

LINKING RURAL VENDORS WITH URBAN PUBLIC MARKETS:
INSTITUTIONAL CONSTRAINTS AND POSSIBILITIES
IN THE EVOLUTION OF URBAN FOOD SYSTEMS

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Leah Rachel Rigdon

Certificate of Approval:

Conner Bailey
Professor
Rural Sociology

Joseph J. Molnar, Chair
Professor
Rural Sociology

Raj P. Mohan
Professor
Sociology

George T. Flowers
Interim Dean
Graduate School

LINKING RURAL VENDORS WITH URBAN PUBLIC MARKETS:
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Leah Rachel Rigdon

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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Leah Rachel Rigdon

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Public Markets are a new food retailing phenomena located in major urban centers throughout North America, presenting a means for more directly linking urban consumers and rural food producers. However, the new vision of public markets is still not well understood. Public markets involve direct-food retailing that focuses on providing a convenient place to purchase and sell local food products as well as fostering producer-consumer relationships. This study will highlight the importance of direct-food retailing for small farmers, small businesses, and environmentally conscious consumers. The qualitative data will include the interest and concerns of Birmingham, Alabama food producers in participating in a proposed public market for downtown Birmingham. This

analysis examines the possibilities and constraints that shape the interest of food producers in participating in public markets. We are particularly concerned with the participatory and organizational issues that shape the evolution of local institutions in the context of a globalized and industrialized food system.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Public Markets are a new food retailing phenomena located in major urban centers throughout North America. In recent years there have been several assessments of farmers markets in the United States (Hinrich 2000; Lyson 2004; La Trobe 2001; Halweil 2004). The new vision of public markets, however, is still not well understood. Already in North America there are public markets scattered throughout major cities such as Seattle, Vancouver, Milwaukee, Rochester, Little Rock, and Portland, Maine. Public markets provide indoor and outdoor retail places where local food producers can gather to sell fresh foods from stalls (Smith-Heimer and Golem 2005). These markets are an asset to the local food movements taking place in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. These markets meet the demand from consumers that value buying fresh local food products. Unlike a farmers market, a public market is a permanent market that has a set amount of weekly hours of operation and is open year round to be most convenient to its customers (Smith-Heimer 2005).

Public markets focus on providing a convenient place to purchase and sell local food products. In order to be a market vendor, the vendor's business is typically required to be in the state in which the market is located. Public markets provide opportunities for small farm owners and value-added food producers to market their products to a local audience as well as providing fresh, local food products for metropolitan residents. The purpose of this paper is to examine the conceptual underpinnings of public markets and to

examine potential vendor concerns and requirements for participation in a public market in Birmingham, Alabama.

“From an economic point of view, a public market is an outstanding small business incubator. Farmers sell produce at retail rather than wholesale, and improve their cash flow by diversifying into crops they can harvest in several seasons” (Portland Public Market 2004). By buying locally produced items, customers can enjoy knowing that they are supporting small business as well as helping to revitalize rural economies (Trobe 2001). In order to support local metropolitan residents, these markets foster social responsibility by typically accepting food stamps and WIC (Women, Infants, and Children Program) vouchers and by holding cooking demonstrations that communicate the nutritional value of eating fresh foods.

The Project for Public Spaces (2007) website identifies three principles that distinguish a public market from other retail outlets:

1. *Public markets have public goals.* These can include helping preserve local agriculture, commercial districts, and small business opportunities.
2. *Public markets create public spaces.* They help create a safe, inviting, and lively place that promotes interaction and community activities among a wide range of people.
3. *Public markets contain locally owned, independent businesses.* Vendor stalls that are locally owned offer unique choices that are simply not available in more standard retail settings.

These goals are intended to help public markets promote health, preservation, and community in their state. Public markets create a permanent retail setting for small

farmers and small food producers to sell their products and incubate small business marketing on a state level. “In contrast to bulk commodity marketing, direct marketing allows producers to learn the needs, interests, and reactions of local people using their products” (Hinrichs 2004). By learning directly from the customer, the producer will spend more time on the consumer’s needs and less on the actual production of the product. Creating quality customer focused products will help preserve the economic stability for a small food producer.

Economic sociologists stress that markets are social institutions that contain culture and meaning (Swedberg 1991 and Zelizer 1988). “Social networks—built on kinship or friendship, trust or goodwill—sustain economic relations and institutions” (Lie 1997). Markets are places that are embedded in complex webs of social relations (Block 1990, Granovetter 1985, and Mingione 1991). Embedded is a theoretical term used to describe how to make something an integral part of something else. Social embeddedness can be as simple as the relationships that are formed in a person’s everyday life. “If relations between producers and consumers are distant and anonymous in more global food systems, in local, direct markets, they are immediate, personal and enacted in shared space” (Hinrich 2000: 295). Public markets provide a place for consumers and food producers to have face-to-face interaction with no middleman. If a customer has a question or concern about the food products that they purchase the farmer or food producer will be there to answer these inquiries. Public markets encourage social interaction by requiring customers to pay the food producers separately. “Embeddedness, in this sense of social connection, reciprocity and trust, is often seen as the hallmark (and comparative advantage) of direct agricultural markets” (Hinrich 2000: 296).

Food Shopping and the Rising Concerns about Globalization

Most consumers purchase food at a grocery store where there are thousands of products from all around the world. The food industry has become a global marketplace placing great distances between the food producer and the food consumer. American consumers can complete an entire grocery store visit without a single social encounter (Sommer, Herrick and Sommer 1981). In the past ten years there has been a growing movement to buy food directly from local food producers due to rising concerns about food safety and growing cynicism about the motivations of agribusiness (Lyson 2004; Hinrichs 2004; Halweil 2004). These movements have been successful in shifting the way consumers purchase groceries by shortening this distance through various outlets including farmers markets, community supported agriculture, and public markets.

Consumers enjoy a diverse product offering when visiting a grocery store to shop for their food. Thousands of varieties of food products line the shelves in grocery stores today, featuring products from every end of the globe: bananas from Ecuador, avocados from Mexico, and milk from Canada. Imported vegetables and food products from foreign countries have become cost effective alternatives for grocery store supply chains in order to ensure year-round availability (Fishman 2006). Globalization creates a long-distance relationship between the food products purchased at grocery stores with the producer of that food which makes it difficult to trace where the food originated (Pollan 2006).

Between the years 1987 and 1992, the United States lost on average 38,500 farms per year (Mander and Goldsmith 1996). “Centralization and specialization in food

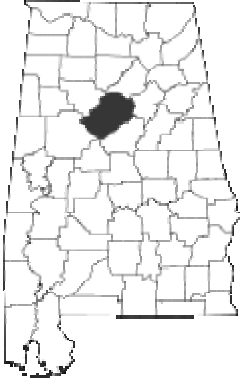
production is occurring on a global scale, a process fuelled by the economics of comparative advantage” (La Trobe 2001). Much of America’s farm production is now shaped by corporations that specialize in one to two product offerings (Lyson 2004; MacLeod 2002; Pollan 2006). “Some of the changes being imposed on agriculture are now largely tailored to the powerful food manufacturing and retail sectors which are content to source foods from anywhere in the world at the expense of their national producers” (Lang and Heasman 2004: 133). The U.S. has slowly moved away from its agricultural roots and now relies on the rest of the world to grow and produce a large percentage of their food.

However, there are still many small farmers scattered throughout rural areas in the United States. One of the largest challenges facing small farmers is the marketing of their food products (Selfa and Qazi 2005; Griffin and Frongillo 2002). Small farmers do not have the product volumes or consistent quality necessary to participate with grocery store supply chains, therefore limiting their ability to reliably market their products. Farmers benefit from direct-selling markets because of the elimination of the middleman costs (Magdoff, Foster and Buttel, 2000; Griffin and Fongillo 2003). The creation of farmers markets, community supported agricultural shares, and public markets have provided small farmers with a place to market their products directly to the consumer. These direct-selling outlets benefit small farmers by providing them a place to sell their products for retail prices. “Prices received for produce sold directly to consumers can be substantially higher than typical wholesale prices, yet still be below supermarket prices” (Gale 1997).

