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Seeding Alternatives: Back-to-the-land migration and alternative agro-food networks in Northern Italy

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Abstract

This thesis explores 'back-to-the-land' migration in Northern Italy with reference to the social, political and economic networks that sustain it. 'Back-to-the-land' generally refers to the adoption of agriculture as a full-time vocation by people who have come from non-agricultural lifestyles. For categorical clarity in this project, research participants were limited to those from predominantly urban backgrounds, most of whom worked in service sector jobs before moving to the countryside. Many geographical studies have examined urban to rural migration but these have focused almost primarily on migrants who are *not* engaged in agriculture. This research traces theorisations of urban to rural migration within the discipline, situating back-to-the-land as part of broader counterculture practices originating in the 1960s. Many current expressions of back-to-the-land, however, reveal an attempt to address contemporary social, environmental and economic concerns, representing both a trajectory and an evolution from 1960s origins.

Empirical research was conducted in four northern regions of Italy, looking specifically at urban to rural migrants engaged in organic or other 'alternative' forms of agriculture. Three simple questions informed the methodology and theoretical perspectives employed: 1) Why do people go back-to-the-land?; 2) How do they obtain the requisite skills to become competent farmers?; 3) How do they make this lifestyle economically sustainable? Answering these questions demands attention to how new farmers are inspired, supported and sustained by alternative agro-food networks (AAFNs). The research therefore explores the reciprocal relationships between back-to-the-landers and AAFNs, examining how new farmers can stimulate and influence AAFNs in addition to receiving their support. These issues are explored through interviews with back-to-the-landers and institutional representatives of AAFNs, as well participant observation in alternative agriculture projects. Particular attention is given to the organisations Slow Food, Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF) and Associazione per Esperienze (APE), primarily with regard to their respective roles in enabling back-to-the-land migration.

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1. Introduction

The Seeding Alternatives research project seeks to explore 'back-to-the-land' migration in Northern Italy with reference to the social, political and economic networks that sustain it. There is no directly equivalent phrase in Italian, but by 'back-to-the-land' I generally refer to urban to rural migrants who adopt agriculture as a full-time vocation, having worked in another sector previously. Many geographical studies have examined urban to rural migration but these have focused almost exclusively on migrants who are *not* engaged in agriculture. Such studies have made significant contributions to the literature on changing countrysides, using a prism of rural in-migration to explore commuting, rural self-employment, the leisure and tourism industries, retirement and second-home ownership. This is an incomplete picture, however, and this research hopes to provide a sturdy bridge between the hitherto neglected phenomenon of back-to-the-land migration and earlier geographical investigations into city to countryside movements.

It is a commonly accepted fact in developed market economies that the financial rewards of farming are minimal. For years farm gate prices have remained stagnant relative to inflation, a condition stimulated by the growth of industrial agriculture and the primary sector's shift toward economies of scale and corporatisation. Rural populations have declined in response, leaving many farms abandoned. Why would educated urban workers choose to enter these conditions? If there are economic disincentives to leaving the city, what are the 'pull' factors that bring these people into the countryside? These are the two basic questions that initially inspired this study. Through early exploratory research, other questions emerged that collectively form the key themes of this thesis: How does somebody with no prior experience of agriculture learn to become a farmer? Is this a solitary pursuit, or are there structures and organisations that enable the migrants to remain on the land? Given the economic conditions that characterise contemporary agriculture in Europe, how do the small-scale, independent farming practices of back-to-the-landers become economically sustainable? Finally, are there enough commonalities among back-to-the-landers to justify calling the phenomenon in

contemporary Italy a 'movement' – or are back-to-the-landers just a disparate group of individuals, loosely connected by the basic fact of their migration?

The following chapters interrogate these questions further and attempt, through theoretical and empirical analysis, to provide direct answers. Also embedded into the analysis is an attention to the question of why this is happening in Northern Italy, and why it is happening now. That is, having put many of the issues into a broad context, I attempt to endow them with significance relating to current conditions in four case study regions of Northern Italy: Piedmont, Tuscany, Emilia-Romagna and Umbria.

Chapter 2 begins with a wide overview of urban to rural migration as a subject of geographical inquiry. Looking in particular at the evolution of counterurbanisation, or population deconcentration, as an interpretive frame, I note both the successes and shortcomings of different methodological approaches and theoretical perspectives. A key argument here concerns the generalising tendency of counterurbanisation studies, particularly those based on quantitative methods, which accounts for the lack of distinction between groups of migrants. My conclusion holds that counterurbanisation studies have failed to distinguish between separate cohorts of urban to rural migrants, leaving groups such as back-to-the-landers under-researched. I am not the first to make this critique; in fact, it gained considerable currency during geography's 'cultural turn' of the 1990s, whence a concern with subjectivity and diverse experiences of migration were given due recognition. During this period, I argue, many theoretical and methodological advancements were made, but in specific relation to this topic they reflected disciplinary preoccupations such as class inequalities and local / outsider dichotomies. While interesting and in many cases valuable, such studies often carried essentialist assumptions, particularly regarding class status. This, I argue, tells an incomplete story about urban to rural migration, particularly concerning the politically-informed back-to-the-land experiments that have emerged since the 1960s, and which are commonly associated with countercultural movements. This development represents a more radical strain of urban to rural migration, whereby rural space is reconfigured to disrupt the status quo and serve as a model for alternative modes of living.

From this argument follows an historical summary of back-to-the-land as an ideal and set of practices, tracing its fluctuations across decades and continents. Having arisen as a response to prevailing cultural and economic trends of 1960s North America and Europe, the ideal has repeatedly been mobilised to present alternatives to a given set of contemporary conditions. Self-sufficiency in food and non-exploitative economic relationships are ideas that stimulate the sense of independence that many back-to-the-landers either long for or claim to possess. How this is practically achieved – or at least attempted – is a question that warrants considerable analysis. By interrogating the practical and material aspects of back-to-the-land living, it is possible to address what factors facilitate and constrain the stated ambitions and principles of the migrants. More directly, the practicalities of back-to-the-land reveal much about the ability of migrants to uphold the ideals they carry to the countryside and open a critical debate around idealism and material necessity.

Similar debates inform Chapter 3, which comprises a brief review of the literature on alternative agro-food networks (AAFNs) and the debates that they have provoked. Back-to-the-landers have historically been instrumental in establishing and stimulating these agglomerations of labour, food and capital, often fashioned to embody an ideal of reduced labour exploitation, high-quality food and environmental stewardship. Back-to-the-landers are particularly well-placed to test the real possibilities of this ideal given that they operate, for the most part, on the margins of the agricultural economy and rely on the existence of such networks for economic sustenance and the development of practical skill and knowledge. This research offers one of the most comprehensive attempts to date to merge existing theory on AAFNs with an ethnographic study of back-to-the-landers. The intended point is that back-to-the-land living can offer a crucible for analysing how some of the tangled politics of AAFNs unfold among those who are intimately connected with them; also, that the networked, interconnected nature of contemporary back-to-the-land in Italy is significant to the point of it being impossible to ignore. Therefore, one of the main arguments of this thesis holds that future research on back-to-the-landers should demonstrate a cognizance of AAFNs and their role in sustaining this particular form of urban to rural migration.

Chapter 4 offers an initial justification as to why certain AAFNs were selected as case studies, and clarifies the methods used. I articulate a case for immersive ethnography as the preferred approach to researching back-to-the-landers in Italy, with illustrative asides concerning taste as methodology and the ethics of animal slaughter in research. The chapter also includes information on interviewing techniques and the questionnaires that supplement the ethnographic data.

Building from some introductory material provided in the preceding two chapters, in Chapter 5 I analyse three AAFNs (*Associazione per Esperienze* [APE], Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms [WWOOF] and Slow Food) that have figured significantly in the experiences of back-to-the-landers who acted as research participants. Background information on the organisations is provided in Chapter 5, along with details about their structures and operational capacities.

Empirical research findings begin with Chapter 6, which aims to give a wide-ranging but focused summary of who back-to-the-landers in Northern Italy are, where they come from and why they have migrated to their current locations. The diversity of the research participants' biographical details confounds simple demographic summaries; instead, personal biographies are interwoven into more general histories of the gradual reclamation of Italian agricultural land by idealistic incomers. I discuss several key factors in influencing the decision to go back-to-the-land and the practices that follow from that event. Among these are the conditions of urban lifestyles and structured employment that agitate back-to-the-landers to seek alternatives. In this context, I explore relative notions of independence, and how aspirational levels of autonomy are articulated materially through rural in-migration and agrarian lifestyles. Additionally, I consider how personal dispositions and biographical details also inspire the decision to adopt a new lifestyle in the countryside – but one that is distinct from a more consumptive appreciation of the rural, such as second-home ownership or commuting. In accordance with my aim to capture diverse experiences through a non-essentialist perspective, I give significant attention to gender, asking how organic farming and rural in-migration relate to and impact upon gendered household relationships. There is reason to take caution in making broad statements about femininity and the 'ethic of care' (cf. Kneafsey et al., 2008) that underpins much alternative agriculture, while a critical perspective on the empowering

potential of structured employment and financial parity reveals considerable discontent among some women who long for a greater surplus of time than money. The relationship between back-to-the-landers and money then leads to a discussion of class, in which I take into account the preceding findings and consider whether class can serve as a useful analytical frame for understanding the back-to-the-land phenomenon. Drawing on the work of J.K. Gibson-Graham (1996, 2008) and their diverse economies project, I argue for a more contingent notion of class to interpret back-to-the-land and AAFNs as solidarity networks in becoming, rather than categorically class-based or occupying an immutable position in either mainstream / alternative dichotomies. This leads to a consideration of potential enablers and disablers to future back-to-the-land migrants in Northern Italy, particularly those who may come from underprivileged financial positions.

Chapter 7 can be seen as a continuation of the narrative foundations laid in the previous chapter. Having established why some people choose to go back to the land, I then concentrate on how they develop the requisite skills and knowledge to become competent farmers. I refer to this process as the 'slow transition', denoting the lengthy timescales involved in attaining the desired attributes of the skilled and confident agrarian, while also suggesting that slowness can be interpreted as an ethic embraced by aspiring farmers. Both components of the 'slow transition' are theorised through a consideration of skill and craft, with attention given to the symbiotic workings of head and hand, or mental and manual capacities. These integrated capacities are, I argue, developed through repetition and careful study, often on a private level, but can also be facilitated by structured networks. By way of example I focus on the three case study AAFNs, detailing how back-to-the-landers can take advantage of their frameworks for advancing their agrarian knowledge bases and skill sets. I look in particular at the importance of local knowledge (as opposed to universal scientific knowledge) in helping back-to-the-landers adapt the best working practices for their given locations. This sensitivity to the limits of specific ecological conditions, I argue, is concordant with theorisations of craft, a fact that supports the claim of many producers who market their produce as alternative or artisanal.

The distinctiveness of local farm foods is what serves as the financial motor for many back-to-the-landers. In Chapter 8 I describe and critically analyse their strategies for economic sustainability, noting how ideals and economic realities form confluences or contradictions. The chapter begins with a discussion of 'pluriactivity' (cf. Bull and Corner, 1993), a principle by which farmers engage in multiple agricultural and non-agricultural activities from their farms in an effort to remain on the land. In most cases, this involves offering hospitality or other leisure pursuits. Few back-to-the-landers subsist entirely from the returns on their produce; in fact, many produce primarily for themselves in an attempt at self-sufficiency, while engaging in formal economic activities to provide a cash basis for an otherwise minimal household economy. That said, farmers can never predict a household's annual food needs, nor rely on the land to provide it. Therefore, they tend to seek novel methods and structures to sell surpluses, given that they generally produce too small an amount to penetrate mainstream markets. The bulk of Chapter 8 is dedicated to conveying how these structures work and the reciprocal role of back-to-the-landers in being sustained by them, while also stimulating them through active participation. The structures analysed include official farmers' markets, secret, self-organised markets (*mercatini clandestini),* collective buying groups and retail.

Interwoven with the themes listed above is an attention to what Mitchell (2004) describes as the persistent questions that cling to counterurbanisation studies. Slightly re-phrased and applied specifically to my research subjects, these are:

- Who are the back-to-the-landers?

- Why have they gone back to the land?

- What is the nature of the phenomenon that is occurring and what sense can we make of it?

Answers to these questions span the personal and political, touching upon economic sustenance and knowledge exchange to reflect the material form of the phenomenon and how it endures and grows (or, potentially, contracts). Hence, the consideration given to alternative agro-food networks encourages the observation of social and economic structures that sustain, and indeed may be initiated by, back-to-the-landers.

In placing food production at the forefront of their adopted lifestyles, back-to-the-landers promote a positive, pro-rural ideal over reactionary anti-urbanism (Halfacree, 1997; 2007a; 2008). I conceive of this, however, as a process rather than a given fact. Through the act of production, something is made, crafted from whatever available materials exist. Back-to-the-land is less an escape from modernity than the production of something new, even if it symbolises an alternative to the modern city. In actual fact, the technology and relationships that enable contemporary back-to-the-land migration suggest a more hybrid identity, that of the cosmopolitan farmer. In trying to understand contemporary rurality in developed economies such as Italy's, it is the cosmopolitan farmer who deliberately seeks a panoptic view of both the future and the past. The following is an account of why and how this happens, who these cosmopolitan farmers are, and what their actions mean for the territory they inhabit.

2. Growing radical ruralities: Urban to rural migration and the back-to-the-land movement

Since urban to rural migration began receiving attention from geographers in the 1970s, its treatment in academia has evolved substantially, from a predominantly quantitative model based primarily on large-scale demographic patterns, to subjective, localised accounts of the varied impacts of this migration on individuals and communities. The subject has repeatedly generated considerable excitement within the discipline, though there has been little consistency in methodologies and conclusions. The spatial science techniques that dominated in the 1970s and 1980s were largely displaced by qualitative analyses in the following decade, steering the subject toward associated geographies of class, consumption and rural gentrification. Urban to rural migrants who went 'back-to-the-land' to engage in some form of agricultural production were for the most part unaccounted for, though admittedly they have always represented a small minority. Still, this 'alternative' form of migration has continued apace since the 1960s and plays an important role in stimulating and supporting the political agendas of alternative agro-food networks (AAFNs). Research on the role of urban to rural migrants involved in these AAFNs can assist in revealing the political dimensions of this kind of migration, and illustrate what an ecologically sustainable, socially just countryside might look like, at least in the minds of those who try to cultivate these ideas into a lived reality.

I have framed the first two sections of this review in an historiographic manner to overcome what I feel are the limitations of literature in which broad-brush generalisations about urban to rural migration are made, with a view to initiating a more politically-focused approach to the subject. There are two main conceptual epochs that I address in these sections, which I call the statistical era (the late 1970s to 1989) and the cultural turn (beginning in the 1990s, with enduring resonances). An interlude between considerations of these periods looks specifically at Northern Italy to contextualise subsequent empirical chapters and illustrate key arguments from previous sections, particularly concerning the ambiguity of urban/rural distinctions in research. My goal in these sections is to provide a summary of how urban to rural migration has

been approached in the geography discipline, while noting certain contradictions and inconsistencies in an effort to unpack assumptions about migrants themselves. In both the statistical and cultural turn eras, researchers sought to discover the push and pull factors that drove migration to the countryside, and what these indicated about both rural and urban environments. I maintain the centrality of this question in my own investigations, but seek to broaden the discussion to include the potential for migration to represent the growth of a new rural radicalism.

The third section of the chapter addresses the (relatively scarce) literature on 'back-to-the-landers', or urban to rural migrants who in some way depend on the land for their economic subsistence. A direct connection between radical politics and the back-to-the-land migration is drawn from Belasco's (1989) historical consideration of an 'alternative infrastructure', or collection of 1960s and 70s activist and countercultural networks based around food as a shared resource. The growth of the alternative infrastructure foreshadows today's alternative agro-food networks (AAFNs), and suggests strategies that back-to-the-land migrants may use to sustain their livelihoods while also presenting an alternative rurality, or a perspective on how a politically progressive and ecologically sustainable countryside might be configured. This reconfiguration of rural space is fundamental to all considerations that follow. In exploring urban to rural migration in general terms or with particular reference to back-to-the-landers, I am seeking to answer who is involved in the phenomenon and what it implies. This review examines how these questions have been addressed historically, while later chapters explore the same issues with specific regard to new farmers in Northern Italy.

2.1. Urban to rural migration in the statistical era: early theories and methods

2.1.1. Counterurbanisation and the problem of definition

The term 'counterurbanisation' is closely associated with the work of Brian Berry (1976), a geographer whose treatment of the subject was stimulated by data showing a reversal in

postwar demographic trends in the United States. Berry's work, later updated in a 1980 paper (Berry, 1980), defines counterurbanisation as 'a process of population deconcentration; it implies a movement from a state of more concentration to a state of less concentration.' The process Berry attempted to record was expressed as 'the direct antithesis of urbanization' (Champion, 1989a) and viewed metropolitan population decline and non-metropolitan growth as connected phenomena, operating with reciprocal causality. Berry (1980:13) views this development as a significant turning point in socio-spatial relations, declaring that '[u]rbanization, the process of population concentration, has been succeeded in the United States by counterurbanization... characterized by smaller [population] sizes, decreasing densities, and increasing local homogeneity, set within widening radii of national interdependence.'

