

**St. Olaf Community Based Research:**  
**Local Food Infrastructure: Collaboration with Market Fair**

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May 22, 2010

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Abstract**

*This community-based research project studies the Northfield Riverwalk Arts Quarter and Market Fair within the local foodshed of Northfield. The project works to illuminate connections between producers, distributors, and consumers of food in the Northfield community. Data was collected through observation and personal communication over the course of six weeks. Personal communication was obtained with local farmers and growers, food store and restaurant managers and owners, Market Fair collaborators, college food service providers, and customers. Through the theoretical substructure of holistic economics and local food infrastructure, we examined the projected impact of the Market Fair farmers market in the Northfield local food economy. Centering around the themes of economics, health and lifestyle, environmental sustainability, and community, our analysis acts as a resource to highlight interest and opportunities for the expansion of the local food market in Northfield by aiming to foster connections between participants.*

### **Summary of Findings**

- Some distributors struggle with the economic costs and benefits of buying locally produced foods.
- Buying local food helps stimulate a strong, local economic community. Businesses and consumers who economically support local food producers develop strong, long-lasting business relationships.
- Market Fair is committed to fostering entrepreneurial connections by providing a space for consumers to meet directly with artists and growers.

- Individual health and lifestyles can limit or promote decisions to consume local food.
- Riverwalk Market Fair offers visibility and access to local food, facilitating the opportunity to change attitudes about healthy eating.
- While there is an awareness of the environmental benefits of eating locally, economic factors play a more decisive role in consumers' food purchases.
- Generally, there is a high awareness of the environmental benefit of eating locally grown and organic foods.
- The ability to "put a face to your food" allows producers and consumers to cultivate connections and encourage enduring personal partnerships.

## **SETTING AND COMMUNITY**

Northfield is a community of approximately 19,860 people located thirty-five miles southeast of the metropolitan area of St. Paul and Minneapolis. Currently it is located within Rice County (City of Northfield 2010). Additionally, Northfield's population has steadily increased since the 1960s, according to Census data, and projected population over the next few years (Northfield Area Chamber of Commerce, Convention and Visitors Bureau 2009). Northfield strives to generate the warmth of a small-town community, but its location as a southern suburb makes for an easy commute to the Twin Cities.

The economic capacity in Northfield is fairly large compared to its small town atmosphere. The largest employer in Northfield is the Malt-O-Meal company, which currently employs 861 people of the Northfield and the surrounding communities. The next two greatest employers in Northfield are the local two colleges, St. Olaf College and Carleton College, with a combined employment of approximately 1,520. Additionally, Northfield is home to multiple healthcare services including nursing home care, the Northfield hospital, and patient clinics. However, amidst Northfield's economic wealth, there is a five percent unemployment rate with roughly 1,615 members of the available workforce unemployed (Northfield Area Chamber of Commerce, Convention and Visitors Bureau 2009).

The current racial demographic of Northfield is primarily homogenous, since ninety-eight percent of Northfield residents reported themselves as only one race (Census 2000). Additionally, the majority of Northfield locals report themselves as white (92.6 percent), with Black or African Americans consisting of the next largest racial category making up 0.9 percent of the overall population. Although the racial demographic of Northfield is primarily Caucasian, there has been an increase in the Latino and Hispanic population. This increase correlates with

the overall increase in the Latino population within the state of Minnesota as projected by the United States Census Bureau (Chicano Latino Affairs Council 2010).

Additionally, Northfield is a town that has a rich and exciting history. Northfield was found in 1855 by John W. North on the banks of the Cannon River, and was first developed as a mill town. North established a dam, a gristmill, and a sawmill for lumber along the river before moving westward to California and Arizona (Northfield Historical Society 2009). In addition to being a statesman and one of the founders of the Republican party in Minnesota, North was an established school teacher and certified preacher. However, not long after the creation of Northfield did the town fall victim to an attempted robbery by the James-Younger Gang on September 7, 1876. The raid of the First National Bank left Nicholas Gustavson, a Swedish town resident, and gang members Clell Miller and William Stiles dead on the scene (MN Historical Society 2010). To commemorate the Northfield citizens' victory over the famed gang, an annual celebration, the Defeat of Jesse James Days, is held the first or second weekend in September. The celebration has been going on since 1948 (Tim Freeland 2010).

As mentioned above, Northfield is home to two private liberal arts colleges. Carleton College was founded in 1866 and is currently located on the east side of the Cannon River. The college is currently home to 1,986 students from forty-nine states and forty-five countries who are majoring in the arts, humanities, natural sciences and social sciences (Jaye E. Lawrence 2009). St. Olaf is located on the west side of the Cannon River and was found in 1874 by Norwegian Lutheran immigrants. It is currently recognized as a college of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America and is residence to 3,099 students from all fifty states and thirty countries (St. Olaf College 2010).

Currently Northfield has a farmers market, located at Riverside Park on 7th Street. The

Northfield Area Farmers Market runs in the summer months on Tuesdays and Fridays from 11:45-1:00 and on Saturdays from 9:00 -11:00 (Local Harvest 2009). The current farmers market has been in existence for almost 30 years. While this farmer's market is a great resource for local foods, Dean Kjerland, Gail Jones Hansen, and partners at the Riverwalk Arts Quarter have come up with a new idea for a farmers market. Their new initiative is called Market Fair and the aim is to create a European style open-air market on Northfield's Cannon River riverwalk. By combining fresh produce, cut flowers, pastries, breads, and other local and organic foods with street performers and an art fair displaying local artists' ceramics, paintings, prints, jewelry, and more, this will be a family-friendly setting where the founders hope patrons enjoy "the art of a summer Saturday." The founders are looking to draw a regional consumer base through this initiative, bringing more people into the Northfield community and economic infrastructure.

We are collaborating with Dean Kjerland and Gail Jones Hansen of the Riverwalk Market Fair to investigate the local food infrastructure in Northfield. With the knowledge of the Northfield foodshed, we can help determine the supply and demand for local foods, which will help Market Fair in their final preparations before opening this summer. We have chosen to take multiple angles and interview several groups of people potentially involved with or impacted by the local foodshed. Initially conceived of by Dean through his work with the Riverwalk Arts Quarter, this event hopes to stimulate the economic growth of Northfield by creating opportunities for community collaboration and entrepreneurial connections between area artists, producers, consumers, and business owners.

Northfield is home to a variety of restaurants ranging from sandwich establishments, coffee shops, bars and eateries, and ethnic specialty restaurants. We were particularly interested in the locally owned restaurants, as bigger chains and fast food establishments have little control

over their suppliers and rarely involve local food. We have also been interviewing people associated with the farming community and farmers themselves who are located within 40 miles of Northfield. In the greater Northfield area, there are approximately 100 farmers that live and farm within 25 miles of Northfield, creating a relatively broad local food structure. Northfield is also home to three grocery establishments, Cub Foods, EconoFoods, and Just Food Co-op. Initially, we were hoping to gain interviews with management and patrons of all three; however we were unable to obtain permission to interview Cub Foods and EconoFoods management and patrons, so we focused on interviewing multiple people involved with Just Food. Just Food is a cooperative seeking to provide the community with “fresh, local and organic food, and sustainable household and personal care products” (Just Food Co-op, 2009). They try to promote social, environmental, and economic sustainability in the local community. Finally, we conducted interviews with students and management of Bon Appétit, a sustainable food service at Carleton and St. Olaf Colleges, as they are a large part of the Northfield community.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### *Observation*

In completing observation at grocery stores in Northfield, group members spent about two hours observing in each of three locations: Cub Foods, Econofoods, and Just Food Co-op. As group members spent time in each store, members took note of aesthetic values of the store and visible messages to patrons. In each store, group members sought to figure out where the fresh produce and processed food was coming from. When completing this observational research, group members did not speak with any employees or customers of the stores. The purpose of the observatory research was to familiarize our research group with the food

distribution stores in Northfield.

### *Interviews*

The vast majority of research was completed through individual interviews. A total of 113 interviews were conducted either in person, through email or telephone communication, or through an online survey. In order to incorporate all aspects of the local food flow in Northfield, our six-person research group divided into smaller groups to conduct interviews. All interviewees were informed of the purpose of our research project, their ability to refuse to answer any questions, their right to discontinue the interview at any point, and the confidentiality of their identity. All interviewees were given a pseudonym to protect their identity except for Dean Kjerland, Gail Jones Hansen, Angie from Beef 'O' Brady's, Angie from the Ole Cafe, Chad, Doug, Jake, Joan, Joe, Lisa, Melanie, and Tina who all gave oral consent to allowing the use of their true name.

### *Production*

To interview producers, we contacted ten farmers in the Northfield regional area. We received the farmers' contact information through a prominent community contact. Six farmers agreed to participate in interviews either on the phone, through email, or face-to-face. We also contacted four students involved in local food production and interviewed them. Interviews lasted approximately forty-five minutes to an hour and consisted of about ten open-ended questions. When interviewing farmers, we asked about their involvement in the local food industry, obstacles to selling locally, and the role the farmers market will play in the local food industry. We asked about their personal shopping habits and to clarify the advantages to buying locally.

### *Distribution*

Representing the distributors of food products required contacting management at Just Food Co-op in Northfield, local restaurants, St. Olaf and Carleton College food services, and directors of the Market Fair. We spoke with a manager and four employees at Just Food, fourteen restaurant owners/managers (after contacting all 30 restaurants in Northfield), four people involved in food service at the colleges, and the two co-chairs of Market Fair. At the local food co-op, Just Food, we interviewed a manager about buying and providing local and organic food in an extended interview lasting about one and a half hours. On a Saturday morning, we talked with employees in five to ten minute long interviews. We asked them about consumer base, projected economic impact of the farmers market, and knowledge of the local foodshed. When interviewing the local restaurant managers, we asked questions pertaining to from whom they buy their produce and meat, whether or not they were aware of local food producers, their interest in buying locally, and reasons for their actions. When interviewing St. Olaf and Carleton College food service managers, we asked how local food is integrated into their service and how they made their decisions when purchasing food. We also talked about the economic effects of buying locally relating to food preparation, amount of waste produced and demographics of students that attend the college. In our interviews with the two chairs of Market Fair, we asked about the conception and details of the event, as well as the goals of economic and community growth it hopes to facilitate. Additional questions were asked about the effects that Market Fair would have on existing businesses and markets in Northfield.

### *Consumption*

To measure the consumption aspect of local food, we conducted interviews with customers at Just Food on a Saturday morning and created a local food survey on the Survey

Monkey website. For the customer interviews at Just Food, we conducted 28 two to five minute long interviews, asking about personal shopping habits, preferences, and awareness of farmers markets. We encouraged friends and colleagues to take our survey and dispersed flyers to advertise the survey to the Northfield community. We also gave the web address to Just Food patrons we interviewed. In the Survey Monkey survey, we ask about shopping habits, preferences, awareness of the local farmers market, eating-out preferences, opinions about buying and eating locally, and demographic information. Additionally we inquired about personal consumption while conducting our longer interviews with producers and distributors.

### *Strengths*

In assessing our observation and interviewing processes, we consistently received in-depth responses from interviewees, demonstrating the strength of our interview questions. We were able to secure interviews with decision-making authorities, adding a level of managerial credibility to our research. Through our research, we were able to speak with a large sample of owners, directors, managers, farmers, employees, and patrons, adding a diversity of position and interest to our findings. We were also able to connect with a wide variety of people in Northfield due to the online survey. By conducting research through this online survey as well, we were able to gain some demographic information. Additionally, in all of our interviews and the online survey, we were able to ask questions about farmers markets and Market Fair to assist our community partners.

### *Weaknesses*

Our largest obstacle in conducting our research was the time restraint preventing us from contacting and interviewing all possible venues. We were unable to adequately report on major food providers in Northfield, such as Cub Foods and Econofoods. Due to this inability to

interview corporate food providers, the community perception of the local food industry and interest in local food is skewed. Additionally, we needed to create two online surveys, seeing as our first survey was not specific enough. We created a new survey, but had already distributed the old address. In general, the responses we received may be biased since people willing to participate already hold interest in the local food movement.

### *Limitations*

The biggest limitation to our research was the lack of participation of large-scale, corporate grocery stores, specifically Cub Foods and Econofoods. We contacted both Cub Foods and Econofoods, but in order to obtain permission to research we had to submit a letter of request to research to their corporate office along with an outline of our project, a consent form, and the questions we would ask management and store patrons. We were denied permission to research at both businesses. Thus, our findings were mainly collected through interviews with farmers, Just Food, and local restaurant owners and managers. Due to this, we were unable to fully report on the complete local food infrastructure in Northfield since we needed to omit key economic players, such as Cub Foods and Econofoods.

Smaller limitations to our research included the fact that our research was conducted during planting season, making it difficult for farmers and growers to participate in extended interviews. Additionally, the time we had to conduct research was limited to six weeks, making it difficult to arrange interviews with a significant number of community members.

### **PROBLEM**

We became aware of a growing interest in the local food industry and foodshed through collaboration with the Market Fair farmers market. In conversation with Dean Kjerland, we

began discussing community members' food choices and preferences among various area restaurants and grocery stores. Market Fair aims to promote community education and awareness of the benefits of eating local in order to improve the health of the community and environmental sustainability. Market Fair and our research group were interested in investigating interest in the new farmers market and local food in general. We wanted to assess the local foodshed, defined as "a self-reliant, locally or regionally based food system comprised of diversified farms using sustainable practices to supply fresher, more nutritious food stuffs to small-scale processors and consumers to whom producers are linked by the bonds of community as well as economy," (Pretty 2001:8) and how food moved within this foodshed.