Context for the Study

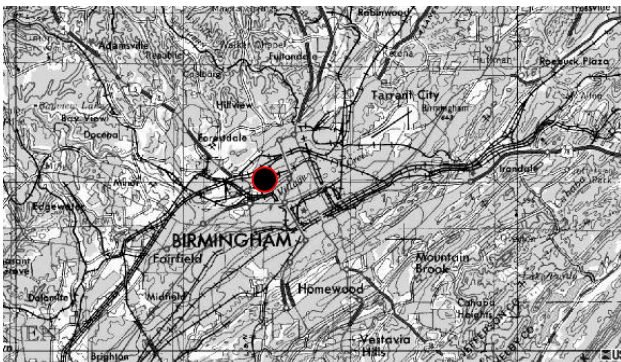
The local food movements in the United States and throughout the Western world have been pivotal in providing new opportunities to small food producers through farmers markets and public markets. Civic Agriculture, Slow Food, and Foodsheds are some of the movements that have brought attention to the importance of supporting small businesses and small farmers as well as decreasing the use of fossil fuels and keeping commerce in the local economy (Lyson 2004; Halweil 2004; Kloppenburg 1996; Selfa 2005). By emphasizing the importance of buying a locally produced food product, these movements have kept consumers aware of the implications of the global food system. Because public markets address all aspects of these movements, a public market in Birmingham, Alabama can link local consumers not only to locally produced food but also to this larger movement. Most states do not yet possess a public market to showcase their state's agriculture and value-added food products. A public market for Birmingham, located in Jefferson County, would not only provide Alabamians with a modern landmark to showcase the state's food producers but would also be innovative on behalf of the state. The question addressed in this study asks if food producers have a diverse enough product offering and an interest in participating in a public market.

Figure 1 Jefferson County, Alabama



The historic Truckers Farmers Market is proposing to build a public market adjacent to their existing farmers market located near I-59 on West Finley Avenue in downtown Birmingham, Alabama (Bukanya et. al 2006). The Truckers Farmers Market is run by the Jefferson County Truck Growers Association, a non-profit grower’s association that currently has 207 members (Gu 2006). The farmers market is solely owned and operated by Alabama farmers with between 2,000 and 2,500 farmers—large and small—that use this market annually (Bukanya 2006).

Figure 2 Trucker Farmers Market Location Birmingham, Alabama



The Jefferson County Truck Growers Association has worked to increase awareness of the benefits of a public market, and raise funds to support planning and development activities. “Some sources envision a revitalization strategy that would

construct new residential units, including substantial amounts of new affordable housing” (Bukenya 2006: 15). Opening a public market on this site would significantly increase visitor traffic to the Trucker Farmer’s Market as well as promoting Alabama producers and farmers to come together in one place to sell their products. A ‘foodshed,’ analogous the term ‘watershed,’ describes the flow of food as it travels from its origin to its final destination (Kloppenburg 1996). The proposed market would create a foodshed effect by bringing in products such as canned goods, baked goods, wine, meats, and cheeses from all over Alabama. This would be the largest facility in history to sell strictly Alabama products. The market would not only be a tourist attraction for visitors but would also be a place for the local community to shop for their weekly groceries. Therefore it will be important that the state’s producers are able to provide a variety of food products.

Research Objectives

Public markets can physically and conceptually bring together small businesses with new customers in order to contribute to the ongoing ‘buy local’ movement. These markets also seek to renovate metropolitan areas by creating a tourist attraction, building new and often partially subsidized housing, and providing spaces for new businesses while fostering community for metropolitan residents. Birmingham, Alabama’s Trucker Farmers Market is facilitating a feasibility study to place a public market across from their downtown farmers market. To be successful the market will need a variety of diversified vendors to rent the stalls from the market. This study seeks to address four objectives:

- 1) To study how food can create a sense of community and connection between consumers and producers.
- 2) Review conceptual approaches to the role of public markets in urban and rural economies.
- 3) Determine Alabama producer interest in providing products for a public market.
- 4) Suggest practical steps to guide the development and implementation of the Birmingham Public Market.

This study hopes to answer these objectives through a review of the literature that provides a context for identifying and interviewing Alabama value-added food producers.

Much of the research on the ‘buying local’ movements include the implications that retail establishments have on a community’s support for their local farmers and food producers. What is not included is how these retail establishments (i.e., farmers markets and public markets) can create communities of people that have similar social viewpoints. Together these people can change the realities for local farmers and small businesses by supporting them through their food purchases.

The qualitative research in this report will include interviews concentrating on Alabama food producer’s interest in becoming a vendor for a Birmingham Public Market. This will help the Jefferson County Truck Growers Association determine whether the proposed market will be able to provide a diversified array of food products to supply to the market. It will also report whether there are enough producers willing to sell their products in a retail setting. In order to stay viable and to retain repeat customers, a food market must provide a diverse array of food items that are typical at a normal grocery store (Smith-Heimer 2005).

This study will trace the local food movement from the causes for the movement to the current issues faced by its proponents. Conducting a vendor analysis will also enable us to identify the different types of food producers in the state of Alabama as well as assess their concerns involving distribution, consumer product demand, vendor stall features, and location concerning the Public Market. After the thorough look at the vendor analysis for the public market it will be crucial to determine the implications of these findings for the Jefferson County Truck Growers Association members. After determining the implications of the findings, the report will conclude with considerations and suggestions for the association members.

II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter will address the motivation for the conception of public markets and the challenges that are faced by the small producers that make up such markets. Americans enjoy the assortment and accessibility of food that grocery stores offer. It is not uncommon to be able to purchase seasonal food throughout the year. The food purchased at grocery stores comes from all over the world due to the globalization of the world food economy. First this chapter will discuss how globalization in the food market has brought with it several different factors of concern including foreign disease, pollution, and overproduction to name a few. Next, it will introduce a movement to counter against globalization concerns including the community of people that value buying locally produced food. Then the chapter will explore how many cities across North America are creating foodsheds that connect local farmers and food producers with consumers through farmers markets, public markets, and community supported agricultural shares. These food outlets are offering small farmers and small businesses new opportunities to sell their products directly to the public. Finally, the chapter considers the importance of understanding the challenges small businesses face when selling directly to the public.

Global Food

Few things bring people of the world together like food. Food is one of the basic necessities and therefore becomes a part of our daily life, our identity, and the way we relate to our world and the people in it. In many ways food helps create, nurture, and foster community throughout the world. Families gather around the dinner table, friends meet to eat at a restaurant, family reunions, holidays, and festivals all involve people coming together and enjoying food. Food connects us to our region, our country, and to our overall culture (Beardsworth and Keil 1997). Not only is food a social exchange but it also connects us to the farmer and the land on which the food was grown.

“Food travels farther than ever before, and little of what farmers produce is eaten there” (Halweil 2004: 3). A pound of food in America travels an average of 1200 miles before it reaches its consumption point (Norberg-Hodge 1995). Our world is becoming more global and the food products that stores offer are coming in more varieties with less seasonality (Lyson 2004; Lezberg and Kloppenburg 1996). Consumers today are far removed from the places and faces of the people who feed them and their families (Lyson 2004). Because of these increasing distances between producer and consumer, the world is using more and more fossil fuels to move food products, polluting the environment, and continuing to deplete the earth’s fuel supply (Lang 2004; Goldsmith 1996).

Importing mass quantities of food from other countries has led consumers to face ethical, sanitation, and biological concerns involving these distant producers (Raynolds 2000). In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the beef industry was threatened by a mad-cow disease epidemic that began in Great Britain. In response to this situation, consumers

reduced their beef consumption until beef was declared safe again. More recently, bagged spinach was found to be contaminated by *E. coli* bacteria. Spinach producers were forced to recall their spinach because it was difficult to determine from which farm or processing plant the contaminations originated. After the confusion with spinach, consumers were still concerned about the safety of bagged spinach. The importation of food has and will continue to have occasionally alarming consequences for customers.