Berry's analysis combines classic spatial science with broad observations on national identity and cultural narratives, superimposing historical patterns and macroeconomic trends on population data. He cites the futurological predictions of HG Wells and suggests that a search for cultural continuity among mobile populations and accelerated social differentiation are cultural drivers that have pushed populations away from urban cores and into exurban peripheries (1980:14-19). Meanwhile, he argues, structural change throughout the US's postwar development has accelerated the spatial manifestations of cultural migration: by the late 1970s, heavy industry had declined while the spatially flexible service sector had grown, with formerly centralised investment capital becoming diffuse. The outflanking of spatial constraints by capital flows was achieved analogously with communication and transport improvements, resulting in time-space contraction and enabling population mobility.

> The glue of centrality that restricted innovative new developments to the core cities of the industrial heartland has been dissolved. Regions throughout the nation are sharing in the newer forms of employment growth. Transportation improvements and new forms of communication have virtually eliminated the classic localizing effects of transport inputs and the significance of proximity in speedy transmission of new ideas and practices.

> Berry (1980:17-18)

Studies by Vining and Strauss (1977) and Vining and Kontuly (1978) supported what became known as the 'clean break' position, statistically documenting distinctive post-1970 shifts in urban and rural settlement patterns in the US and Europe, respectively. The clean break theory holds that counterurbanisation describes a demographic revolution and clear repudiation of past trends, rather than temporary anomalies and cyclical shifts. Fielding (1982:19) condenses the clean break position into the following fundamentals: 1) Individual preferences are the primary drivers in the deconcentration process; 2) Urban living has lost its appeal to the majority, and 'traditional' cultural values are influencing rural repopulation, and; 3) Contemporary economic systems enable this retreat, accelerating the pace of counterurbanisation.

As Fielding emphasises in his first point, fundamental to Berry's model is the primacy of individual choice and agency in migration, with rural repopulation evincing a culturally intrinsic 'possessive individualism' (Fielding, 1982: 19) suppressed by urban American lifestyles. This implication, however, is largely unsupported through qualitative evidence, despite its prevalence in quantitative studies. Vartiainen (1989: 218), for example, critiques Berry's formulation as 'a rather extreme – and questionable – interpretation of counterurbanisation as a unidimensional anti-urban phenomenon.' Population deconcentration is treated by Berry as almost inevitable, foreseen by soothsayers like Wells, written into the landscape and vital to American cultural identity. The success of the counterurbanisation concept, at least in turning academic attention to the deconcentration phenomenon, suggests that Berry's approach struck a nerve and encouraged the tracking of urban to rural migration as source of sociological insights.

While Vining and Kontuly (1978: 51) 'prefer to let the facts stand by themselves, unadorned by theoretical discussion', Berry's attempts to impose a causal framework on population data have prompted much of the debate over how to conceptualise counterurbanisation. Critics of Berry's original thesis are concerned with both his 'correlation implies cause' connection between demographic data and social phenomena and with his 'apparently simple definition of counterurbanization [which is] not in the least straightforward' (Champion, 1989a: 24). Berry's use of population data, according to geographers such as Fielding (1982), Champion (1989a;

1989c) and Mitchell (2004), may make a positive step toward validating the deconcentration theory but leaves too much room for competing interpretations of the data. While counterurbanization is clearly meant to define a phenomenon more substantial than 'suburbanization "writ large"' (Fielding, 1982: 17), determining whether population data conforms to this principle has been fraught with challenges. Fielding (1982) refines the counterurbanisation thesis to describe 'the revival and growth, via net migration, of "rural areas", together with the corresponding population decline of the cities and large towns.' This raises its own problems, such as the lack of a universal standard on what constitutes the 'rural'. Berry (1976) specifically focused on growth in non-metropolitan US counties (so classified 'according to their commuting allegiance to metropolitan areas' [Champion, 1989a: 25]), but his later work demonstrated high levels of population growth (+8.95m people) in central cities' 'suburban rings' (Berry, 1980: 17).

Though Fielding's (1982) attempt to connect migration to rural 'revival' aims to distinguish between the suburban and rural, later counterurbanisation studies demonstrate that such distinctions are both conceptually ambiguous and culturally specific. For example, in Winchester and Ogden's (1989: 162) analysis of counterurbanisation in France, the authors conclude: 'It is the centres of cities which have experienced the greatest population loss, while the rural *communes* which have gained population are those close to the built-up areas.' In an analysis of the slowing of urbanisation in Japan, Tsuya and Kuroda (1989:208) claim that studies of 'urbanization and counterurbanization depend very much on the definition of "urban areas"; there is more than one definition used in Japan.' The authors illustrate this point by stating that traditional Japanese city boundaries often included agricultural areas with low population density. As with contested understandings of the urban, similar ambiguity applies to academic and popular conceptions of rurality.

The quantitative bias in these studies represents a general academic current in the 1970s and 80s, before geography's 'cultural turn', discussed in the next section. Even so, Berry's early thesis attempted to 'say something' about America beyond mere statistics. The fact that he offered no clear methodology for reproducing such an analysis elsewhere, however, leaves a gap to be filled by competing interpretations of the counterurbanisation phenomenon itself.

Berry's work marries social explanations with quantitative analysis, creating a template for counterurbanisation studies which has led researchers to question the respective significance of both components, and whether each is necessary at all. Berry never makes clear whether counterurbanisation is a *pattern* or a *process*, a statistical feature to be mapped or a social movement to be uncovered (Champion, 1989a;1989c) . Treating counterurbanisation as *both,* argues Champion (1989b: 238), 'is a sure recipe for semantic confusion'.

2.1.2. Counterurbanisation and the problem of scale

The ambiguity concerning non/metropolitan delineations and scales of migration is one major contributor to counterurbanisation's lack of conceptual clarity, and has presented a major obstacle to empirical and methodological consistency. As Champion (1989a: 24) observes: '[Berry] describes population redistribution at all geographical scales from suburban moves to inter-regional shifts under this heading [of counterurbanisation].' An anthology of counterubanisation studies edited by Champion (1989) can be held as a summary example of the inconsistency of scale that he highlights in his critique. Its case studies are geographically diverse (though focused primarily on Europe and North America) and thus apply different data sets to multiple regions in varying stages of economic development. Remembering Berry's attempt to characterise counterurbanisation as an epoch-defining national event, it is difficult to detect any revelations of similar significance in Champion's collection, where conclusions on a scale larger than the local seem difficult to justify.

An especially relevant chapter on Italy by Dematteis and Petsimeris (1989) in Champion's *Counterurbanization* anthology illustrates this difficulty in identifying conclusive national patterns: while deconcentration appeared to be the dominant trend in the North of Italy in the 1970s and 80s, the more sparsely populated and less industrially developed South experienced relatively consistent urban growth. Examples such as this beg the question as to whether population deconcentration is ever anything other than a temporary localised fluctuation. The formulation of counterurbanisation based on net population gains and losses holds a certain utility in identifying discrete local phenomena, yet as the case of Italy shows, projecting

conclusions onto a national or international scale (cf. Vining and Kontuly, 1978; Fielding, 1982; Champion, 1989c) is problematic. As Mitchell (2004: 350) argues: 'Such studies are useful in showing national demographic trends… but not for determining if a counterurbanizing process is underway.'

If counterurbanisation studies are let down by inconsistent or contradictory explanations of *who* is moving and *what* this migration signifies, this shortcoming is compounded by the fact most literature from the 1970s and 80s measures domestic migration only. Early studies such as those of Vining and Kontuly (1978) and Fielding (1982), for example, consciously disregarded international migration. This tendency is explained by Frey (1989: 53-54), who argues that the issue is separate from internal migration: '[Immigration] observes different geographical patterns from internal migration. The destination selections of immigrants are less responsive to the kinds of economic forces and environmental attractions that affect internal migrants' choices.' Nevertheless, Frey (1989: 50) acknowledges that immigration does influence statistics on population (de)concentration, showing that with immigration accounted for, most US regions actually experienced a population gain from 1965-1980, including many metropolitan regions. Viewed from this angle, population shifts seem less dramatic in terms of net gains and losses. Given the importance of immigrant labour to agriculture in many rural European and North American regions, it would seem sensible to account for seasonal population adjustments in analyses of predominantly agricultural regions as well. This has not been a regular feature of counterurbanisation studies which have attempted to focus on settlement patterns of less transient migrants. Ignoring immigrant groups, however, may effectively de-legitimate their presence in the countryside, implying a homogenous rural identity and marginalising their contributions to rural society and economic activity. Such an approach hints at assumptions about who 'belongs' in certain areas and excludes those fitting a different profile, a concern that was addressed directly in the literature that emerged in the 1990s (e.g. Philo, 1992).

2.1.3. Beyond the numbers – toward qualitative approaches

By taking a geneaological approach to counterurbanisation theories, it should be possible to recognise the innovations in methodology that stimulated geographers to begin analysing urban to rural migration while also highlighting the limitations of particular approaches. The statistical era revealed significant information about regional demographic trends but the methodologies generated by spatial science were generally insufficient to support the inductive reasoning that sometimes offered explanations for shifts in population data. As early as the mid-1980s, Cloke (1985:14) had already labeled counterurbanisation a 'stretched and diluted catch-all phrase'. Yet while the possibility of counterurbanisation as a verifiable demographic pattern may never find broad acceptance, the phenomenon of urban to rural migration continues nevertheless. This is recognised in Mitchell's (2004) paper written nearly 30 years after Berry's original thesis, prompting a call for new classifications of rural in-migration based on the social and / or economic factors driving individual migration decisions. To some extent, a more developed social understanding of this movement (in both senses of the word - as a physical relocation and collective embrace of particular ideas) did begin to materialise in the 1990s. The methodological strategies that characterised this phase of research often acknowledged that a demographic portrait of the phenomenon may be influenced by regionally-specific structural conditions, while the *form* of the population movement, and the processes that shape it, had to be teased out through engagement with migrants themselves.

The next section considers the evolution of urban to rural migration research from the close of the 1980s, and focuses on how qualitative methodologies and the notion of 'other' ruralities stimulated new ways of thinking about urban-rural relationships and the question of migration. Geography's 'cultural turn' of the 1990s helped to steer migration and rural studies toward methodologies that were decisively attuned to individual experience and social relations (cf. Halfacree and Boyle, 1993; Skeldon, 1995; Cloke and Little [eds], 1997), making the motivations of migrants, and their relationships with rural space, the focus of future research.

2.2. Urban to rural migration and the 'cultural turn'

Academic geography's 'cultural turn' emerged as both a critique of existing limitations of theory and an experimental engagement with revitalised qualitative methodologies. Fundamental to the new forms of academic practice was an engagement with subjectivities, reflexivity and the construction of meaning, often circulating around interrogations of postmodernism and poststructuralism. Barnett (1998: 381) writes that the 'cultural turn needs… to be located within the wider set of debates that emerged in the late 1980s around postmodernism which in large part were the vehicles for geography's entry into new fields of cultural theory.' Although he admits that 'the embracing term "cultural turn" hides some significant differences within and between particular fields', a commonality exists in

> …a commitment to epistemologies, often loosely labelled 'post-structural', that emphasise the contingency of knowledge claims and recognise the close relationship among language, power and knowledge. Both epistemologically and in the construction of new empirical research objects, the cultural turn is best characterised by a heightened reflexivity toward the role of language, meaning and representations in the constitution of reality and knowledge of reality.
>
> (Barnett, 1998: 380)

As Morris and Evans (2004: 322) observe, attendant to the expansion of theoretical supports for geographical practice was a broadening of methodological strategies. During the cultural turn, qualitative techniques such as in-depth interviews, discourse analysis, image and text interpretation and ethnomethodology became common methods for exploring cultural topographies. In an influential paper, Philo (1992) argues that postmodernism's promised escape from metanarratives, such as the broad-brush generalisations made in the early counterurbanisation studies, has the potential to liberate 'other' or 'neglected' voices previously unheard. This had a particular relevance for rural geographies, which as some of the statistical era studies demonstrate, relied on uncritical assumptions about what constitutes the 'rural'. The cultural turn's proliferation of theoretical and methodological departures was

perceived to counter what Philo characterised as a largely essentialist and homogenising view of rurality:

> [In] many of these contributions [to the rural geography subdiscipline]… there remains a danger of portraying British rural people (or at least the ones that seem to be important in shaping and feeling the locality) as all being 'Mr Averages': as being men in employment, earning enough to live, white and probably English, straight and somehow without sexuality, able in body and sound in mind, and devoid of any other quirks of (say) religious belief or political affiliation.
>
> (Philo, 1992: 199-200)

2.2.1. Post-productivism and the changing contexts of the countryside

Philo's call to elicit 'other' rural voices not only received a significant response within academic geography for its theoretical dimensions (cf. Murdoch and Pratt, 1993; Cloke and Little, 1997; Cloke, 1997; Halfacree, 1997), but also coincided with increasing recognition that familiar certainties about the countryside could no longer be relied upon. The notion of a 'post-productivist' countryside cleared some conceptual space for investigations into the rural that reflect its social and economic diversity, rejecting 'Mr Average' precedents. Like 'counterurbanisation', no standard definition exists for post-productivism (Mather et al., 2006), though the concept was used widely in the 1990s to describe a condition of rurality in which agriculture no longer represents the 'hegemonic cornerstone' (Halfacree, 1997) of economic and cultural life in the countryside. Geographers employing the post-productivism concept have often looked to national policy objectives to support claims that such a status has been reached, citing increased governmental measures that recognise multiple rural interests, such as tourism, leisure and residential development, with agriculture relatively de-prioritised (e.g. Murdoch and Marsden, 1994; Van der Ploeg et al, 2000; Goodman, 2004; Mather et al, 2006; Feagan, 2007).

Although the importance of agriculture varies considerably between the rural economies of one European country and the other (Abresch et al. 1996; Strijker 1997; Bollman and Bryden 1997), it is clear that in general its significance is declining. We can conclude that it is not only at the level of the inter-relationship between society and agriculture, but also at the level of the countryside as a well-defined social and geographical space, that new forms of articulation are to be developed (Lowe et al. 1995). The 'rural' is no longer a monopoly of farmers.

(Van der Ploeg et al, 2000: 393)

Such studies have had a predominantly North American and European focus, with post-productivism also characterised as a post-industrial or postmodern condition, applicable only once a certain threshold of economic development has been crossed. Post-productivism does not imply that agriculture has been relegated to insignificance, but merely acknowledges the growth of non-farming activity in traditionally agricultural regions, as well as the possible adaptation of farming enterprises to diversified economic activity, such as tourism (Murdoch and Marsden, 1994; Halfacree, 1997). Changes in rural landscapes that reflect inflows of capital, technology and population do embody some of the early observations of Berry (1976; 1980), though post-productivism and counterurbanisation are rarely linked explicitly. One can infer that counterurbanisation's conceptual incoherence made post-productivism a more appealing template for interrogating countryside change, particularly given the 'official' or policy basis for this perspective, such as the 'second pillar' of the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) which both acknowledges and promotes 'rural development' through diversified (non-agricultural) enterprise (CAP, 2008; Wilson, 2001; Wilson, 2010). Murdoch and Marsden's (1994) studies on Buckinghamshire, England, for example, describe the imposition of leisure pursuits (tourism, golf, second homes) for proximate urban markets upon space conventionally regarded as 'rural' by long-standing inhabitants. Using planning proposals, in-depth interviews, business plans and EU rural policy documents, the authors demonstrate how this refashioning of the countryside is made possible through capital generated in nearby conurbations (in this case the London metropolis). Their research also reveals how understandings of the countryside are continually challenged by both development and conservation proposals: a rural site becomes a terrain of competition, with economic value, social relations and aesthetic and ecological considerations all vying for primacy.

Halfacree (1997) is one of the few authors to explicitly link counterurbanisation and post-productivism, as well as make a distinction between the two. In his contribution to the influential *Contested Countryside Cultures* (Cloke and Little [eds.], 1997) he claims that the 'turn toward a post-productivist and in many ways a post-agricultural future for the countryside is most clearly represented in the importance of counterurbanisation and counterurbanisers in the production of contemporary rural space.' (p.72) He then offers yet another characterisation of counterurbanisation, one updated for a post-productivist era: 'It reflects both the increasing use of rural space for non-agricultural purposes and the predominance of consumption interests over production interests, with the rural as a space of residence.' (p.72) Halfacree is careful to distinguish between post-productivism and counterurbanisation, the former a context in which the latter, a process, is enabled:

> Migration from an urban to a more rural residential environment is commonplace in most highly developed countries. In Britain, such migration takes place with a backdrop of an agricultural industry mired in a state of crisis. Indeed, academic analysis of the depth and prolonged character of this crisis have [*sic*] led to suggestions that we are witnessing a shift from a 'productivist' to a 'post-productivist' era in the countryside as a whole. With such a shift comes the opening up of a space for relatively novel actors to stamp their identity upon the British countryside.