At first, we were interested in how local food flowed in Northfield, how it got from farmers' fields to consumers dinner plates. What we discovered was that the 'farm to fork' concept is extremely intricate, interconnected, and complicated. Convenience and budget are important factors in food consumption affecting decisions to purchase local foods. We began asking questions such as: What motivates people to eat local food? How will the community respond to Market Fair? Will Market Fair encourage more people to eat local? In essence, we wanted to assess the general interest in local food and the impact that Market Fair would have in bolstering this interest.

Since food choices can be limited in Northfield, we wanted to evaluate who controls consumers' options. We wanted to gauge how much agency local management had in food supplies at larger supermarket chains like Econofoods and Cub Foods, as well as assess whether restaurants stocked local products. This lead us to ask the question, do the consumers control their own food choices?

Bill McKibben explores the macrolevel impact of conventional farming, shopping, and

eating when he writes, “growth is no longer making most people wealthier, but instead generating inequality and insecurity” (2008: 1). As the food industry grows, consumers grow further away from producers creating great unknowns about food. He challenges our conventional efforts to increase efficiency, obtain material items, become wealthy, and stimulate economic growth. McKibben instead asserts that it is important to think about economics in a broader and more holistic fashion. Are these endeavors for wealth and material gain giving us the results we are looking for? We are not satisfied. These mindsets and behaviors are not making us happier. Alternatively, we are acquiring inequality and insecurity. As a result of our economic pursuits, the environment is deteriorating. McKibben encourages us to focus on local economies, which may mean losing out on quick material gain but will allow us to reap the benefits of closer social connections and stability (2008: 2). Riverwalk wants to encourage a radius of sixty miles around Northfield to contribute to and stimulate the Northfield economy through the purchase of local art and local food.

As we explored these questions and theories further, we stumbled upon people’s hesitancy in buying or selling local food. We began to wonder whether there was a stigma attached to shopping at farmers markets and co-ops. Did people feel intimidated to shop at these places? We wanted to explore what role economics and pricing played in the decision to purchase local, thus assessing whether a consumers' socioeconomic status factored into their food decisions. We also attempted to explore other setbacks that consumers faced in buying locally such as location, lack of knowledge, or unwillingness to change lifestyle.

In assessing local food, cost was an issue that was often raised by both distributors and consumers. In *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*, Michael Pollan interviews Joel, a farmer, who claims "whenever I hear people say clean food is expensive I tell them it’s actually the cheapest food

you can buy...Society is not bearing the cost of water pollution, of antibiotic resistance, of food-borne illnesses, of crop subsidies, of subsidized oil and water- of all the hidden costs to the environment and the taxpayer that make cheap food seem cheap” (2007: 243). The cost of food is much more than a barcode. Market Fair attempts to take an approach to local food that promotes quality and health, while making the food accessible to a variety of people.

As we explored grocery stores and restaurants, we began to realize the misleading labeling of products, lack of transparency, and emphasis on bargains and deals. Here, again, economics played a huge role. Labels throughout Cub Foods, Econofoods, and Just Food were prevalent, but there did not seem to be a standard definition for local, organic, or natural. It was difficult to find where products originated from. We asked questions such as: What does it mean to be a product of the United States? Why were there so many ingredients in boxed foods and where did *those* ingredients come from? Why did Pop-Tarts and Lunchables have an entire side panel dedicated to a list of unpronounceable ingredients?

We also began to wonder what the local food industry meant for farmers and local food proprietors. Why were they so dedicated to selling or shopping locally? What were their motivations? Most importantly we wanted to assess the role the Market Fair would play in the food chain between producer and consumer. We wanted to investigate how Market Fair attempts to bridge this gap and what farmers, distributors, and consumers hope to gain from this relationship.

In order to answer these questions, we needed to explore the definition of a farmers market. According to Burns and Johnson with the USDA, a farmers market is “a common facility or area where several farmers/growers gather on a regular, recurring basis to sell a variety of fresh fruit and vegetables and other farm products directly to consumers” (Brown 2001). Thus,

in a sense, farmers markets provide consumers a way to come in contact with those people who produce their food. Farmers markets are a direct sale of produce from the producer to the consumer.

Local food is a broad, expansive topic that is defined in different ways by various people. As we explored the meaning of "local," we discovered answers from "grown in Minnesota," "grown within half a days drive," "grown in a five state area," to "fresh not frozen." Since it is difficult to consistently define "local," we asked each of the interviewees to define "local" for his or her interview. Generally, when we reference "local food" in relation to Market Fair, we are talking about farmers within a 60 mile radius of Northfield, the distance that would make it economically viable to participate in the local food infrastructure of Northfield and in Market Fair. We were investigating what the foodshed of Northfield consisted of including producers, distributors, and consumers. As Market Fair works to develop the local foodshed, we looked to assess how food flowed within this local foodshed and the implications this had on the Northfield community.

Michael Pollan writes, "Depending on how we spend them, our food dollars can either go to support a food industry devoted to quantity and convenience and 'value' or they can nourish a food chain organized around *values*- values like quality and health" (2008:161). Often times, local and organic farming is about reassessing the conventional approach to farming that is not necessarily working. Market Fair attempts to redefine the local food community and strengthen the local foodshed. We attempt to assess how this system will be enacted, how it will be received by the community, what participation in Market Fair will be like, and the implications of buying locally on strengthening the bonds of a community.

## **FINDINGS**

To better understand the food flow in Northfield we looked at three different parts of the food system. In the production section we examine interviews done with farmers, farmhands, and others involved in the growing of food. In the distribution section will look at various distributors in Northfield that get food from farmers and deliver it to customers and other ways that consumers are able to purchase foodstuffs. Finally in the consumer section we address why people shop where they do and gauge local interest in food.

In Gail Feenstra's article *Local food systems and sustainable communities*, she writes, "Local food systems are rooted in particular places, aim to be economically viable for farmers and consumers, use ecologically sound production and distribution practices, and enhance social equity and democracy for all members of the community" (1997:28). Within the production, consumption and distribution sections, we attempt to analyze economic viability, health and lifestyle, environmental sustainability, and community in the context of the local foodshed and food flow in Northfield.

## **PRODUCTION**

### *The face of food*

Farming. The word conjures up images of tractors slowly rolling across fields rich with corn underneath an azure sky carefully painted with clouds. But the reality of farming can be quite different. Much of conventional farming is no longer the idyllic operation that we imagine. Conventional farming can be defined as "an industrialized agricultural system characterized by mechanization, monocultures, and the use of synthetic inputs such as chemical fertilizers and pesticides, with an emphasis on maximizing productivity and profitability" (Eicher 2003).

Great expanses of corn and soybeans are most likely part of a conventional farm. Large monoculture farms are fairly typical, but are not always environmentally sustainable or healthy. However, conventional farming is not in itself bad, although size and waste management on these facilities can be problematic.

Within the farming industry in Northfield there is subset of farmers committed to sustainability, economic viability of their communities, and the health of their products. These farmers may or may not be organic. Organic can be defined as “referring to a type of agriculture that promotes the use of renewable resources and management of biological cycles to enhance biological diversity, without the use of genetically modified organisms, or synthetic pesticides, herbicides, or fertilizers” (Eicher 2003). Despite these benefits, organic certification by the government can be expensive and difficult to obtain.

Farmers comprise the production side of the food industry. They cultivate fruit and vegetable crops, raise a variety of livestock, and tend to the soil. Producers have a variety of ways of disseminating their crops in the local food shed. They can sell to the food cooperative in Northfield, Just Food, or to other food cooperatives in the Minneapolis-St. Paul Metro area requiring that food be certified organic. Consumers can receive food directly from farmers through Community Supported Agriculture, or CSAs, which are “farms that are funded by a group of community members. In exchange for a membership fee, members are entitled to an assortment of fresh- picked produce every week throughout the growing season” (Eicher 2003). CSAs are an easy way for community members to be involved in local food production because members are often invited to participate in some part of the growing process on the farm. Farmers also sell directly to consumers as well. Another way to get farm produce to community members is through local farmers markets. Market Fair, a new farmers market in Northfield, will

give Northfield and the surrounding area an opportunity connect with local farmers.

The key to Market Fair operating successfully is a community committed to local and healthy food, and this begins with the growers. Within a twenty-five mile radius of Northfield there are a hundred farmers. According to Nancy, one farmer we interviewed, one acre of vegetables can feed twenty-five families. Northfield has the capacity to feed its residents, yet many consumers do not realize the extent of the foodshed in Northfield. Farmers are still forced to travel to the Minneapolis-St. Paul metro area to sell their produce because there is a lack of customers in the Northfield area. Market Fair aims to create a destination so that farmers have a consistent customer base in Northfield that will benefit the local economy. We will examine the challenges and benefits that affect a community when they put a face to their food.

## **ECONOMY**

*“The biggest obstacle in buying locally”*

There is a pervading idea that local, organic, fresh food is inherently more expensive than food that is frozen, preserved, or canned. However, according to local farmers, this commonly held notion is not necessarily true. Farmers try to make healthy, local food more accessible, especially through CSAs and programs like the new SNAP program at Market Fair, which will make local food accessible to lower income families. In a world where we spend money monthly on cell phone, internet, and cable bills, Michael Pollan wonders if we cannot afford to spend a bit more on better quality food. Pollan interviews an organic and small scale chicken farmer who claims that his clean, sustainable food is the cheapest food you can buy. The price on the barcode simply does not tell the story of the true cost and the true quality of food.

Nancy is a local omnivore farmer. She is extremely passionate about local food and is

active in the local Sustainable Farming Association. In a phone interview, she told me that organic vegetables and fruits should be no more expensive than conventionally farmed produced. On the other hand, Nancy said that organically-farmed meat and dairy products would be more expensive because the “systems in place tend to raise costs at a small local level still.” So it is indeed true that local food can be more expensive.

But Nancy is quick to point out that consumers are paying for quality and freshness. She believes that the conventional food industry has “hidden things where food comes from.” The sustainable food industry is more transparent, more accessible and thus cheaper overall. For Nancy, “It’s also about helping people understand the true cost of food. The 39 cent per pound turkey really costs people about 20 dollars per pound if you count all the subsidies given to the supply side along the way.” People tend to notice price stickers when shopping, not the consequences of their food choices. Farmers are here to present those choices in a more appealing manner to the customer base. They are the face of the food. When people know who they are getting their food from they are likely to pay more.

The notion that fresh, local food is more expensive has created a stigma around local produce. Through Market Fair, those involved in the farming industry hope that they can make local food more accessible. Caitlin, a Saint Olaf student who has worked on local farms in Northfield and on Saint Olaf’s campus, has coordinated with a local nonprofit, Growing Up Healthy, to implement a system at the farmers market that will accept food stamps (known as the SNAP program in Minnesota). Sara, another student from Saint Olaf who is involved in a myriad of environmental and food related activities, believes that the SNAP program “will make [local food] more accessible.” The hope is that it will erase the stigma around organic and local food. It will make farm fresh food available for all.

Market Fair will also develop a new economic market in the Northfield community for farmers to sell their produce. According to Nancy many farmers were driving to the Cities because they were able to sell more and thus make more money. She says it is a catch- 22, suggesting that “we need more markets but need more farmers to serve the markets.” Caitlin suggests that publicizing the farmers markets and making connections with the Cities will bolster business in Northfield. The larger the customer base, the more willing farmers will be to become vendors in Market Fair. But there has to be enough farmers to create initial interest at first as well.

Sara, who has become involved in Market Fair with her local social entrepreneurial class this fall, says that the “original goal was to stimulate money in Northfield,” through mutual support and putting money into one another instead of outside corporations. Stacy, a key actor in Market Fair, claims that, “It isn’t hard for farmers to sell locally because the movers and shakers in Northfield are into local food.” Stimulating economic growth in Northfield will be about not only encouraging customers to come to Northfield, but also convincing local farmers that participation in Market Fair is economically viable. Encouraging the sale of local food at reasonable prices will benefit not only farmers, but the health of the community.

## **HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE**

### *"The challenge of relearning"*

Local food offers a myriad of health benefits. However, buying local can also be a challenge to consumers as they learn the seasonal limitations affecting farmers. The relearning process is important for farmers as well as consumers. As more people choose to buy local, more farmers can grow heirloom varieties of vegetables. According to Caitlin, these have more flavor

but are not easily transportable. Developing a local food shed that is aided by the participation of a variety of local farmers offers a myriad of health benefits that must be accompanied by an education about local food.

Nancy says that local food is “the most efficient and most healthy.” She claims that because produce has less travel time, nutrients and freshness are preserved when consumers eat local. When asked why she chose to sell and promote local produce, she said, “I’m selfish. I want healthy [food], really good for me and my family, so I have to help create it...to have to rely on something as essential as food in the hands of farmers 1500 miles away, on trucks that use oil, that pass through warehouses of questionable protocol...yikes!”