Through technological innovations over the past twenty years, many scholars ask if globalization was inevitable (Micklethwait 2000). Foreign countries often can offer the same food products at a lower price than can American producers (Halweil 2004), therefore, dependence on foreign food products may have been predetermined. Big box stores like Wal-Mart and Target have begun competing against local grocery store chains and food markets, increasing the tendency to force food prices down (Fishman 2006). While these prices are being forced down, farmers are forced to produce more food from their crops while at the same time lowering the prices for their products (Pollan 2006).

“Ongoing processes of globalization, industrialization, and market liberalization are fueling social injustice and environmental destruction around the world” (Raynolds 2000: 298). The globalization of the food industry has not only become an economic concern for Americans but also a social, moral, and ecological concern worldwide. There is no guarantee that workers are paid and treated fairly if the food consumers are purchasing travel thousands of miles to their local food store (Litterell and Dickson 1999) and it is becoming impossible to determine the origins of food (Pollan 2006).

The globalization of the agricultural market has resulted in regional production in the United States as well as throughout the world (Lyson 2004). “The degree of

concentration has reached the point where the ten largest multinational food processors control over 60 percent of the food and beverages sold in the United States” (Lyson 2004: 49). Farms now use genetically modified seeds in order to boost crop production in order to keep up with rising demand. This leads to overproduction of monoculture crops leading to lowered prices which in turn forces farmers to produce more in order to make enough money to sustain their farms (Pollan 2006). Transnational corporations in the food and beverage industry are likely to form alliances with the seed, biotechnology, and agrochemical companies as genetic engineering becomes more widely used (Lyson 2004). Agricultural homogenization, by focusing on a single crop, depletes the land of nutrients and puts the United State’s food security in danger of complete reliance on foreign agricultural products.

“In times of war and in times of famine, the lack of domestic production for domestic consumption in food-importing countries has had disastrous consequences when food-producing nations suddenly designate their production for their own populations, at the expense of those who have become accustomed to constant supplies” (Lehman and Krebs 1996: 125).

America is becoming increasingly dependent on foreign goods to sustain basic commodity purchases. This dependency could have severe consequences in the future if left up to the extended marketing chains of multinational food systems. Lehman (1996) uses the example of a drought in the U.S. forcing prices of meat to rise for European dinner tables. Because of weather conditions on another continent, food prices surge thousands of miles away.

Local Food Movements Create Community

Because of the rising concern over the global food market, some consumers are slowly becoming conscious of farmers that practice humane, environmentally friendly agriculture (Selfa 2005). Sustainably produced food is argued to help preserve biodiversity, keep rural communities strong, and foster the renewal of healthy ecosystems (Carusi 1997). This socially and environmentally conscious mindset is creating a community of people that find value in knowing where their food comes from and how it was grown. There have been major developments in organic farming, fair-trade practices, and buying directly from food producers (Lyson 2004). These developments have helped to keep consumers educated about not only the practices of the farmer or food producer but also information about where the actual food originated. These changes have created new food labeling and most important to this study, new food retailing establishments (Selfa 2005).

The demand for organically produced food has grown increasingly in the past couple of decades (Fromart 2006; Selfa and Quazi 2005). “Since the 1990s, certified organic acreage has increased as producers strive to meet increasing demand for organic agricultural and food products in the United States” (Dimitri and Greene 2000: 1). The market for organic products is worth over \$10 billion dollars worldwide (Kortbech-Olesen 1998). Organic food products are sustainably grown without the use of chemicals or pesticides. Food producers and farmers that grow or process organic foods must be certified by the USDA in order to display ‘organic’ on the label unless organic sales are under \$5,000 per year. One-third of supermarket shoppers in the U.S. list organic amongst the food products they buy in order to maintain health (Lang 2004). Buying

organic food products can provide benefits that contribute to human health and to the health of the environment.

Fair-trade is another movement in response to global agribusiness. Fair-trade practices focus on the “re-embedding of international commodity production and distribution in equitable social relations, developing a more stable and advantageous system of trade for agricultural and non-agricultural goods” (Raynolds 2000: 297). Fair-trade is a labeling system that assures consumers that a product was produced by workers who were paid fair wages. The most popular items bearing the fair-trade label include tea, coffee, cocoa, and sugar. “Today it is an important force in 17 affluent food countries linking 350 commodity producers and representing 4.5 million farmers in developing countries” (Lang 2004).

Buying local has become to be a significant cultural movement (Lang 2004) and the main focus of the Birmingham Public Market project. “The goal of localization would not be to eliminate all trade but to reduce unnecessary transport while encouraging changes that would strengthen and diversify economies” (Norberg-Hodge 2004). Many studies have defined local as a regional term or even meaning buying ‘American’ but the term ‘local’ in this study pertains to buying food produced or farmed within the state in which the consumer is located. Consumers that value buying local products know that the money they spend on local products will directly contribute to community businesses oftentimes to smaller entrepreneurs. Organic, fair-trade, and the buy local movement seek to create a more sustainable world agro-food system (Raynolds 2000; Lezberg 1996).

Building a Local Foodshed

This constant process of food traveling from the places food is grown to the place it is consumed has been referred to as a foodshed. A foodshed, as mentioned previously, is a term analogous to the concept of watershed, to describe the flow of food as it travels from its origin to its final destination (Kloppenburg 1996). Creations of local foodsheds require connecting local farmers with consumers through farmers markets, public markets, and community supported agriculture. Through these outlets, consumers have direct access to locally produced products as well as stay informed about current agricultural issues. Consumers can take comfort in knowing that the food they purchase in these arenas is most likely locally grown. “Dollars spent for locally produced food and agricultural products circulate several times more through the local community than money spent for products manufactured by multinational corporations and sold in national supermarket chains (Lyson 2004: 62).” Foodsheds can bridge the divide between the local community and the local economy (Lyson 2004).

The University of Madison-Wisconsin presented a study on alternative food security that was based on sustainable, self-reliant, local/regional food production (Lezberg 1996). The study advocates regional food self-reliance or rather “that the food supply of a region should come from proximate locales rather than from distant places where the production practices remain invisible to eaters” (Lezberg 1996: 30). The study uses Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) as an example for regional food systems. CSA is a commitment from consumers to share in the risks and benefits that come from a farm’s production. A consumer will join a CSA for a fee (share) and will in return receive a fresh box of seasonal produce from the farm. CSA boxes can include varieties

of fruits, vegetables, eggs, canned goods, baked goods, and flowers with many farmers including recipes that use the items in the box. CSA programs are beneficial to farmers by providing financing for production costs at the beginning of a season. Wisconsin residents that participate in CSA's contribute to positive local transformations as well as connecting themselves to a particular locality (Lexberg 1996). Community Supported Agriculture is a practical example of a way in which Americans can begin creating local foodsheds in their communities.

Studies in the past have shown that buying locally produced products is not only good for the local economy but also for the community as a whole (Green and Hickey 2002).

“The theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of a more localized agriculture and food system were set forth over fifty years ago in two studies published by the U.S. government as part of a congressional inquiry into the role of small business in the American economy” (Lyson 2004: 64)

One of these studies was completed in 1946 by the noted sociologist, C. Wright Mills and his colleague economist, Melville Ulmer, through their report titled, *Small Business and Civic Welfare*. The purpose of the report was to understand the “effects of big and small business on city life” (Lyson 2004). Mills and Ulmer’s report concluded that communities where the economic base was composed of small locally owned businesses showed higher levels of well-being than communities where the economic base was dominated by large, absentee firms (Lyson 2004). Small business communities provided for their residents a more balanced economy than did communities dominated by big business (Lyson 2004). The general level of civic welfare was also abnormally higher in

the small business community (Lyson 2004). Small business was determined to be better suited for community well-being than giant multi-national corporations.

A community made up of small businesses is more likely to be sustainable than a community that relies on one to two major companies or industries. Sustainable development “rests on production and consumption maintaining at least some linkages to the local community” (Lyson 2006:299). Creating a local foodshed creates a community of civic-minded producers and consumers. Through this created community, relationships develop between the consumer and the products they consume. Foodsheds increase agricultural literacy by directly linking consumers to producers (Lyson 2004). This producer-consumer community brings importance to support and trust in local sustainable agriculture. Sustainable agriculture is intended to produce environmental health, economic profitability, and social and economic equity. By supporting sustainable practices in farming, a consumer is giving back to their community and to the land they live on. Farms practicing sustainable agriculture should be capable of maintaining their productivity and usefulness to society indefinitely (Duesterhaus 1996).