> (Halfacree, 1997: 70)

2.2.2. Class and conflict in the countryside

Despite the general deviation from counterurbanisation as a theoretical route, studies of urban to rural migration expanded throughout the 1990s, often maximising the use of qualitative methodologies to uncover the previously 'hidden' voices of migrants themselves, as well as 'locals' in communities perceived to have absorbed a significant influx of migrants. If there is one element of post-1980s urban to rural migration research that can be singled out for consistency, it is attention to class and socio-economic status. This reflects the development of some predominant 'cultural turn' concerns, and seeks to reveal the economic inequalities, spatial marginalisation and contested representations of space engendered by the migration

process and maturation of the post-productivist condition. Murdoch (1995: 1213) makes a direct call for increased attention to class in rural geography, claiming that '…interest in such topics as [rural] restructuring, gentrification, deprivation, regulation, subsumption, commoditisation, etc… depend, at least in part, on concepts of class for their explanatory value. Yet, for some reason, class analysis per se seems to be of secondary concern to many sociologists and geographers working in rural studies…' In many respects, the class analysis which duly developed in rural geography has been essential to the broadening of urban to rural migration research beyond strictly statistical models. At their most incisive, studies framed around class relations can situate particular rural spaces as expressions of capitalist processes, revealing the impact of those processes on both new and deep-rooted rural dwellers. On the other hand, they are prone to viewing social relations between migrants and self-described locals as overly deterministic.

Responding to Murdoch's call for a focus on class, and reflecting a wider incorporation of critical class analysis into human geography, Halfacree (1994), Halfacree and Boyle (1998), Cloke et al (1998a; 1998b), Murdoch and Marsden (1994) and Murdoch and Day (1998) have all treated urban to rural migration as primarily a case of middle-class in-migration. This perspective benefits from considerable empirical justification, at least in the contexts where the research was carried out in the UK. Since the 1970s, data gathered on rural in-migration shows rural population growth as consistent with industrial deconcentration and the development of leisure and consumption interests in the countryside (Champion, 1989b; Murdoch and Marsden, 1994), processes that entice newcomers and new capital, sometimes with demonstrable consequences for long-standing 'locals'. In one study, Cloke et al (1998b) use interviews with self-described locals and 'outsiders' (migrants from elsewhere) living in Gower, Wales, to elicit the highly differentiated understandings of place that exist among residents. The issue of class is powerful: many locals feel disconnected from the newcomers and reveal a resentful attitude to the changes that they associate with in-migration, such as increased housing costs and a perceived disruption to social cohesion.

Similar concerns are echoed in Cloke et al's (1998a) study of rural in-migration in England and Wales, and in the language applied to 'outsiders' in Allan and Mooney's (1998) study of

migration into rural Scotland, which the authors identify as establishing entrenched self/other dualisms between social groups. Such resentment is by no means universal, though it has proven a rich empirical resource for researchers interested in rural transformation and evolution, to some extent validating Murdoch's (1995) demand for attention to class relations. Allen and Mooney's (1998) research, to illustrate, deals predominantly with middle-class, mostly retired and mostly English migrants to a rural Scottish community. The authors do not claim that these migrants are broadly representative of in-migration as a whole, but the work is reflective of an academic trend in which the migrants' identity is presented as being notably at odds with the traditional agricultural character of the community into which they have moved. Yet this separation of populations into distinct class categories can in itself bias a study toward results that emphasise conflict, potentially obscuring other positions that express a more hybrid or fluid variation on class or other forms of identity (Gibson-Graham, 1996; 2008). Studies such as those cited above are largely concerned with rural gentrification, which although relevant can offer an imbalanced view of rural in-migration. They ignore, for example, those who do undertake practices (such as agriculture) and lifestyles seen as more compatible with a locality's self-image.

In his memoir *The Farm,* journalist Richard Benson (2006) reflects on the discomfort he feels as someone who is neither fully rural nor urban. Hopeless with manual tasks, unable to make a garden grow and more interested in classic literature than *Power Farming* magazine, he moves to London from his family farm in rural Yorkshire to study English at university and become a journalist. Shortly after he takes a job at a popular magazine a colleague sympathetically informs him that he will never be truly accepted in London media circles on account of his being Northern and working-class. This second category baffles him. Working-class? 'Technically my dad's a capitalist,' he replies.

This anecdote neatly encapsulates the confusion and contradiction that imbue categorical conceptions of class, in which farmers occupy a particularly awkward position. Much of the rural geography literature under discussion here frames a perspective on class in which domination, exploitation, resentment and resistance reveal themselves as the effects of economic stratification. However real these effects – and their root in disparities of wealth –

may be, their reduction to categorical *class* tensions fails to critically interrogate the multiple and contested meanings of class. In Cloke et al.'s (1998a) study, for example, 'middle-class' and 'working-class' categories are treated as a given, with categorical distinctions implied through relative economic power, particularly property ownership. This provides a useful lens for examining the effect of economic inequality on experiences of rural in-migration, but it also suggests homogeneous class identities and therefore deflects other possibilities that are not intimately related to the authors' uses of class analysis.

For geographers working within political economy frameworks, class remains a fundamental condition of society and therefore key to social analysis. This approach uses definable 'relations of production' (Wolf and Resnick, 1986, cited in Gibson-Graham, 1996) to configure class conceptions. These are outlined by Gibson-Graham (1996: 49) as follows:

> Three shared attributes and experiences are commonly invoked in defining social groups as classes. One of these is *power,* with control over the labour process and/or domination in other aspects of social life distinguishing ruling classes from the ruled. Classes may also be distinguished on the basis of *property ownership,* especially of the means of production. Finally, classes are defined by their relation to *exploitation*, the question of whether they produce surplus labour or appropriate it.

Gibson-Graham (1996; 2008) take an anti-essentialist stance and argue for a re-theorisation of class as less a social grouping than a number of processes by which economic stratifications are reified, but which can be contingent, contradictory and fragmented. Pratt (2000: 87) writes that in Gibson-Graham's analysis, 'the economy in capitalist societies is not seen to exhaust the social and is conceived as complex combinations of capitalist and non-capitalist processes (e.g., feudal, communal, slave, independent…).' In this view, individuals become sites of multiple class processes and relations. At work, home and in social life, individuals wield power over some, are exploited by others and exercise differing degrees of control over economic activity. This accounts not only for flexible and heterogeneous social groupings, but also for diverse economic relationships. The household, for instance, becomes a site where multiple class processes coexist in simultaneous operation. This spatial boundary can host paid and unpaid labour, circulate market and non-market flows of goods and currency and act as the

base for self-employment, illicit acquisition, voluntary activity and non-profit enterprise (Gibson-Graham, 2008: 616). To describe such a household as 'middle-class' or 'working-class', then, significantly understates the socio-economic complexity of a household (and, by extension, clusters of households occupying ostensibly similar economic strata). It also blunts the possibility of performing 'other' economies, or acting outside the assumed interests of a class category. When academics reduce action exclusively to categorical class interests, argue Gibson-Graham (2008: 618), the effect is to reinforce 'what is perceived as dominant', which is 'usually something large and threatening (like neoliberalism, or globalization, or capitalism, or empire).' Adopting an anti-essentialist view and acknowledging the diversity of socio-economic relations, they argue, is a 'political/ethical decision that influences what kind of worlds we can imagine and create, ones in which we enact and construct rather than resist (or succumb to) economic realities' (Gibson-Graham, 2008: 619).

This is a crucial point, given that many studies conducted in the 1990s frame rural in-migration as a potential source of social tension or the extension of economic inequalities, articulated in an essentialist language of class, while other approaches reveal different insights. Jacob's (1997) work on back-to-the-land migrants in North America, for instance, focuses less on relations between neighbours and migrants and more on the motivations and economic survival strategies of rural newcomers, revealing a breadth of socio-economic positions that would challenge any predetermined class assumption. As one way of resisting the essentialising tendency in rural in-migration studies, Cloke et al. (1998b) suggest that varying levels of 'cultural competence', broadly defined as active engagement with 'local' socialisation and consumption practices, can differentiate between types of migrants. Importantly, it looks beyond economic inequality to understand how the relations between migrants and 'locals' might be negotiated. This offers one way of breaking away from a perspective which views relations as exclusively or at least predominantly economic, and which legitimates experiences that challenge essentialist readings of class dynamics.

2.2.3. '…the rural as space and the rural as representing space'

The nexus between urban to rural migration, class relations and the local/outsider dichotomy is in many ways an issue of *representation*. Halfacree and Boyle (1998: 9-11), Halfacree (1994;

2004; 2007), Cloke et al. (1998a) and Woods (2005: 13) argue that rural in-migration patterns have been contoured in large part by collective cultural inscriptions on the countryside, with population reconfiguration often directly linked to the pursuit of the 'rural idyll'. The rural idyll, writes Woods (2005:13) 'presents an aspirational picture of an idealized rurality, often emphasizing… pastoral landscape and… perceived peace and quiet'. Bunce (2003: 21) characterises 'the essence of the rural idyll' as the 'imagery of nature and of natural yet domesticated settings.' Little and Austin (1996: 102) describe the rural idyll as conveying 'an uncomplicated, innocent, more genuine society in which traditional values persist and lives are more real. Pastimes, friendships, family relations and even employment are seen as somehow more honest and authentic, unencumbered with the false and insincere trappings of city life or with their associated dubious values.' Woods (2005: 177) suggests that a 'further feature of the "rural idyll" is nostalgia and the sense that the countryside has been less changed and corrupted by modernity than the city.' Such uncomplicated and 'timeless' evocations of the rural, argues Halfacree (1997: 80), 'can be seen as part of a strategy to deny the postmodern complexity and to create and sustain "eternal truths" in the search for 'ontological security'. Such a strategy, he suggests, forms a significant push factor in steering urban dwellers toward new lives in the countryside. How rural areas are understood and represented by long-standing inhabitants also has a major impact on how newcomers are received.

The rural idyll is projected through what Bunce (2003: 23) refers to as 'the nostalgia business', an industry of rural representation that capitalises on the 'intellectual, literary and artistic abstraction of rural life.' Books, magazines, films, conservation projects and heritage sites may all conspire to produce an image of the rural that sustains its image of arrested development and traditional lifestyles. This view of the rural as an intensely mediated, culturally refracted space is largely in keeping with general preoccupations of the cultural turn in academic geography, in which 'the mainstream of cultural studies argues… what we consume is now itself more and more *only* images… Everything is thus a text or picture or more generally a "representation"' (Mitchell, 2000). It is also a rather essentialist perspective, reducing experiences of nature and the rural to a class-filtered simulacrum, with material space little more than a semiotic function.

Halfacree (1993: 34; 1997; 1998; 2007) has frequently argued against a homogenising view of the countryside and its inhabitants, regardless of their length of tenure, and presciently claimed in 1993 that 'the problem in literature seems to stem from a failure to distinguish between the rural as a distinctive type of locality and the rural as social representation – the rural as space and the rural as representing space'. The risk in this conflation is evident in the suppressed heterogeneity of rural incomers' voices, and the result has been the casting of urban to rural migrants as a largely conservative, middle-class social group, guilty of reinforcing economic inequalities and owing its collective understanding of rurality to imagined nostalgia. This is not to say that studies which promote this view are lacking in empirical value; on the contrary, this strain of literature recounts a wealth of experiences and aligns them with diverse theoretical conjectures. However, the sustained focus on conflict, real or potential, between groups occupying certain dichotomies (working/middle class, local/incomer, rural/urban, self/other) has limited the purview of this subcategory of rural geography.

The remaining sections of this chapter will consider how alternative expressions of rurality can be performed by incomers, specifically back-to-the-landers, or rural in-migrants who adopt a primarily agricultural lifestyle. Counterurbanisation, in this inclusive understanding, incorporates multiple processes, agendas and lifestyles. In this frame, some forms of migration, such as 'back-to-the-land', can embody radical, countercultural ideals that foster experimentation with rural space as a platform for social justice and environmental stewardship. Such possibilities have been largely overlooked in the historical development of counterurbanisation theory and are introduced here to suggest diverse readings of 'the rural', and to recognise the practices and ideas that have activated rural space as a site of contestation against certain forms of power.

2.2.4. Conceptualising a radical ruralism

The importance of distinguishing between reactionary anti-urbanism and 'pro-ruralism' has been noted by several commentators (e.g. Halfacree, 1997; 1998; 2007; Mitchell, 2004; Kingsnorth, 2010; Herring, 2011). Anti-urbanism, claims Herring (2011: 13), 'is a phobic

response to fill-in-the-blank "pestilential" elements that fall under the rubric of "the city"' and often finds its foil in imagined rural idylls. There are radical political and social agendas that have been incubated in the countryside, however, which challenge the sentimental imaginaries so often assigned to the migrants who choose to settle there.

As actions and strategies designed to strongly disrupt the status quo, 'radical' rural projects can take a vast number of forms, including far-right ethnic exclusivism and militant libertarianism (Woods, 2005: 294-5; Halfacree, 2007: 131; McKay, 2011). The 'radical ruralism' envisioned by Halfacree (2007b) (and supported by the alternative food networks and ethical farming practices outlined in the next chapter) is associated with objectives that would broadly fall into a left-leaning, 'green' and anti-exploitation agenda. This can include, but is not limited to nor exclusively defined by: cooperative or non-profit economic systems, eco-sustainability projects, low-impact development, permaculture [1] or small-scale organic agriculture[2], and a tolerance or promotion of 'alternative' or socially marginalised lifestyles. Research by Holloway (2002) frames rural projects of this sort as an oppositional use of space, visibly expressing resistance and demonstrating alternatives to relations of production regarded as unethical or exploitative. Organic smallholdings become symbolic of self-reliance and cooperative relationships, or models for animal welfare standards at that defy the efficiency-driven methods of high-volume meat production. The radicalism implied in these projects comes from the proposed reconfiguration of dominant ethical norms and market relations, utilising the unique potential of rural spaces, in their capacity as regions of food production, as platforms from which to launch these challenges. Radical ruralism is also concerned with expressions or reclamations of power: 'radical visions', writes Halfacree (2007b: 131), 'imagine produced rather than induced difference', seeking to 'take rural development in a fundamentally different direction than that which dominates today.' Of course, radicalism itself is subject to varied interpretations, and it is not inconceivable that migrants to the countryside embody a mixture of reactionary anti-urbanism, mediated nostalgia and pro-rural

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[1]   Permaculture is a system of design and practice that seeks to achieve sustainable production through limiting waste, minimising material and labour inputs, working in harmony with rather than altering natural conditions and stimulating experimentation. The original meaning of permaculture ('permanent agriculture') focused primarily on agroecology, but more recently its principles have been adapted to town planning, architecture, intentional communities and community projects (cf. Pickerill and Maxey [eds], 2009; McKay, 2011).
[2]   Organic qualification requirements vary historically and regionally, though some fundamentals remain constant. Organic food production restricts artificial pesticide and fertiliser use, promotes animal welfare through regulations on stocking densities and natural diets, prohibits any use of genetically modified organisms and encourages soil longevity through natural fertilisers, crop rotation and composting (Food Standards Agency, 2011). Organic principles and practice in historical context are explored by Belasco (1989), Petrini (2007) and McKay (2011).

progressivism. Local case studies are therefore important in examining what migrants to the countryside actually *do*, and how rural sites of dwelling are configured to represent their putatively transformative ideals.

2.3. Going back to the land – a model for alternative counterubanisation?

Migrants to rural areas who attempt to achieve a predominantly agrarian lifestyle have been christened – confusingly – with several labels: neo-farmers (Mailfert, 2007), neo-peasants (Brunori et al. 2010), new pioneers (Jacob, 1997), new agrarians (Trauger, 2007a) and, most commonly, back-to-the-landers. The fundamental features that unite these cohorts of individuals are an experience of migration to the countryside and the adoption of farming or horticultural practices as a significant lifestyle component. There is, however, some historical basis for the ambiguity of their labels: 1) Fluctuations in the popularity of migration to the countryside has complicated efforts to achieve consistent, comprehensive research on the subject; 2) Few institutions and formal organisations for back-to-the-land networks exist, and; 3) Regional, historical and political variants of back-to-the-land practices have thwarted efforts to view them as a unified movement (Belasco, 2006; Jacob, 1997; Halfacree, 2007a; Mailfert, 2007). That said, the 'back-to-the-land' label does have a common currency and usually succeeds in drawing some immediate associations with particular lifestyles, so is therefore the most universal of all the various desciptors.

2.3.1. Origins of back-to-the-land

The popular associations linked to the term 'back-to-the-land' tend to reference 1960s counterculture and experimental lifestyles based on self-sufficiency or communal living in rural areas, for it was during this period that the term came into common use. Work by Jacob (1997), however, suggests earlier origins of the impulse that stimulated the conscious adoption

of rural lifestyles and agrarian economic production as a *change* from other ways of living. In a comprehensive study of contemporary North American back-to-the-landers, he notes that a sense of independence, self-discipline and personal achievement often inform his case studies' worldviews. These ideals are traced to Thomas Jefferson's 19th Century equation of the self-reliant family homestead with bucolic happiness and strong individual rights.