Many farmers expressed the same sentiment: farming and eating from local farms was the best way to get fresh, healthy food. Stacy, a prominent figure involved with Market Fair, said that farming and eating locally helped her “appreciate food more.” Cooking one's own food is much more satisfying this way. She also said that among the local farming community bartering occurs, such as trading fresh produce for fresh eggs. This exchange allows farmers to build community through their commitment to health and freshness.

Nancy said that she wanted to be able to visit the farms she gets her food from, and this often means shopping locally. Farming and being in a community of farmers allows her a guaranteed way to receive fresh and healthy produce. Nancy made it clear throughout the interview that people who farm conventionally are not “bad people,” she just believes there are better ways of going about the farming process that are more sustainable and ultimately more healthy.

Ed, a Northfield resident that works for a food company, explained his perspective on how he provides food to his family. More and more, “people know that they should shop at the

co-op. But they realize the price at Cub or Econofoods, and have to [buy there].” He explains that some people might feel guilt about not buying locally. Ed admits that it is sometimes "hard to do the right thing" when faced with economic realities. On a personal level, he explains that with four kids, “when the budget is tight, you have to decide what your level of commitment is.” He emphasizes that food choices are about rationalizing what one is buying. “I think about what I feed [my family]. I can find local (that is, non-imported foods) at Cub.” Even if one is working within personal budget challenges and other restraints outside of their control, making food decisions with thoughtfulness and awareness makes a difference.

Andrea, a farmhand on Nancy’s farm, said the biggest obstacle in community members buying locally is “relearning; we have to re-learn how to buy [sic] and store a side of beef, dig root cellars for winter root vegetables, canning, drying and other preserving methods need to be re-taught.” Education is key for bridging the gap between the produce-knowledgeable farmer and the non-food educated consumer.

Nancy says that children who come visit her farm are shocked to learn that carrots come from the soil. She says that “soccer moms” are looking for convenience, which they often find at fast food restaurants. She says that to change this convenience mentality we must “raise awareness.” When she worked long days she would cook meals on the weekends and freeze them to eat throughout the week.

Caitlin says the main obstacle for buying local is that “it is not part of our daily life.” Farmers will not have everything that consumers want, since they can only produce what is in season. “We are used to eating whatever we want, whenever we want,” according to Caitlin, and “the seasonal aspect [of eating local] doesn’t appeal to everyone.” Farmers rely on people’s interest in food during peak seasons when their produce is at its prime. Education about different

food systems is essential in helping the public understand how to buy local best.

Sara claims that another reason people are hesitant to buy local is because of “not knowing how to prepare food,” especially in the winter where vegetables are more unfamiliar. Sara and Stacy stress that education is integral to awareness about when and how food is available. Farmer’s passion for local food has not necessarily translated to the general public. Stacy says that popular culture, such as *Jamie Oliver’s Food Revolution* television program and documentaries such as *Food Inc.*, helps people become more aware of the issues and more interested in local produce.

For many farmers, the health and lifestyle of the local food movement are exactly why they farm. John is a farmer who lives and farms on his family land about forty minutes outside of Northfield. He has been farming for about six or seven years and his farm is certified organic. His farm is supported through CSA members, sale to food co-ops and coffee shops, and direct sales to customers. He very much enjoys his way of life on the farm. John is able to reduce his cost of living significantly by having most customers come to him, not going out to eat because they eat what they produce, and farming generally decreases his family expenses.

Throughout our interview, John emphasized the importance of farm life in sustaining a small town economy. Now that he is back in his small hometown, John has learned the importance of a communal interdependence and mutual-supportive. He describes his community as “rather unique and entrepreneurial,” adding that they do not rely on a Wal-mart for needs. He wants to promote good, local, healthy food. Corn and soybeans are “made into God knows what.” By farming organically on ground that is normally farmed conventionally, he is “feeding a lot more people per acre.”

John takes pride in “knowing, personally, who is consuming our food.” But, “people get

the notion that farming is about a peaceful field,” and he says it is much more work than that. Farming involves a lot of paperwork, filing, emails and phone calls. He has to “invest a lot of time maintaining that support network” and to keep up with marketing by soliciting every sale. Farming is a different lifestyle that John is committed to supporting because he believes in a self-supportive small town economy and re-finding an older way of life.

He believes that in our “cultural subconscious we naturally want to connect with our food.” When discovering where food comes from, John says, “People get so excited, not because it’s a fad or new thing, because it is a fundamental connection: We are what we eat.” He is motivated to farm to “ultimately make a change in the system on a global scale.” His family lost most of his farm because of dairy subsidies in the 1980s. John seeks to regain this bygone family lifestyle, hoping to cultivate his two young sons' appreciation of this lifestyle. In the end John wants to preserve his family, land, and hometown economy by revolutionizing how we think about food.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**

### *“Our Needs Have Consequences”*

According to the USDA, organic is defined as “an ecological production management system that promotes and enhances biodiversity, biological cycles and soil biological activity. It is based on minimal use of off-farm inputs and on management practices that restore, maintain and enhance ecological harmony” (USDA 2010). Organic, according to Stacy, “doesn’t mean small scale anymore.” In fact, organic certification can be extremely expensive for small businesses.

Caitlin says, “organic is about the method” and an assurance for consumer that they “kind

of know” the origins of their food. A St. Olaf environmental student organization leader agrees: “the only reason you need to certify organic is when it is so far removed from the farm that you need to verify the practices.” But if a farmer doesn’t meet the organic guidelines, Caitlin says “you loose.” Getting organically certified makes farming more risky on a small scale. If a farmer is organically certified, he or she cannot use pesticides in an emergency, and it can be upsetting to see an entire crop fail if the farmer knows he or she could save the food with minimal pesticide use. Additionally, an organic farmer could be faithfully following the organic practices he or she agreed to, but if he or she ever gets accidental cross-contamination from another farm, he or she would need to throw the crop out because of the previous organic agreement. This does not mean that small-scale producers do not use sustainable farming practices. According to Stacy it can be over 800 dollars a year to maintain organic certification. In addition, farmers must pay for a certifying agent to come down from Minneapolis-St. Paul. In general, Stacy says that organic certification is “a hassle.” Her farm--where she grows fruits and vegetables and produces eggs--is organic, but is not certified. She does not use chemical synthetics and takes a more natural approach, which is her definition of organic farming. Stacy says that it is not necessary to be certified organic if you are “not selling to big stores,” but rather to local co-ops, such as Just Food, that accept non-certified organic food.

According to Caitlin another aspect of organic food is the commonly-held belief that it is more expensive. She claims that this idea is highly contested, with many organic advocates claiming that organic is higher quality and that consumers should pay more. In reality though, Caitlin says that “only certain products are more expensive.” Organic is just one of many food choices that confront consumers in grocery stores, co-ops, and farmers markets. It is then up to the consumer their personal priorities.

Recently a 'local food' movement has begun which has attempted to persuade consumers to "think global, act local," which begins with buying food locally. According to a recent New York Times article, "the average food item traveled 1,500 miles from farm to table" (Burros 2007). In response many have made an effort to eat locally mostly because of "fuel costs and the contribution all the transportation is making to global warming and climate change"(Burros 2007). Sara believes that "food and caring about the earth are really important," asserting that "organic doesn't matter." There are better ways to be environmentally sustainable, through systems like integrated agriculture and promoting natural processes. Sara also believes that eating in season is "healthier for us" and better for the earth. Sara believes that conventional local farming is acceptable as long as it is managed properly. In context of the small-scale risk, the expense, and the politics of organic certification, an environmental student organization leader at St. Olaf College agrees with her and states, "Organic isn't outweighing all deficits of the conventional."

Mabel, a small, local producer of raspberries, juneberries, and vegetables, focuses on soil quality. She says that "fertilizers feed the plant not the soil." Sustainable farming must focus on health of the earth, not just growing produce faster and bigger. The biggest challenges in growing on a small scale, according to Mabel, is the weather. Considering Minnesota's history of harsh weather, farmers face the possibility of a hard frost in any given month. When crops are so dependent on the weather it can be difficult to farm without chemicals.

Sara talked a lot about what she calls "integrated agriculture." Integrated agriculture, for Sara, involves emphasis on permanent agricultures, like shrubs, bushes, and trees, which help the soil retain nutrients and integrity. Integrated agriculture will include animals in between rows in orchards for grazing, planting, and fertilizing. This way, there is better natural pest management

and more reliable crops. Sara believes that since natural systems have animals, so should agriculture. For Sara producing food involves being in touch with the seasons and the earth. Most importantly, Sara insisted that we must recognize that “our needs have consequences.” Farmers who produce their crops and raise their livestock through integrated agriculture encourage consumers to buy from environmentally sustainable agriculture.

While interviewing with another local farmer, we had the chance to visit his farm, which is based on this system of integrated agriculture. Emilio owns an acre of farmland in Northfield. He uses this ‘model farm’ to show the Latino immigrant community how to start an inexpensive chicken farm that is sustainable and economically viable. His goal is to “create a symbiotic system.”

On his farm we stood and overlooked rows of winter wheat that had sprouted next to hazelnut trees while chickens wandered about the entire facility. Only the chicks were contained in an open unit that was to keep them warm during the cold months. Much of the heating system on the farm is solar so no outside energy source is required. The entire system is interdependent. This system is not only more economically viable, but more environmentally sustainable.

Poultry manure “creates a level of biodiversity in the soil that no other manure can achieve.” According to Emilio, this manure works at a micro and macro level creating a biodiversity that is essential in promoting healthy soil and thus healthy crops. The entire farm is “an ecological infrastructure in itself.” For each unit of chicken production there are two paddocks, which leaves lots of room for chicken to graze. There are perennials, like hazelnuts and apples, that aid in decomposition. Chickens plant winter wheat in between the rows of perennials. The seed provides the chickens with food, which they naturally replant while they peck, ensuring more chicken-feed the next year. The fertilizer produced can be used to grow

vegetables and herbs. Herbs such as peppermint and garlic are used as medicinal additives to food for chickens. The whole system is interconnected to form an entire environmental system on one farm.

Emilio says the most important part about the food industry is creating storylines, generating a “word of mouth buzz.” He aims “to not disturb natural processes” which gives him a “competitive edge.” Chickens are a good livestock to raise because it takes only 12 weeks to grow a bird and can be done on a quarter of an acre. That gives people from lower economic statuses a chance to start a businesses that will bring them healthy food and an income. Emilio believes that lower income families are not a “population to be marketed.” Instead of trying to sell them food, Emilio believes that they need to be “engaged in the production of food.”

His ultimate goal is to “harvest everything without disturbing the ability of the system to sustain itself.” His innovative contained ecological system creates community and economic advantage, but he is afraid that the “level of knowledge is too shallow.” To increase this knowledge, Emilio proposes that more young people get involved in the ecological principles behind integrated agriculture. Through education and knowledge he hopes to disseminate more information about sustainable, integrated agriculture.

## **COMMUNITY**

*“Seeing who grows your food is just so satisfying”*

Economic viability, environmental sustainability, and lifestyle all allude to a greater theme of the community that can be seen among farmers. The passion for good quality food and making that food accessible is extremely important to farmers and this seems to create a bond among them. More importantly, many farmers expressed the wish to extend this community

throughout Northfield to include consumers, especially through the new farmers market.

According to Jules Pretty, a professor of environment and society, "For as long as people have engaged in agriculture, farming has been at least partially collective business" (2001:3).

According to Stacy, farmers in the Northfield community barter their varying food supplies.

Also, Stacy asserts that the farming community is not competitive. It is about supporting each other. Market Fair will be a project that is mutually beneficial for farmers because more vendors draw more customers. The two feed off of each other to produce a larger community committed to local food.

Caitlin asserts that "you are ten times more likely to have a conversation at a farmers market than at a conventional grocery store." As a society, according to Caitlin, we have lost this connection with producers and she would "enjoy getting this back." Local food production for Caitlin is about, "being part of a community," even if inadvertently. Going to farmers markets and directly buying from farmers, "helps put a face to your food." Farming and eating locally are "embodying self and values" for Caitlin. Community between farmers is extended through farmers market activities and understanding where one's food comes from, wanting to know, and feeling satisfied knowing. A St. Olaf environmental student organization leader agrees with this: "being a part of a CSA is really good because you know [farmers], and even if they aren't certified, you know what is happening with your food."

Mabel, the local berry producer, is part of the Northfield Farmers Market. This Market has been in operation for thirty-five years and runs three times a week during the summer. Market Fair has been trying to create a cooperative atmosphere with the Northfield Farmers Market, so that they can encourage one another's business during the summer. However some participants at the old farmers market are worried about competition, according to Mabel. She

hopes that Market Fair has advertised effectively and that it will be worth the farmers efforts this summer.

Sara believes that local food will be a destination through Market Fair. By participating in the farmers market, farmers will create a space that consumers will want to come to meet the people behind their food. Sara is motivated to work with local food by, “community, foremost.” She is a liaison between Saint Olaf and growers and values her position there. Market Fair is intended to be a community activity, enhanced by meeting the people who grow your food.

Mabel believes that consumers need to "care about buying things locally, care about knowing where food comes from, and care about knowing who grows their food." Market Fair encourages consumers to know their farmers and know where their food comes from.