Many states have already organized foodshed projects to encourage local food production that benefits community health, environment, and economic base. They work on fostering community gardens, farmers markets, urban agriculture, and direct participation in the local food economy. These organized projects help keep farmers informed on new organic and sustainable farming practices through websites and annual conferences. From a consumer’s standpoint, the foodshed projects provide information on where to visit a farmers market, join a CSA, or participate in a community garden project. It takes the consumer closer to understanding how to act responsibly and effectively for

change in their local food system (Kloppenburger and Lezberg 1996). “We imagine foodsheds as commensal communities which encompass sustainable relationships both between people (those who eat together) and between people and the land (obtaining food without damage)” (Kloppenburger 1996).

Although Birmingham, Alabama does not have a formalized foodshed project in place they do have farmers markets, CSAs, and “buy-local” food marketing campaigns. Downtown Birmingham alone is home to three farmers markets that have been growing in size and participation each year. Alabama’s agricultural marketing campaigns have included the ‘Buy Fresh, Buy Local’ campaign initiated by the Farmers Market Authority and the ‘Buy Alabama’s Best’ by Alabama’s Department of Agriculture. “The campaigns not only help keep money from leaking out of the local economy but also help educate people about the hidden costs to the environment and to the community in purchasing less expensive but distantly produced products” (Norberg-Hodge 1996). The Buy-Alabama campaigns purely focus on buying Alabama owned, manufactured, grown or produced food products. The campaigns have focused on point-of-purchase advertising by placing signs or logos near Alabama products at grocery stores throughout the state. The programs are publicized through the internet, local news stations, and local newspapers. The efforts so far are strictly to highlight the companies that produce Alabama food products and do not include information on buying organic and sustainable products.

Farmers Markets

Consumers have been buying food at farmer's markets long before there were formalized grocery stores. Farmers markets are food markets that usually take place outside where a farmer or food producer can sell their products to the community. Some farmers sell produce from a pre-constructed stand or table and others may sell directly out of the back of their pick-up truck. These markets provide the community with fresh locally grown produce, locally raised meats, and an abundance of locally produced pre-packaged foods. Before the advent of the modern supermarket, farmers markets could be found in every town in the United States (Lyson 2004). Farmers markets were a necessity for communities to purchase their groceries to feed their families for the week. With the inception of modern supermarkets, farmer's markets vastly declined in number. "By the 1970s, the number of farmer's markets reached its nadir, with fewer than 100 still operating" (Lyson 2004: 92).

Although American's today still shop at their local grocery stores, farmers markets in the United States have been rapidly increasing every year. In 2002, the U.S. Department of Agriculture reported over 3,000 farmers markets in operation (Lyson 2004). Farmers markets are not only taking place in rural communities but are also becoming familiar in metropolitan areas. Farmers markets help to "revitalize both the cities and agricultural economy of the surrounding region while reducing money spent to process, package, transport, and advertise food" (Norberg-Hodge 1996). This is exceptional news for public markets. Public markets, not only provide fresh seasonal produce and products, but also provide an indoor amenity to customers that are not accustomed to shopping outdoors at a farmers market. "As food production and

consumption become more consciously entwined, urban populations become more closely linked to natural environments and the local economy, reducing the distance from field to plate” (Andreatta 2003: 37).

Lyson’s (2004) farmers market study indicated that there are three types of farmers market vendors. These include traditional full-time farmers, part-time growers and market gardeners, and finally for local artisans, craftspeople, and other entrepreneurs. It again has become a way for farmers to be directly in control of the distribution of their products. No longer do some farmer’s have to sell directly to manufacturers that supply food for the global grocery stores. “While health- and food-conscious consumers are purchasing more fresh fruits and vegetables than ever from farmers markets, local government officials see farmers markets as engines of economic and community development”(Lyson 2004). Farmers markets also put money directly back into the local economy by avoiding purchasing from distant corporations and purchasing directly from local vendors. It is not only healthy for local economic and community development, but also fosters the entrepreneurial spirit that is the economic fabric of our country.

Farmers markets are a good place to find fresh organic produce. Consumers that buy organic value the benefits associated with chemical-free production. Organic produce abounds at local farmers markets (Dimitri and Greene 2000). Farmers market patrons tend to be more educated on health and environmental concerns associated with food (Sommer 1981; Lyson 2004). This is good for organic farmers at the markets. “Organic farmers market their food directly to consumers much more frequently than conventional farmers do, and the last decade has see a renaissance in the use of farmers markets across the country” (Dimitri 2000: 2).

Farmers markets provide Americans a place for food shopping while enjoying the time-honored traditions of an outdoor market. Small and specialty farmers find these markets to be an ideal place to market and sell their fruits and vegetables to a wide variety of customers in their local community. Customers of the farmers market can enjoy the interaction with the actual producer of their food as well as knowing that they are supporting their local community by buying their products locally. Farmers markets will probably continue to grow in popularity as Americans move closer to appreciating their local farmers (Hinrichs 2000).

The project to assess the feasibility of a public market in downtown Birmingham, Alabama is directly related to farmers markets. The public market combines aspects of farmers markets and the typical indoor grocery store to provide a true 'market' shopping experience for its customers. The Trucker Farmers Market currently sells produce by the box to restaurants and to grocery stores for resale. The public market would support the existing Trucker Farmer's Market by providing the Alabama farmers at the market with a new network of customers that are willing to pay retail prices instead of purchasing produce by the box. Farmers could sell produce in smaller amounts and charge a higher retail price. Retail selling will require the farmers to sell during business hours instead of selling early in the morning. Some farmers will find this acceptable while others will probably continue to sell produce by the box.

Public Markets

Public markets are the next logical step in local food movements. Consumers need a place to shop for local foods everyday and rural food producers need a place to sell their products everyday, not just during the farmers market season. Public markets may be indoor or outdoor spaces that are in general, retail places where local food vendors sell from stalls and consumers are attracted by the wide variety of locally-produced food items (Smith-Heimer 2005). The type of public market this study focuses on is the “market hall” type which includes a permanent indoor facility with a variety of different sized vendor stalls for permanent vendors, as well as day tables, located outside of the market, for the temporary vendors (Bukenya 2006). Vendors with more seasonal items, such as flowers, may choose to sell from the temporary day tables located outside of the market. Alabama farmers would be able to sell from their trucks in the farmers market area which will surround the public market. Demonstration kitchens and educational areas will be provided on the inside of the market for market activities (Bukenya 2006).

Food varieties at public markets usually include fresh fruits and vegetables from local state farmers, fresh meats, pre-packaged food items (honey, jam, boxed mixes, and sauces etc.), cheeses, wine, breads, cakes, and hot food that is available to eat at the market. Because of the seasonality of fruit and vegetable crops, fruit and vegetables would not be available all year at the market. Public markets are places that customers can either shop for groceries or eat a quick lunch. Most markets provide an outdoor as well as an indoor seating area for customers that want to eat at the market.

In many cases public markets will include meeting halls, residential units, and restaurants to compliment the market. The River Market located in Little Rock, Arkansas includes a large meeting room as well as several outdoor pavilions for rent for corporate functions, picnics, wedding receptions, class reunions, cultural or church events, award ceremonies, fundraisers, and birthday parties (Hoffman 2006). The Pike Place Market in Seattle, Washington is home to over 500 residents that live in seven buildings surrounding the market in one and two-bedroom apartments (Binder 2006). Many of these buildings are federally subsidized in order to offer low-income and elderly residents a convenient and affordable place to live (Binder 2006). Granville Public Market in Vancouver, Canada offers their customers small restaurants for the customers in a hurry and includes cultures such as Indian, Chinese, Greek, Japanese, Mexican, Polish, and Italian (Granville Public Market 2006). The extra income earned from the surrounding businesses owned by the market help to support and sustain public markets. These public market extras also serve as a marketing tool for the market to invite a diverse mix of people to the market on a regular basis.

