental issues are quite evident in co-op shoppers'

preferences, self-enhancing values, represented in concerns for pesticide residues, appear to also have very strong pull.

Natural food retailers do not share the organizational structure of cooperatives, and their consumers have also been less studied as a uniform group. Their numbers are growing much more rapidly than cooperative members, however. The number of natural health food stores over 5,000+ square feet in size tripled to over 650 stores in the early 1990's, for instance (Goldstein 1999). . This can be which can linked to the booming alternative medicine industry during this same period (Ibid.). These stores tend to offer products and resources that support a great number of alternative medicinal philosophies, including Chinese traditional medicine, homeopathy, and macrobiotics, and practices like acupuncture, herbal therapy and aromatherapy (Thompson 2004; Thompson and Troester 2002). These retailers also typically sell food products that align with these medical philosophies and other health-centered diets, such as organic, gluten-free, additive-free, and other less processed foods. Thompson and Troester's work with natural health consumers helped to shed light on these consumers' complex microcultural framework, which largely reacts against allopathic, or conventional Western, medicine and requires holistic approaches to individual health and internal well-being (2002). Though the value systems of natural food store consumers may certainly overlap with those of cooperative consumers, the former's intense focus on personal wellness and healing does not include cooperatives' additional focus on community-based ownership. Natural food store consumers are therefore less likely to be ideologically concerned with self-transcendent values in their

food choices and more likely to be concerned with self-enhancing values relating to inner health and wellness.

Methods

In early 2009 (February-April), focus groups were utilized to assess consumer preferences for a variety of emerging ecolabels. Using an intercept sampling method, 46 participants were recruited in person from natural food stores and retail food cooperatives in Lansing, Ann Arbor and Kalamazoo, Michigan. These cities were chosen because each possessed at least one natural food retailer and one retail food cooperative. Twenty participants in total were recruited from natural food stores, all three of which served as grocery markets and nutritional supplement centers. Two stores were independently owned while one retailer represented a statewide chain. A total of twenty-six participants were recruited from food cooperatives, all three of which were members of the National Cooperative Grocers Association and focused their sales on natural foods. These participants were all member-owners of their co-op, in that they all maintained membership status.

Focus groups were held one week after each recruiting period. Six total focus groups were conducted, divided equally between natural food store participants and food co-op members. Sessions were held in the same city as the recruitment location and ran approximately 90 minutes in duration. At the beginning of each focus group session, participants were introduced to the purpose of the study and asked to sign a consent form. Participants were provided a light meal and $40 compensation.

The design, data collection and analysis of the focus groups followed the guidelines first developed by Morgan & Krueger (1998; Krueger and Casey 2009). A structured question set with open-ended questions was utilized. Participants were first asked to discuss why they shop at the retailer from which they were recruited. They were then asked about seven different ecolabels individually: 1) Organic, 2) Biointensive Integrated Pest Management (Bio IPM), 3) Family Farmed, 4) Humane treatment of animals, 5) Domestic Fair Trade, 6) Local (more specifically a Select Michigan label administered by the Michigan Department of Agriculture), and 7) Pasture-raised. More explicitly multi-criteria labels (e.g. Food Alliance) were not tested for simplicity. These ecolabel criteria were chosen based on those that were most appealing in previous research (Howard and Allen, 2010), with the addition of some untested, lesser known emerging ecolabels (e.g. Bio IPM, family farmed, & pasture-raised). Participants were provided with brief definitions for each label (Figure 3), developed by the researcher, and asked if they would prefer the labeled product to a similar product without the label, and why or why not. No images were used to present the labels. The label order was randomized for each focus group to avoid a fatigue pattern. Saturation was reached with the conclusion of the third focus group for each consumer type, as these groups reiterated similar themes with no new major themes emerging. Following the completion of the discussion period in each focus group, participants were asked to rank the all the labels in the order of their preference following the completion of the discussion period in each focus group. Finally, a demographic survey was administered before each session concluded.

Figure 3: Seven ecolabel criteria were presented in the study. Participants were provided with these descriptions.

BioIPM: Incorporates integrated pest management practices that reduce the need for pesticides, herbicides and fungicides. Practices are management intensive and employ ecological principles. Adherents to this strategy first seek to prevent, then observe problems and finally interfere, if need be, with pest issues. Interference utilizes mechanical controls, biological controls and, lastly, chemical controls.

Domestic fair trade: Blends the international fair trade's labor standards (safe and healthy working conditions, fair and stable pricing) with farms in North America. Supports farmer-led initiatives (like co-operative organizations) and works to connect them directly with traders, retailers and consumers.

Family farmed: The owners of the farm contribute the majority of labor and management decisions.

Humane: Assures that animals that are raised for meat or other products (i.e. milk, eggs, wool, etc.) are humanely treated. This means they are provided a clean and nutritious diet (that does not contain antibiotics and hormones), shelter and sufficient space. The animals are allowed to behave naturally during their lifespan.

Organic: Standards prohibit the use of synthetic pesticides, herbicides, fungicides, and fertilizers, genetically engineered seed, and irradiation. Animals must be fed 100% organic feed.

Pasture-raised: This label would assure that livestock are raised on pastureland except during inclement weather. Ruminants are primarily grass-fed.

Select Michigan: Promotes the public awareness and sales and market opportunities for Michigan grown food products.

