

## Local Food and Marketing

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“Is local food a set of policies, a consumer fad, a new market, or a social movement? Something that strives...to protect things that never should have been marketized in the first place?” –*Local Food: A Social Movement?* (Starr 2010, 480).

**Research Question:** what were the key factors, individuals, or organizations that allowed for local food movement in Maine, and how might these be replicated in a local wood movement there?

### **What is Local Food? :**

- Geographic—centralized producing, processing, distribution, marketing
- Connection and knowledge that allows consumers to target purchases to local economy (USDA *The What and Why of Local Regional Foods*, 2012)

### **Stewart Smith**

- Agricultural Economics Professor at University of Maine, Orono and former Maine Commissioner of Agriculture
- In 1983 as Commissioner of Agriculture tells MOFGA, “for Maine to be self-reliant in agriculture, we need public support; support from Cooperative Extension; financial credit from the state for small and part-time farmers; marketing assistance; a state policy about what Maine farmers can reasonably be expected to produce for Maine citizens; and assurance that sufficient land will be preserved for agriculture.”
- “Unhealthy” marketization
  - 85% of the dollar goes to marketing; only 6% to farmer
  - Industrial
- “Healthy” marketization
  - Mid-size; wanted to capitalize amount of consumer dollar retained by farmer

### **Hannaford**

- “Locally Grown” → “Close to Home”
- Competitive prices for local food –leap of faith for distributors!
- Not organic products
- “Close to Home” annual magazines

### **Open Farm Day**

- Organized annually by Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry
- “This family oriented event encourages better understanding of how food happens.” – Commissioner Whitcomb
- “Maine farms maximize the potential of our natural resource-based economy and provide jobs and economic prosperity to Maine people.” – Gov. LePage

Maine Open Farm Day is a popular event that takes place each year during which farms all across the state of Maine open up for public access and provide tours and demonstrations about farm work. The event is praised for its educational and entertainment value, but it is interesting from a sociological standpoint as well. The discourse surrounding Open Farm Day is telling about the unique factors that have allowed for a successful local food movement in Maine. In a 2013 press document for the event released by the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, Governor Paul LePage notes that, “Maine farms maximize the potential of our natural resource-based economy and provide jobs and economic prosperity to Maine people.” Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Commissioner Walt Whitcomb adds to this sentiment, stating, “this...event...encourages better understanding of how...farm families contribute to both the local economy and the locally grown food supply.” Yet, according to LePage, in addition to the economic benefits of these local farms, “they strengthen communities as well.”

In this short press release, LePage and Whitcomb tease out several of the components that have made Maine’s local food movement so successful. On one hand, both cite an economic benefit that may have propelled this movement and, though implicitly, its governmental support. On the other hand, LePage hints at a cultural component that may have driven it. Individuals or organizations may have pushed this change. Following a brief historical account of agriculture in the United States and Maine, this paper will tease out the cultural, and economic forces as well as the individuals and organizations that have most affected the local food movement in Maine. It will conclude by discussing what support systems exist or could be created that could allow for a local food movement there.

In her piece *Local Food: A Social Movement?* Sociologist Amory Starr asks, “Is local food a set of policies, a consumer fad, a new market, or a social movement?” (2010, 480). She concludes that it is a social movement because it strives “...to protect things that never should have been marketized [sic] in the first place—health, ecology, farms, locality, artisanship, community relations” (2010, 486).

However, when I met with Stewart Smith, Agricultural Economics Professor at University of Maine, Orono and former Maine Commissioner of Agriculture and he had a slightly different idea about this. In his view, all of these things can be healthily “marketized.” His research analyzes how much of the consumer dollar farmers have received going back to 1910. He discovered that, today, farmers receive about 6% of the consumer dollar, while about 85% goes to marketers. He started Lakeside Family Farm about ten years ago as an experiment to see if a mid-size farm selling its produce locally could capture more of the consumer dollar once again. That is, he wanted to see if smaller and local was actually more efficient than industrial farming. He described to me how his son, who farms industrially (potatoes for Frito Lay and corn subsidized by the Canadian government) will quickly exhaust his current 800 acres of land and survives only by government funds and the marketing prowess of Frito Lay, but that so far, his farm seems sustainable (as long as he can survive on only 2 hours of sleep a night!)

Stew sells all of his produce locally. Most of it goes to local Hannafords. His first season coincided with the beginning of Hannaford's "Locally Grown" program. Hannaford promised that as long as they could buy local produce at the same price or better as non-local produce, they would do so. The suppliers for the company had no reason to trust that this was achievable, but they tried it out (perhaps a testament to the strength of the local pride culture in Maine) and have been doing so ever since. The program is now called "Close to Home" and includes more than just veggies.

Stew's farm is not organic. Therefore, in wood terms, his products are local but not FSC. He told me he would be unable to sell locally to Hannafords if he was organic because his produce would be too expensive.

Stayed away from economics at first, but marketing is a very important piece—how do we market? To whom do we market?

### **Case Study: Lakeside Farm, Stew Smith**

Lakeside Family Farm is a fourth generation Maine farm growing local produce for local markets. Located primarily at the northeast edge of Lake Sebasticook, we plant about 50 acres of mixed vegetables and grow and deliver over 30 products from field and storage.

We are philosophically committed to the principles of sustainable agriculture and to delivering fresh, local produce to local consumers. We believe that for Maine local products to have a meaningful place in the market and to command a meaningful share of the \$3.5 billion of food sales in Maine for consumption in Maine, requires that those products be available where consumers shop and, where possible, year round. Althea and her brother Alex (the fourth generation) brought product directly to consumers at three farmers' markets this summer, and Stew (the third generation) continues his strategy of delivering fresh local product directly to supermarkets — at competitive high quality and high service and at a reasonable competitive price.