Jefferson's vision of a nation composed of fiercely independent smallholders, however, was superseded by that century's rapid industrial development, bringing unprecedented urban growth particularly to the northeastern United States. Henry David Thoreau's *Walden,* an 1854 memoir-cum-manifesto for simple living, was significant in presenting the homesteading lifestyle as an oppositional stance against the work routines imposed by capitalist industry (Jacob, 1997; Agnew, 2006). Thoreau's essays cast the self-reliant smallholder as performing a quiet resistance to the city's insatiable cycle of money, toil and waste. However, nothing like an organised movement or related demographic shift began to favour this view until the 1930s, when the dearth of circulating capital during the Great Depression saw more people leave than enter American cities in search of work. Encouraged more by economic necessity than the romantic lure of the rural, the repopulation of the countryside nevertheless influenced national agricultural policy toward a framework which promoted subsistence farming for low-income urban emigrants (Jacob, 1997). Rooted in the language of Jeffersonian independence, these policies had little long-term impact due to bureaucratic sluggishness and the disruptive impact of World War II. By the 1950s, the cities had rebounded and back-to-the-land ideals were not to surface visibly again until their embrace by the counterculture in the following decade.

The back-to-the-land movement of the 1960s and 70s is often framed in relation to general cultural currents that encouraged 'dropping out' of mainstream society in search of alternatives. Halfacree (2007) cautions against a caricatured view of the 1960s and the popular connotations linking it to social upheaval and the iconography of the Haight-Ashbury hippie culture, yet it is inescapably within this context that back-to-the-land as an identifiable movement began to take shape. As Allen et al. (2003: 66) remark, the widespread migration of young idealists into the countryside in pursuit of agrarian lifestyles had its roots in 'resistance to the Vietnam War, alienation from consumer culture, and environmental concern.'

'Multiplying fivefold between 1965 and 1970,' writes Belasco (1989: 76) of communal back-to-the-land projects, '3,500 or so country communes[3] put the counterculture into group practice.' Although much of the literature on the subject relates to North America and the United Kingdom, rural in-migration with a 'countercultural flavour' occurred throughout many urbanised, industrial and postindustrial nations throughout the 1960s and 70s (Halfacree, 2007a: 3). Writing on the estimated 100,000 people who went back to the land in France in the 1960s and 70s, Mailfert (2007: 23) claims that '[t]hese urban migrants, disillusioned with capitalism and modern life, wandered from village to village in search of an "ideal society" where they could feel free to invent alternative economic and social systems, raising goats, making cheese and honey, tending gardens, or living as artisans.'

In *Appetite for Change,* Belasco (1989) builds his social history of the country communes mainly through excerpted memoirs and magazine pieces in publications such as *Mother Earth News*, *Organic Gardening and Farming, Countryside, Country Women* and *The Whole Earth Catalog.* Such periodicals are the closest the back-to-the-land movement has ever come to having institutional representation, a fact Jacob (1997) attributes to the relatively low visibility of these migrants on the radar of radical politics. Although political justifications for the country life were never far away from some contributors' columns and letters (cf. Herring, 2011), the magazines were less ideological tracts than clearinghouses of practical information to help grow crops, maintain livestock and ensure some degree of economic survival. While visions of self-contained organic utopia may have been an underlying influence in countercultural rural projects, there was a need to reach and connect with others navigating the same unfamiliar territory to make even basic survival a possibility (Belasco, 1989: 76-86). The resulting discourses, preserved in these journals, provide not only an insightful glimpse at the ideological currents that influenced a radical conception of the countryside, but also a blueprint for making this alternative rurality a practical reality. *Mother Earth News* and

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[3] Back-to-the-land communes, often incorporated into the slightly broader notion of 'intentional communities', have generally received more academic attention than disparate individual back-to-the- land initiatives. Poldervaart (2001, cited in Meijering et al., 2007: 42) identifies intentional communities by their expression of 'a deliberate attempt to realise a common, alternative way of life outside mainstream society.' In Belasco's (1989) study of 'How the Counterculture Took on the Food Industry', for example, the communal component of back-to-the-land lifestyles informs most of the author's analysis, while the adoption of farming by families or individuals is left largely unexamined. This academic bias is likely to result from a greater visibility of the intentional communities, as well as the considerable interest in exploring the social and political dynamics that the communities reveal.

Organic Gardening and Farming, for instance, are still published today and viewed by Jacob (1997) as lifelines for contemporary back-to-the-land migrants.[4]

Back-to-the-land memoirs such as those of Mark Vonnegut (1975) and Elizabeth Agnew (2006) detail how the authors and their friends migrated to the countryside as part of a general strategy of disengagement from mainstream society. Often young, these idealistic groups adopted voluntary poverty and rejected structured employment and dependable incomes for the unpredictable demands of rural self-reliance. Many built log cabins, drew water from wells, stitched their own clothing and bartered for what they could not produce on their own homesteads. 'Like the pioneers of old,' writes Agnew in a tone of mild self-mockery (2006: 27-8), 'we saw industry and progress as the enemy of the natural world… We back-to-the-land people, by renouncing the material objects and technologies desired by the rest of our weak and gluttonous society, demonstrated our superior integrity. *We* had control… and would reap mystical rewards by participating in the manual processes long ago taken over by machines.' Of course, cars were often essential to reaching these new homesteads in the first place, and cars required petrol, which required real money. Indeed, a pre-industrial romanticism may have been what inspired many back-to-the-landers, but a full-scale adoption of such a lifestyle proved neither desirable nor achievable for most. There is certainly a nostalgia for a bygone era evident in the 'technology-free zones' (Agnew, 2006) that back-to-the-landers attempted to create, but it differs in form and intention from the emulation of landed gentry that some writers on the rural idyll describe.

Vonnegut's memoir, *The Eden Express*, recounts the creation of an idealised 'Eden' in the remote woods of British Columbia at the dawn of the 1970s, a place where he and his recent college graduate friends would collectively work the land and share its bounty, rejecting or at least delaying the set trajectory of career progression and social aspirations for which their educations had primed them. There was a political dimension to their motives as well, though it was not expressed in party politics or formal, organised agendas. Most of the communards at Eden were opponents of the Vietnam War and sought to disengage from an economic system

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[4]   *Organic Gardening and Farming* is now known simply as *Organic Gardening*. This is possibly a telling transformation about the mainstreaming of organic principles, suggesting that organic living is something that can be achieved with less life-changing commitment than back-to-the-land migration. Both Belasco (1989) and Jacob (1997) consider the influence of this publication, and its founder, JR Rodale, in their texts.

and political culture that they perceived as supporting it. Concurrent with anti-war activism and an open resistance to the social values of mainstream society, environmentalism also emerged in the 1960s as a form of radical critique, breaking from a prior ideal that was largely traditionalist, conservation-oriented, and embraced mainly by upper-class elites (McKay, 2011). Belasco (1989) argues that new forms of political consciousness and organisation were given a 'green' stamp of identity, a process he calls the 'pastoral turn', as environmental concerns were paired with broader challenges to consumerism, economic competition and party politics.

Back-to-the-land migration, then, was one form of action in a series of wider strategies to combat hegemonic power structures. Quite distinctly from the rural gentrification described in previous sections, 1960s back-to-the-landers, particularly those involved in communes, 'went beyond personal protest to build a cohesive model community' (Belasco, 1989: 76). 'In remote derelict farms,' claims McKay (2011: 110), 'in tipi villages, in abandoned mountain hamlets, with copies of Kropotkin or Henry Thoreau in hand, short- and long-term intentional communities were – and are – formed, in which eco-villagers experiment with different or rediscovered ways of living.' These alternative lifestyles often centred on food production, something that Kerans and Kearney (2006: 146-151) argue forms a natural focal point for radical or experimental ways of social organisation, given that food is fundamental to survival and therefore not something to which anyone can profess indifference. Shared rituals of food production and consumption promote a sense of interdependency, an 'ecological' regard for the human and non-human actors involved (Belasco, 1989). In this respect, the physical sites where food is grown, transported, processed and consumed become expressions of values in which plants and animals are entrained to systems of production that announce certain priorities, such as capitalist accumulation, collectivism, biodiversity, low-energy building or aesthetic beauty. Recalling Gibson-Graham (1996; 2008), individual sites may host any or all of these ambitions in varying degrees, in both complementary and contradictory ways. As McKay (2011: 10) writes: 'Climate change, peak oil transition, community cohesion, the environment, genetic modification and food policy, diet, health and disability – the garden is the local patch which touches and is touched by all of these kinds of major global concerns, whether it wants that kind of attention or not.'

2.3.2. Back-to-the-land now

After reaching a peak in the late 60s, Belasco (1989: 87) claims that by 1972, membership and general interest in North American communes were already in decline. Belasco attributes this to often irreconcilable personal and ideological disputes within individual communes. Disagreements concerning resources, technology, money and labour, combined with less immediate political and spiritual disharmony left the back-to-the-landers' holistic mindset 'distressed' (Belasco, 1989: 80). Vonnegut's (1975) personal account supports this claim. At Eden, a steady stream of freeloaders put constant strain on the communal ethic of the group. Despite work rotas and verbal agreements, tasks were never evenly distributed, and those with the largest cash surpluses found themselves subsidising the remainder. Agnew (2006: 198), who began homesteading with her family in the Maine woods in 1975, puts it simply: 'We had grown tired. We now understood why our pioneering ancestors had only lived to be thirty-five or forty. The simple life entailed so much *toil*.' Despite their efforts to escape the mainstream economy, back-to-the-landers were nonetheless affected by the 'low farm prices, debt and foreclosure, shrinking tax base, and atrophying social services' that afflicted rural America in the 1970s and 80s (Jacob, 1997: 21) . Across the Atlantic, Leger and Hervieu (1979, cited in Mailfert, 2007: 23) estimate that toward the end of the 1970s, 95% of the nearly 100,000 would-be farmers in France had returned to the cities. Those who remained in the country were 'more sensitive to ecological issues, less politically engaged... [T]heir goal became owning a farm rather than "living alternatively"' (Mailfert, 2007: 23).

Despite the decline of the experimental rural communes in the 1970s, Trauger (2007: 9) claims that '[s]ince the 1970s the numbers of farmers in the United States beginning alternative modes of farming or converting their operations to organic or sustainable methods has steadily increased.' This growth is mirrored in Europe, with Italy as the continent's leader in certified organic hectares of land (FiBL, 2011). Individuals or families going back to the land have been at least partly responsible for this growth and well-placed to take advantage of a growing trend. The most comprehensive single study of individual (rather than communal) back-to-the-land projects is Jeffrey Jacob's (1997) *New Pioneers*, a work that characterises the historical and contemporary back-to-the-land movement as the 'search for a sustainable future', or a politically informed but practically-based route toward ecologically balanced and socially

cooperative lifestyles. Methodologically, *New Pioneers* offers an innovative (if limited) approach to the subject by creating a typology of back-to-the-landers: an exercise that acknowledges ambiguity and fluid identities, and uses this classification system as a lens to explore the practical and philosophical dimensions of North American back-to-the-land ambitions.

Jacob builds his profile of back-to-the-landers on surveys and semi-structured interviews, with his sample population based on a regional subscriber list for *Countryside and Small Stock Journal,* a magazine with roots in its publisher, Jerry Belanger's, 1960s self-sufficiency projects. More commonly known simply as *Countryside*, it describes itself as 'more than a magazine: it's a network where homesteaders share a wide variety of experiences and ideas about simple, sustainable, country living' (*Countryside*, 2009). Jacob (1997) begins with a survey of *Countryside* subscribers in the mid-1990s northwestern US and Canada and uses their responses to disaggregate the sample into categories of back-to-the-land commitment based on respondents' primary sources of income and time spent on their homesteads. The questionnaires and further communication with homesteaders helped Jacob to develop a classification system (Table 2.1), designed to reflect actual time spent pursuing the goals of localised self-reliance through food production and other small-scale, independent economic activities. Though only a partial picture, the survey nevertheless demonstrates the 'diffusive' (Halfacree, 2007a: 3) nature of the back-to-the-land concept and its broad appeal.

Table 2.1 – A typology of back-to-the-landers

Category	Description	%
Weekenders	Have full-time employment away from their farmsteads, but spend their free time (weekends, early mornings, and evenings) working on their empty property	44
Pensioners	Retired and supported by pensions (social security, investments, and retirement plans)	18
Country Romantics	Take part-time or seasonal work, then spend the rest of their time at work *and* leisure on their property	17
Country Entrepreneurs	Major source of income comes from small businesses on property (e.g. cabinetmaking, welding) that does not directly involve farming	15
Purists	Invest only part of their time in growing a cash crop on their property, for just enough cash income to survive in a monetized economy; otherwise subsist from the resources of their own property and barter relationships with their neighbors	3
Microfarmers	Devote most of their working time to the intensive cultivation of cash crops on their property – usually fruits and vegetables with high market value	2
Apprentices	Learn the back-to-the-land craft while working on someone else's farm	1

Source: Jacob (1997: 53). Percentages are based on a total number of 559 survey respondents.

There is an argument to be made that Jacob's sample (Table 2.1), comprised as it is of nearly 44% 'Weekenders', limits the inferences that can be made about this sample as representative of back-to-the-landers. It is itself a significant finding, however, one that demonstrates the difficulty of making the transition to a full-time agrarian lifestyle. As subscribers to

Countryside with a rural property, they presumably hold ambitions of self-sufficiency and independence, yet are restricted by the financial obligations of full-time work. That 'Purists' make up less than 5% of the whole suggests that back-to-the-land aspirations are indeed heavily compromised by the hardships of economic survival. Nevertheless, this 'purism' is still 'the way of living most homesteaders have in mind when they imagine the perfect country property… For back-to-the-landers it has overarching symbolic significance.' (Jacob, 1997: 54-55) Despite this chapter's best efforts to refine the categories of urban to rural migrants, even recent research (e.g. Halfacree, 2008) on back-to-the-landers uncovers some of the same 'definitional conundrums' that Mitchell (2004: 27) assigned to counterurbanisation. For Jacob (1997: 28), the definition of a 'new pioneer' is grounded 'in intent or interest. The new pioneers are individuals and families who are interested in self-reliant living on their own land.' This expression of intent is key to making the distinctions – however rudimentary – between consumption-focused lifestyle migrants and their politically-guided, ecologically-minded counterparts. That said, there is most likely a hybrid identity between these rather simplified categories. Yet just as there is a complex but discernible difference between organic as an ecological paradigm and as an added-value strategy in agribusiness, there is likewise a real difference between back-to-the-land ideals and the high-end consumption practices of some rural second-home owners, retirees and commuters. Using intent or interest as a platform for classifying urban to rural migrants helps to combat the taxonomic confusion that generic terms like counterurbanisation inevitably produce.

Efforts to identify and analyse more contemporary back-to-the-landers are further compromised by the relative paucity of research conducted outside North America. Belasco's (1989) and Jacob's (1997; 2003) works are exclusively focused on the US and Canada, and draw from the uniquely American Jeffersonianism that they and others such as Berry (1976) place at the heart of the rural lure. This is evident in the log cabins, butter churns and other forms of 'pioneer' imagery that American back-to-the-landers have often adopted, though it is not representative of what is in fact a more geographically diffuse phenomenon. Halfacree (2007a; 2007b; 2008) has outlined an 'international and fuller picture' of counterurbanisation which is inclusive of back-to-the-land ruralism, and work by Mailfert (2007) in France, Escribano (2007) in Spain, and internationally by Meijering et al. (2007) helps to broaden the purview of the back-to-the-land philosophy and the attention it receives in geographical research. This collective attempt to create a more international perspective on urban to rural migration,

however, is relatively young and will require further theorisation, especially in relation to its socio-political alignments. To date, a lineage has been drawn between contemporary back-to-the-landers and political unrest and alternative youth culture in 60s and 70s North America and Europe. Halfacree (2007a) challenges the universality of this lineage but acknowledges that, in the absence of much evidence to the contrary, it is nonetheless useful for contextualising the phenomenon.

Definitional conundrums and regional variations notwithstanding, Jacob's work, as well as more recent research, helps to reveal some of the strategies employed to bring back-to-the-land aspirations closer to reality in a more contemporary socio-economic context. Recalling the early 20th Century peasant-worker family economies of Northern Italy, many new pioneers are involved with craft or workshop enterprise, often involving repairs, carpentry, food processing or art. Extolled in certain influential publications as the only successful formula for profitable farms, the cultivation of cash crops with high market values, such as organic fruits, vegetables and nuts, is one common method of securing something like a reliable income and may be one of the few sustaining forces in modern homestead economics (Jacob, 1997; Agnew, 2006). Niche market produce, though, comes with considerable political baggage and demonstrates the constant tension between idealism and survival that some back-to-the-landers must address. Many commentators on political economy of organic food (e.g. Trauger, 2007; Petrini, 2007; Guthman, 2004; McCarthy, 2006; Johnston, 2007; Jackson et al., 2008; McKay, 2011) note the ethically compromised status of low-impact, pseudo-peasant agriculture producing high-end food for the small elite that can afford it. This is not a new phenomenon; in the early back-to-the-land communes, new farmers often languished in a state of ethical compromise that harsh economic realities forced on idealistic entrepreneurs and activists in the alternative infrastructure, a condition Belasco (1989: 97) calls the 'troublesome overlap between counterculture and capitalism'. Jacob's response to the discrepancy between practiced and idealised norms is to use back-to-the-land 'purism' as the normative *aspiration* of the 'new pioneers', rather than their common experience.