Michael Pollan write in his book *In Defense of Food*, “In a short food chain, eaters can make their needs and desires known to the farmer, and farmers can impress on eaters the distinctions between ordinary and exceptional food, and the many reasons why exceptional food is worth what it costs...Shake the hand that feeds you” (2008: 160). And that is the long and short of it. The benefits of shopping local are readily apparent. Yes, it has its set backs, but farmers believe that their commitments to creating healthy, fresh produce are surely worth the investment. Market Fair this summer will create a venue that will allow direct producer and consumer contact, creating relationships and trust in the community. This communal foundation will help extend the local food market to all citizens of Northfield.

## **DISTRIBUTION**

The distribution of food in Northfield is quite varied. We spoke with Just Food Co-op, Bon Appétit, a variety of local restaurants, and Market Fair to see how food got from farmers to

consumers, or from warehouse to customers depending on the business. The Just Food Co-op is a grocery and household products store located in downtown Northfield. The establishment is dedicated to selling local, organic, and sustainable living and dining products to its patrons. Just Food Co-op provides its own definition of a cooperative on their website stating:

[Cooperatives are] member-owned, member-governed businesses that operate for the benefit of their members according to common principles agreed upon by the international cooperative community. In co-ops, members pool resources to bring about economic results that are unobtainable by one person alone. Most simply put, a cooperative is a business: voluntarily owned by the people who use it, and operated for the benefit of its members.

Thus, the Northfield Co-op is owned by over 2,000 people. Due to their investment in the co-op, these co-owners will earn an income through “patronage rebates” once Just Food has become profitable and pays off their loans (Just Food Co-op 2009). Consequently, Just Food defines success as “social, environmental, and economic stability” (Just Food Co-op 2009).

Bon Appétit is an “onsite restaurant company” that provides catering and café services to “corporations, colleges and universities, and specialty venues” (Bon Appétit). The company currently has over 400 distribution locations in 29 states. Two of those distribution locations are the St. Olaf College and Carleton College cafeterias. They are dedicated to cooking from scratch, using fresh and seasonal ingredients. Bon Appétit also purchases “socially responsible” ingredients and is dedicated to cooking and purchasing practices for a “sustainable future” (Bon Appétit).

In addition to contacting the Just Food Co-op, Bon Appétit, and the co-chairs of Market Fair, we contacted thirty independently owned restaurants in Northfield. Ten restaurants allowed us to conduct interviews with their owners, managers, or current head chefs. Our objective was to establish a better understanding of the local food infrastructure in Northfield and to explore how local foods affected the restaurants' distribution. We learned that local food is a complex topic that is not completely understood by the majority of restaurant distributors.

We also conducted interviews with Dean Kjerland of the Riverwalk Arts Quarter and Gail Jones Hansen of The Write Solution. They are the co-chairs of the Riverwalk Market Fair initiative. Market Fair is an enterprise to create an open air market on Northfield's Cannon River riverwalk. The market is split into two aspects: art and food. An artisan's market would allow local artisans to sell their ceramics, painting, prints, and jewelry. The food aspect aims to sell fresh produce, fresh cut flowers, pastries and breads, and other local and organic foods produced by farmers within the sixty mile radius of Northfield. Market Fair's ultimate aim to for their patrons to enjoy "the art of a summer Saturday" (Riverwalk Market Fair 2010).

### **JUST FOOD CO-OP**

Just Food Co-op opened in 2004 in Northfield to provide local, organic, sustainable, and responsible food choices for community members. Just Food Co-op is committed to exactly that: justly distributed and received food (*Welcome*, n.d.). The concern for "just food" includes both producers and consumers, ensuring that all food and products are equitably produced, distributed, and consumed. Along with this commitment to "just food," the co-op is committed to supporting "local farmers and producers" distribute their produce and goods within the community (*Welcome*, n.d.).

The definition of local food varies depending on the source, but Just Food categorizes "local food" within a five state region, including Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, North Dakota, and South Dakota. Regardless of the type of produce, Just Food prioritizes its selection to provide local, certified organic, sustainably grown produce. Just Food remains dedicated to creating a local foodshed, allowing farmers to remain on the land and thereby reducing the environmental impact of eating. Just Food recognizes that the way to support a local foodshed is to engage the

community. Through the co-op's membership program, community members can individually invest in the co-op by buying a membership and becoming a partial owner (*Welcome*, n.d.). With just over 2,000 members and partial owners of the co-op, the Northfield community joins in Just Food's commitment to local food. Through these memberships and community involvement, Just Food is able to support its "triple bottom line" mission of "social, environmental, and economic sustainability" through local food (*Welcome*, n.d.). With the co-op's emphasis on "healthy living," Just Food is able to invest more of its time, energy and money to buying local food and supporting regional farmers.

## **ECONOMY**

*"Money does become an issue"*

The commitment to eating locally is not just a social issue; it also requires an economic commitment. Paul Wright, a manager at Just Food, considers the co-op's dedication to providing local food as a "philosophical and financial" ideology. According to Paul, offering local food requires a time and money investment that many larger operation grocery stores are unable to allot. A food cooperative, such as Just Food, is an "alternative economic model" for a food store compared to the large chains with which Americans are familiar (Just Food Co-op, 2009). In order to fund a food cooperative like Just Food, customers are able to buy memberships to "bring about economic results" that would otherwise be unachievable (Just Food Co-op, 2009). Currently at Just Food, customers can invest in a membership for a one-time fee of 125 dollars. As an owner of the co-op, members enjoy voting privileges, a ten percent discount on case orders, newsletters, and rebates when profits are high enough and the Board allows it (*Welcome*, n.d.). The increasing number of members demonstrates the social as well as economic support

for the co-op in Northfield.

Although about ten percent of Northfield's population now holds a membership to Just Food, Paul notices that the economy has affected people's preferences lately. With the national economic troubles, people have had to make hard choices relating to buying food. For some customers when money becomes an issue, slightly more expensive local, organic produce is a luxury that can easily be cut.

Although Cub Food, the largest chain grocery store in Northfield, also offers limited local produce, many employees at Just Food do not feel that they are in competition. Even with the tough economic times, people budget to buy local and organic products at the co-op according to Alexis, a Just Food employee, so economics does not factor in as much. She does not think that Just Food needs to compete with grocery stores simply because "they don't have the selection." Paige, another Just Food employee, agrees with Alexis, but Hank and Rosa, both employees, think there is some economic competition with the grocery stores in town. Hank admits that the grocery stores hold some appeal with their selection and low prices. In spite of that, both he and Rosa assert that if one compares Just Food's local and organic produce with the grocery store's equivalent, Just Food can compete with prices.

In addition to being able to compete with same-item prices, Paul advocates that money spent at the co-op mainly stays within the community. Just Food reports that about 25 percent of products purchased (in dollar amount) by the co-op are locally produced (*Welcome*, n.d.). Just Food's mission statement clearly declares their commitment to economically supporting and assisting locally produced goods: "We will serve as a marketing distribution point for locally produced food, thereby encouraging the economic success of family farms in the area and the recirculation of money within the Northfield community" (*Produce Department letter*). The

profits from the co-op “stay in the local economy” and help to fuel further local food initiatives (Welcome, n.d.).

## **HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE**

*"People have become disenchanted with the mainstream way"*

The health benefits of eating local and organic food connect to the fact that most local food is purely natural, unprocessed food. At Just Food, their products contain no artificial colors or preservatives, and they only offer hormone-free milk and antibiotic-free meat. None of their foods or products contain high fructose corn syrup or transfat (Welcome, n.d.). According to Hank, an employee, people within the Northfield community are drawn to the co-op for the local and organic produce, wellness products, and the gluten-free and dairy-free products. Members of the Northfield community and Just Food co-op are therefore attracted to its focus on healthy foods.

Paul asserts that many of the people who are drawn to the local, organic, and sustainable food offered at the co-op are also “disenchanted with the mainstream way” of food production. To accommodate this frustration with the impersonality of the food industry, Just Food offers courses and workshops on healthy living and cultivating sustainable habits. The topics of these workshops vary from “How to Break Up with Your Car,” a session supporting wannabe cyclists, to “Shopping Co-op on a Budget” (Just Food Co-op, 2009). Just Food strives to not only provide healthy eating alternatives, but also to educate customers and community members about the benefits and importance of living a healthy lifestyle.

Northfield community’s interest in healthy living reflects a broader, more national trend. According to Paul, “Middle America” is now taking ownership and pride in the local and organic

food movement. He has noticed that the “nation’s mind is getting more focused” on the benefits of eating locally, organically, and sustainably. The national healthy eating and lifestyle initiative has aided the stimulation of the local, organic, and sustainable food movement, creating a market for the Northfield local foodshed.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**

*"Always know where your food is coming from"*

The health benefits of eating locally not only apply to individual, physical health, but also to the general health and well being of the earth. Lowering one’s individual carbon footprint by buying local, organic, and sustainable food replenishes the earth and lessens an individual’s impact. Paul explains that at Just Food Co-op all produce is labeled so that “you always know where your food is coming from.” A section of Just Food’s mission statement sufficiently describes their beliefs about providing sustainable food: “We will strive to provide whole food choices and products that are fresh, in season, minimally packaged, reasonably priced and produced by businesses with sound/ethical practices” (*Product Policy*).

Due to its founding principles, Just Food strives to provide as much local produce as possible. During the “in” season, about 90-95 percent of the produce that Paul stocks is local food. The remaining five to ten percent of the produce consists of tropical fruits, grapes, oranges, and other foods that are basically impossible to grow in a Midwestern climate. However, during the “off” season, about 90-95 percent of the produce is not locally grown, illustrating the difficulty of eating locally during the winter months. To help customers and members of Just Food learn how to eat locally during low-production times, Just Food offers the Eat Local Challenge. For one month in the fall, customers can pledge to take the challenge and ensure that

80 percent of the food they consume be locally grown. The goal of the Eat Local Challenge is to encourage customers and community members to “pay attention to where our food is coming from” while building up the local foodshed (*Welcome*, n.d.).

Generally, Paul aims to buy from United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) certified organic local farmers. He notes that this certification is one of the best assurances that the produce is grown and tended properly. However, Paul recognizes that obtaining the USDA certification can be a long, expensive, and tedious process. Due to this, Paul offers an agreement for small-scale farmers following the “national organic standards.” If a small-scale grower makes less than 5000 dollars in a year and follows all the national standards, Paul will label that grower’s food “organic” at the co-op. This illustrates Just Food’s commitment to supporting sustainable agricultural practices within the community.

Although Just Food supplies a lot of local food, Paul notes that the biggest seller in the whole store is bananas. Bananas are shipped from warm climates and are not able to be grown in closer locations, leaving no way for the co-op to buy these locally. This shows that the local food movement is about much more than simply buying local food; it is about a dietary readjustment to coincide with personal needs but also the needs of the world. A shift like this requires a whole new outlook on eating, one that not everyone is willing or able to adopt.

## **COMMUNITY**

*"Taking ownership and pride in local and organic food"*

While helping stimulate the local economy, Just Food Co-op encourages everyone to shop at their store. Hank asserts that they are “not trying to cater” to anyone or “exclude” anyone else. Since about 2,000 members currently own the co-op, Paul explains that Just Food offers a

diverse selection of products and extends into the greater community of Northfield. Just Food shows its dedication to nurture and encourage the community within Northfield by supporting local initiatives and organizations through donation boxes and a system called “Planet Patches.” In this system, when customers bring their own reusable bags, they receive a slip of paper worth five cents that can either be collected by the customer and used at dollar value, or donated to an organization of the co-op’s choice. Through initiatives like these, Just Food remains dedicated to helping the growth and development of the Northfield community.

Just Food has a special niche in the Northfield food industry, as Paul relies on about 15-16 regional produce providers (excluding meat, cheese, and dairy). Just Food supply-buyers are able to cultivate personal relationship with growers, encouraging the communal aspect of providing locally produced food. Paul notes that the local food network in Northfield is strongly connected, allowing communication to flow easily between growers/farmers and the managers/buyers at Just Food.

Employees at Just Food assert that an important aspect of their mission is to nurture and encourage the local foodshed. Paul explains that they work with local farmers to help them sell directly to distributors. People in the Northfield community may be unaware of how to buy directly from a farmer, so Just Food acts as a meeting ground for producers and consumers. Just Food supports a program called Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) that allows community members to invest in a farm and in return collect a share of the harvest. Just Food also hosts a CSA Day, inviting all their CSA farmers to come to the co-op and meet potential investors. This past year, Paul reports that 12 farmers participated in the event. The co-op also acts as a drop-off and pick-up location for CSA harvests. In addition to the CSA program, Just Food ensures that its customers know who their local farmers are, providing farm and farmer

profiles which are available to all customers and on the Just Food website.

As well as bringing farmers and growers to the co-op itself, employees of the co-op, like Paul, believe in showing solidarity with the current farmers market in Northfield. Since organizers of farmers markets are working to achieve the same goal of strengthening the local foodshed, Just Food supports farmers markets. The Market Fair farmers market, planned to begin in June 2010, is no exception. Although Rosa, an employee, believes that Just Food may experience a slight loss in business due to Market Fair, the co-op is committed to supporting local farmers and therefore prepared to give up some business for the benefit of the local farmers. All the employees of Just Food that we spoke with agreed that customers would still come to the co-op to buy food products such as cheese, meat, dairy products, and other miscellaneous items that will not be available at Market Fair. Since farmers markets and Just Food cater to a very similar demographic, Just Food employees are confident that customers attending Market Fair will most likely seek out Just Food for the remainder of their shopping needs. As part of Just Food's mission to not detract from others' business in town, Paul states that they must "support others striving for the same goal" of a stronger, more extended local foodshed.