Full transcriptions were produced using the audio recordings of the focus group discussions. The data were analyzed using the qualitative analysis computer software, NVivo 8, produced by QSR International. I identified and coded emergent themes, which my advisor cross-validated for accuracy. Codes were then divided between self-enhancing and self-transcendent value dimensions, and co-op focus groups and natural food store focus groups were compared. In this study, I define preferences as the overall favorability toward ecolabels; values as the reasons participants give to support their

preferences; and value types as the motivational types of values adapted from Schwartz (1996). Despite Schwartz's distinction of four value dimensions, for simplicity in this analysis I defined value dimensions as self-enhancing or self-transcendent binaries. I included hedonism and security value types in the Self-Enhancing dimension and did not utilize the Openness to Change and Conservation value dimensions. This collapsing and slight rearranging of categories followed my interpretation that hedonism and security value types align more closely with self-fulfilling goals than altruistic goals with respect to foods.

Schwartz's value systems framework helps to classify the rich and complex data produced within a focus group setting. As participants discuss their reasoning behind their label preferences, values can be interpreted. By categorizing these values into either self-enhancing or self-transcendent motivational goals, I can then analyze which types of values correlate to specific ecolabels. For example, one may have a preference for the organic label because of a value for environmental welfare, which is categorized as a universalism value type, and which falls into the self-transcendent value dimension. I can also compare value differences between co-op participants and natural food store participants, honing in on which labels will be more or less appealing to which groups. Finally, this framework allows me to better understand how consumers apply self-enhancing or self-transcendent values when purchasing ecolabels, which retailers and labeling organizations can then use to more accurately target consumers.

Results and Discussion

Participants expressed a wide range of self-transcendent and self-enhancing values for each ecolabel presented, and the more values elicited for a label, the more likely participants preferred it. Both consumer groups generally viewed the organic, local (Select MI) and humane labels most favorably overall. The family farmed and Bio IPM labels received the most scrutiny and were generally perceived unfavorably by both consumer groups. The pasture-raised label and domestic fair trade labels fell somewhere in the middle, and consumer groups were more divided in their perceptions and favorability. The focus group discussions in addition to the ranking surveys (Table 1) support these findings.

Table 1: Most to least preferred ecolabels as determined by the ranking survey (n=45).

Rank	**Total votes***	**1st place votes (%)**
1. Organic	104	51.1
2. Humane	113	17.8
3. Select Michigan	161	15.6
4. Domestic fair trade	183	11.1
5. Pasture-raised	194	0
6. Bio IPM	251	2.2
7. Family farmed	254	2.2

*lower total votes = higher ranking

Values and preferences for ecolabels

Focus group participants identified four main value types as defined by Schwartz (1996). Within the self-enhancing dimension, participants identified value types for

hedonism and security. Hedonism values that participants discussed included feelings of satisfaction that could be derived from purchasing an ecolabeled product and enjoyment of the product's taste and quality. Security values include participants' concerns for food safety, personal and familial health, and supporting one's economy with ecolabeled products. While boosting the economy affects many people and may not initially seem self-serving, Schwartz argues that the stabilization of national security for the sake of maintaining a sound society still speaks to values ultimately aligning with egocentric aspirations. In the self-transcendent dimension, participants identified themes that were categorized into Schwartz's universalism and benevolence value types. Universalism was elicited in participants' concerns for farmer and human well-being, animal welfare, environmental conservation, and equal access to high quality food. Benevolence was shown in motivations for community support, that is, promoting community cohesion or providing financial support for small and local enterprises through ecolabel purchases.

More values, more preferred

The values that participants expressed were not limited to the values targeted by the label. Instead, participants referenced a wide range of values pertaining to each label. The most referenced values from both consumer groups included farmer welfare from the self-transcendent dimension and health and quality from the self-enhancing dimension. Co-op participants in particular expressed all three of these values for every label presented. Environmental values and generalized ethical values (for human and animal welfare), though slightly less pervasive, also were frequently present across a

range of labels. Despite the values that the labels intended to target, participants consistently expressed their most important values and based their preferences on how well the labels were perceived to meet them.

The more values that participants expressed for a label, the more participants tended to favor it. More preferred labels, like organic and local, were more readily connected to multiple values while less favorable labels, like Bio IPM and family farmed, elicited fewer values. The local label, for instance, drew the widest range of values from participants of both consumer groups; they connected the label to nearly all the values expressed over the entirety of the focus groups. Many participants expressed enthusiastically that the local label contributes to farmer welfare, environmental conservation and stronger communities. Participants also felt locally grown products would be safer and healthier to eat and of better quality. Other favored labels were often perceived as fulfilling similar values. Less favorable labels were perceived to satisfy fewer values. The Bio IPM label, for instance, was largely unfamiliar to many participants who perceived it as addressing few values. In some participants' view, Bio IPM could benefit farmers and could potentially be healthier and of higher quality than conventional, but they typically indicated that these same values are better fulfilled by the organic label.

Differences between cooperative and natural food store participants

Despite their similarities, co-op and natural food participants differed significantly in their range of value types, the importance of self-transcendent values in label

preferences and in their comprehension and articulation of current food system issues. Co-op focus groups, as compared to natural food store focus groups, applied a wider range of values types across labels, maintained more focus on self-transcendent values, and more fluently discussed food systems issues. Natural food store focus groups expressed a narrower range of values, considerably less focus on self-transcendent values and generally displayed less assuredness and insight on food system issues.