> [A]re they able to practice a style of life consistent with the ideals they profess? Or
> do they adapt, as their neighbours, to the pressures of depressed rural economies?
> Then, to what extent can it be said that the neohomesteaders' actual tenure on the

land is a model of ecological design principles that commercial farmers and other intensive land users might emulate?

Jacob (1997: xii)

The thematic routes that Jacob takes into these questions consist of ethical values (environmental, animal welfare, human relationships), the use of technology and the relative priorities given to work, time and money. Jacob (1997: 232) concludes that non-economic motives for action (e.g., the initial act of migration; food production; political organising) are key to distinguishing the alterity of back-to-the-land projects and their lineage in countercultural traditions, emphasising that it is 'not the acquisition of status, power, or wealth [that] inspires them.' He acknowledges the various contradictions and ethical paradoxes (particularly in the need for many would-be homesteaders to commute to city jobs) that exist in modern back-to-the-land ideals, and argues that it is naïve to see neo-farming as incorruptible or anywhere near its desired state of purism on an expansive scale. In terms of actual results, though, Jacob is convinced that 'neohomesteaders… demonstrate that a large and diverse group of families and individuals can make at least a partial break with the prevailing commercial culture and then find fulfilment by commitment to ideals like voluntary simplicity…' (Jacob, 1997: 233).

In a later paper based on the New Pioneers research, Jacob (2003: 187) argues that '…it is always possible that the back-to-the-land movement of the late twentieth century will be remembered not so much as an exercise in sentimentalism for a dying tradition as for the revival of agrarianism through its reconnection to agricultural production.' Such a view is echoed by other commentators on contemporary back-to-the-land ideals and practices. As McKay's (2011) work on 'radical gardening' argues, for the agrarian or ruralist impulse to be derided as bourgeois sentimentalism, as some readings of the 'rural idyll' suggest, is historically contingent and deeply bound with dominant economic and social trends. Rural 'development', for instance, speaks of a certain modernist trajectory in which the importance of agriculture in rural economics becomes increasingly diminished as people 'naturally' abandon the countryside for the city (Gibson et al. 2010). From this modernist perspective, back-to-the-landers are filled with nostalgic yearning for an economically outdated model and antipathy for the urban cosmopolis. This is not to deny that anti-urbanism and a romantic

vision of the 'timeless' countryside do influence the decision to migrate for some contemporary back-to-the-landers. Recent writing (e.g. Halfacree, 2007b) on the subject, however, suggests that current back-to-the-land projects can be situated within a 'green' politics that shares many concerns with less exclusively rural movements, particularly around social and economic justice as well as environmental issues. While looking backward to disappearing ways of life, contemporary back-to-the-landers simultaneously keep focused on the future, their homesteads anticipating a world of food and oil shortages, local economies, self-reliance and the collapse of a status-conscious consumer culture.

One publication that has served to collate back-to-the-land ideals as part of a broader 'alternative' vision is *The Idler*, an annual periodical published in the UK and distributed internationally. Starting as a satire on work in the early 1990s, *The Idler* has increasingly focused on practical alternatives to waged labour, exploring novel forms of earning one's keep outside of mainstream structures including freelancing, smallholding and itinerant volunteering. As a way of dissociating a pejorative notion of idleness from privileged elites, *The Idler's* editor Tom Hodgkinson (2006; 2010) insists that the rejection of dependent employment draws upon traditions of resistance and radical politics and uses *The Idler* as a platform for practical liberating strategies. Its anti-work ethic is not dogmatic; rather, it suggests myriad justifications for exploring alternative social and economic strategies and presents a range of advice on how a binding, exploitative capitalism might be subverted.

The 2010 edition of *The Idler* is themed 'Back to the Land' and contains a series of essays and comic strips exploring the potential of life on the land for a creative, fulfilling existence in the present tense, rather than an idealized retirement. Figure 2.2, a cartoon from the 'Back to the Land' issue, reveals an awareness of popular suspicions of the back-to-the-land impulse as being a genteel lifestyle choice based on a sentimental view of the rural.

Figure 2.2 – Trials of the Green Man

Pete Loveday (2010)
Source: *The Idler* 43

The contributing authors do not wallow in nostalgia for an imagined past but discuss the practicalities and challenges of working the land as a strategy for active disengagement from formal employment. A sense of justice and environmental stewardship infuses the essays, with Hodgkinson (2010: 2-3) writing that 'it is time for all of us to find ways of taking back the control of our food supply and of our land from today's robber barons, the supermarkets, who steal from the poor and redistribute to the rich... The land is our source of food, pleasure and beauty... So it is time to seize the means of production and free ourselves.' Other contributors, such as Kingsnorth (2010) and Fairlie (2010), argue against the view that those with a fondness

for the rural are reactionary, bourgeois or simply unworldly. Recognising positive values in the rural, they claim, militates against the countryside's capitulation to the negative values inherent in urban prejudices, such as 'backwardness' and social conservatism. The key to subverting this perception, suggests Kingsnorth (2010), is through enacting positive examples of alternative practices, demonstrating the potential that rural spaces hold for purportedly 'better' ways of living. Going back to the land, he argues, imparts knowledge about human interaction with local ecologies, knowledge that militates against waste, environmental degradation and excessive consumption. Moving to the countryside involves distancing oneself from centres of capitalist accumulation and entering a peripheral zone where natural productive features (e.g. soil, vegetation and topography) can be employed to fashion an alternative, sustainable mode of living. This is a process of active disengagement, or a repurposing of energy, rather than simply 'dropping out' out of society.

Though I have made a case up to this point for locating back-to-the-land upon certain ideological foundations, I would also advise caution so that stated ideals do not presuppose material outcomes. It is admittedly a problem in back-to-the-land research that, simply because few other accounts exist, studies such as Belasco's (1989) and Jacob's (1997; 2003) must rely on the self-mythologising discourses of 60s and 70s back-to-the-landers or the idealistic, hopeful visions of more recent migrants. Testing back-to-the-land migration as a viable strategy for transformative social and economic organisation remains beset with challenges in terms of the evidence available, given differing regional and historical contexts and their variations in material practice and foundational ideas. Nevertheless, it is still important to try to situate back-to-the-land migration as part of a general cultural development, revealing the ideas and motives which have given the movement its form and content. This is what I have tried to accomplish in this section and preceding ones. The challenge from this point onward is to interrogate how analysis of the back-to-the-land phenomenon might be pushed in new directions, specifically by focusing on how research subjects' motives lead to action and what results this action demonstrably achieves.

2.3.3. Toward an alternative infrastructure

In some respects, the material form of a back-to-the-land farm is an indicator of both intent and practice. It can be seen as a statement of principles that contest 'conventional' understandings of how rural space should be used, as well as a site from which alternative understandings can be given material embodiment. Holloway (2002: 2055-6) argues that 'alternative' farmers, such as those performing small-scale organic agriculture, 'present a critique through their presence, practices, and ways of talking about farming… [F]arming is often explicitly bound into moral discourses concerned with (re)establishing what are taken to be "richer" and ethically superior relationships between humans, animals, food, land, nature, etc..' The space of a farm becomes invested with values that challenge dominant norms, while the activities that radiate from it work in pursuit of change or within ethical frameworks that celebrate values such as care and welfare.

New farmers' participation in alternative agro-food networks can also suggest a commitment to the values espoused by those networks. Mailfert's (2007) study of 'neo-farmers' in southwest France, for example, reveals that 19 of 20 new farmers interviewed were participants in some form of AAFN, a fact that places these farmers within an orbit of ideas and organisations that actively challenge the status quo. Belasco (1989) suggests that because many early migrants to the countryside maintained social connections to the city and to other back-to-the-landers, these relationships helped to develop an 'alternative infrastructure' of food production and distribution linked to the rural communes and supportive of countercultural aims. A highly inclusive term, Belasco's alternative infrastructure accommodates food cooperatives, collectively-run restaurants, alternative press food writers, small-scale natural food manufacturers, cheap ethnic grocers, urban gardeners and back-to-the-land communes. Through this infrastructure food and farming were linked to a broader counterculture economy, one that embodied alternative models to the growing concentration and power of corporate food and the homogeneity, quality differentials and questionable ethics that back-to-the-landers associated with it. The alternative infrastructure concept foreshadows contemporary AAFNs. As Brunori (2011: 2) writes:

> As far as these relationships are set up, they facilitate the activity of others. The availability of specific inputs lowers the search costs for farms, the presence of an organic shop in the neighbourhood lowers the search costs for consumers. Specific trade relationships generate specific languages, tools, norms of behaviour, knowledges.

Oppositional approaches to food production and consumption, expressed as a repudiation of one system and the creation of alternate means and ends, hint at potential reconfigurations of economic and spatial relations. In this context Marsden and Sonnino (2006: 188) recognise the rural as a site from which grassroots politics can be enacted: '…[E]merging networks attempt to recapture rural space as an active and transforming force in shaping agri-food – thereby potentially giving rise to a new rural development paradigm.' Similarly, Petrini (2007: 231) argues that local, independent agro-food networks support a 'living countryside': '…with small local productions, the use of chemicals can be very limited, the produce does not travel and therefore does not pollute, and rural areas are kept alive with native and variegated production.' Yet it is not always clear whether participation in these networks is born out of economic necessity or ideological commitment, or a combination of both.

The practical manifestations of AAFNs can include farmers' markets, cooperative grocers, local food festivals, organic delivery schemes, cashless bartering and direct distribution to local businesses (Murdoch et al, 2000; DuPuis and Goodman, 2005; Marsden and Sonnino, 2006; Feagan 2007; Kneafsey et al., 2008). Volunteering on organic farms in exchange for room and board, a practice facilitated by organisations such as Help Exchange and Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF) (Chapter 5), offers another example of how capitalist economic relations (in this case, owner / employee) are challenged through practices that defy capitalist conventions. There is no guarantee, however, that any of these structures will produce quality, sustainability or justice, and the branding of an enterprise or product as 'alternative' is fraught with political and ethical tension. McCarthy (2006: 807-809) argues that the search for alterity among such networks is young, conflicted and constantly changing direction, and that there is a 'need to specify what such assemblages are alternative to, and what makes them alternative.'

> Many authors see these projects as attempting to craft alternatives to capitalism in general; others see them as more specifically responses to postwar productivism, globalization or neoliberalism… Few are so alternative that they eschew the circulation of capital in commodity form altogether; rather they attempt to harness intrinsic dynamics of capitalism to progressive political projects.

McCarthy highlights the tensions that I have described already in presupposing a set of principles to which participants in 'alternative' practices are attached. These may become fixed and deterministic, or could simply be too ambitious for practical implementation. It is worth making a clear statement here, however, that the attempt to establish alternative systems of food provision, commodity exchange and labour value is essential to understanding potential power networks and their associated reconfiguration of rural and urban geographies. Following Brunori (2011: 3), empowerment is conceptualised here as 'the process by which individuals or groups increase their capacity to control their environment.' Efforts such as back-to-the-land migration and alternative food networks represent a negotiation of power that hints at a potential politics of the future, and studying these efforts *in situ* allows researchers to critically relate practice to ideals, ambitions to outcomes.

As much of the work on back-to-the-landers shows (e.g. Belasco, 1989; Jacob, 1997; Holloway, 2002; Mailfert, 2007; Halfacree, 2008), farming spaces are constructed within spatially and discursively articulated frameworks that reflect intent; they are projects that are ethically situated and often overtly expressive. Intentions to participate in alternative models to mainstream norms may be assumed from back-to-the-landers' involvement in AAFNs, yet it is essential to avoid an uncritical reading which does not question what is being challenged and how. As Holloway et al. (2007: 7) argue, the ideas surrounding the alterity of certain food networks are 'stimulating and valuable', yet come with 'risks of romanticising the radicalised "alternatives" in such a way that they are not subject to the same degree of critical reflection which is currently being applied to "mainstream" food supply systems.' To date, there has been surprisingly little effort in geographical studies of food and agriculture to assess back-to-the-landers' role in food systems. Not all new farmers will necessarily embrace alternatives to the industrial model (Mailfert, 2007), but in those that do there exists a unique opportunity to explore the articulation of their ideals as experimental practices. The next chapter offers an overview of some current debates surrounding AAFNs and explores how the politics of food can connect contemporary back-to-the-land ideals to material practice.

2.4. Conclusion

The geographical and conceptual breadth of the preceding accounts should give some indication as to the difficulty of narrowing urban to rural migration into a contained theoretical context. From large-scale statistical profiles to remote back-to-the-land projects, an inclusive view of the phenomenon requires attention to a large and diverse body of literature. The spatial articulation of urban to rural migration, accordingly, is dependent on specific ideologies, economic conditions and practices that reflect the power relations to which they either conform or attempt to resist. This is true in both consumption-led rural gentrification and subsistence-based neo-farming, hybrids of which may well exist.

In tracing the geneaology of research on urban to rural migration, I have tried to identify the focal points and oversights that emerged through evolving methodological and epistemological treatments of the subject. My main contention in summarising the early literature on counterurbanisation is that, due to the generalising tendencies of the quantitative methods employed, scholars have been limited in identifying causality, and in determining the motives and character of migration. Back-to-the-land migration would in quantitative formulations be indistinguishable from other forms, such as commuting or retirement. These early efforts did, however, engender a sustained interest in rural in-migration and lay the foundation for further investigation. Following the 'cultural turn' in academic geography, which gave rise to innovative uses of qualitative methods and greater attention to subjectivity, urban to rural migration began to be addressed in the terms expressed by those acting as part of the phenomenon. Through these subjective accounts, geographers have been able to obtain new perspectives on the migration experience as it relates to class, gender, age, race and other factors obscured by statistical approaches, also highlighting the varied understandings of the rural held by migrants and 'locals'. Presumably because much of this research has been conducted against a backdrop of post-productivist, multi-functional ruralities, migrants with an interest in agriculture, whose presence in rural areas is decidedly productivist, are notably inconspicuous in the literature on changing countrysides.

In acknowledging the population deconcentration phenomenon in the first place, and offering diverse theoretical and methodological approaches to its study, researchers have successfully

challenged long-standing assumptions about migration, urbanisation and indeed the 'rural' itself, which had been assessed largely in a productivist paradigm until the 1970s. Although the term counterurbanisation itself has fallen out of fashion somewhat (Mitchell, 2004; Halfacree, 2008), its mixed meanings and 'definitional conundrums' (Mitchell, 2004) still hold implications for contemporary research. In other words, some of the questions that counterurbanisation studies could not answer in the 1970s and 1980s are still questions that need to be asked. These concern identifying the primary actors in the counterurbanisation process, determining its causes and interpreting its significance.

This review should demonstrate that such investigations are unlikely to be resolved in a single study, or without complex and complementary methodologies. That conclusions to these questions are still ambiguous, however, can be taken as evidence that counterurbanisation still holds some relevance for rural geography (though its myriad theoretical forms are likely to perpetuate the pattern of using the term when it seems most convenient and discarding it when it is not). One argument that I have pushed particularly strongly contends that there is a politically radical strain in urban to rural migration that counterurbanisation studies have neglected. Relatively recent studies of back-to-the-landers reflect an incremental attempt to redress this, and the chapters that follow support these efforts.

The politics of class and consumption weighed heavily in the cultural turn's treatment of rural in-migration, again expanding and challenging prior understandings of what constitutes the rural and how processes of in/exclusion are constructed through language, representation and socio-economic status. The development of the post-productivist countryside, as both a policy ideal and academic concept, has allowed researchers to see possibilities in the rural beyond agricultural hegemony. Interrogating 'other' ruralities has broadened understandings of rural realities, allowing subjective discourse to challenge the homogenising tendencies that have long shaped popular perceptions of the rural in culture and politics at large. This literature's concentration on subjectivity and hidden politics – de-institutionalised, discursive and sometimes unconscious – allows for a fuller understanding of the countryside's heterogenous social, political and economic composition. Through their agrarian activities, back-to-the-landers can be seen as resuscitating understandings of the rural which in some ways conflict

with the post-productivist paradigm. It is within this context, however, that they are given a voice to speak of alternative ruralities, countrysides that actively reconfigure socio-economic territories rather than simply provide escape from a monolithic urbanism.