As a food co-op with a focus on local, organic, and sustainable lifestyles, Just Food feels that "it is our responsibility to give back" to the town of Northfield (*Welcome*, n.d.). Since Northfield is a community that is comparatively "more aware" of food issues, according to Paige, an employee, the community members in Northfield are generally aware of important food issues. As a source for local, organic, sustainable, and fresh food, Just Food works to strengthen the local food community.

## **MARKET FAIR**

The wind softly blows through the art banners hanging over the Cannon River as market patrons mingle with artists, farmers, artisan bakers, and other community members. Customers come for the market's signature pastries, to purchase artwork, and to spend time with their families and friends: one vendor is selling a hard roll, patrons venture to another to get cheese, and farther down on the plaza there is lemonade for sale. While eating these treats, ideas are exchanged, art is admired, and new entrepreneurial suggestions are instigated in the Northfield community. This is "the art of a summer Saturday."

The Riverwalk Market Fair, a regionally focused local art and farmers market, will be open to everyone in the Northfield community from June through October 2010. Supported by the Riverwalk Arts Quarter in Northfield, and co-chaired by Gail Jones Hansen and Dean Kjerland, this event offers artwork, artisan breads and food produce for sale, facilitating social interaction in the community and stimulating the economic growth of Northfield. It provides face-to-face connection between farmer and eater, artist and art patron. By creating close connections between farmer and consumer, the line between production, distribution, and consumption of food is severely reduced. The Market Fair has economic, health, and community benefits that are rarely found among conventional types of food distribution.

## **ECONOMY**

The Riverwalk Market Fair is focused on the economic growth and vitality of the Northfield community, evident through the benefits offered to its artists and vendors, its commitment to visibility within the community, and its desire to work alongside other businesses and organizations in the community. There are tremendous benefits to artists and vendors selling

at Market Fair. As Dean expressed, “Anyone with an entrepreneurial spirit should get involved [in Market Fair]. They are handed a marketing plan.” One of the main goals of the market is to sell artwork, and it facilitates this by literally giving visual artists and local growers a market and a platform from which to draw business. Liability insurance for the market is provided, and the farmers and artists have built this market from the bottom up: they wrote their own bylaws for the market and recruit new farmers and artists to get involved. Farmers and artists are directly and affordably linked with patrons in an innovative way: vendors simply pay 15 dollars per Saturday and bring their own tent in order to participate. The locally-based structure of Market Fair furthers its ability to provide a place for entrepreneurial connections to be made and stimulate the Northfield economy.

## **HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE**

The Riverwalk Market Fair provides health benefits for all involved. Dean reports that “it is an alternative to the corporate thing.” Market Fair hopes to change the attitudes about and access to local food in the community. Dean hopes to see a change in the food that comes to Northfield, and wants to facilitate this change through Market Fair. He has a broad perspective focused on food infrastructure and expresses interest in seeing more organic, sustainable, and local food emerge in the community. Market Fair will be a strong force that will get local produce in front of people, and once it is visible, they can use it much more easily. The market will give the Northfield area community a chance to interact and take an active role in their art and food choices. It facilitates personal attitude changes regarding sustainable food choices and a commitment to healthy eating. Market Fair makes a family event out of buying groceries and spending time together, allowing children to get involved and become a part of choosing food for

the family.

While Market Fair encourages attitude changes toward health eating, some question the availability and access of this sustainable food to different groups of people. Dean states that, ultimately, unequal access to healthy food is a structural and systematic problem. He advocates, “institutionalize it!”—get schools, the Northfield Retirement Center, and institutions to serve local food. Eating sustainably is a personal decision, and once all costs are factored in (especially the cost of health problems), it is not too expensive. Gail asserts that portion control is an effect of changing attitudes about healthy eating: “Eating well is naturally conducive to small portions [because it fills you].” Dean adds, “if you eat two packages of Snack Well’s cookies, they don’t fill you.” The quantity one eats in conventional snack foods could inevitably cost as much as the quality one finds in a smaller-portioned more sustainable treat.

For community members with economic limitation, the Northfield Food Shelf is available to those who need it, and the produce at farmers markets can be affordable. Additionally, both Gail and Dean are committed to allowing the SNAP program to be available at Market Fair. By facilitating access and making themselves very visible, Market Fair is able to accomplish their goal of facilitating healthy eating habits and the presence of more local food in Northfield.

## **COMMUNITY**

Market Fair’s goal of Northfield economic development is similarly manifested in its commitment to visibility within the community. Additional goals of the market include social interaction and conversation among community members including the commissioning artwork, collaborations between restaurant and farmer, business and individual seller, farmer and consumer, hand to hand, no intermediaries. Dean explains that “[Market Fair] is a whole

different way of thinking about things...It is about people meeting others and making connections, having conversations." As mentioned above, a main objective of the market is to sell artists' work. Market Fair offers art in addition to a farmers market, which helps shed the elitism sometimes associated with art and art markets.

The economic development of Northfield can only be achieved through the work of many in the community: Market Fair must work within the existing structure of businesses and organizations in Northfield. Other food suppliers and sources in Northfield include Cub Foods, Econofoods, Target, restaurants, and an already existing farmers market. Both Gail and Dean are assured that local businesses will benefit from Market Fair, since it is about getting people to come together downtown to see, interact, sell, purchase, and talk, generating awareness about the community and its possibilities. This family event is for everyone and is designed from a local perspective with the entire community's best interests in mind. Northfield businesses will not be selling items at Market Fair because they are already downtown and "if you have bricks and mortar, you don't need a tent!" Dean says. The Market Fair informational guide has a map of Northfield restaurants, so patrons are informed of all food options in the area. Since Market Fair is unique, preference is given to those without retail presence. Dean and Gail point out that just moving food somewhere else in Northfield does not work. If Sysco, a national food supplier company, moves to sell their food at the Market Fair instead of through Restaurant X in Northfield, nothing changes in the community. Market Fair is about community change and economic development in Northfield.

In addition to existing food sources and businesses in Northfield, the Northfield Farmers Market is another farmers market located in Riverside Park. Conversation and contact between the Northfield Farmers Market and Market Fair began from Market Fair's conception, and the

existence of Market Fair is seen as something that can enhance both markets. As Dean says, "there is plenty of room" for both in the community and patrons will be able to attend both markets on Saturdays. Market Fair is not only focused on the sale of artwork and produce, but is also interested in further developing the Northfield economic infrastructure. Dean hopes that through grant funding the Market Fair can achieve its goals of economic communal development.

The hope is that Market Fair will build on itself and grow. The market is all about collaboration; they want to be perceived as open to everyone. As they proceed forward in the plans for summer 2010, the co-chairs ask, "What is the future of Northfield? What does its economic future look like for the Northfield community?" Market Fair's multiple goals all work harmoniously with one another to create to a unified economic community.

## **BON APPÉTIT**

Bon Appétit Management Company, a company dedicated to serving local foods, started on the West coast and has grown to be a national corporation with over 400 locations in 29 states, 36 of these locations being colleges. As a corporation they are committed to sustainable and socially responsible practices (Bon Appétit, n.d.). Every location within the Bon Appétit is called a unit. Within these units, the management has a choice relating to how they want to implement Bon Appétit's commitments. Dave, a Bon Appétit manager at St. Olaf, explains that accounts are allowed to operate independently. Each manager is responsible "to make the right decisions," in accordance with corporate guidelines. It is the unit's job to find their producers in the local community and develop relationships with those producers. Within the Bon Appétit, the unit managers have the ability to buy from any licensed co-op or farmer. If the farmer is

certified, the unit can buy from them. The Bon Appétit corporation was bought by the Compass Group in 2003, but still remains very autonomous. Bon Appétit's commitment to sustainability and social responsibility has been adopted by the Compass Group and implemented in other sectors of their corporation.

## **ST. OLAF COLLEGE**

St. Olaf College's Bon Appétit foodservice is a model of an institution that is able to sustainably distribute local food to customers within its corporate business structure. The community is a major contributor to the success of Bon Appétit at St. Olaf College. This community can be seen through the relationship between Bon Appétit and the St. Olaf account, as well as through the large amount of student participation in the school's foodservice. Although Bon Appétit is a national foodservice corporation that gives guidelines to its accounts, it also grants independence to the managers of each individual location. This allows them to build relationships with local farmers and food suppliers as they see fit. The managers at the St. Olaf Bon Appétit account have done just this: they use as much local food in the school cafeteria as possible, according to foods' harvest seasons.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**

The St. Olaf Bon Appétit account serves food that goes with produce seasons. For example, the school cafeteria had a lot of tomatoes in September and acorn squash and sweet potatoes in the winter. Depending heavily on the season, the St. Olaf Bon Appétit account buys about 20 percent of its food locally, considering local to be within the three-state region of Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Iowa. After speaking with the account staff, it is clear that it is

difficult for any food provider to state that they do something absolutely all of the time. This Bon Appétit account, along with all other local food distributors, work on a local level with local food that has seasons, quantity, and price fluctuations, very rarely can a service assert that they always provide a certain amount of local or organic food. Conventional food companies' corporate procedures often do not buy local food much, but have the tendency to exaggerate the perception of their commitment to buying locally. This sends mixed messages to consumers, which is something that the St. Olaf account makes an effort to avoid. "We don't like talking about doing the right thing, we just want to do it."

The independence of Bon Appétit accounts allows for the perspective of each accounts' management to shine through in decision-making. The managers at the St. Olaf account are able to critically evaluate the best food purchases for its account. Management realizes that local isn't always better. For example, the energy it takes to keep fruit in a greenhouse near Northfield, might take more energy than it would for fruit to be shipped from Florida. A leader of the St. Olaf Bon Appétit Student Coalition asserts that the account is generally more concerned with the carbon footprint and energy use and less on the economic benefit of buying local. An additional benefit of providing as much local food as possible is that it cuts down on waste. The St. Olaf account uses the whole food—the creativity of chefs allows for the full use of a product, evident in the fact that they make their own stocks and soups. Dave explains that "in prepackaged and processed foods, there is inherently a lot of waste." St. Olaf goes beyond buying food locally. The St. Olaf account purchases napkin holders from the River Box Factory in St. Paul, a small, family-owned company that sells napkin holders made of recycled materials. These napkin holders are also cheaper and more environmentally friendly than the wire baskets provided by Bon Appétit.

The St. Olaf student organization, Corporate Accountability, is interested in providing awareness about sustainability issues on the St. Olaf campus. Currently, one of their interests is in providing information about the human rights and labor violations of Coca-Cola. They are committed to providing other cola options to students through the foodservice. One other student took up the effort of looking into the use of reusable take-out containers in a Bon Appétit café on campus. However, delays came up in this campaign after the amount of embodied energy in one reusable container ended up being more detrimental than beneficial to the environment. It must be noted, though, that according to research that was done among four colleges with these reusable take-out containers with Bon Appétit foodservice, two out of four of the accounts were successful.

## **COMMUNITY**

### *A model of a national institution that distributes local food*

The relationship between Bon Appétit and the St. Olaf Bon Appétit account allows for a lot of flexibility and independence on the part of St. Olaf management. The St. Olaf account receives praise for its good food and for being local and sustainable, a rare occurrence among colleges. Management on campus has given Bon Appétit a good reputation at St. Olaf, and conversely St. Olaf has a good relationship with Bon Appétit.

Due to the nature of this relationship of Bon Appétit to its accounts, managers of the St. Olaf Bon Appétit account are able to take the initiative to create relationships with area food growers. These efforts are a commitment, but generate worthwhile results for the foodservice at St. Olaf. Dave asserts that they want to “buy locally as much as possible because we are a company focused on preparing the best, most flavorful food for clients. It’s about flavors.”

As a result of the large amount of independence characteristic of Bon Appétit accounts, the St. Olaf account is able to purchase food from various distributors. Bix, located in St. Paul, provides both local and non-local produce and food to St. Olaf. The Thousand Hills Cattle Company is located in Cannon Falls, Minnesota and inspects grass-fed cows, finishes them, and sells the meat to St. Olaf. St. Olaf also receives food from Open Hands Farm, an organic farm located in Northfield that provides produce and vegetables. Food from Bridgewater Produce in Northfield is also used. Finally, St. Olaf Garden Research and Organic Works (STOGROW), a student-run organic farm on the St. Olaf campus, sells to the St. Olaf Bon Appétit account. When buying local, “people tend to only think about price. But there are other costs we need to think about. ‘What is the value of what we’re getting?’” asks the management at St. Olaf.

Although individual Bon Appétit accounts are owned by a national corporation, Dave states that this relationship still allows for “Bon Appétit [to be] a contracted company that wants to meet the needs of clients.” This account at St. Olaf is constantly encouraging themselves to do better, and “[they] will get better if [they] are pushed by the people [they] are serving to.” Bon Appétit at St. Olaf recognizes the importance of not only providing quality food to their guest community, but the impact of the community’s market power and participation regarding company food choices.