1. Range of values

Overall, the co-op focus groups expressed a wider range of values than natural food store focus groups suggesting that co-op participants more strongly preferred more labels than natural food store participants. Co-op participants expressed self-transcendent values and self-enhancing values more widely over all the labels presented. The need for equal food access, in particular, was only discussed in co-op focus groups and not in natural food store focus groups. Co-op participants referenced more types of values for the humane, domestic fair trade, Bio IPM, and family farmed labels.

The values connected to the domestic fair trade label showed the most difference between consumer groups. Both co-op and natural food participants held similar self-transcendent values for having an ethical responsibility to promote basic human rights and for supporting environmental welfare through pesticide reduction. However, co-op focus groups also valued supporting farmers through the label, and some co-op participants were concerned that the label's cost requirements could be out of reach for

some farmers. Self-enhancing values divided consumer groups further. Both groups were interested in health and quality, but co-op participants also valued supporting the national economy and believed food safety would be improved under a domestic fair trade label due to better US agricultural safety regulations.

2. Comprehension of food issues

The second major area of distinction between cooperative and natural food store participants involved their interpretation of current food issues and how this interpretation informed values. Co-op participants tended to more fluently express a systemic and political understanding of the some of the major problems in the food and agricultural sector today, including issues of equal food access, the power of agribusiness, and its detrimental effect on small farmers. Co-op participants also were more critical of the USDA Organic label citing accessibility problems for small farmers and the reality that standards still allow the application of certain pesticides. Many participants within co-op focus groups were clearly passionate and knowledgeable about these issues and expressed the careful thought that goes into their food choices. They therefore tended to more clearly articulate their values as they relate to food system problems than natural food store shoppers.

Natural food store participants were indeed familiar with many of these food system issues but the groups as a whole tended to discuss these issues and their values in a more fragmented and less articulate manner. A generalized ethical obligation often emerged in natural food store focus groups in place of more specific self-transcendent

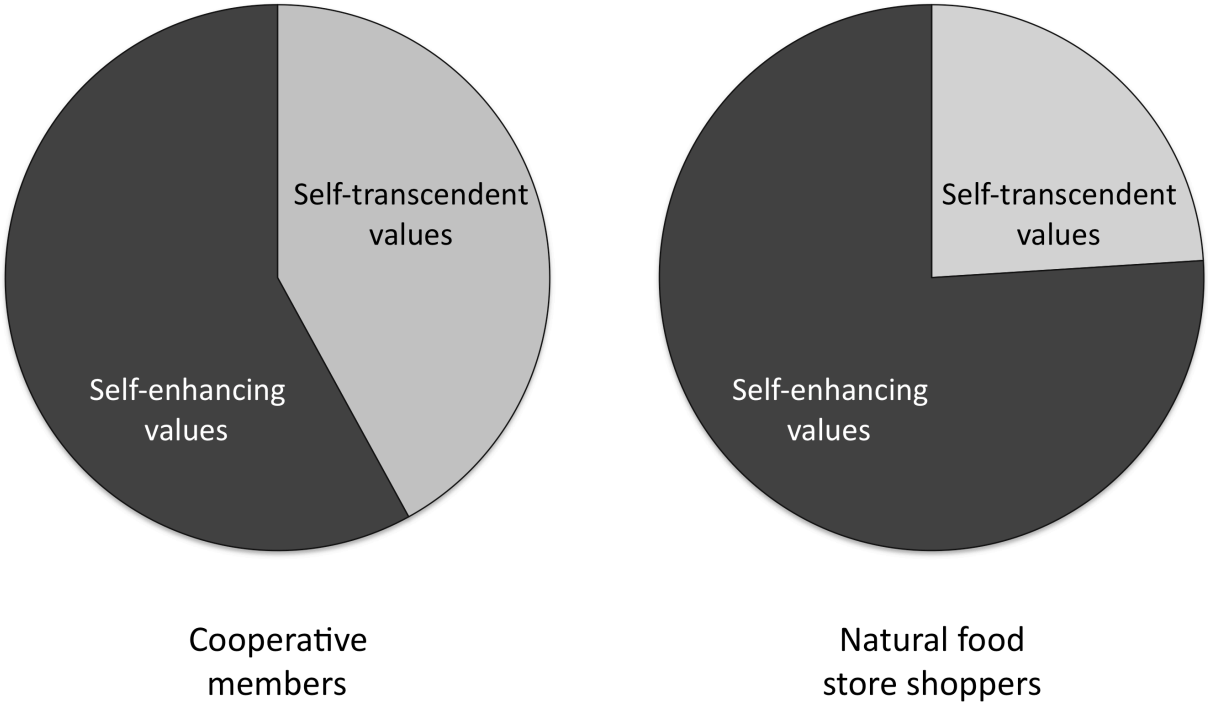
values. This value was characterized by participants' expressions of their moral reasons for supporting a particular label (e.g. It's right to let livestock graze on pasture; human rights violations are wrong). However, these expressions were more simply stated and discussions rarely approached an understanding of how these moral judgments are violated in the current food system. A lack of understanding of food system issues was most evident when discussing the domestic fair trade label, which natural food store participants largely met with confusion. Many participants were unclear of the need for this label due to an unawareness of farmworker injustices in the United States. Some participants had little knowledge of the exact meaning of international fair trade labels, which only added to their confusion toward a domestic counterpart. Some natural food store participants preferred to support current international fair trade labels instead of a domestic fair trade label because workers' injustices in the Global South were perceived to be greater than those of domestic laborers.