Back-to-the-land migration as a radical countercultural enterprise has multiple aims, few of which could ever be evident in anonymous demographic data. The biographical explanations favoured in the 1990s can help to articulate these agendas and motivations, yet exclusive reliance on subjective accounts may conceal the networked interactivity of these migrants. While contemporary back-to-the-land may be primarily an individual or familial endeavour, its principles remain linked to broader social movements, a claim I support with evidence throughout subsequent chapters. It is for this reason that I present modern back-to-the-land migration through a countercultural lineage dating from the 1960s. Social and economic conditions have changed to give current lifestyle experiments a sometimes different form to their predecessors, however, and I would argue that contemporary efforts represent an evolution more than a straight continuum. Building on an 'alternative infrastructure' of social and economic structures that support back-to-the-land enterprises, today's migrants can implement strategies for both personal sustenance and wider social change. In these ambitions and practices it is possible to observe a continuance from previous decades as well as an embodiment of new priorities, reflecting the particular conditions of the present. These priorities often find their practical manifestations in the alternative agro-food networks in which back-to-the-landers frequently participate. The next chapter offers some further context on these structures, interrogating their contested politics as well as operational dynamics. Both have significant implications for back-to-the-land in Italy today.

3. Alternative Agro-Food Networks (AAFNs): Context and debates

Food is a product of spatially contingent environmental inputs, including material conditions such as climate and soil, as well as politics, culture and economics. The success and survival of particular foods are dependent on complex assemblages of economic viability, consumer demand, transportation infrastructures, marketing strategies, trade agreements, political framing and matters of taste. Like other environmental issues, when problems and contestations related to food arise, Dryzeck (2005: 9) suggests that these 'are found at the intersection between ecosystems and human social systems, and thus are doubly complex.' The ubiquity and necessity of food means that it is frequently – and emotively - integrated into generalised, universal issues such as justice, security and sustainability. As Kerans and Kearney (2006: 148) claim, because of its omnipresence food easily becomes a rallying point, a nexus of contested power relations and strategies of control. Alternative agro-food networks (AAFNs) often serve as the discursive and material fields in which these contestations are articulated, the description of which, argue Holloway et al. (2007: 9), 'should trace how food is implicated in the "holding together" of particular sets of relationships and spatio-temporal arrangements.'

This chapter follows from the back-to-the-landers' development of an 'alternative infrastructure' to explore the contemporary practices and politics of AAFNs in more detail. Implicit throughout is an effort to determine how the politicised ideals that back-to-the-landers bring to the countryside might be enacted through a relationship with rural space. Reflecting the industrial capitalist domination of food provision, 'mainstream' or 'industrial' agro-food systems are frequently used as a foil to various alternative strategies of production, provision and consumption. The contrary strategies of AAFNs tend to embody local politics and priorities while engaging directly with issues of globalised economics, particularly questions of food quality, environmental sustainability and social justice. By assessing the practices and ideas promoted by such networks, alternate forms of socio-economic organisation are

suggested, even if they are not always fully manifest. The examples given here are international in scope, partly reflecting the considerable attention that the subject has received from geographically disparate researchers, but also to more fully contextualise issues that are addressed within an exclusively Italian framework in later chapters.

3.1. Alternative to what? Introducing industrial food

Following World War II, changes in technology, trade and demographics led many industrialised countries, with the United States leading the charge, toward a more homogenous, corporatised and convenience-based food economy. For Goody (1997), the most pivotal developments in the growth of industrial food have been modern canning and bottling techniques, artificial freezing (as well as the mechanisation of these processes), expanded transport networks and vehicle technologies, and the growth of branded retailing. Combined, these factors constitute a standardised 'world cuisine', divorced from specific localities and adaptable to a broad range of markets. Though many of these technological developments originated before the war, Goody (1997) argues that the creation of 'industrial food' was accelerated by the cult of convenience, appropriation of food businesses by international conglomerates and the new consumer markets that have continued to burgeon since the 1950s.

Murdoch et al. (2000) view the industrial agro-food system as an attempt to 'outflank' or 'circumvent' nature, with the layers of separation between producers and consumers leading to blockages and distortions in the judgment of quality and authenticity. '[B]iological constraints', suggest Murdoch and Miele (1999: 467), 'are outmanoeuvred by production processes which ultimately seek to bring all the variables in food production under control and thus reduce the influence of unpredictable natural processes.' Similarly, Parkins and Craig (2006: 75) argue that the 'value of the local firstly derives from its very character: its physical environment (land, climate, flora and fauna). The local, for example, is the site from which the seasonality of produce can be understood and appreciated. Of course, the global food system benefits from *overcoming* such spatial and temporal "limitations"…' The integration of food products and brands with transnational markets has resulted in its becoming a shared,

'placeless' cultural object through globalisation (DuPuis and Goodman, 2005). As Harvey (1989: 300, cited in Johnston, 2007) argues, globalisation 'brings together different worlds (of commodities) in the same space and time', and 'conceal[s] almost perfectly any trace of origin, of the labour processes that produced them, or of the social relations implicated in their production.' Key actors in an industrialised food network include farmers, politicians, retailers, processors, distributors, technicians, consumers and public administrators. Since the 1960s there has been an argument that this extended chain of intermediaries between field and fork has gradually eroded the quality of mass-produced food by 'displacing' any unique attributes of seasonal, local produce varieties and striving for universal, cheap and dependable products which facilitate corporate exploitation through scientifically managed processing, distribution and retail networks (Belasco, 1989; 2005).

While these arguments largely focus on the consumptive end of food geographies, the process of growing food is also heavily mechanised in industrial economies, with impacts on health, inequality and ecology. Increased dependence on mechanised methods (and higher yields through chemical enhancements) has led to soil compaction and erosion, resulting in 40% of the world's farmland being 'seriously degraded' (IFPRI, 2006, cited in Tudge, 2007). Industrial farming is also suspected to be a major contributor to climate change. Tudge (2007: 13) reports that a fifth of the United States' fuel use is directed toward food. Primarily this goes toward packaging, transport and storage, while the remaining non-renewable energy is channelled into artificial fertilisers, farm vehicles, irrigation and pesticides. Livestock production, now mostly concentrated in high-density rearing facilities, is a major source of greenhouse gas emissions, according to a 2006 UN report (FAO, 2006). The report also claims that beyond the methane, carbon dioxide, ammonia and nitrus oxide emissions, land deforested for or desertified by intensive livestock production could further exacerbate climate change by eliminating natural spaces of carbon sequestration.

On top of the immediate environmental threats posed by industrial farming, which also include intensive demands on water supplies and the reduction of biodiversity, industrial food production has an acute human cost. The concentration of capital within industrialised food networks dictates the nature and prices of agricultural produce, thus restricting what can be

raised and how much farmers can earn. This has a local impact, but when extrapolated to global markets and configured by trade agreements, subsidy schemes and national and transnational structural policies, systems that favour corporate profits over human welfare are diffused globally. Economic survival is a daily struggle for many farmers subjected to the vicissitudes of international commodity markets, while structural adjustment policies from organisations like the International Monetary Fund encourage participation in these markets as an alternative to subsistence farming.

Critiques of industrial food frequently position local networks of production and consumption against homogenising, globalist forces. Yet in both its consumption and production stages, all food – even that of the industrial variety – shapes localised socio-economic dynamics. The origins of industrial food may be occluded, but the contexts in which these foods are grown, processed and eaten are situated within locatable boundaries. Furthermore, though the industrial model may be the dominant contemporary paradigm, it is a relatively recent development and its hegemony is being challenged on a number of fronts, as strategies of resistance appear in networks of institutions and individuals that collectively promote practical alternatives to the industrial model.

3.2. Contextualising alternative agro-food networks (AAFNs)

Partly in response to the growth of industrial food (and partly due to the endurance of certain systems that have resisted co-optation), new or resurgent formations of production, trade and consumption have emerged, latterly conceptualised by academics as alternative agro-food networks. In some instances these refer to encompassing principles such as organic, fair trade or localism (Brunori, 2011), but they can also refer more generally to closer connections between producers and consumers, or shortened food chains (SFC), represented by initiatives such as farmers' markets or organic delivery schemes (Kneafsey et al., 2008).

Goodman (2003, cited in Holloway et al., 2007: 7) argues that AAFNs have taken related but divergent directions in North America and Europe, a fact that influences related academic

research on each continent. As Jackson et al. (2008: 13) state, a 'debate has ensued between those who argue that ethically defined alternative food networks... represent a radical departure from conventional food system and those who regard them as an incremental and niche phenomenon, rooted in the lifestyle preferences of particular social groups.' In Europe, Goodman suggests, AAFNs have been identified primarily as strategies related to the economic survival of small, independent farmers and their associated constellations of small-scale business. Artisanal foods require specialised production techniques that are often retained by a relatively small number of producers within a region particularly suited (through environmental conditions and cultural traditions) to their production. By contrasting the qualities of these foods with their industrial counterparts, '[e]ntrepreneurially minded individuals are able to carve out niches for specialty food enterprises in a demanding business environment' (Holloway et al., 2007: 7). 'Alternative', then, is presented as a dualism with the homogenous, 'placeless' food produced by 'mainstream' industrial methods. On the other hand, the North American literature, according to Goodman, has focused more on the politicised origins and oppositional intentions of small organic producers and consumers, and the 'transformative potential' that such a position represents. Echoing Belasco's (1989) work on 60s counterculture's alternative infrastructure, Goodman and Goodman (2007: 26) suggest:

> Support for organic agriculture in the USA only began to take shape as a recognisable movement in the late 1960s, when it was known as the 'back-to-the-land' movement and comprised a disparate assortment of romantics, hippies and peaceniks. In a classic process of innovation embedded in learning-by-doing and informal mechanisms of knowledge transmission, this unlikely coalition gave rise to marketed organic produce, urban food cooperatives and natural food stores.

While there may be scholarly variations in North American and European AAFN studies, in practice these differences may not be so clear. As subsequent chapters and recent literature (e.g. Kneafsey et al., 2008; Brunori et al., 2011) show, European AAFNs often demonstrate overt political commitment, while North American 'alternative' production can equally be reduced to 'niche' marketing strategies (Guthman, 2004; 2007; Getz et al., 2008). In practice, AAFNs are evolving and diverse, a fact reflected in the different strains that related research has taken. In the case of Italy, for example, several scholars (e.g. Murdoch and Miele, 1999; Sassatelli and Scott, 2001; Brunori, 2006) have investigated the 'niche' phenomenon, exploring how Italian producers construct notions of quality and added value around ideas of local tradition and artisanal skill, in contrast to the homogenous design of globalised corporate food.

The cultural and economic infrastructure that surrounds this brand of production has roots in traditional and locally-specific practices, while the marketing of these products has adapted to a very modern context, targeting specific – and often wealthy - groups of consumers in a highly fragmented marketplace. By contrast, Parasecoli (2003) and Leitch (2006), frame Slow Food, arguably Italy's best-known and largest AAFN, within a context of political opposition to a globalised food system that advantages multinational corporations at the expense of localised networks of commodity, knowledge and social exchange. Slow Food itself certainly conceptualises its activities as political, having specific objectives that invoke a discourse of social and economic justice, and frequently negotiating with local and national policymakers to achieve them (Petrini, 2007).

One basic question that straddles both the 'niche' and politicised perspectives on AAFNs concerns who benefits from alternatives to conventional systems of production, distribution and consumption. While the structure and stated intentions of particular networks can be revealing, their actual impacts can be difficult to measure (Fonte, 2006; Goodman and Goodman, 2007). Because AAFNs often speak to fairly vague notions of quality, sustainability and justice, their ability to achieve any of these objectives has become increasingly contentious.

3.3. The contested politics of 'alternative' food

One development that has led to an association of AAFNs with less politicised agendas has been the so-called 'quality turn' in food marketing and production, whereby provenance is employed to signify attributes of taste, craftsmanship, care and trust. Murdoch et al. (2000), Goodman (2004), Feagan (2007) and Jackson et al. (2008) have given attention to this trend, questioning how consumers and producers negotiate ideas of quality and how this shapes the circuits through which food is exchanged. The issue of provenance is important as a contrast to 'placeless' food, or that with untraceable origins. To some extent, the distrust in products of opaque origin reflects health scares such as BSE, *e. coli* and salmonella poisonings. As Murdoch and Miele (1999) and Sassatelli and Scott (2001) argue, food producers have been able to

capitalise on these anxieties by emphasising the 'naturalness' of their products. Producers employ specific discourses to allay fears of adulterants and complicated production methods, portraying their own products as relying only on less opaque traditions that may pre-date industrial methods. This sense of naturalness is often mediated through an announcement of a food's geographic origins, usually through packaging, marketing, regulatory schemes and interaction between producers and consumers (Murdoch et al., 2000). As Jackson et al. (2008) argue, however, such an approach can be easily co-opted by 'mainstream' operatives, as evinced by the recent attention to provenance shown by UK supermarkets. Detailing the creation of the 'Oakham' chicken by supermarket chain Marks and Spencer, the authors demonstrate how an upfront attention to rearing conditions, poultry breed and UK origins are used to impart a sense of superior quality. The marketing behind the birds suggests that the Oakham can be trusted as free of contaminants and raised in humane conditions, and will taste better for this careful production. In this case, however, such transparency is somewhat illusory: although Oakham is a real town in England, the Oakham chicken is a trademarked brand, saying nothing about the geographical origins of the birds (which actually are reared on multiple farms across the UK).

The 'quality turn' serves as a useful starting point for understanding recent developments in AAFNs. The growth of certain types of initiative has been concurrent with increasing public interest in foods that embody the qualities promoted through a discourse of naturalness. Traceability, for instance, is a key dimension of farmers' markets (Hinrichs, 2000) while fear of contaminants may stimulate the market for organic products (Murdoch and Miele, 1999). There has also been a backlash against foods harvested long before their peak ripeness to accommodate long-distance shipping, a distaste born from gustatory concerns as well as anxieties about 'food miles', a key concept in analysing the environmental sustainability of production-consumption networks (Blythman, 2004; Feagan, 2007).

A 'naturalness' achieved through organic methods or low-impact technologies is closely linked with popular conceptions of sustainability. Some scholars and activists, however, have called into question the casual application of that term. Maxey (2007: 60), for example, argues that sustainability is a social and political construction that depends largely on a binary dualism with 'unsustainabilty'. The appropriation of the term in policy discourses, he argues, assumes a knowable set of values or conditions worth promoting indefinitely. Rendered into 'scientific'

language based on quantifiable outcomes, such an understanding cedes authority to those with the power to control the meaning of sustainability. Jacob (1997: 12-13), who describes the back-to-the-land ideal as a 'search for sustainability', cites the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development's definition of sustainability as the most widely accepted, a sustainable society being one that 'meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.' By Maxey's reasoning, this definition could be viewed as problematic in that it does not challenge the logic of economic growth as a fundamental goal in itself, nor does it address the fact that consumption of resources is regionally differentiated, and subject to strong variances in scale. Thus a totalising, globalist view of 'top-down' sustainability competes with so-called grassroots efforts to 'reclaim' sustainability by activists and those who lead consciously low-impact lifestyles. In light of competing discourses over sustainability, Maxey (2007: 61) encourages a perspective that asks us to 'be clear about what it is we seek to sustain and why.'

As more and more structures have emerged to promote 'natural', 'sustainable' and 'fair' foods, scholars have increasingly turned their attention from challenging industrial food to a reflexive critique of so-called alternatives. The primary concern for most of these critics pivots on a question of access. The risk in creating niche markets for alternative foods, they argue, is exclusion. What may indicate fairness for producers, suggest Guthman et al. (2006), can in fact lead to an elite capture of the healthiest and freshest foods, thus creating a highly uneven terrain of food justice. Ethical underpinnings are often present in AAFNs, though the practical achievement of social justice through food networks has been among the most difficult of AAFN ambitions to confidently theorise and practically demonstrate (Trauger, 2007). The question of how the economic rewards of food production can be spread more equitably, while remaining bound to an inherently competitive system like capitalism, has elicited much skepticism. 'A major constraint to the development of alternative practices,' claims Brunori (2011: 2), 'is that the conventional practices, even when recognized as exploitative, unfair or environmentally degrading, are already tested systems… [which] minimize the risks of choice, or make choices easier by the actors.' Both Petrini (2007) and Tudge (2007), while deeply critical of neoliberal capitalism, cite a need for some kind of market to guarantee maximum quality at prices that sustain further production without comprising local ecologies through heavy exploitation. It is this position from which numerous experiments have been launched, though the results have not always been welcomed without criticism.

Organic produce offers a case in point. Goodman and Goodman (2007) and Guthman (2004; 2007) argue that the success of organic food has been achieved largely through appealing to those of a certain socio-economic status: health-conscious, sympathetic to some progressive values, generally well-off and city-based. This niche market has allowed growers to charge higher prices for organic produce, leading some critics (e.g. DuPuis and Goodman, 2005; Guthman, 2004; Johnston, 2007; Jackson et al., 2008) to argue that organic produce represents a consumption divide shaped by incomes, with pesticide-free produce being kept out of reach of many lower-income households. Johnston (2007) is openly scathing about some forms of organic distribution, claiming that 'Post-Fordist niche markets for organics and "natural" foods capitalize on the food anxieties and disposable income of highly privileged economic strata.' Though he remains open to the possibility of truly counter-hegemonic food networks, his argument forms part of a growing body of literature that challenges the orthodoxy of organic as an ethically superior choice. Market exclusion and health divides are not the only criticism to have hit organics. Labour, particularly in California, has recently become the focus of such critiques. In Guthman's (2007) analysis of the increasingly valuable organic salad businesses of California, she writes that growers have 'continued to rely on the "time-honoured" exploitation of racialised and marginalized immigrant workers...' Similarly, Getz et al. (2008) reveal a concerted campaign by organic lobbies in California to block a state law that would outlaw the use of 'stoop labour', or physically damaging farm practices that require labourers to remain stooped for long periods of time, day after day, when alternative methods are available. Referring to the attitudes of the organic lobby as 'agricultural exceptionalism', the authors echo a point made by DuPuis and Goodman (2005) that some participants in AAFNs may see themselves as beyond criticism.