#### *Student participation in the success of the St. Olaf account*

A big part of the St. Olaf Bon Appétit account success is the community participation in food choices and cafeteria policies. The STOGROW farm and student organization efforts all provide a strong model of consumer interest and involvement exerting power and influence over Bon Appétit foodservice decisions.

St. Olaf students provide food for the Bon Appétit account. The STOGROW farm was built from the bottom-up by students, and now students are employed to work with STOGROW. Bon Appétit provides security for STOGROW and allows STOGROW to try new things and take risks, such as growing new vegetables. Bon Appétit accommodates to what they get from STOGROW, and plan their menu around that produce. This contrasts with a conventional restaurant model, planning the menu first and then finding the food.

St. Olaf student organizations are invested in finding better solutions. Bon Appétit Student Coalition, Corporate Accountability, and Environmental Coalition all provide support and platforms about food policies and related issues in which students can get involved, hosting campus events and sharing individual ideas about food policies. In the past, one student initiated an effort to use Turbana Banana fair trade bananas (as opposed to Dole, Chiquita, or Del Monte) after personally witnessing labor problems with these companies on his study abroad trip to Nicaragua. Bix was the distributor willing to offer these bananas to St. Olaf, but only if Bix secure the sale of a certain number of cases of bananas each week. Unfortunately, the St. Olaf account combined with other Bix food purchasers did not meet this amount, and Bix was unable to offer Turbana Bananas for sale.

Thankfully, there is room for student involvement in the Bon Appétit foodservice at St. Olaf. This student participation has been a large influence over the food decisions at this Bon Appétit account and is a reminder of the power of the consumer in food choices. The St. Olaf Bon Appétit account is a model of a corporation that gives its accounts enough independence to let local perspectives, critical thinking, and consumer involvement make a difference in its decisions to distribute local and healthy food to its consumers.

## **CARLETON COLLEGE**

Bon Appétit's Carleton operation is committed to buying locally produced foods. During the peak of the season they get about 20 percent of their food locally, and in midwinter they can still get about ten percent of their food locally. They define local within 150 miles of Carleton.

## **ECONOMY**

When addressing the economic aspect of buying local for their operation, Steve, the account manager Carleton's Bon Appétit, adamantly states that, for Carleton, one cannot only consider an economic standpoint. It is the flavor, nutrition, and quality of the product that matters; one cannot equate a dollar value to it. Steve recognizes the importance of buying locally for the economic community in Northfield.

## **HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE**

Nutrition is important to this operation. Steve asserts that chefs enjoy cooking local food, and they utilize the best possible products to create menus based on seasonal foods. They recognize that local food creates a better final product. Steve stresses that they use antibiotic-free meat, hormone-free milk, and cage-free eggs. By buying this meat, the account can ensure a healthier, better tasting product. Steve believes that a college's food plays a role in students' decisions to attend that college. Due to this reality, it is important for Bon Appétit to provide healthy, delicious, and sustainable food. Steve hopes to instill the importance of local food in at least some of their student body.

## **COMMUNITY**

It is important for the Carleton Bon Appétit account to support local producers since that also supports the community. Supporting the community begins with Carleton buying most of their products from the student-run Carleton Garden farm and extends to other local farms, such as Open Hands Farm, Fireside Apples, Thousand Hills Cattle Company, Ferndale Market, Lorentz Meat Market, and Lorence Berry Farm. For Carleton's Bon Appétit account, supporting the community goes beyond their food purchases. They also support local businesses, such as Larson's Printing where they buy their uniforms. Being a part of the community in which their unit exists is important to the Bon Appétit Corporation.

## **RESTAURANTS**

The restaurants in Northfield function as a crossroad between producer, distributor, and consumer. Many of the independent restaurants have control over their suppliers and have been grappling with the idea of local food. While most management we interviewed gave the impression that local food was morally important, they also said local food might not be the most viable option for their establishment. Before investigating the reasons for an establishment's standings on buying locally, we decided it was important to inquire about the individual interviewee's conceptual definition of "local food."

The owners and managers gave a broad range of definitions. One of the first definitions of local food was food grown or raised in Northfield. Joe, the owner of J. Grundy's Rube'n' Stein supported this point when he stated "local means within the Northfield area." However, when asked what he meant by the Northfield area, he expanded his answer to the "three county area." Joan at the HideAway similarly declared local food is "anything grown or raised within a

fifty mile radius.” Some had an even narrower definition of local as Chad from Beef ‘O’ Brady’s stated that local meant the ten-mile radius around their restaurant. Angie, also from Beef ‘O’ Brady’s stated jokingly, as if to taunt Chad, that buying locally was “like going to Cub!” Multiple restaurants expanded the idea of local food from beyond the immediate Northfield area. Angie, the owner of the Ole Café, explained that local food was from across Minnesota and “not just Northfield because there’s not necessarily a ton (of local farmers who would sell to restaurants) in the close vicinity.” However, our research found there are one hundred farmers within twenty-five miles of Northfield. It would seem that there are plenty of farmers, but perhaps a lack of communication or willingness to participate in local food exchanges and relationships. Additionally, the manager, head chef, and owner of Froggy Bottoms River Pub each stated that local meant within the five state area, meaning Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, and North and South Dakota, agreeing with the definition used at Just Food Co-op. The most interesting response came from the owner of Kurry Kabab, who stated that local food was “like fresh, not frozen.” The owner’s point was supported by our interview with a St. Olaf student, Summer, who is very involved in the local food movement. She stated that she thinks of local foods as “foods that are grown near where I am... [such as] raw foods including fruits and veggies, foods that aren’t processed.”

We chose to continue each interview based on the individual’s definition of local food. Thus variations in our research were generated, as we did not specify a particular distance or the types of food produced. However, we felt it important to use the individual’s definition as it shows us how restaurant owners and managers think about local food and what business decisions are made based on those ideas. Nevertheless, the variation of responses made us realize that people define locally grown foods in a range of ten to five hundred miles. There is a need to

come up with a concrete definition, including a specific distance, to eliminate confusion of what is meant by “local food” in the restaurant industry.

After determining a definition of local food, we investigated the inhibitions and advantages of buying locally. We questioned each restaurant about their target consumer base to examine the relationship of economic supply and demand between producer, restaurant, and patron. Economic concerns were one of the main reasons restaurant owners were hesitant to buy locally, however some restaurants saw return benefits from an economic investment in the local food market. Quantity and consistency were also major concerns when considering buying local. There was also apprehension and misconceptions regarding local food distribution laws. If restaurants determined it would be economically feasible to buy locally, economic return, environmental sustainability, and health benefits were all considerations, yet the idea of supporting the local community played the largest role in this decision.

## **ECONOMY**

### *Target Consumer Base and preferences*

We asked the ten restaurants about their target consumer base, specifically if they were trying to draw a certain demographic of patrons into their restaurant. Most restaurants replied that they had a broad consumer base in order to attract everyone who lives in Northfield. Joe, the owner and operator of J. Grundy’s Rube’n’ Stein, said if you want to stay afloat and in the restaurant business, “You can’t cater to just one group in a small town.” He added, “We have farmers in for lunch, businessmen in for meetings, and Malt O’Meal workers in for happy hour.” Joe went on to add that the bigger cities can have a specific target consumer base because they are drawing people from a larger population density. Joan, the owner of The HideAway

Coffeehouse and Wine Bar stated that their patron demographic was “anybody who eats or drinks!” Angie, the head cook at Beef ‘O’Brady’s agreed with Joan, stating that their target market was “pretty much anyone: families with kids, grandparents, high schoolers...” Angie at the Ole Café explained their consumer base was “kind of everyone” so that a “whole family” could come in and all find something that they would like to eat.

Although we found that most restaurants wanted to appeal to the entire demographic of Northfield, a few of the restaurants wanted to draw in a particular crowd. Lisa at Fused, a wellness and smoothie center on Division Street in Northfield, stated that her smoothies are “geared toward people who are in a hurry.” Additionally, she said that she would love to make her center a place for young people to come in and hang out. Lisa went on to describe the multiple facets of youth outreach that she has or hopes to employ in order to change her consumer demographic. Her marketing idea is to “work through her kids” in order to introduce her nutrition shakes to young people. She promoted her shakes by asking her young customers to refer others through word of mouth. Additionally, she is working with Northfield High School sports coaches to try to bring the teams in for healthy, well balanced, pre-game meals. Because of her conversations with coaches, the Northfield dance team now has all of their pre-meet meals at Fused. However, she noted that it was not only the sports teams that she was gearing to appeal to, but the entirety of youth in the Northfield area because “the twelve years and younger crowd are going to be the first generation not to outlive their parents.” To aid in her mission, she has hired two high school aged girls to work in her center and to go out to the schools to market her shakes.

Beef ‘O’ Brady’s also wanted to reach out to the college students at Carleton and St. Olaf. Tina, the owner of Northfield’s Beef ‘O’ Brady’s, stated that her restaurant is

“unfrequented by college kids.” Although they tend to draw in a significant amount of college students through their fundraiser nights for student organizations, they still lack a consistent flow of students through their doors. Tina added that multiple MIAC (Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference) sporting teams, specifically St. Olaf’s men’s and women’s hockey and soccer teams, come in after one of their games or to watch a professional sports game. However, it is only on these special occasions that the teams drop by. She went on to explain that she felt the restaurant was missing the boat with the college club teams, because they have never sponsored a club team or contacted them for advertising opportunities. The restaurant’s problem actually lead to a role reversal in an interview with Tina, who decided to ask questions of one of our group members about the possible ways of getting more college students into the restaurant. Tina elaborated on the difficulties of potential solutions, stating that they did not have enough money for a shuttle bus to run college students to and from the restaurant, and that their advertising in Buntrock earlier this year did not lead to an increase in college patrons frequenting Beef ‘O’ Brady’s. She added that the corporate directors of Beef ‘O’ Brady’s aim to target families with parents in the twenty-four to forty-five age group, and that they cannot make their establishment “into a bar before eight o’clock” p.m. On the other hand, they could develop a college bar scene after eight, but she noted that distance is a problem as it is not an “easy” walk to Beef ‘O’ Brady’s from either the Carleton College campus or St. Olaf’s campus due to its highway location. Thus, multiple difficulties stand in the way of making Tina’s establishment college friendly.

Froggy Bottoms River Pub was more successful in targeting college students. Jake, the owner of Froggy Bottoms, stated that “they do have certain nights” where they have drink specials to draw in college students. However, on these nights only college students who are

twenty-one years of age or older are allowed into the restaurant, thus making it difficult to draw from the entire college community. Jake did add that college students are the “biggest age group” that is available for them to target.

We also questioned the restaurants about how their consumer base would change if they added local foods and ingredients to their menu. Many of the restaurants stated that the addition would add some draw, but most said they expected that adding local foods would not drastically change their consumer base. Joe, owner of J. Grundy’s Rube’n’ Stein, stated, “to offer local foods might change our consumer base,” but “I’d have to advertise it.” Lisa from Fused added that she “would think” that the addition of local foods would change her consumer base because “people come in and ask me if things are organic, if the fruit and milk are bagged locally...” She also said buying locally might be a little more expensive, but it would only help her. She would be able to put up a sign advertising local foods to draw people in. The owner of Kurry Kabab said that buying locally is the “in” thing to do these days, and all the restaurants wanted to advertise having local food. However, we that providing local food options did not always bring customers or were not always favored by customers.

The HideAway, owned by Joan, used more local food in the past because their patrons said they wanted it. However, Joan found once they offered local foods, patrons did not always favor it and she gained very few people in her consumer base. She added that ideally the reintroduction of local foods “would increase foot traffic”, but she’s a “little gun shy on that” due to The HideAway’s past experience with local food. Doug, the manager at Brick Oven Bakery, stated that although they use local ingredients “most of the people that come here [to his bakery] have been coming here from a long time.” Also, Doug noted that they do not advertise their use of local ingredients, so their consumer base is not affected by their use of local products. Angie,

at the Ole Café, explained that she does not believe the restaurant's use of local foods draws more people in. They "do advertise on the whiteboard our food that comes from Bridgewater," a local produce farm located in Northfield. She went on saying that "people like to see that it comes from there," yet she thought people purchased the items based more on season rather than the local label.

Additionally, only one of the restaurants we interviewed in Northfield emphasized their use of local foods. Melanie, the co-owner of the James Gang Coffeehouse and Eatery, stated that "certain people are drawn in, definitely," by the restaurant's use of forty to fifty percent of locally grown food. However, she added that local food was "not the sole factor drawing people" into the restaurant, stating that atmosphere, convenience, and location also play a large part. The majority of the other restaurant owners agreed with Melanie, as locally grown food was only one of the many factors that help people determine where to eat. Also, the addition of local foods to a menu might impact what people choose off the menu, but economic factors also played a large part in what people choose to eat.

We also inquired about the impact the addition of local foods would have restaurant menus. Most of the restaurants stated that the addition of local foods would not have a large impact on their menus. Joe at the Rube stated "I don't think it would change the menu," and the head chef at Froggy Bottoms felt similarly. In our interview with the owner of Kurry Kabab, she declared that "If we got a good source [of local foods] then we would add it to the menu," but their overall menu would not change significantly. Thus, from our ten interviews, it seems the addition of local foods to a restaurant would not change who comes into their restaurant and what is currently on their menu.