The Birmingham Public Market would be located adjacent to the Trucker Farmers Market on Finley Avenue in downtown Birmingham. The Trucker Farmers Market is located in an older part of downtown Birmingham that is mostly made up of neighborhoods, warehouses, and small businesses. There is a famous Birmingham restaurant located a few blocks from the market. Bukenya (2006: 20) notes that “despite the trade areas’ relatively lower population growth rate, the market’s ideal location at the intersection of I-20 and I-65 and within close distance to I-459 places it within easy driving distance for residents of surrounding neighborhoods and in-and out of state

travelers.” It is suggested that, like the public markets in other states, the Birmingham Public Market would provide a mix-use space that would include new housing, retail stores, and office space to accommodate downtown development (Bukenya 2006).

There are a plethora of benefits available to consumers while visiting a public market. Public markets can entice your senses with relaxing entertainment and rich cultural experiences (Hoffman 2006). “Direct purchases from farmers provide city residents with a source of inexpensive fresh produce and an opportunity to get in touch with their rural roots” (Gale 1997: 19). Many times a farmer will have picked the fruit or vegetables the same morning or the day before when selling directly to consumers. Consumers do not have to worry about how long a product has been sitting on the shelf when they buy directly from the producer. The food producer is available to answer any questions about the product that a customer might have. “Public Markets can be complementary to farmers markets, and the experience of other cities suggests that Birmingham can expect that having both of these types of markets will expand the overall demand for local products, allowing both types of markets to thrive” (Bukenya 2006: 14).

In both types of direct-markets, valuable social interactions can occur among farmers and small business owners that allow them to learn from one another (Griffin 2003). Consumers are free to speak with the food producer about the processes of making the item and the food producers will sharpen one another by sharing vital marketing information including price, advertising, and new product developments. Producers that are informed by regionally based food relationships with consumer-citizens will emphasize quality and specialty product innovation (Hinrich 2004). “While these interactions are often social and greatly valued as such, they can also generate and

circulate knowledge vendors might use to develop new products and creative ways of marketing them” (Hinrich 2004: 33).

Public markets were once found in virtually every European town and village (Norberg-Hodge 1996). These markets confront the problem of globalization by providing a place for local small businesses and farmers with limited capital to sell their products. Americans are beginning to move back into the inner-city in order to reduce their commute to work (Miller and Washington 2006). Public markets “enliven town centers and cut down on fossil fuel use and pollution” (Norberg-Hodge 1996). “National chains including Wal-Mart, Target, Home Depot, and Whole Foods are opening stores, auto dealerships, and banks to tap into the unfulfilled demand of inner cities” (Miller 2006: 86). Public markets are located in downtown areas to meet the demand of inner-city residents as well as tourists on vacation.

Independent Vendors at Direct-Markets

Small independently owned businesses make up direct-markets. The proposed public market for Birmingham would include 24 vendor stalls to ensure enough product variety. One of the challenges facing a public market will be the supply of available vendors to rent stalls at the market (Smith-Heimer 2004). It is important to understand the challenges associated with small business entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs create a new business organization to hopefully supply something that is needed by consumers. Food product producers may be farmers, value-added producers or farmers that add value to their food products. By adding value to the product a food producer is able to charge a higher retail price for the food item.

In the past, sociologists have studied different attributes of entrepreneurs including the “individuals’ need for achievement, locus of control, risk-taking propensity, problem-solving style and innovativeness, leadership style, values, and socialization experience” to explain why new organizations are formed (Thornton 1999). Sociologists have also taken into consideration attributes of culture, social class, and ethnic group (Thornton 1999). Each type of enterprise will require different challenges therefore will require different types of entrepreneurs (Thornton 1999). The entrepreneurs at a public market must not only be able to provide food for the market but also to communicate with the market customers and provide information on their products.

Challenges of Small Business

A study in Great Britain conducted by rural geographers Ilbery and Kneafsey (2000), considered small producers of regional specialty food products in the southwest of England. These food producers found it challenging for customers to trust the quality of a new product on the market. In this study it was found that quality is a socially constructed concept formed by various actors including producers, institutions, customers, and consumers (Ilbery and Kneafsey 2000). “Quality has to be ‘earned’ and is best measured in terms of the number of repeat customers” (Ilbery 2000: 229). The producers in their survey realized that to earn quality they must give a personal guarantee on their product and at the same time form trusting relationships between themselves and the buyer (Ilbery 2000). The buyer in this study could be the actual store that resells the product or the actual customer of that store that consumes the product. Either way food producers will face quality issues when introducing new products.

The further food travels before consumption the longer the supply chain. With increasing technological innovations, longer and longer supply chains will be created and coordinated (Fligstein 2001). Large supply-chains can sometimes hide information necessary for coordinating value-added products and maintaining brand names (DiPietre 2000). Producers may find their products quality information difficult to determine due to a long supply-chain. Small producers that sell directly to their customers can directly confront the quality challenge by communicating with their customers. Social learning occurs when producers directly engage with customers (Hinrich 2004).

Another struggle that is common amongst small farmers as well as small food producers is marketing. “A market depends on the buyers continuing to show up in a particular social space to purchase the product” (Fligstein 2001). The marketing of a product or place has the specific purpose of enticing buyers to spend money on that product or in that place. Marketing includes issues relating to the product, price, advertising, and distribution of the product. Farmers and small food producers usually do not have experience in marketing before starting a company, therefore marketing is oftentimes neglected. This can be detrimental to product sales. Companies like Coca-cola spend a large proportion of their budget on advertising their products in order to remind consumers to buy. Small producers without a large operational budget will often allocate little money to marketing.

A study from Cornell University addressed the marketing challenges faced by farmers at upstate New York farmers markets. “Farmers believed that finding and maintaining a niche in the midst of changing consumer trends and increasing competition is the greatest marketing challenge” (Griffin 2003). With competition remaining high at

farmers markets, farmers said that it is hard to find a niche and then stay one step ahead of the trends (Griffin 2003). Many of the farmers that participated in the study complained of farmers selling products for much less than everyone else even though most of the farmers at the market coordinate prices (Griffin 2003). Others found it tough to keep up with the quantities that larger farmers would bring to the market (Griffin 2003). When asked about success at the market, farmers said that customer awareness and perceptions of markets is important (Griffin 2003). The farmers also found it important to offer to educate customers on the importance of farmers markets (Griffin 2003). Social interactions between a farmer and a consumer contribute not only to inform but also to learn.

Conclusion

Food market globalization has raised new concerns about the social, moral, and ethical practices of agribusiness. These concerns have created food movements in communities all over the world where people value buying local food products. Local food movements continue to form local foodsheds to increase agricultural literacy and support sustainable agriculture. The reintroduction of farmers markets and public markets has increased the need for small farmers and small food producers. It will be important to consider the quality and marketing challenges small businesses face to better understand the Alabama product producers. The empirical portion of this study will consider small businesses marketing concerns as well as the importance of repeat business from consumers.

III. METHOD

The focal population for this study is vendors of Alabama food products. I used a network sampling approach to identify potential participants in the Birmingham Public Market. The vendor analysis was carried out in three phases. The first phase was the collection of an Alabama product producer name database and then determining which producers would be interviewed. The second phase involved visiting Alabama food producer websites in order to collect information on the products available from Alabama food producers. The final phase included summaries of interview material to cover during the interviews with Alabama producers, conducting interviews, and analyzing the interview answers.

Data Collection

The collection of the Alabama vendor database involved using several different methods. The initial collection was found through using internet search engines to collect Alabama food producer company names and contact information. There are many websites that collect producer information including LocalHarvest.com and many different food cooperative websites. The collection of vendor names also included visiting seven different grocery stores in Alabama; one located in Jefferson County, two located in Lee County, one in Shelby County, and one in Lowndes County. During the

grocery store visits food labels were checked to determine which products were produced in Alabama. Farmers markets were also visited to collect names and contact information for potential market vendors. The subsequent names in the vendor database came from vendor interviews. The final database collected the names, telephone numbers, and addresses of 108 Alabama food product producers. The database includes names from many different food categories including items such as wine, cheese, meats, canned goods, packaged foods (grits, mill, granola, etc.), and baked goods to name a few. This list contains most known offerings available by Alabama food product producers.