3. Influence of self-transcendent values

Self-transcendent values' level of influence on ecolabel preference was another noted division between two consumer groups. For cooperative participants, self-transcendent values played a more influential role in the justification of label preferences than it did in natural food store participants' justifications. However, it would be false to say self-enhancing values were less important to co-op participants. In fact, both value dimensions seemed necessary to be preferred by co-op members, but self-transcendent values were more equally weighted in their decision-making methods than those of natural food store participants. A way of visualizing self-transcendent values' level of

influence in cooperative and natural food store participants' value systems is depicted in Figure 4. Indeed, self-enhancing values of food safety, health and quality must be

Figure 4: Both consumer groups were mainly motivated by self-enhancing values in their ecolabel preferences though cooperative members were more influenced by self-transcendent values than natural food store shoppers.



adequately met by the label in order to be favored, which reflects the findings of the retailer-developed pyramid presented earlier (Figure 2, from Lang and Heasman 2004:196). However, the pyramid model does not adequately incorporate the importance of self-transcendent values in decision-making and their ability to flexibly interpret product attributes, as was particularly evident with cooperative members. Such hierarchically designed models, while useful in denoting which product attributes are most and least appealing to consumers, may not be the best method of representing

values and their complex interrelatedness.

Perhaps due to the cooperative retailers' organizational structure, co-op members are more adept at negotiating their communal and social needs with personal and familial needs. Self-focused needs are comparatively highly promoted in the capitalist consumer marketplace, which the retail cooperative model attempts to work against. Possessing self-transcendent values may be part of the reason people choose to shop at cooperatives. One co-op participant stated, "when I moved [to the local area] I felt that the co-op would also be good place to find community. I'm also concerned about sustainable food systems, so that is a place where I can shop that would be supportive of those issues." However, self-enhancing values still must be fulfilled, which is evident in another co-op focus group discussion regarding the importance of product quality vs. community support with respect to a family farmed label. One participant was adamant that quality was of the upmost importance in selecting products. Others weighed product quality against benefits to the local farmer and the consumer's ability to negotiate with the farmer and directly influence the product. One co-op participant stated, "I would buy it for [the] family even if the product was so-so 'cause I feel like I would be able to tell the family about the product, and what I would want from them, and still support them." This participant clearly valued good quality products but was able to negotiate a way to meet that value while also supporting the family farmers. Through the farmer-consumer relationship, she could fulfill her self-transcendent values while also meeting her self-enhancing needs. In this way, self-transcendent values become influential in the simultaneous pursuit of self-enhancing goals.

Natural food store participants generally were far less influenced by self-transcendent values when self-enhancing values were not adequately met. The literature on natural health store consumers points to health-centered motives, which was indeed evident in the focus group discussions of this study (Thompson 2004). When discussing reasons why participants choose to shop at natural health food stores, one participant said:

> What really got me started was 20 years ago my kids had allergies to dairy. So I had to find a substitute to milk to put on their cereal and stuff like that, and the soy cheese. I started learning how to use homeopathics, and they sell homeopathic remedies and herbal remedies as well as the vitamins and things.

Another participant stated:

> I like to get the supplements that I'm looking for to supplement my ongoing eating habits. And I also look for, occasionally, the organic fruit there at that particular store. Things like flax seed and 100% tart cherry juice different things like that that you ordinarily wouldn't see in a regular grocery store….and the reason is because I think there's some worth to those products that I want in my diet.

As evidenced here, natural food store participants spoke much more at length about health and wellness, and when providing reasons for why they choose to shop at these stores, participants overwhelmingly discussed health concerns. Some participants or their family members experienced specific ailments, like diabetes and celiac disease,

which led them to seek out natural food stores. Others sought out supplements, organic products and less processed foods. Some of these participants clearly approached shopping at natural foods stores in a distinct way from cooperative participants. Perhaps due to this focus on individual health and wellness, self-transcendent values, while indeed important, simply had less influence on the natural food store participants' decision making process when their values for health were perceived to be compromised.

Implications

This research was conducted in hopes of aiding farmers in choosing the most potentially successful ecolabels for their products; however, the results can also greatly assist retailers and marketers in developing how ecolabels are promoted to consumers. My findings suggest that the values consumers applied to a particular eco-label depend more on the value systems of a specific consumer group than the values promoted by the ecolabeling organization. Shoppers of any consumer group will measure their most influential values against any food product, and then determine if that product meets their needs. In this case, self-enhancing values were found to be highly important to both natural food store shoppers and cooperative members. Therefore, labels should emphasize self-enhancing values for health, food safety and high quality in order to capture the broadest market possible.