The mainstream co-option of 'alternative' foods represents both an opportunity and a threat for organic farmers. On the one hand, greater demand provides expanded market opportunities and consumer awareness. The risk is that the ethos of environmental sustainability will be sacrificed to economic demands, as rapacious consumption overtakes a niche market and creates standardised, locally indistinct versions of organic foods that bear little relation to the specialist products characteristic of small-scale agriculture (a process known as 'conventionalisation': Guthman, 2004). The difference between organic and conventional is

eroded, generating a new struggle for recognition among self-styled alternative producers. Some networks, such as collective buying groups and farmers markets, can act as a buffer against this process, keeping alternative products within relatively alternative circuits of trade. These circuits, however, still depend on fairly conventional structures of exchange, where goods are traded for currency at a profit. Whether this is compatible with ecological sustainability remains an open debate. As with issues of fairness or justice, the tensions inherent in market exchange come to the fore in alternative agro-food networks in relation to sustainability as well.

A stratification in agricultural incomes through the organic / conventional divide raises the spectre of an economically polarised countryside, with power and capital concentrated amongst those who have configured their local environments to satisfy elite market demands. It also suggests a collapse of potential collective strength, where 'quality' and 'alternative' producers are clearly pursuing different priorities from conventional farms, and challenges the notion that it is with AAFNs that the potential for rural radicalism is greatest. As Mailfert's (2007) and Holloway's (2002) studies indicate, there can be a pronounced lack of solidarity between new alternative famers and their 'conventional' neighbours. These tensions arise not only from a sense of incompatible views on farming, but potentially from the resentment engendered by the added value of alternative produce. Citing van der Ploeg and Renting (2000: 533 in Guthman, 2004), Guthman notes that organic farming in Tuscany can generate up to 20% more income than conventional farming on a similar scale. Other European examples demonstrate that non-traditional farms, where participation in AAFNs as well as pluriactivity such as tourism is more likely, are statistically shown to generate more money than farms operating in an industrial agro-food paradigm (Guthman, 2004). If social justice is to be taken seriously as a goal of AAFNs, then it will be necessary for future research to investigate the extent to which material comfort is a driving force in encouraging farmers' involvement in AAFNs, and the potential impacts this has on rural geographies at local and broader levels.

Urban purchasing groups, such as community-supported agriculture (CSA) programmes, offer a strategy for mutually agreed, rather than coercive, pricing structures. Though local structures vary, a typical CSA project involves a group of people, generally in an urban or semi-urban

area, contracting a grower or group of growers to produce a season's food, which is collectively paid for in advance or instalments based on the growers' budget calculations. As Kerans and Kearney (2006: 158) write, this agreement 'gives farmers economic stability, working capital, and an assured, up-front market, and so they can concentrate on what the consumer wants – variety and nutritional quality.' Of course, CSAs depend on the existence of a market that can pay upfront, a fact that critics could see as excluding the economically disadvantaged (e.g. Getz et al., 2008). Kerans and Kearney (2006: 158) claim, however, that in a good harvest year customers will pay less than wholesale prices. What is needed are considerable quantities of time and resources to organise such a scheme, as well as enough community solidarity to make such a programme workable on a local level.

Kerans and Kearney (2006) and Johnston (2007) praise the success of Toronto's Good Food Box, run by the non-profit organisation Foodshare. An effort to distribute high-quality produce to the neediest households, the Good Food Box is a delivery scheme that reaches multiple economic strata. More than half of Foodshare's customers are considered low-income, but through the donations of charitable foundations and city subsidies, the organisation is able to supply fresh, local food to disadvantaged customers while also supporting local agriculture. Operational costs are kept low by using volunteer labour, often exchanged in return for discounts on the Good Food Boxes, or even free ones (Johnston, 2007). Consumer sovereignty is subordinated to collective empowerment in that subscribers have little influence over the contents of their boxes. Johnston (2007) argues that this is part of an understanding that while consumers have individual rights, 'they are also citizens with collective responsibilities – to the livelihoods of the farmers, to the health of the land, and to eating what is in season.' Such a model promotes what Slow Food has labelled the 'co-producer' system, in which multiple parties make a joint investment in the production and consumption of food, eroding the need for intermediaries. The approach of Foodshare, writes Johnston (2007), 'minimizes the anthropocentric tendency separating production from consumption, presents food producers as ecological stewards, and de-fetishes food as a commodity to be sought out as cheaply as possible by individual consumers.'

Returning to Brunori's (2011) point that the empowerment of alternatives is limited by their dependency on existing structures of trade and distribution, social justice and alternative food networks seem to be in something of a bind. Direct interfacing between producers and consumers is broadly considered a step in the right direction, but again, the systems, money and will to organise this effectively are likely to be concentrated far from the 'food deserts' of the urban poor, and indeed from small semi-rural towns whose food sovereignty has been largely decimated by corporate supermarkets (cf. Blythman, 2004). Although alternative structures like CSAs may technically be able to offer affordable produce, results from a study by Perez et al. (2003, cited in Goodman and Goodman, 2007: 35) show that CSA members in a five-county California region were nearly exclusively white, generally highly educated and relatively wealthy. Moreover, the focus on localism has potentially damaging impacts on the agricultural workers of the Global South, whose crops are being increasingly directed toward the export economy. To address some of this tension, DuPuis and Goodman (2005) offer a distinction between 'reflexive' and 'unreflexive' localisms. The former is constantly asking itself how it can become 'an effective social movement of resistance to globalism rather than a way for local elites to create protective territories for themselves', while the failure to disrupt polarised power dynamics is the dominant feature of unreflexive localisms. The authors argue that a lack of reflexivity can go so far as to enforce local inequalities and legitimate the politics of exclusion. Therefore, local case studies will always be a useful crucible for unpacking these problems without overstretching their significance into untenable generalisations. This what I have attempted with the case study organisations analysed in subsequent chapters of this thesis.

3.4. Conclusion

This brief chapter provides an overview of some key themes emerging in recent literature on alternative agro-food networks. A critical approach to AAFNs should ask how progressive alternatives can be enacted as a response to imbalances of power, while recognising that operating within the existing system of commodity production and provision can create exclusionary zones even within territories clearly marked by particular ethical signposts. AAFNs are currently negotiating their way through a system built to favour corporate, industrial dominance, while the exercise of alternatives is articulated from a hugely varied range of

positions, pitting homogenous standardisation against a multilingual, spatially diffuse, economically uneven set of actors. In the chapters that follow, I consider how actors in Italian AAFNs grapple with these conditions, exploring collective buying groups, farmers' markets, retail and other forms of enterprise. Unusually for a study on AAFNs, I also investigate the extent to which case study organisations can serve as networks of knowledge exchange and skill development (as opposed to focusing exclusively on their economic capacities), and how these processes fit within broader constructions of ethical production and consumption.

As I have stated, AAFNs should be regarded as part of a continuum in which back-to-the-land migration has played a significant role. The 'alternative infrastructure' described by Belasco (1989) has laid the groundwork for initiatives that have been benefited from the participation of back-to-the-landers. Additionally, new migrants to the countryside may in some cases rely on this infrastructure for skill development, social networking and economic sustenance. The extent to which this reciprocal relationship exists between back-to-the-landers and AAFNs in Italy is made particularly explicit in Chapters 7 and 8. The scope and shape of AAFNs, not to mention their political motivations, links new farmers to established and nascent alternative power configurations. Back-to-the-landers and AAFNs are not always co-dependent, yet their continued co-existence, especially in light of the alternative infrastructure as a proto-AAFN model, offers valuable research potential for unpacking the politicised biographies and subsistence strategies of the former, while exploring the tensions between ideals and economics in the latter. The result is a more complete understanding of both categories.

Whether influenced by the dream of cooperative agrarian utopias or successful second careers in high-value organic produce, new farmers are exceptionally well-placed to observe the stated principles of AAFNs in action. The motivations underlying their relocation to rural areas are likely to echo the proposed aims of AAFNs, and their practices and values provide an illuminating entry point into the social, economic and political spheres in which they operate. Back-to-the-landers' work practices and strategies for economic sustenance will consequently demonstrate the performance of AAFNs as both ethically-constructed systems of exchange and enablers to urban-to-rural migration. As Leyshon and Lee (2003: 4) write, the 'various oppositional movements and projects to "think and perform the economy otherwise" reveal a

keen attention to matters of space and place', and therefore have grounded and observable consequences in specific locations. Economic subsistence strategies are crucial to understanding migrants' motives and desires as a set of lived, spatially-bound practices, and AAFNs offer a valuable perspective on these strategies. Following Holloway's (2002) efforts to situate new farmers within an ethically configured set of spatial relations, rural space is presented here as a platform for producing defined outcomes of quality, sustainability and fairness. This chapter has sought to contextualise those concepts within contemporary academic debates and foreground some of the themes that have emerged through empirical investigation. Primarily, these concern food quality, social and economic justice and environmental sustainability. For a back-to-the-lander, and indeed other participants in AAFNs, these issues remain closely intertwined, with individual farms serving as experimental spaces where new ideas are conceived and existing networks strengthened.

4. Research design and methods

To study any kind of farming, a researcher must be attentive to the many factors that influence the basic end products of the activity. To use wheat as an example, some ingredients in the production of an industrial quantity might include chemical inputs, seed purchases, subsidies, distribution contracts, machinery and paid labour. The political and social institutions that attend to this form of production must be compatible with its scale. The form and activities of farmers' unions, university research labs, supplier corporations, distribution firms, lobbying groups and subsidy funds will reflect the broad geographical scope of the projects that come under their remit. For the researcher, this can generate massive quantities of data and may bias the research toward the macro level, directing analyses toward a regional, national or international scale. Moreover, generalisations based on the data are inevitable – and certainly useful in many contexts – given that it is technically impractical for in-depth investigations to take place at each of the many individual sites that collectively form a region. Using a more humanistic approach (Table 4.1), a researcher may instigate discovery through immersion in an environment, applying certain controls and enhancements but remaining vulnerable to circumstantial change. This again produces a distinct kind of output, one more attuned to routine and circularity, to the flux of relations both managed and 'natural', and to history, imagination, change and tradition. Generalisations, then, become more challenging to produce but are de-prioritised relative to subjective experience. Much of this chapter, and indeed the remainder of the thesis, makes a case for taking a slow, immersive approach when investigating agriculture that explicitly invokes the connections between land, body and spirit, such as espoused and practised by back-to-the-landers and alternative agro-food networks (AAFNs).

Table 4.1 – Types of information for studying the geography of agriculture

Maps
Aerial photographs and remote sensing
Agricultural census
Other statistical sources (government and agency publications)
Geographic information systems
Bibliographic sources
Humanistic sources (photographs and film, sound recordings and oral history, novels and diaries)
Fieldwork

Source: Clark (1992: 32)

In small-scale farming the methods of food production are distinctively *emplaced*, demanding that associated research must be compatibly emplaced as well. If the goal of the industrial food system is to outflank nature (Murdoch et al., 2000), and by extension deterritorialise production and consumption, then the alternative food systems developed to challenge this outcome can be viewed as efforts to reconnect food with place. In alternative agriculture there is nothing like the large quantity of secondary data generated by industrial farming, so investigating such projects involves locating and exploring the places in which they are enacted. While factors such as climate, topography, soil fertility and hydrological cycles affect agriculture at all scales, being *present* to interpret them on a sensorial level adds a dimension of empirical understanding that generalised, 'distant' data cannot provide. A persistent opponent of 'flat' or scientistic interpretations of landscape and environment, Ingold (2005: 506) suggests that humans 'are generally concerned to protect themselves, their homes, their fields and gardens, their animals and their land. They do so in order to create a sphere in which they can dwell in relative peace and prosperity. We could call such a sphere a place, meaning by that not a bounded portion of territory but a nexus of ongoing life activity.' To

provide richer accounts of that sphere than are arguably offer by quantitative methods it is necessary to become a part of the putative nexus.

Patience, the production of knowledge and the interdependency of socio-spatial relations are recurring, perhaps dominant themes in the following chapters. To locate and interpret these variables, techniques are required which fully invite them in to the inquiry as constitutive elements of lived experience. As Ingold (2000: 81) remarks, 'those who toil on the land… are assisting in the reproduction of nature, and derivatively of their own kind.' Likewise the geographer who formulates conclusions from the perceived interface between soil and society, matter and meaning. However materially embedded, representations remain precisely that – subjectively mediated depictions fashioned to communicate ideas. These representations are the product of the researcher's labour and the environment that shaped it. The act of production – whether of food or empirical data – requires that certain expectations are met since the ultimate end for each product is a form of consumption, and the producer configures a product with the end user in mind. In researching agriculture, then, the academic's production necessarily mirrors the farmer's, with nuances of scale and rhythm reflected in the results.

To this end, the research techniques I have used for this project are primarily qualitative, with the majority of the empirical data obtained through participant observation and in-depth interviews. Most of the ethnographic work was performed on the farms of back-to-the-landers, where I volunteered through the Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF) network. Other observations were obtained through participation in various independent events, detailed in section 4.5. Access to these sites and events was achieved mostly through the WWOOF host farm directory, an automatic benefit of membership in the organisation. Some contacts were established through a questionnaire sent to WWOOF hosts, another method that sought to profile back-to-the-landers in Italy and which supplements the qualitative methods with some quantitative data.

4.1. Site selection and context

The area of focus for this research is generally described as Northern Italy[1], though the fieldwork was limited to four major regions within the geographical north: Tuscany, Umbria, Emilia-Romagna and Piedmont. This section explains why these regions are of particular relevance to this study, accounting for particular socio-economic conditions and historico-cultural legacies.

Figure 4.1 – Map of Northern Italy

Source: School of Geographical and Earth Sciences, University of Glasgow

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[1] My choice to capitalise 'Northern' follows a popular convention, though it should be noted that there is some contestation over what truly constitutes the putative North and South of the country. For purposes here, the North would delineated by a horizontal border drawn directly beneath Rome.

As the northern suburbs of Rome dissipate into the hilly and fertile Lazio region, one enters the more temperate, wealthier and more industrially developed half of Italy, or what is commonly referred to as the cultural and economic North. Cities built on ancient Etrsucan and Roman settlements are the country's economic motor and traditional migration destinations. Milan, Turin, Florence, Venice, Bologna, Parma, Genoa, Pisa, Modena and Perugia form a well-connected and mutually supportive constellation of industry, tourism, art, education and gastronomy. South of Rome, the picture changes dramatically. According to 2007 EuroStat figures, GDP per inhabitant south of Lazio was considerably below the EU average, ranging from 65% of the average in Campania to 78% in Molise. By contrast, every northern region except Umbria (97%) exceeded the EU average, with the highest incomes concentrated in Lombardy (134%). (Eurostat, 2007; Ginsborg, 2003). Although it is reasonable to assume that some back-to-the-land migration has taken place in the South (especially given the low property prices), I had a strong rationale, outlined below, for limiting research to the North.

Following Brunori (2006), the wealthier Northern regions of Italy are ideal locations for studying alternative food networks on account of their sharing the following characteristics: 1) a strong market economy with well-developed institutional networks; 2) relatively affluent residents who can exercise a considerable degree of choice in consumption habits; 3) a high potential for integration and connection with broader networks; 4) a prevalence of post-productivist contexts, where rural space is being regularly reimagined and put to new uses. The four regions selected were chosen on the basis that they best represent both back-to-the-land migration and alternative agro-food initiatives. Tuscany, Emilia-Romagna, Umbria and Piedmont are, for example, the regions most heavily represented in the WWOOF Italia host farm directory (Figures 4.2 and 4.3). WWOOF, discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 5, is a non-profit organisation which links organic 'host' farms with volunteers who perform agricultural work in exchange for food and accommodation. Volunteer members and host farms each pay €25 to join the network, resulting in host farms being listed in a directory that volunteers use to select their work destinations (Appendix IV).

There are other reasons, furthermore, for identifying these regions as particularly significant to this project. Tuscany, for example, has long been the destination of choice for rural in-migrants whether they desire a summer home, retirement villa, weekend retreat or fully engaged life on the farm. Different nationalities have come to Tuscany in staggered waves, with Germans and Swiss arriving in droves in the 1970s and 80s, while the late 80s and 90s saw an influx of English, Dutch and American immigrants.