Interview

The interview topics were established by reviewing previous research conducted for the Portland Public Market and from meetings with the Birmingham Farmers Market board. The objectives of the interview questions were to get a general idea of vendor concerns for the market, vendor stall needs, and vendor customer needs. The interviews consisted of open-ended questions in order to let the vendor raise concerns and ideas for the proposed market. The interview topics included the following: interest in selling at the Public Market, interest in selling items that the vendor does not currently produce, preferred months of the year to sell, preferred days of the week to sell, type of lease preferred, interest in day tables, interest in conducting cooking demonstrations, their extensive product offering, their current product distribution, and their customer inquiries (organic, nutrition, cooking tips, and where grown).

Interviews were conducted mostly on the telephone and occasionally in person at a farmers market. The vendor database collected at the beginning of the research was

used to select the vendors to be interviewed. Vendors selected for interviewing were randomly selected with the vendors with diverse product offering, being singled out for interviewing. 45 vendors were interviewed and the average interview lasted from 35 to 45 minutes. For the most part, vendors were interested in talking about their product offerings and excited about the prospect for a new place to distribute their product. The 20 in-person interviews were conducted at farmers markets. The in person interviews were not as detailed because the product producer was sometimes busy helping customers.

IV. RESULTS

Characteristics of Alabama Producers

Alabama producers are distributed throughout the entire state of Alabama. There are two distinct categories of Alabama food producers. The largest category interviewed includes small companies that are located in rural areas and have limited product offerings and distribution capabilities. The other category includes large corporate food producers based in Alabama that produce an assortment of food products for a particular food category and distribute their product throughout the United States. Most of the small companies interviewed have been in business for between two to five years with the large corporate food producers having been in business for 15 to 50 years. The small companies usually employ from one to five employees with the larger companies employing from 50 to 400.

Interest in Selling at the Public Market

Each of the 45 Alabama product producers we surveyed was asked about their interest in selling at the Public Market. The most common response is that the producer was interested as long as someone else sold the product for them, a condition somewhat at odds with a public market. Most of the producers interviewed already had their products placed in many locations throughout Alabama, the Southeastern United States,

and some throughout the continental U.S. The producers were accustomed to having their products purchased for resale by an established retail vendor and some sold directly to consumers by attending a once a week farmers market. Many of the producers live two hours away from Birmingham and were unsure that they would have the personnel to cover a vendor booth at the market. An Alabama condiment producer said that if someone else sold her product for her she would “want them to be fully aware of what to use and how to prepare our product. Our name is on that (the bottle) and we take pride in our company’s name. We wouldn’t want just anyone to represent our company.” Knowledgeable representation for their product was a common concern amongst the producers. A large sausage producer expressed that “we would only be interested if our products were for resale. Our company is not set up to directly sell our sausage to the public. We use a large distributor that places our products all over the southeast.” Food products for resale reported to be the most common response when asked about the food producer’s interest in selling at the public market.

The producers interested in selling at the public market had many different reasons for their interest (Table 1). In order to increase sales was the most common response among respondents. An Alabama frozen food producer expressed that “the ‘Buy Alabama’ promotion has created a tremendous amount of response from customers. I think it’s a great idea!” The positive response to Alabama food product marketing in the past led many producers to answer that the public market could greatly increase the sales of their product. Increased visibility was another common response amongst producers. An Alabama grits producer said that she had “a big interest in the Slow Food Movement and would be interested in reaching customers with the same interests.” The third most

common response was to broaden the market segments for their products. Many of the smaller food producers expressed that the market would provide a good way to enter the Birmingham customer market. All of the respondents interested in selling at the public market answered this question.

Table 1 Reasons for Interest in Selling at the Public Market, 2006

Interest	Quotation	Product Classification
Increased sales	The 'Buy Alabama' thing has created a tremendous amount of response from customers. I think it's a great idea!	Pre-packaged foods
	Birmingham is a big market which would greatly increase our sales.	Baked goods
Increased visibility	We are always trying to reach new market segments and this would provide a great opportunity.	Beverages
	I have a big interest in the Slow Food Movement and would be interested in reaching new customers with the same interests.	Pre-packaged foods
	I would love to put the product out more and get our name known a little better.	Pre-packaged foods
Broadened market segments	Birmingham would be a new market for me and my sauce.	Condiments
	Anything to promote grass fed beef!	Animal Products

The product producers who expressed no interest in selling at the market gave various reasons for their disinterest. An Alabama goat cheese producer said that he “didn’t know if he could produce enough product to sustain a year round market. We are stretched as it is to sell our product at two farmers markets in the state.” A coffee producer for the state expressed that he “didn’t want to compete against the company’s current distributor by selling at a non-chain store.” Many of the disinterested producers were unsure that the Finley Boulevard location would attract the right niche of customers for their specialty products. A snack food producer said, “I’m just not sure the area would be safe at night for the kinds of customers that we deal with. Our customers come from mostly Mountain Brook, Vestavia, and Forrest Park and I don’t know if they would be willing to drive out there.” This could be an issue with the proposed location of the Birmingham Public Market.

Only a few of the producers interviewed expressed an interest in selling items that they do not currently produce. Most felt that their company did not have enough personnel to consider selling another company’s product.

Desired Stall Features

Each producer required specific stall features to compliment their product offering. The frozen food producers required freezers and the fresh food producers required refrigeration with many expressing interest in glass cases. The pre-packaged dry food producers required a table, display area, and a sample area. If the producer was provided with a sample area then they also expressed interest in a prep area as well as a sink. Most of the desired stall features were specific to the particular food product

offering of the individual companies. The universal stall feature was a cash register in order to complete transactions.

Interest in Cooking Demonstrations

Almost all of the food producers interviewed had participated in a cooking demonstration in the past. Most of the producers found the demonstrations beneficial for their products sales. “Customers seem to enjoy watching the demonstrations and learning how to correctly prepare the sausages,” replied an Alabama sausage maker. Cooking demonstrations were something that all producers were willing to participate in and seemed excited to learn that demonstrations would be a regular occurrence at the Public Market.

Advertising and Distribution

Many of the producers were concerned about the marketing portion for the market. One of the common concerns displayed about the Public Market was, “Will the market assist in advertising for the products?” The trouble most of the producers had was lack of funds for their current advertising. The producers wanted to be sure that if they signed a lease with the Public Market that there would be an assured customer interest in the market. The program of meetings and events at the meeting facility on the site could be a significant source of customers for product vendors.

Potential vendors also had concerns dealing about product distribution (Table 2). A syrup producer from South Alabama stated that “distribution is tough because of

shipping and that sort of thing. Syrup is a very heavy and breakable product.” Many of the producers do not have a food distributor to distribute their product. These producers were mainly distributing their products themselves once a week or as little as once a month. The location of the market presented obstacles for them mainly due to the distance from their business headquarters. A Northern Alabama honey producer said “I do this part time and mostly just for fun. Driving for two hours to Birmingham would not be cost effective and shipping the product is very expensive.” Most of the larger food producers have corporate distribution already in place and expressed no problems with their current distribution.