The strength of ecolabels as political consumerism devices is dependent upon their ability to gain wide appeal in the marketplace. As a result, ecolabels should

attempt to market to a broad consumer base, while also maintaining commitments to the ethical goals that motivated their creation. As ecolabels become increasingly available in the marketplace, consumers will have more opportunities to express their influential self-transcendent values in their purchasing decisions. Cooperatives were at the leading edge of these trends, and these retailers may both attract consumers who already possess highly influential self-transcendent values and also encourage shoppers to consider self-transcendent values in their purchases. However, without drastic changes to the way in which the dominant market functions, these consumers' value systems will likely remain in the minority. Increased consumer education of ecolabels and food system topics may help to generate more interest initially but still may not be enough to encourage widespread success in mainstream markets. For natural food store shoppers and mainstream consumers, increased ecolabel access alone will not be enough unless self-enhancing values are also recognized. Importantly, participants with differing values systems in this study still largely favored many of the labels presented to them, no matter which dimension held more influence. Consumers will see in labels what they want to fulfill in themselves. Labelers, retailers, and educators have the ability to explicitly connect the self-transcendent values promoted by labels to the self-enhancement values of consumers. By appealing to the wide spectrum of values in both self-transcendent and self-enhancing dimensions, consumers will no longer be forced to choose between the two. Consumers of many backgrounds will likely prefer products that satisfy both value dimensions instead of choosing the dimension that is most individually influential. In this way, ecolabels will have greater potential to appeal to

many consumer types thus increasing the scope of political consumerism efforts.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

Schwartz's value systems research has been criticized for its reductionist approach but proved useful in classifying data in this study. One limitation of this study, however, was its limited scope in terms of participants and depth of cultural context (Thompson and Troester 2002). The results from this study are limited to the extent that participants may have overstated their interest and preferences for labels and may not reflect actual purchasing behavior. This study drew from a relatively small sample of participants in Michigan, which limits the extent to which the results can be generalized. Future studies can strengthen this research by applying surveys to larger samples of natural food store and co-operative consumers. Both willingness to pay (WTP) surveys and those that gauge consumer motivations and values for emerging ecolabels would benefit this research. Additionally, using focus groups with conventional consumers to capture a range of themes would be a valuable supplement in situating the niche consumers from this research into a broader context.

Conclusion

Of all the labels discussed, organic, humane and local labels were preferred most strongly. Both cooperative and natural food store consumer groups expressed self-transcendent and self-enhancing values when discussing their eco-label preferences, and the most favorable ecolabels were perceived to fulfill more values. Cooperative participants tended to express a wider range of values across all labels, and showed a

stronger fluency in food system issues than natural food store participants. Additionally, self-transcendent values held much more influence for cooperative participants, which led them to negotiate self-enhancing values differently than natural food store participants.

The number of ecolabeling organizations will likely only grow given current market trends, and the most popular ecolabels will change over time. Consumers' value systems will remain relatively consistent, and continuing to build a deeper understanding of these systems and how they inform product preference will only strengthen ecolabel marketing and educational tools. Producers will benefit from selecting ecolabels that emphasize self-enhancing values of health, food safety and high quality to appeal to the broadest range of consumers. The way in which ecolabels can connect self-transcendent and self-enhancing value dimensions should be communicated through labels and addressed in educational efforts. Appealing to the whole of consumers' value systems may reduce shoppers' need to choose between altruistic and egocentric goals. This in turn may lead to increasing the viability of political consumerism as a strategy for improving the sustainability of the current food system.

CHAPTER 3

Expanded Results and Implications

In this chapter I more thoroughly discuss the results for the labels studied and presented in Chapter 2. I begin with an explanation of the ranking survey results followed by in-depth descriptions of the attitudes and values elicited for each of the labels presented. Finally, I discuss these results in relation to how emerging ecolabels can contribute to political consumerism efforts in the marketplace.

Ranking survey results

The ranking survey (Table 1) administered at the end of the focus group session revealed that the organic label was rated most important overall and received just over one-half (51%) of first place votes. The humane label came in second with almost 18% of first place votes. The Select Michigan, or local, label was voted third most important (15.6%), which was followed by domestic fair trade (11.1%) and pasture-raised labels (0%). The Bio IPM and family farmed labels were least preferred overall, in terms of total votes, and each received only 2.2% of first place votes. Natural food store participants and co-op participants ranked the labels in a relatively similar order, except for the domestic fair trade and pasture-raised labels. Co-op participants ranked the domestic fair trade label much higher than natural food participants. The pasture-raised label, on the other hand, received a higher ranking from natural food store participants than co-op participants.

Attitudes and values for labels

The following describes the major themes, attitudes and values that emerged from the focus group discussions for each label presented. Co-op and natural food store focus groups are compared. Self-transcendent and self-enhancing values were spread widely over a range of labels, and some labels, like organic and local, were more readily connected to multiple values while others elicited fewer values. Labels are discussed roughly in order from most to least preferred.

Organic: Participants connected an organic labeled product to self-transcendent values for farmer well-being and environmental conservation. Self-enhancing values included health, quality and food safety. Natural food store and co-op participants shared similar value types for the organic label but co-op participants more thoroughly discussed self-transcendent values. Personal and family health and wellness was a major factor in both groups' preferences for organic labeled products. Many participants connoted organic products with having more nutrients and less toxic chemicals and with generally promoting long-term wellness. Additionally, many participants viewed organic food to be much safer than conventional products because of the perceived lack of chemical applications during production.

For some natural food store participants, the added expense of organic was too high to justify its purchase. This was the only negative reaction to the label in the natural food store focus groups, and if organic labeled products were cheaper, some would buy it more often or even exclusively. Co-op members, however, frequently

expressed dissatisfaction with some aspects of the labeling scheme. Generally, co-op participants felt it was important to support certified organic farmers, though some expressed concern that small farmers with few resources cannot access the label due to the USDA's regulations. Some co-op participants also acknowledged that organic labeled products do not automatically equal nutritious food or lead to a healthier environment. One co-op participant felt that organic products were given too much clout:

> Its just amazing how much stock people put in it…How could that possibly be better to have an [organic] apple from New Zealand? It's not better! It's better to have pesticides from Michigan if you're looking at the whole system. It's trendy to have things organic so a lot of people think it's like a checklist. People say, 'It's organic so I don't have to think about it.'…They have organic Pop Tarts! Don't tell me that that's a healthy thing!