### *Economic Costs and Benefits*

Economic cost was a resounding limiting factor on buying local foods. Joe from the Rueb’N’Stein had said, “there’s a fine line between quality and pricing”. He cannot buy a lot from Just Food because it is expensive, and he knows farmers with certification and licenses; however, he said their prices are often double that of conventional distributors. At Fused, the owner says it is important to buy fresh, but it is also important to keep the costs down. The owner of Froggy Bottoms has realized that much of his food could be sourced locally, as he learned at a sustainable food conference, yet the growers or the establishment would have to exert a huge amount of effort to fully supply the establishment, presenting a challenge. While he takes advantages of some local products as features, as a business, “the name of the game is always to save money.”

While the Hideaway currently utilizes some local products, it has decreased its use of local goods because it was cost prohibitive. They found while customers said they want local foods, the prices from purchasing local foods drove the menu price up, and subsequently fewer customers purchased those items. In order to keep the menu price down, the product cost must be lower which is not always the case for local foods. Following the laws of supply and demand, the establishment has pulled back from their use of locally grown foods.

Even if local food costs are higher, some restaurants have found economic return benefits from engaging in more exclusive or symbiotic relationships between the establishments and producers. Froggy Bottoms buys a particular bleu cheese made in Faribault, and is the only restaurant that uses this cheese. Through advertising and word of mouth, people realize Froggy’s is the only place that serves this specific bleu cheese, and people come just for the cheese. Thus, the local brand of cheese brings business to Froggy’s and vice versa. The owner said it was great

word of mouth advertisement for both the restaurant and the producer. The Brick Oven Bakery has another symbiotic relationship with Just Food. They buy about one third of their ingredients from Just Food, and Just Food advertises for them. Since they use local ingredients, they expect local sellers will buy the products at Brick Oven. Also, at Froggy's, they said contracts could reduce the price differences between commercial and local food, and as Melanie from the James Gang said, the farmers have been great to work with prices. Yet, even if it becomes economically feasible for an establishment to source with local foods, there are several other concerns about buying locally.

## **OTHER CONCERNS ABOUT BUYING LOCALLY**

### *Quantity and consistency*

One of the main reasons restaurant managers said they did not purchase locally grown foods, was the need for quantity and consistency. The owner at Basil's Pizza Palace said their main products like cheese, tomato sauce, mushrooms, and other toppings would not be available from a local producer in a large enough quantity to sustain the establishment's constant need for these ingredients. The management of the James Gang, explained, what producers and the co-op sell varies seasonally, yet the restaurant's menu remains relatively the same. Additionally, there are some products that cannot be grown locally like avocados and coffee beans. Thus, it is very challenging for a restaurant to maintain a constant menu with local growers that do not have fresh products all year round, or specific products needed by the restaurant. As the owner of Froggy Bottoms River Pub said, they would buy from a farmers market or local producer if it were big enough to meet the supply of the restaurant's demands. However, he also said that it is hard to justify the costs of losing his current distributors for seasonal growing and less constant

sources. There is also a sense of loyalty to current distributors that keeps people from switching to local growers. For example, Basil's Pizza Palace has been buying from the same cheese producer for fifty years. There is a personal connection and loyalty that stems from these long lasting relationships that is hard to break for seasonal and less constant sources.

In addition to constant availability, consistency of the product type and quality can also be very important. One of the owners/bakers at Brick Oven Bakery said that bigger companies simply provide a more consistent product. His baking is based on precise ingredients, and if the ingredients vary, then he has to adjust his measurements and recipes, which takes time and can be costly. However, Brick Oven Bakery was the only restaurant to mention time loss as a potential impact of the addition of local foods.

When we asked about how preparation and cooking time would be affected by local food, most of the restaurants stated that local foods only have a slight impact preparation time. Angie from the Ole Café said the local farmers wash everything before they deliver it to the restaurant, thus cutting down on wash-time at the restaurant. However, overall preparation time was unaffected. Tina and Angie, the owner and head cook at Beef 'O' Brady's, stated that the addition of local foods would "have no impact on the chef's preparation time."

### *Legal misconceptions*

Restaurant managers often mentioned that they would like to buy locally, but there were legal barriers deterring them from buying directly from a local producer. The need of USDA certification, inspection, or approval from the Department of Agriculture was a rather frequent comment from many of the businesses that did not serve local food. One restaurant owner said she would definitely buy local foods if the producers could provide a USDA stamp. She was

under the impression that this stamp was necessary for health inspection, and that her “hands are tied” in regards to buying locally without this stamp. She also said it was very hard to get connected with the farmers that did have USDA certification. To her knowledge there was not a compiled list of farmers with certification and it was a hassle to go through the Yellow Pages to find certified local farmers. Another restaurant owner said that “dealing with the farmers market can be sketchy” because food must be inspected before it can be sold in a restaurant. A different owner talked about wanting to sell local baked goods at her business, but she said regulations by the Department of Agriculture prevented her from doing so.

In contrast, when we asked one of the managers from a restaurant that does occasionally serve local food, she said a producer does not need to be certified as long as neither the producer nor distributor are “not claiming it’s something it’s not”. According to the Minnesota Department of Health, commercial food operators can buy produce from local growers “if the person is selling produce that they have grown on their own land. A license would not be required, as indicated by: Constitution of the State of Minnesota, Article 13, Section 7; Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 28A.15, Subdivision 1; Minnesota Rules 4626.0130 (B).” The website also states that

A license would be required if foods are processed, such as cutting, heating, canning, freezing, drying, mixing, coating, bottling, etc., or if foods are purchased for resale. Processing would not include sorting, trimming as part of the harvesting process, or preliminary washing to remove extraneous soil and debris. In addition, if a person buys produce from another grower for resale, that person may need to be licensed as a Minnesota Wholesale Produce Dealer. Further questions on this should be directed to the Minnesota Department of Agriculture. (2009)

From this section, it seems that buying local produce without certification or a license would be acceptable. However, goods that have gone through any sort of preparation need inspection. Also, according to the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, meat, poultry, and eggs do need state level inspection (2010).

The interviewees were correctly concerned about certification when it comes to animal products and prepared foods, however, there was a clear misconception about buying produce locally. Perhaps if regulations were clarified, restaurant owners would be properly informed that local produce is accessible for their establishment even without certification.

## **HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE**

While ideas of health inspection were brought up, only one restaurant manager, Lisa from Fused, discussed health benefits from buying locally grown food. Her business focuses on creating healthy “fast food” protein smoothies that are quick and easy, yet still very healthy. She is trying to get people, particularly youth, to be more proactive about their health with the right diet and exercise. She believes in buying local food to provide fresh ingredients, and as a previous vendor at a farmer’s market, she knows the importance of buying “green,” healthy foods. While this was a focus for Lisa, this was not an emphasis for any other restaurant.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**

We also found environmental sustainability was not a huge emphasis for many of the restaurants. However, some of the restaurants alluded to the relationship between environmental and economic travel costs for food. As the owner of Fused said, buying locally could cut down on her driving time and the economic cost of going to distributors like Sam’s Club, which is located in suburbs of Minneapolis. She believes by spending a little more on local food yet cutting down on longer distance trips, her overall costs would be about the same, if not perhaps a little cheaper. Additionally, she figured she could buy fresh produce from local vendors and freeze it for after the season. Two other interviewees replied that while the cost of the specific

product might be higher, the economic and environmental cost of getting it here would be less. Management at The Hideaway had similar ideas about reducing driving time to places like Sam's Club. Yet, not all of their ingredients could be purchased from a farmers market or local farm. Consequently, they would still have to make these trips, thereby not reducing their travel, and thus, environmental costs in this manner.

## **COMMUNITY**

Even if economic and environmental costs of local food are not reduced, some restaurants believe community benefits outweigh these costs. As previously mentioned, mutual relationships between local producers, distributors like Just Food, and restaurants can create return benefits by supporting local businesses and increasing the local consumer base. According to the management at Brick Oven Bakery, buying locally grown food as a local establishment "just makes sense." If you want people to support your local business, then you should support other local businesses. Several restaurant managers mentioned a sense of loyalty to fellow local businesses. The owner of Froggy's said that is simply better to go through local producers and distributors, as there is a sense of pride in supporting local community members. The owner of the Kurry Kabab said she was very proud of being Minnesotan, thus purchasing Minnesotan food. Additionally, many people in the Northfield community see buying locally as the "good" or "right" thing to do, which may create a social atmosphere encouraging local food purchases. Joan from the Hideaway mentioned she lived in the country where her neighbors and fellow community members are very involved in the local food movement, enhancing her involvement with local food.

While there have been concerns about economic costs, quantity, consistency, and legal

issues, buying locally can bring economic return through local relationships, health and environmental benefits, and support of the local community. As Angie from the Ole Café explained, buying locally is “worth it,” even if the economic costs are greater. Melanie from the James Gang ultimately said she buys locally simply because “that’s the way it should be!”

## **CONSUMPTION**

Markets are based on the demands of the consumers. Consumers play a larger role in what is produced as well as how much it costs. When looking at food infrastructure, the consumer base must be willing to change in order for the market to evolve as a whole. In his book, Michael Pollan addresses this idea saying, “a successful local food economy implies not only a new kind of food producer, but a new kind of eater as well, one who regards finding, preparing and preserving food as one of the pleasures of life rather than a chore.” (*The Omnivore’s Dilemma* 2006: 258). In this section we took a survey of the population of Northfield to see what kind of market has been established and see to assess the consumer interest in participating in the local foodshed.

To evaluate at consumer habits in Northfield, we surveyed people through the Survey Monkey website. We learned about personal shopping habits, restaurant patronage, demographic information, and views about shopping local. We had 45 responses to our survey. In order to survey more consumers, we also conducted short, two to five minute interviews with customers at Just Food Co-op. Our goal of the survey was to assess why people were shopping there and gauge their interest in a farmers market. At Just Food Co-op, we surveyed 32 people. Our sample was 40 percent male and 60 percent female, with an ages ranging from college students to the elderly, with the largest group being middle-aged. The third method for gathering information on

consumers habits was through extended interviews about personal consumption.

The preliminary results gave us information relating to consumer preferences and food stores. Of the people surveyed, the majority of them shopped at Cub Foods. Econofoods was frequented second most, with Target as the third most popular shopping destination. Just Food Co-op was also mentioned, and farmers markets were attended the least. We inquired further about their willingness to frequent stores more often, such as three or more times per week, to get fresh local produce. The majority of the participants said they would not be willing to go to the store that many times. When we asked about farmers markets, three-fourths of participants said they had shopped at a farmers market before.

When looking at local food in restaurants in Northfield we asked how often people frequented local establishments. 40.5 percent went one to two times a week, 40.5 percent went one to two times a month, 11.9 percent said they went three to four times a month, 4.8 percent said they went two or more times per week, and 2.4 percent said they never go out to eat. When asked what type of restaurants they preferred, most people said they enjoyed sit-down establishments. While people reported frequenting ethnic restaurants, a lesser amount also went to fast food restaurants, sandwich shops, and pizza places. As we inquired about local food in restaurants, we asked about consumer knowledge of restaurants currently serving local food. Of the people surveyed, 12.5 percent knew of restaurants that served local food, and 60 percent of those people reported that offering local food on the menu impacted their choice to eat at that restaurant. When we asked about whether local food would impact entrée choices, the majority replied affirmatively.

When asked about the broad impact of eating locally, we received a variety of responses.

The majority of people reported that eating local was important, and 24.4 percent said it was very important. Additionally, 22 percent classified the importance of local food as somewhat important, and 12.2 percent said it was not very important. This data shows that for 87.8 percent, the large majority of the people surveyed, local food was at least somewhat important to them.

Of the 32 people we interviewed at Just Food Co-op, 27 people said they shopped at other stores in addition to the co-op. Six of those people said they only shopped at other stores for special products not offered at the co-op. When inquiring about the farmers market, all of the people interviewed said that they had shopped at a farmers markets, though only one-fourth said they shopped at the Northfield farmers' market regularly.

## **ECONOMY**

When asking in our online survey about shopping motivations, the majority of people reported shopping at Cub Foods, with the large majority of them stating economic reasons. In questions about eating local foods, economic reasons usually hindered people's ability from buying locally. When asking about willingness to frequent grocery stores multiple times a week for fresh produce, economic restraints prevented a small sample from adopting this habit.

When inquiring about local foods in Northfield restaurants, we found that people were concerned with prices. When asked if they would choose an item on the menu because it was made with local food, some participants said if it was not too expensive, they would consider it. Others said that it would be too expensive for them.

Economics were not mentioned in the Just Food surveys.

When inquiring about personal preferences in longer interviews, we found price was a

large factor in determining where people shop. As Ellen said, she shops at Cub Foods for “variety, price, price, price.” She notes that with a large family of six children, price has to be a consideration, making it hard to buy locally. Marj has a large family as well and shops at Aldi in Faribault because anywhere else is too expensive. Tim also said it was “really hard if you have a family of six or eight to buy from [the co-op].” He says the co-op becomes expensive, even when purchasing a smaller amount of food. This idea was supported by several others who expressed economic limitations when shopping at the co-op. One St. Olaf student, Summer, says, in a perfect world, she would love to shop almost exclusively at Just Food, yet this is not economically feasible for her.