Table 2 Forms of Distribution Expressed by Alabama Food Producers, 2006

Form of distribution	Quotation	Product Classification
Corporate distribution	We've been using the Alabama Grocer's Association for three years to distribute our product in five southeastern states.	Frozen Foods
	Our coffee is roasted, distributed, and sold throughout Alabama through internal sales representatives.	Coffee
	We have used Tree of Life Distributors for over three years to distribute our beef, pork, and free-range eggs all over the United States.	Animal Products
Farmers Markets only	It's only the two of us and it takes all of our time just to man two farmers markets per week.	Dry Foods

Table 2 Continued

Farmers Markets only	I only have enough flowers for the Pepper Place Market therefore, I am the sole distributor.	Flowers
Website	We've been using LocalHarvest.com for two years now and are extremely happy with the amount of business it generates.	Condiment
	We use the web primarily because due to Alabama's wine distribution laws but, we would love to join a co-op.	Wine
Self-distributed	We distribute two days a week, on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Birmingham is two hours away so I wouldn't have any way of getting it there.	Condiment
	My son is our primary distributor and he makes around three trips a week to different shops around the state.	Wine
	Honey is expensive to ship due to the weight. I directly deliver the honey to small stores all over Mobile.	Honey
Mail Order	Our product is very seasonal and we receive orders from all over the country through our mail order catalogue.	Candy

Vendor Cooperatives

A suggestion that resonated many times from the producers was to form cooperatives with other similar Alabama producers. A cooperative could form and the members could take turns selling at the stall. One wine producer expressed that he was “trying to find other Alabama wine producers to join with his vineyard to lesson the costs of distribution. I think it would be great to sell at an Alabama Public Market if only I could partner with other wine makers.” Some of the producers that were already a part of cooperatives expressed an interest in collectively leasing a stall. A Florence condiment producer stated that “we already take turns selling at our local farmers market and I don’t see why we couldn’t collectively sell at a Public Market as well.”

Preferred Time to Sell

All food producers interviewed were asked to answer the question as to their most preferred months to sell during the year (Table 3). The producers that answered spring and summer included mostly animal product producers. An Alabama beef producer expressed that “spring and summer time is our busiest time of year when everyone wants to be outside and grill out.” The next season of interest was winter time which included the producers had a warm food offering. An Alabama coffee roaster said that “coffee is consumed all year but I think even people that are not coffee drinkers like to a warm cup when it’s cold outside.” Most of the breakfast food producers also expressed selling more products during the winter months.

Table 3 Most Preferred Months to Sell During the Year, 2006

Time Period	Quotation	Product Classification
Spring/Summer	Spring and Summer time is our busiest time of year when everyone wants to be outside and grill out.	Animal products
	Summer is a big time of the year in the shrimp business.	Animal products
Winter	We have a primarily breakfast product that is consumed throughout the winter months.	Pre-packaged foods
	People seem to like to cook our product when it's cold outside.	Frozen foods
	Coffee is consumed all year but I think even people that are not coffee drinkers like a warm cup when it's cold outside.	Beverages
Christmas only	Our desserts are a southern tradition that sell primarily during the Christmas season.	Baked goods
	Lots of our customers buy wine as presents during the holidays. Producing enough for the holidays takes us all year.	Beverages

The last category of preferred times of the year to sell included Christmas time. The wine producers and baked goods producers reported that Christmas time is when they sell the largest volume of product. “Our desserts are a southern tradition that sell primarily during the Christmas season” commented an Alabama baked goods producer.

Each industry expressed interest in different times of the year when their product sells the best with one-third of the food producers having no particular months of increased sales.

When asked which days of the week the food product sells the best, the answer was always ‘the weekend.’ Most Alabama food producers observed that consumers purchased their products overwhelmingly on the weekends. A dried foods producer stated that, “most people still seem to do the bulk of their grocery shopping on the weekends. People have to work during the week and try to catch up their shopping on the weekends.” The weekend is reported to be the time of the week when food products are purchased.

Customer Queries

Several questions concerning customer preferences were asked to each food producer interviewed. These queries included specific questions asked by their customers including: ‘Is this item organic,’ ‘What is the nutrition of the food product,’ ‘Cooking tips suggestions,’ and ‘Where is this food product produced.’

The first question concerning the food product being organic had a common response (Table 4). An Alabama coffee producer said “we rarely ever get the question whether our wine is organic.” A coffee roaster in Alabama replied that “there are still not enough organic customers to make it worthwhile for us to provide an organic blend of coffee.” Most of the respondents said that their customers did not inquire about their food products being organic.

Table 4 Customer Queries, Organic 2006

Organic	Quotation	Product Classification
Is this item organic?	Our customers are more concerned whether the shrimp is 'Wild Caught.' If it's 'Wild Caught' they will support you.	Animal products
	We rarely ever get the question whether our wine is organic. It's almost impossible to grow muscadine grapes without using fertilizer.	Beverages
	No, there are still not enough organic customers to make it worthwhile for us to provide an organic blend of coffee.	Beverages
	No, our customers usually ask whether or not the cheese straws are organic, but it is an 'All Natural' product with no preservatives.	Pre-packaged foods

The customer inquiry question concerning the nutrition information of the product resulted in several different responses (Table 5). Many of the producers said that their customers did not inquire about the nutrition of their food product. An Alabama barbeque sauce producer said that “No, most people that eat barbeque are not incredibly interested in nutrition facts.” Some producers however responded that their customers usually inquired about the nutrition of the food product. An Alabama beef producer said that “they are very concerned about the nutrition information. Our beef is very high in Vitamin E.” Most producers interviewed responded that the nutrition information is

displayed on the product packaging in order to explain the nutrition information of the product.

Table 5 Customer Queries, Nutrition 2006

Nutrition	Quotation	Product Classification
Do your customers inquire about the nutrition of your product?	They are very interested in the health benefits that our wine offers.	Beverages
	Yes, they can also see the nutrition facts on the label. Many are also concerned whether the relish is Kosher.	Condiments
	They are very concerned about the nutrition information. Our beef is very high in Vitamin E.	Animal products
	No, most people that eat barbeque are not incredibly interested in nutrition facts.	Condiments

Only few of the food producers interviewed felt that their customers wanted cooking tip suggestions. The producers that did occasionally get cooking questions responded that there is a recipe offered on the packaging of the product. Many others answered that there were recipes offered on their company’s website for their product and that they referred their customers to the site often.

Most of the Alabama producers responded that their customers wanted to know where their product was produced (Table 6). “Having an Alabama product is an important selling point for our products,” responded an Alabama barbeque sauce producer. An Alabama shrimp producer stated that “Initially our customers are concerned

about nutrition and taste until they find out it's Alabama 'Wild Caught' you have customers for life." Many also felt that having a product produced in Alabama as being an asset to their product sales.

Table 6 Customer Queries, Place 2006

Alabama	Quotation	Product Classification
Do your customers inquire about where the product is made?	My customers are very interested in where my hives are located because of the health benefits of local honey.	Pre-packaged items
	Some of my customers are concerned with the location of my cattle. I always let them know that each of my animals has a unique I.D. that holds the animals test information.	Animal products
	Having an Alabama product is an important selling point for our products.	Condiments
	Initially our customers are concerned about nutrition and taste until they find out it's Alabama 'Wild Caught' you have customers for life.	Animal products
	No, our customers usually are not concerned where our product is made but we like to tell them.	Beverages

Producer Follow-up

Most of the producers wanted to make sure that they received information on the Alabama Public Market as soon as it was available about what was expected from a market vendor. Clearly vendor interest will be stimulated by a clear sense that other events and activities will bring a stream of potential customers to the Public Market.

V. CONCLUSION

Public markets highlight the theoretical embeddedness of markets in an applied approach. Birmingham vendors are open to the idea of a public market in conjunction with the developing 'buy local' movement. Alabama food product producers have experienced success of the 'buy local' campaigns and already Birmingham residents are participating in farmers markets and CSAs. Interviewed vendors were not confident in their understanding of public markets. To be successful, much effort will be required of the Jefferson County Truckers Farmers Market in explaining the benefits and operation of a public market to potential vendors. Planning congruence with Alabama product producers would be a positive next step for the implementation of a Birmingham Public Market. Keeping the potential producers informed on the planning progress will be pertinent to establishing an assortment of fresh Alabama food products.

Importing mass quantities of food from other countries has led consumers to face ethical, sanitation, and biological concerns involving these distant producers (Raynolds 2000). The local food movements in the United States and throughout the Western world have been pivotal in providing new opportunities to small food producers through farmers markets and public markets. Kloppenburg (1996) has highlighted the foodshed movement which included support for sustainable agriculture, organic farming, and buying local. The customers were only concerned about where the products were produced. These movements have reinstated historical places to purchase food including

farmers markets and public markets, and by creating community supported agriculture. Birmingham residents have responded by creating communities of people that are changing the realities for local farmers and small businesses by supporting them through farmers markets and CSAs. Birmingham vendors reported that Alabama customers did not inquire about their product being organic. Birmingham will not have a pure foodshed approach to their food campaign but perhaps through more information through the public market social engagements, consumers can be educated on the sustainable practices of local farmers and food producers.