Many co-op participants expressed the idea that buying organic labeled products is a step in the right direction, but the label ultimately does not provide other important information regarding the ethics of the farmer/company or the distance the food has traveled.

Humane: A humane label held wide appeal across both natural food store and co-op groups. Both consumer groups shared self-transcendent values for farmer welfare, hoping small farmers could benefit financially from selling humane products, and ethical responsibilities toward animal welfare. Co-op groups additionally emphasized

environmental values through the humane label's ability to strengthen ecological relationships. Both groups described self-enhancing values for increased health and quality, while co-op groups also discussed improved food safety.

The concern for health was a major discussion topic as many participants believed humanely raised animals to be healthier, leading to safer and more nutritious food products than those derived from conventionally raised animals. One natural food participant stated, "I like this label. It would positively affect me. I like also how it says the animals are allowed to behave naturally. I think that's really important especially from the nutritional aspect." Another natural food participant stated her reasoning for purchasing a humane labeled product, "For me it's about what's going in my body…I think of the animal, but again I think of me and my children above those animals." With a humane label, many participants perceived the animals to have a more natural lifestyle, without being subjected to steroids or hormones, and slaughtered humanely. For many participants, all of these factors would contribute to a healthier animal and therefore a healthier food product.

Local: The locally grown label, by far, drew out the widest range of values from participants. Participants from both consumer groups connected the 'Select Michigan' label to nearly all the identified values that were expressed over the entirety of the focus groups. These included self-transcendent values for farmer welfare, environmental welfare, community support (co-op groups) and ethical responsibilities (natural food store groups) and self-enhancing values of personal health, improved quality, food safety, support for the economy, and self-satisfaction (natural food store groups).

Co-op and natural food participants viewed the local label positively, and supporting farmers through this label was heavily valued. One natural food participant, for example, expressed concern for the viability of local farms:

> I think that would catch my eye, especially considering the whole Michigan economy. Having been born and raised in Michigan, of course. So maybe I'm very partial to want to see Michigan do well. If you travel around Michigan and you start to see the farmland disappearing, even just around Washtenaw County over the last twenty years, it's really sad to me to see farms going up for sale. And you think, that was their livelihood passed down from generation to generation.

Natural food store participants, however, generally expressed slightly more skepticism than co-op participants regarding the label. While supporting farmers was valuable to one natural food store participant, she felt the farmer didn't need to live in close proximity for her to do so. Also, from a self-enhancement perspective, some natural food store participants acknowledged that a local product might not always be cost effective or even of good quality. These factors would make a locally labeled food significantly less desirable.

Domestic Fair Trade: Reactions to the domestic fair trade label clearly showed inherent differences between consumer groups. In the ranking survey, co-op participants expressed much more interest in this label than natural food participants. All natural food participants consistently ranked this label in one of the three least

preferred positions whereas most co-op participants ranked it in one of the three most preferred positions. The discussions reflected these results. Co-op participants held a more positive outlook on the label and expressed greater enthusiasm for its cause. Natural food participants in general were less familiar with the details of current international fair trade labeling devices and expressed more confusion about the rationale behind the domestic alternative. Additionally, co-op participants imbued more values into a domestic fair trade label than natural food participants.

Both co-op and natural food participants held similar self-transcendent values for being ethically responsible in promoting basic human rights and for supporting environmental welfare through pesticide reduction. However, co-op participants also expressed values for supporting farmers. Some co-op participants held concerns that the label's cost requirements could be out of reach for some farmers.

Self-enhancing values diverged further between consumer groups. Co-op participants valued supporting the national economy through this label. Some natural food store participants preferred to support international farmers and farmworkers through current fair trade labels because their needs were perceived to be greater than those of domestic laborers. Co-op participants also thought health and food safety would be improved because of fewer applied chemicals and through U.S. agricultural safety regulations. Natural food participants expressed more wariness about the quality and added costs of a domestic fair trade labeled product. Many were concerned that the label did not necessarily improve the quality or nutritional content of the product,

which would have a direct affect on their decision to buy. One natural food shopper commented:

> [B]ecause this doesn't impact my own health I'd be less likely to pay extra for it. Whereas issues like organic that impact my own personal health I'd be more likely to pay more for it. So I'm selfish [laughs], but I'm not the only one.

Another natural food store participant debated about the price:

> To me if there's no difference in quality I don't know that I would—and I know that it's benefitting them [farmworkers] but at the same time—we're not splurging if it doesn't affect the technical quality of the food.

Co-op participants also were concerned with health and quality but took a more optimistic approach that farms operating under good conditions would be able to produce a higher quality, more desirable product that would be worth the higher price.

The results from the domestic fair trade label sheds light on the how the two consumer groups negotiate self-enhancing and self-transcendent values. Both groups shared similar self-transcendent values for ethical responsibility and environmental concerns, which they understood this label to address, but self-enhancing values for health and quality were oppositely interpreted. Whereas natural food store participants did not see health and quality values to be adequately addressed by this label, co-op participants reasoned that health and quality would be improved. Because self-transcendent values were more influential to co-op participants, their self-enhancing values are then negotiated to support them. For both groups, the label must meet health

and quality values for it to be desirable, but co-op participants' self-transcendent values influenced their interpretation of how the label attends to health and quality values. Natural food participants do not see a direct connection between the domestic fair trade label and their self-enhancing values and largely reject it, despite their interest in self-transcendent values.