However, the co-op is trying to make products somewhat more affordable through membership discounts and college cooperative cards. Through the college cooperative card, Summer is able to buy much of her produce, meat, and bulk, dried goods from the co-op, yet it is too costly for her to buy processed foods from Just Food. This allows her to buy more fresh local products and supports a healthier lifestyle.

## **HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE**

In the survey, health and lifestyle had the largest impact on consumer choices. The lifestyle choice of convenience was the main reason participants shopped at Econofoods and Target. People reported shopping at Econofoods because of its location and Target for one-stop shopping. People choose to shop at the co-op for their organic selection.

Respondents reported health and lifestyle reasons for whether or not they were willing or able to go to the store three or more times a week for fresh produce. Though for some, health and lifestyle reasons made it possible to frequent grocery stores more often. Many people said they

were too busy with work and/or school to take that much time to go to the grocery store that often. Others said it was not necessary for their needs. Of the people that said they would be willing and able to go to the store three or more times a week, respondents said it was worth it for healthy fresh produce.

When asking why respondents shopped at farmers markets, people mentioned they liked the healthy fresh food there. Other respondents reported that farmers markets had specific items that fit their lifestyle needs.

Our survey showed the majority of respondents were influenced by food selection when choosing certain restaurants. Some also said that they only went out for special occasions. Convenience also played huge factor in determining respondents' ability to eat out. Some also mentioned that they wanted a change of pace. When inquiring about how and why local food on the menu would impact entrée choices, many believed the food would taste better. Others responded that they would order what they wanted, though they reported it would be a "bonus" if it were local.

Through the Just Food Co-op customer interviews, we found that a large proportion of interviewees mentioned that they valued the good, healthy food at the co-op. Many people specifically valued the organic food available there, showing that their interest went beyond local food movement to encompass the organic food movement as well. Other people needed specific foods for their lifestyle, such as papaya and gluten-free products.

In longer interviews, we found several people bought local food for quality and health reasons. Andrew said, “I think it’s better food” and that “[local food is] just going to taste better.” Several people commented on the fact that they liked local food because of its freshness.

Other people suggested their lifestyle impacted their desire to buy locally. As Sophia said, “Personally, I like to go to the co-op...[I] like to cook not ready made meals.” The St. Olaf Student, Summer, reiterated this point by saying, “If I want a special dinner, I go to the co-op and cook for friends.”

When discussing farmers markets specifically, many people enjoyed the whole atmosphere of the farmers market. Melissa says she goes to the farmers market for the whole experience. She said she enjoys going with her family, browsing, and getting something to eat. Another interviewee from India stated that the idea of a farmer’s market is very Indian, and it makes her feel more connected to home. She also stated that she comes from a farming family and that “somewhere we are [all] farmers on the inside!”

## **ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**

The Just Food Co-op interviews were the only ones that specifically mentioned environmental issues. Respondents reported shopping at Just Food because they wanted to reduce their environmental impact.

## **COMMUNITY**

Community was mentioned most often as the idea of supporting local farmers. When considering respondents' shopping preferences, local food was mentioned as a reason for shopping at both Just Food Co-op and farmers markets. Respondents who were willing to go the

grocery store three or more times a week for fresh produce were also seeking to support local farmers.

Respondents said farmers markets were important for their community. People said they enjoyed supporting local farmers and being able to talk to them about their product. Others mentioned they enjoyed the fun atmosphere that farmers markets create. Of the people that had not attended a farmers market almost half of them did not know of their existence. Respondents reported that if they knew about the current farmers market, they would consider attending.

When asking why respondents choose specific restaurants, people mentioned wanting to support local establishments. Others said they enjoyed the feel and atmosphere of the restaurants. When evaluating the use of local food in restaurants, people who said local food would impact their choice of entrée also said they liked the idea of supporting local farmers.

Through the Just Food interviews, participants expressed that they enjoyed shopping there because of a desire to support local farmers and a local establishment. Respondents said that they had shopped at a farmers market, but were also supported in their own gardens and CSA farms. Some mentioned the farmers market in St. Paul. A few people seemed to be concerned that the Northfield Farmers Market was not at a convenient time.

The trend of wanting to support local businesses continued to be an emphasis in longer interviews. Marj said, “It makes more sense to put my money into Northfield than somewhere else.” Terri reiterated this point by saying that she buys locally to keep money local and to keep places in business. She said that it is harder to get lower prices at smaller places, but smaller, local grocery stores and businesses know her better. She feels she receives better customer service and maintains a personal connection when buying locally. As Tim said, “to take care of

our own,” is important in a small town. It is “what our country’s got to get back to and it starts at the local level!”

## **ANALYSIS**

### **ECONOMY**

From producer to distributor to consumer, costs are a concern when it comes to buying local food. Producers admit that prices can be higher when it comes to certain items. However, this notion can sometimes be a misconception prevalent in the local food infrastructure. Producers also mentioned that it was important to look beyond the immediate price of the product, focusing instead on costs related to transportation and packaging. Distributors, like Just Food and Bon Appétit, committed to providing local food seem to agree that its value transcends the economic restraints to aspects such as health and environmental benefits.

The farming industry is highly dependent on the consumer base available in the community. Farmers need consumers in order to economically support their local food endeavors. Restaurants had unique disadvantages to overcome when trying to run an economically viable business in a small town. Price does matter to their consumers, as seen in concerns raised by consumers in the extended and through the online survey.

Economics play a different role in the goals of Market Fair. Market Fair is looking to create a symbiotic economic infrastructure in Northfield. The organizers of Market Fair aim to stimulate economic growth of Northfield beyond the farmers market to the shops and restaurants in downtown Northfield. Market Fair looks to promote entrepreneurial connections and social relations within the community.

## **HEALTH AND LIFESTYLE**

Lifestyle strongly relates to producers', distributors', and consumers' motivations and reasons to consume local food. Among those that were interviewed for this study, farmers and those with experience in the local food movement were better able to articulate their health reasons for eating locally. Interviewees emphasized the nutrition, better taste, freshness, portion control, and long-term lower medical costs that eating local food offers. Lifestyle also played a significant factor for interviewees who did not eat local: those with time limitations are unable to fully engage in the sustainable food movement; those who do not have the education about basic food and farming facts are unable to participate much in these endeavors; and those with financial constraints cannot always afford to buy locally. These limitations make it clear that choosing local food for health reasons is a conscious choice. Restaurants do not always consider the well-being of their customers' health, either: it takes initiative and a commitment to make the decision to eat locally. Market Fair sees itself as facilitating this change in attitude towards health. By making local food more visible and accessible, people are encouraged to make a choice toward a healthier lifestyle.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**

Through our research we found that people are aware of the environmental benefits of buying locally, but are also concerned with the economic repercussions of doing so. There is a growing awareness about sustainability in Northfield that is fostered by the local food infrastructure. Local food offers distributors a way to curtail their carbon footprint and provides consumers knowledge about where their food is coming from. St. Olaf, Carleton, and Just Food

focus on providing in-season, local produce because it is healthy for both their patrons and the earth. Many farmers focus on sustainable farming practices, aiming to nurture the soil and create a healthy planet since "our needs have consequences." By thinking globally about the earth and acting locally and by purchasing sustainably grown food, producers, consumers, and distributors are able to make decisions that promote a healthy environment.

Restaurants believed that if they were to purchase local food that they could be able to cut down on environmental costs. Using less fuel and buying from farmers who produced sustainably, distributors make a choice to reduce their carbon footprint. However, it can often be more expensive to buy local and organic food especially regarding dairy and meat products. Michael Pollan writes, "The decision to eat locally is an act of conservation" (OD 258), but distributors must weigh the costs and benefits of buying locally in regards to running an economically viable business.

Market Fair will make sustainable purchasing economically achievable through the SNAP program. Market Fair also raises awareness about sustainable food by being centrally located in Northfield and involving local farmers. Although there appeared to be an abundance of awareness of local food in Northfield, consumers and distributors must weigh the economic cost of buying local with the sustainable benefits it provides for the earth.

## **COMMUNITY**

From our research, two trends emerge when considering community aspects of buying local food: economic and personal. Farmers and growers share an interest in further developing a strong local food economy to help support one another. Buyers of local food, such as restaurants, Carleton, and general consumers, express interest in supporting local farmers and businesses to

develop the local economy. Additionally, businesses like Just Food, strengthen the local community by providing donation opportunities for customers to economically support local organizations. Through the development of a stronger local economy, relationships between buyers and sellers strengthen and create economic loyalties between local producers and consumers. The communal benefits of supporting local farmers and business endeavors usually outweigh the economic benefits of outsourcing and lower immediate monetary costs.

In addition to supporting the community economically, involvement in the local food market strengthens personal relationships by helping "put a face to your food." Patrons are ten times more likely to engage in conversation at a farmers market than at a grocery store, ensuring that consumers are actually able to connect with the farmers growing their food. Just Food is able to elicit similar connections between producers and consumers through their Community Supported Agriculture program. St. Olaf Bon Appétit also values developing personal relationships with local area food growers, responding to St. Olaf's broader interest in developing strong community relationships. Connecting a "face to your food" is not only beneficial for consumers; farmers and growers also express finding motivation from a strong community and the personal support of their farm.

The Market Fair farmers market will act as a venue to strengthen both economic and personal community networks in the Northfield area. With their focus on entrepreneurial connections Market Fair will help strength the visibility of the local food community and foster social interactions between local farmers, artists, and patrons. The community between farmers will benefit by extending personal contacts and receiving community support. By allowing consumers to know the person who grew the food, the Market Fair will help strengthen the local economic and personal community while supporting all those working toward the mutual goal of

extending the local foodshed.

## **CONCLUSION**

Michael Pollan writes in *The Omnivores Dilemma*, “But imagine for a moment if we once again knew, strictly as a matter of course, these few unremarkable things: What it is we’re eating. Where it came from. How it found its way to our table. And what, in a true accounting, it really cost...we would no longer need any reminding that however we choose to feed ourselves, we eat by the grace of nature, not industry, and what we’re eating is never anything more or less than the body of the world” (1998: 411). Market Fair attempts to bridge the gap between consumer and producer. It attempts to bring a food chain that is continuously growing longer down to a few simple steps. Farmer to consumer. How simple food can be if we strip away the maltodextrin, the cardboard boxes, and all the barcodes. Food is about community. It is about building stronger bodies, stronger connections, and stronger economies. It is about healthier people and a healthier environment. The local food movement in Northfield promotes a new way of conceptualizing the food industry that most importantly puts the product and consumer first.

One can explore the macrolevel impact of conventional eating through theory that examines the growing levels of wealth, inequality, and insecurity in American society. Theorist Bill McKibben challenges Americans to think about economics in a broader and more holistic fashion. Some of the establishments and organizations discussed address his concerns: there are local farmers in Northfield that can provide a sustainable base for food production and environmental conscientiousness in Northfield. The Bon Appétit foodservice offers an example of the distribution of local, sustainable food on an institutional level. The Riverwalk Market Fair resounds well with Bill McKibben’s holistic perspective: this art and farmers market cultivates

the local economic growth of Northfield. It facilitates social relationships, something that will ultimately bring more satisfaction and security than money can as it provides access to all members of the community, especially by providing the SNAP service. Market Fair works to encourage social equality within the community, according to the best interests of the environment, and cultivating new attitudes toward healthy eating. Our findings allow both individuals and institutions to play a role in sustainable food practices. Individual consumers can use their power of market demand, pushing corporations to consider the well-being of all when making food choices. Schools, restaurants, nursing homes, hospitals, and other community centers can participate in this process of distributing local food by incorporating sustainable and local food practices into their company policies. Our research can help facilitate these changes in our society as we all begin to recognize the universal benefits that come from making sustainable food choices.

For future research, it would be useful to collaborate with conventional distribution companies, such as Cub Foods and Econofoods, consider a larger consumer base, examine foodsheds in urban and suburban contexts for comparison, follow-up after the completion of the first summer of Market Fair, interview a variety of farmers implementing various farming techniques, and interview chain restaurants. Since the Riverwalk Market Fair has such an inclusive perspective of the community and its potential, Market Fair can use this information regarding the food infrastructure of the Northfield community to gain insight relating to the supply and demand of local food. They will be able to use this research to evaluate consumers' motivations for shopping where they do, what type of food they decide to buy, and if they would be interested in shopping at a farmers market. As first Market Fair approaches, Northfield can look forward to solidifying a more holistic, sustainable, and communal economic infrastructure.

### **List of Interviewees**

Angie, Owner/Manager-The Ole Café  
Angie, Head Cook-Beef 'O' Brady's  
Chad, Manager-Beef 'O' Brady's  
Dean Kjerland, co-chair Riverwalk Market Fair  
Doug, Owner/Baker-Brick Oven Bakery  
Gail Jones Hansen, co-chair Riverwalk Market Fair  
Jake, Owner-Froggy Bottoms River Pub  
Joan, Owner-The HideAway Coffeehouse and Wine Bar  
Joe, Owner/Operator-J. Grundy's Rube'n' Stein  
Lisa, Owner-Fused  
Melanie, Co-Owner-James Gang Coffeehouse and Eatery  
Sara, Owner-Kurry Kabob  
Theologia, Owner-Basil's Pizza Palace  
Tina, Owner-Beef 'O' Brady's  
Wes, Executive Chef- Froggy Bottoms River Pub

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