Public markets have become a part of North America's local food movement by providing rural farmers and small businesses a place to sell their products as well as fostering producer-consumer relationships. The proposed public market would need to sell a variety of food offerings in order to compete with existing grocery stores. There would be an opportunity for 24 Alabama food product producers to sell inside of the market. The vendor database is proof that Alabama has enough product variety to provide a public market with plenty of food products. It will be important for Alabama producers to supply meat, dairy, baked goods, and canned goods to have a successful market. The market managers must determine the best assimilation of vendors to ensure a successful market offering.

Community

Sociological theorists describe markets as being socially embedded in complex webs of social relations (Block 1990, Granovetter 1985, and Mingione 1991). Inside, public markets are designed with stalls instead of separate rooms in order to use open

space to bring people of the market together. Public markets are set up in order to encourage communication between not only customers and market vendors but also amongst the vendors. Theoretically, public markets create community by inviting customers to shop at a market that is run by knowledgeable staff willing to answer questions and concerns about the food being purchased. Informing customers will keep them at ease and also will help form a relationship between the customer and the product producer. Customers will begin to care more about the effects of their purchases when knowing that purchases at public markets are helping small farmers and small food producers.

Literature suggests that people are moving back into the city to reduce the commute to work (Miller and Washington 2006). The focus of this study was to highlight Birmingham, Alabama's historical Trucker Farmers Market's interest in building a public market near their existing farmers market located downtown. This public market would support the existing Trucker Farmers Market by appealing to individual consumers and by creating a new space in downtown Birmingham. Public markets have public goals, create public spaces, and contain locally owned, independent businesses (Clark 2006). The market would become a landmark for Alabama and a new tourist attraction and shopping destination for consumers. A public market for Alabama would be a progressive move on behalf of the state and would be a good way to capitalize on the existing 'buy local' movement.

Public markets have physically and conceptually created community by renovating inner-city areas and providing housing to regular and low-income families. Many people wishing to reduce consumption are moving into inner-cities to reduce their

commute to work (Miller 2006). The Birmingham Public Market is envisioned to create new housing opportunities for people of differing income ranges (Bukonya 2006). Public market housing provides a great place for environmentally conscious people to live and build community through common values and interests. Community surrounding a public market also creates built in customers and can attract new business to the area of the new market. Birmingham's public market would be located in a downtown industrial area that has the potential for new housing developments. Already in Birmingham, many of the old downtown buildings have been transformed into condominiums and lofts to support the rising demand for inner-city dwelling (Partners for Livable Communities 2006). Previously uninhabited parts of town are being inhabited by people wanting to move closer to work. Public markets will most definitely reach their audience by locating in Birmingham where there are new renovations and new customers being created everyday.

Local and Rural Economies

In this study local was defined as being located in the same state as the market. By buying food produced in the same state as the market, Alabama consumers would be benefiting from fresh produce and are supporting small business. Many of the small businesses interviewed were located in rural areas and most of the farmers belonging to the Jefferson County Truck Grower's Association have farms in rural areas surrounding Birmingham. We already know that by buying from a farmers market that consumers are helping to "revitalize both the cities and agricultural economy of the surrounding region while reducing money spent to process, package, transport, and advertise food" (Norberg-

Hodge 1996). Public markets can offer the same sorts of benefits but by providing consumers regular operation hours and by offering enough varieties of food to prepare a meal.

Lyson's (2004) study indicates that communities made up of small businesses are balanced and do a better job at withstanding the sometimes unstable economy. The 'buy local' campaigns have helped Alabama producers and will continue to support them in their efforts to localize. "The campaigns not only help keep money from leaking out of the local economy but also help educate people about the hidden costs to the environment and to the community in purchasing less expensive but distantly produced products" (Norberg-Hodge 1996).

Potential Vendors

The positive response to recent Alabama food product marketing campaigns led many producers to believe that the public market could greatly increase the sales of their product. After 45 vendors were surveyed it is concluded that Alabama vendors seem comfortable selling their food products to a distributor or food store but do not have the time or labor to sell at a public market that would operate seven days a week. This is a problem for the proposed market because the main idea behind a public market is the producer-consumer relationship that is built through direct-selling. This problem could perhaps change if the market was successful enough for the producers to hire their own staff. During initial operation, the market would need to consider alternate plans for the make up of the market by possibly using producer representatives to work the stall that are knowledgeable about the producers product production. In order to sustain the social

learning available at the market, the seller would need to stay in touch with these producers.

Development and Implementation

Many smaller producers would be interested in forming cooperatives between their company and other Alabama companies with comparable products. This will be a challenge for the public market managers in attracting and collaborating vendors for the market. It may be important for the market managers to educate themselves about cooperatives and to provide literature and meetings between potential vendors interested in forming cooperatives. This will not only allow smaller producers to participate but will help to ensure a variety of products for the market.

As reflected by previous farmers market studies, marketing is a concern of many vendors who understand the importance of advertising. The public market will need to have a firm marketing strategy in place in order to attract and ensure vendors that there will be enough customers for their products. Literature and information on a strategy for the public market will be important to communicate the legitimacy of the proposed market. During the operation of the market the managers will need to make sure and provide informational marketing sessions for the market vendors.

The findings suggest that there are sufficient food producers in the state of Alabama with enough variety to provide products for a Birmingham Public Market. Although most vendors seem interested in the concept of a public market for Birmingham, many have questions concerning the actual operation and success of a market. The market managers will need to be well informed and ready to educate

vendors about the idea behind a public market. In particular, the formation and support of vendor cooperatives may be a key ingredient in the successful marketing of Alabama products. Enthusiasm, information, and an assertive plan will be important when approaching the Alabama food product producers for participation in a public market.

Economic sociologists stress that markets are social institutions that contain culture and meaning (Swedberg 1991 and Zelizer 1988). Practically, public markets answer the problem of globalization on a state-wide level. The findings are the same as was found in the literature. Food movements have been formed throughout the U.S. as well as in Birmingham, Alabama. Alabama food producers are interested in new opportunities to sell their products in a retail setting although they are not sure that they have the capabilities to supply labor to a weekly market. Alabama food product producers could greatly benefit from a public market as long as the market managers are willing to communicate and relate information necessary for the success of a downtown Birmingham Public Market.

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APPENDIX

Interview Script

Hello, my name is Leah Rigdon, and I am calling from the Auburn University Survey Research Lab. I am collecting information from potential vendors for the proposed Public Market they are thinking about opening across the street from the Birmingham Farmer's Market on Finley Avenue. We are trying to identify the needs and preferences of potential vendors and would like to include the opinions of someone in your company. As you may know, the Birmingham Farmers Market is a fresh produce exchange owned and operated by and for Alabama farmers. It does not pay taxpayer funds for its operations. The farmers who own and run the facility are thinking about starting a Public Market – a place to shop for Alabama products like (their product) seafood, pecans, peanuts, jams, jellies, wine, meats, and other items that come from our state.

Vendor Phone Interview Topics:

- Interest in selling at a Public Market: interested, quite possibly interested, unsure of interest, and not interested.
- Reasons for interest (increased sales, increased visibility to new customers, broadened market segments)
- Would you be interested in selling items that you don't currently produce?
- Would you be interested in selling prepared foods or hot food for sale on site?
- Most preferred months in the year
- Most preferred days of the week
- Type of lease preferred (long-term, short-term, seasonal)
- Interest in outside stalls and day tables

- Other desired features
- Interest in cooking demonstration

Vendor Distribution (circle one)

Alabama only
Southeast
National
International

Product Type (circle all that apply)

Fruits
Vegetables
Prepared foods
Meat products
Dairy products
Hot food
Crafts
Other

Customer Queries

Questions asked by customers

Organic

Nutrition of items

Cooking tips

Where grown

Desired Vendor Stall Features (circle all that apply)

Refridgerators
Freezers
Table
Dry storage
Prep area
Display area
Sample area
Sink
Ice Machine