Pasture-raised: The pasture-raised label received zero first place votes in the ranking survey, suggesting it was a lower priority compared to the previously discussed labels. One potential reason for this decreased favorability is the presence of the humane label in the rankings, which participants generally perceived to be ideologically similar to pasture-raised. Those who did rank the label in more favorable positions were mostly natural food store participants. All natural food store participants who ranked the pasture-raised label ranked it in the 2nd through 4th positions. Co-op participants mostly ranked this label in 5th through 7th place, the three least preferred positions.

While both consumer groups generally liked the idea of a pasture-raised label, they differed on its connotations, viability and affordability. Co-op participants held more skepticism about the plausibility of such a label. Some felt that the costs would be too great for farmers to maintain pastured livestock and would create a product that is unaffordable for most consumers. Many co-op participants also felt that the term 'pasture-raised' was ambiguous and "green-washed," which could easily deceive shoppers. Natural food store participants focused more on the perceived benefits of pasture-raised products and generally expressed more optimism about the label.

Co-op participants and natural food store participants expressed self-transcendent values for farmer support and environmental benefits for the pasture-raised label. Natural food participants also expressed ethical values for pasturing animals, which they felt would result in healthier animals and proper treatment overall. Co-op participants additionally expressed concern that everyone should have equal access to pasture-raised products. One co-op participant raised systemic problems that inhibit increased access saying:

> Some of the folks that are my favorite farmers at the farmer's market live basically in poverty so that we can have our good food…We need a culture shift, we need serious legislative changes with the way farmers are subsidized corn and all of that…we're never going to be able to afford to feed everybody, the way that we eat now, with grass-fed [livestock]. Then we need some real changes and I think legislation will be the first start personally.

Both consumer groups expressed self-enhancing values for health and quality. A few participants briefly mentioned the health benefits of grass-fed beef, but most participants nondescriptly felt pasture-raised would likely be better for animals' health and, in turn, human health. For these reasons, the quality of pastured animal products would be improved. Natural food store participants expressed values for self-satisfaction, in that they would feel good about purchasing a pasture-raised product. Interestingly, natural food store participants did not mention price in their discussions about pasture-raised whereas co-op participants were concerned that a high price would deter the label from entering the mainstream.

The humane and pasture-raised labels sparked debates within the groups about which label best encapsulated animal welfare principles. Participants often recognized that the definition for humane did not explicitly address pastureland but required animals to be "allowed to behave naturally" and were provided "sufficient space." Participants from both groups expressed concern that this definition left loopholes for producers to interpret in their favor, not necessarily the animals'. Conversely, the pasture-raised label did not specifically address the prohibition of antibiotics and hormones, which was of critical importance for some participants. Much debate centered on the semantics of the labels' definitions, with a frequent consensus that the pasture-raised label could be absorbed into the humane label, whose definition was better targeted at animal welfare. Few participants emphasized the environmental benefits of pasturing livestock, why antibiotics are necessary to confined animal feeding operations in the first place, or even that cattle biologically favor grasses.

Semantics and prior agricultural knowledge clearly played a role in participant preferences for these two labels. While humane and pasture-raised may be distinct from a producer or labeling standpoint, participants in this study's focus groups saw them as addressing very similar issues. Based on these discussions, participants wanted animals to be raised in the most natural way possible, and most felt that both prohibiting certain inputs (e.g. hormones and antibiotics) and requiring grazing was important to that goal. Labels addressing these issues would appeal to the most consumers if both humane treatment and pasture-raised are conveyed to consumers.

Family farmed: The Family farmed label initially received positive feedback from participants, however skepticism of the label's literal meaning often followed. While co-op and natural food participants had similar reactions for the family farmed label, values were conveyed differently. Both groups conveyed self-transcendent values for farmer welfare, but co-op participants additionally were concerned with community support. Self-enhancing values for health and product quality concerned co-op participants while natural food store participants focused on the satisfaction they would feel from purchasing a family farmed product.

Participants from both consumer groups felt that the family farmed label definitely has an initial attraction for supporting a family and helping small-scale farmers in one's local community. Some even felt that family-run operations would have higher standards and produce higher quality products. As participants deliberated further about the label, some realized that the term 'family-owned farm' does not necessarily specify local origin or that they uphold ethical business practices. It further does not guarantee adequate product quality.

The issue of quality and product value was intensely debated in one co-op focus group where some participants felt quality was of the upmost importance. Others weighed product quality against benefits to the local farmer and the consumer's ability to negotiate with the farmer and directly influence the product.

Bio IPM: The Bio IPM label was one of the least preferred in the ranking survey and in the focus group discussions as well. Co-op participants and natural food store

shoppers held self-transcendent values for supporting the welfare of farmers who choose to maintain a Bio IPM certification. Co-op participants expressed concerns that the certification could be too expensive for farmers, but also noted that Bio IPM may be more realistic to attain than the USDA Organic certification. Both co-op and natural food store participants would be interested in supporting Bio IPM farmers so long as they are transitioning to organic. If farmers were not transitioning, however, natural food store participants became more hesitant in supporting the label by itself.

Natural food store and co-op participants expressed self-enhancing values of quality. Most understood the quality to be better than conventional but lesser than organic. Many participants from both consumer groups speculated that this label would, or should, be cheaper than an organic labeled product because there was a possibility that pesticides and other chemicals would be applied. A lower price than organic appealed to more participants than few others who wouldn't be interested at all. Some co-op participants, for example, additionally attached health and wellness values to the Bio IPM label viewing it as healthier than conventional products. For others, however, any chemical residue that could exist on the food would be unacceptable at any price. Participants placing high priority on health and quality values were not satisfied with this label while those who were most sympathetic to producers saw that farmers could benefit from these more flexible standards than those of USDA Organic.

This extended discussion of the results provides a deeper look into the major themes produced by each label. This information is useful in understanding how

specific labels appeal to certain values and not others. It further shows the ways in which participants temper their self-enhancing values with self-transcendent values. This research suggests that food cooperative and natural food store consumers want to fulfill self-transcendent values, but rarely at the expense of self-enhancing values. Even for these niche consumers, however, simply possessing self-transcendent values addressed by ecolabeled products do not automatically lead to purchase. In order to attain mainstream success, ecolabels must assert high levels of quality, safety, and nutrition and be reasonably priced in order for consumers to also include altruistic values in their purchasing decisions. Consumers connected these two dimensions frequently in this study, explaining how fulfilling self-transcendent values led to the fulfillment of self-enhancement values, or vice versa. For example, participants often reasoned that the humane label offered the fulfillment of both dimensions since a well-treated and healthy animal leads to high quality and healthy food. The rationale that participants use to support their preferences has potential to appeal to other consumers, and labels would benefit from communicating this rationale in their marketing.

The future successes of emerging ecolabels

The successes of USDA Organic and Fair Trade ecolabels in the United States have opened the door for emerging labels to also gain recognition and mainstream success. While ecolabels do risk market absorption and dilution by the dominant economic model, they still incorporate ethical values and attend to severe food system problems that were previously hidden from consumers. As political consumerism

devices, ecolabels' major strength is their ability to gain wide appeal, which can impact the food system on a vast scale.

Developing a better understanding of consumer values as they relate to ecolabels is important to increasing wider appeal and thus furthering their political consumerism efforts. Cooperative and natural food store shoppers were studied because these consumers represent the first barriers to label success due to their niche status and broader spectrum of values impacting food preference. However, these consumers' value systems will likely remain in the minority so long as markets continue to mask the realities of production thus limiting the wide commercial appeal of labels.

Efforts must be strengthened in connecting values to ecolabels that reflects and includes more types of consumers' value systems. By connecting these value dimensions explicitly though labels and through consumer education, more consumers may favor more labels. Through the presentation of a wide and holistic representation of values on labeled products, consumers will not be forced to choose between competing value dimensions. The need to satisfy both dimensions simultaneously will win out when consumers are presented with the option.

As consumers become increasingly aware of the concept of values-based labeling and have greater access to ecolabeled products, the more likely these products will be preferred and purchased (Vermeir and Verbeke 2006). The ubiquity of ecolabeled products in Western Europe is much greater than in the United States, and their popularity continues to grow with time. It stands to reason that with time and increased

ecolabel access, similar trends will follow in the United States. Increased consumer education of ecolabeling issues can only help to accelerate this process. By speaking to a fuller spectrum of human values, multiple consumer markets can locate their unique interests, producers can fully express their values without sacrificing sales and political consumerism efforts become more accessible to more consumers.

APPENDIX

Focus Group Participants and Demographics

The study was conducted in February, March and April of 2009 and recruited a total of 46 participants. Table 2 breaks down this number by consumer group. Focus groups held between 5-10 participants.

Table 2: Location and number of participants per focus group

Natural food store participants	Co-op member participants
Ann Arbor MI: n=7	Ann Arbor MI: n=7
Kalamazoo, MI: n=8	Kalamazoo, MI: n=10
Lansing, MI: n=5	Lansing, MI: n=9

Demographics results as reported by participants can be found in Table 3. Although a fully representative population was not expected given the small sample size and intercept recruiting, the participants did not differ substantially from the United States as a whole for income and ethnicity (US Census 2010). The median household income of $35 to $50K is similar to the national median of $52,029. The percentage of white, non-Hispanic participants was slightly higher (86.7%) than the national figure (79.8%), and the percentage of African-American participants (8.9%) was slightly lower than the national figure (12.8%). The percentage of Latino participants (2.2%) was significantly lower, however, than the 15.4% national estimate. Participants were also much more likely to report a college degree or higher (69%) when compared to the national average of 24.4% (US Census 2010), which may partially due to the fact that we recruited in university towns. They were also more likely to be women (71.1%),

but this is not surprising due to the fact that women are the principal food shopper in 75.1% of households in the US (Mediamark 2009). The median age of focus group participants was 48.5, with a range from 20 to 80.

Table 3: Demographics of focus group participants

Household income ($)	
Under 10K	6.7
10 to 20K	22.2
20 to 35K	8.9
35 to 50K	17.8
50 to 75K	11.1
75 to 100K	22.2
100K+	11.1
Ethnicity	
White, non-Hispanic	86.7
African-American	8.9
Latino	2.2
Education	
High school or less	4.4
Some college/AA	26.7
College graduate	42.3
Postgraduate	26.7
Gender	
Women	71.1
Men	28.9

Table 3 (cont'd)

Age	
Median	48.5
Range	20 to 80

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