Figure 4.2 – WWOOF Host Farms by Region, 2011
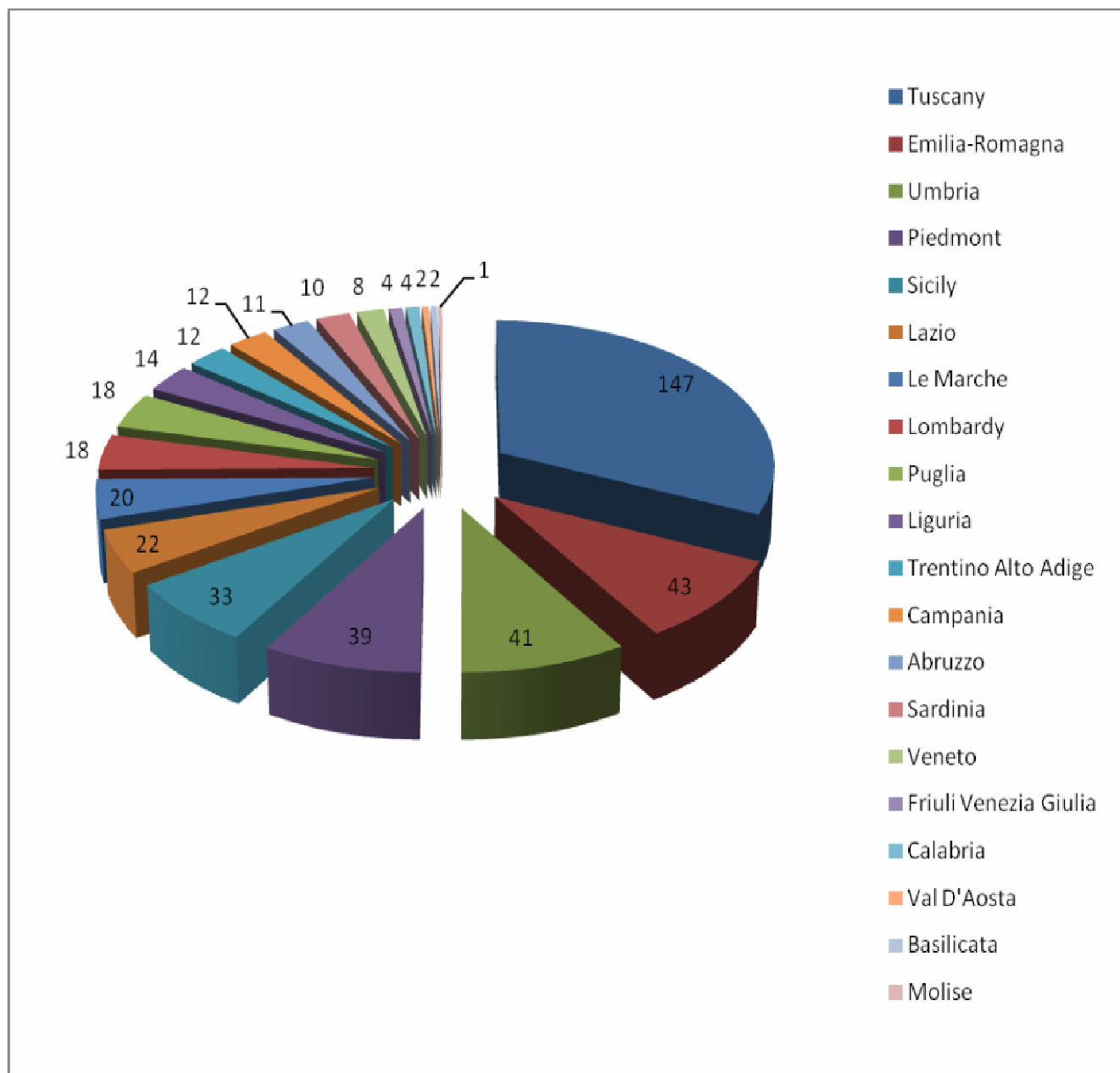
Source: WWOOF Italia

This period, too, witnessed the arrival of many Italians, a development that heralded a significant shift in the national perception of rural areas as somewhere that people escape *from*. An area with deep-rooted gastronomic traditions and many locally unique foods, Tuscany also has the greatest number of farms registered with WWOOF Italia, comprising 32% of its total host farm membership. Neighbouring Umbria, the only landlocked region in central Italy, boasts many of the same landscape and agricultural attributes of Tuscany but property typically comes with a lower price tag. It is also popular with Italian back-to-the-landers, as well as significant German, Swiss and British contingents. Emilia-Romagna, a large region spanning almost the entire width of the peninsula at one point, is the centre of Italy's food industry. With its closely linked cities of Bologna, Parma and Modena, Emilia-Romagna occupies a contradictory position in boasting some of Italy's most coveted gourmet specialties as well as its most mechanized food production systems. Large-scale monocultures in the Po Valley serve the region's industrial processors, while radical alternatives flourish in the hills, reflecting the area's traditionally socialist political heritage. Piedmont is home to the Slow Food movement and the source of its inspiration. The River Po gushes from the high alpine peaks that border northwestern Piedmont, flowing through Turin and the fertile floor of the Po Valley. Like Emilia-Romagna, it is a boundary of cultural and topographical contrasts, where artisanal production is highly valued and gastronomic standards are considered world-class, and yet the landscape is dominated by heavy industry and uniform fields of monoculture. Together these four regions contain 59% of all farms on the WWOOF directory, a fact that suggested significant potential in finding suitable research participants in all of them (Figure 4.3).

4.1.1. Northern Italy as case study: a socio-economic framework

As a case study, Northern Italy offers significant opportunities to situate back-to-the-land migration within a unique and revealing socio-economic context, its most definitive features being integrated urban / rural market structures, flexible and mobile labour, and artisanal, small-scale production. Northern Italy also reveals the challenges in making a solid case for counterurbanisation as a defined and demonstrable phenomenon, its key features also alluding to the country's arguably anomalous status in post-war European industrial development. Kontuly's (1998) review study of counterurbanisation in Europe shows how different explanatory factors were used in the analysis of 18 European countries in the

counterurbanisation literature. Regarding Italy, some authors (e.g. Dematteis, 1986; Dematteis and Petsimeris, 1989) assign multiple factors as the cause for population deconcentration while Keeble et al. (1983) and Kontuly and Bierens (1990) rely on more singularly focused explanations. For example, Keeble et al. (1983) relate structural economic factors, particularly the decline in secondary employment and growth of the tertiary sector, to accelerating migration out of Italy's industrial regions. In a later paper, Kontuly and Bieren (1990) view Italian rural repopulation as indicative of cyclical shifts, with 'return migration' [to rural areas] reflecting the recessionary economics of the 1970s and diminished promise of urban fortunes. Dematteis and Petsimeris (1989) also relate structural factors such as industrial deconcentration, service infrastructure and government planning policies to the declines in population in areas such as Piedmont and Le Marche in the 1970s and 1980s, claiming that counterurbanisation 'depends at least in part on the spatial redistribution of industrial employment.' The authors also refer to the economic performance of the 'Third Italy' as a partial explanation for population growth in the semi-rural north of the country, a consideration that challenges the conventional urban/rural binary upon which many counterurbanisation studies are based.

The Third Italy refers to an idea proposed by Bagnasco (1977, in Hadjimichalis, 2006) at around the same time that counterurbanisation was entering the geographical lexicon. The designation represents a semi-distinct geographical space (the north-east and centre, proximate to but distinct from the 'Industrial Triangle' of Milan, Turin and Genoa), but more often an idealised economic region characterised by small-scale specialist industries which complement neighbouring industrial centres. The first 25 years following the Second World War represent Italy's 'Economic Miracle', and follow what Agnew (1996) describes as a modernist narrative that celebrates the growth of urban industry and the service sector at the expense of the 'backward' or rural agrarian economy. Such a view relies on a series of dualisms (urban/rural, developed/backward, progressive/reactionary, rational/superstitious) that embrace a kind of historical materialism suggesting a natural growth into modernity. The Third Italy concept mounts an alternative to such a totalising expectation.

Figure 4.3 – Map of WWOOF farms by region, 2011
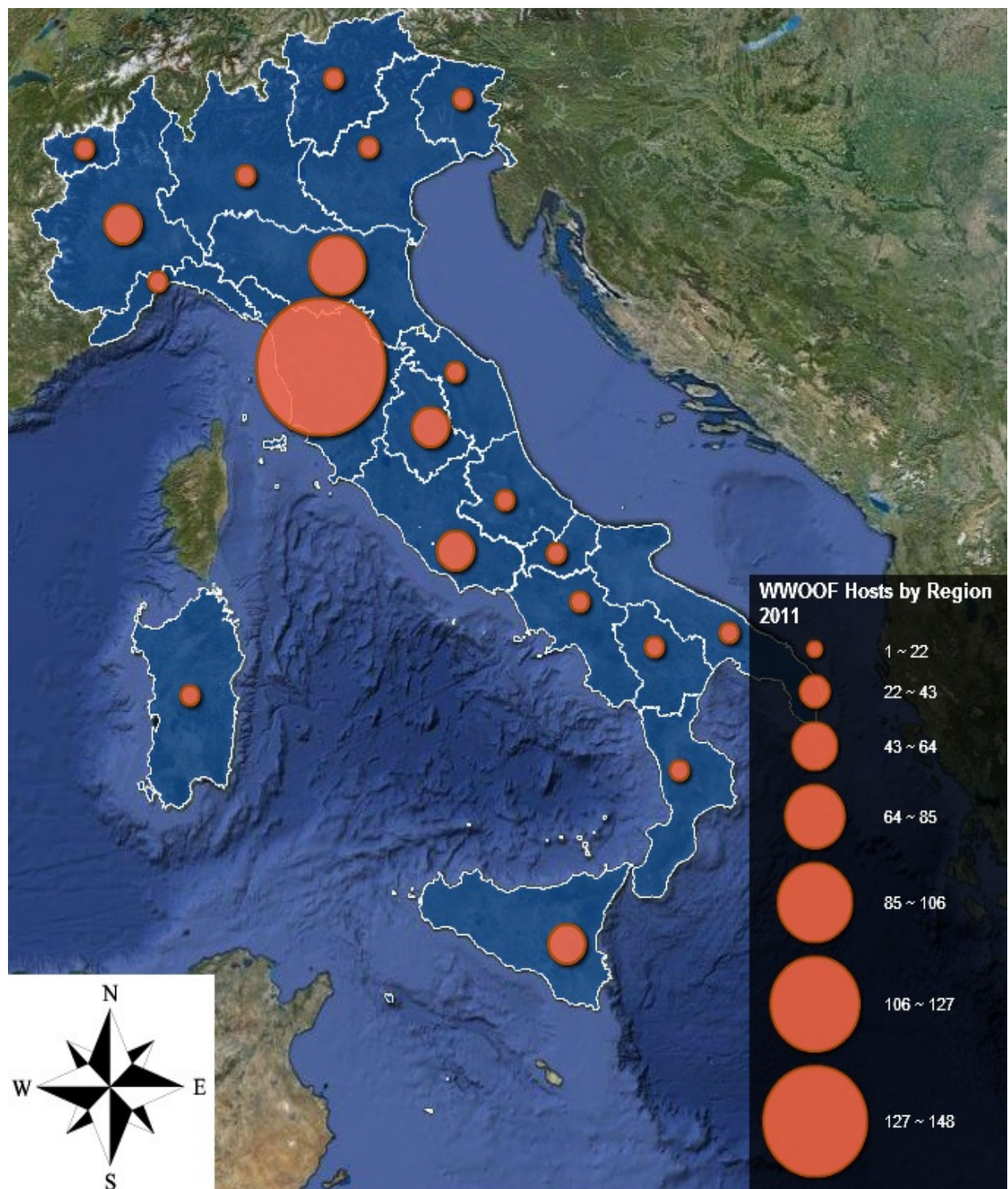
Source: WWOOF Italia

The uniqueness of the Italian 'diffused industrialisation' model, according to certain theorisations (e.g. Bull and Corner, 1993; Dematteis and Petsimeris, 1989), lies in its leveraging of the multifunctional or 'pluriactive' family economy for greater regional productivity. The Third Italy is neither conventionally industrialised nor traditionally rural; rather, it comprises a heterogeneous mix of highly specialised, regionally distinct production clusters that work in the service of both Fordist manufacturing and large consumption markets for regional output. Agnew et al. (2006: 85) describe the widely accepted view of the Third Italy's rise to prominence, as both economic region and analytical concept, as emphasising '[l]ower labour costs, endogenous capital investment, local external economies and the adaptation of craft working traditions'. Firms of the Third Italy tend to employ less than 50 people and provide skilled added-value modifications to products such as leather goods, food processing, clothing, ceramics, textiles and footwear (Ginsborg, 1990; Bull and Corner, 1993). In many cases firms are even smaller and based on extended family networks, accounting for much of the flexibility attributed to the model. The archetypal Third Italy firm, in its diminutive, family-centred structure, is decentralised and unfettered by high capital outlay and managerial challenges, and thus adaptable to changing market demands and technology.

Widely regarded as a successful model, this is a romanticised view of economic conditions in north-central Italy, argues Hadjimichalis (2006), and one that has been brought into the service of various neoliberal rationalisations. An idealised Third Italy emphasises a muted role of the state, flexible (e.g. informal and unorganised) labour and the creativity of small firms, while ignoring large companies' outsourcing of labour to low-cost countries, the financial muscle of large firms in dictating trade terms and the long, informal working hours imposed on 'artisan' craft industries. Ginsborg (1990: 235) also notes that taxation of the small family firms has been 'casually enforced' while regulations applicable to Italian industry can be safely ignored by Third Italy producers. While a critical view of the Third Italy exposes the conditions that challenge an idealised artisan utopia, the socio-economic structure of the region is nonetheless defined by certain patterns that at the very least confuse the modernist urban/rural and industrial/agricultural binaries, and reveal an 'urbanised countryside' infrastructure conducive to a hybrid urban-rural existence (Ginsborg, 1990: 234). Citing research by Saraceno (1994), Parkins and Craig (2006: 84) argue that the 'rural/urban dichotomy is inadequate to account for the spatial logics of Italy' and instead propose 'a diversified countryside working in conjunction with urban centres of varying sizes within contexts of regionality.' This proposition

supports my earlier suggestion of a non-essentialist reading of rural space in Italy, where back-to-the-landers can be regarded as 'cosmopolitan farmers', working within complementary contexts of tradition and modernity.

Bull and Corner's (1993) history of the 'peasant-worker' economy in Lombardy describes the growth of rural entrepreneurialism in Northern Italy as partly an adaptive response to land reforms which dismantled the feudal system of peasant sharecropping, vestiges of which remained until the end of World War II. Gradually granted more and more autonomy, peasants who had previously produced cash crops for a landlord and subsistence crops for their families were often liberated from the feudal system with a very small parcel of land. Fields that had been collectively worked were now subdivided into parcels so small that subsistence farming was impossible, while cash crop production was unfeasible due to the small quantities such holdings could generate. The growth of industry in the North occurred concurrently with the erosion of aristocratic control, and rural depopulation began to reflect the poverty of the countryside relative to economic growth in the cities of Lombardy, Piedmont and Liguria. The 1950s and 60s saw a significant decline in the percentage of population employed in agriculture, particularly in the north-east (especially the Veneto) where the percentage of rural workers dropped from 47.8 to 26.1 per cent between 1951-64 (Ginsborg, 1990: 219). Between 1955-71, claims Ginsborg, nearly 10 million Italians undertook some form of inter-regional migration.

Although the statistics are stark, showing a pronounced urbanisation trend before the mid-1970s, the Third Italy's hybrid geography shows a less clear-cut evolution than the modernist interpretation would suggest. With the growth of industry in northern cities and towns, rural families caught between strained subsistence and a low turnover on crops were able to take advantage of wage labour opportunities in neighbouring regions. The tradition of large families in rural areas provided households with multiple resource bases, with young members and women often sent to work in the textile factories while the patriarch and older sons would manage the land at home. The 'peasant-worker' economy provided a double safeguard for families: if wages were suddenly lost, the family could supplement necessities purchased at the market with homegrown food; after a bad harvest or appearance of another mouth to feed,

waged labour could compensate for any losses to the food store (Bull and Corner, 1993). This strategy of adaptation emphasised a minimisation of spending, rather than a maximisation of income, which can in large part describe the semi-subsistence ethic of modern back-to-the-land migration (Jacob, 1997, Brunori et al., 2011).

Families that became pluriactive were also likely to become entrepreneurial, a development with highly visible legacies in contemporary back-to-the-land. Often, Bull and Corner (1993) claim, rural workers were able to capitalise on existing household skills to generate income, setting themselves up as meat curers, shoe repairers, hairdressers, sausage-makers, tailors and food retailers. Resembling certain models of protoindustrialisation, Bull and Corner argue that the artisanal cottage industries of Northern Italy did not develop into full-scale industrialization, but that urban industrial centres and peripheral specialist production clusters complemented each other. Although all regions of Italy experienced rural depopulation after 1945, the survival of the family economy is reasoned to be the factor that kept many rural entrepreneurs in northern regions on their land. Market forces may have relegated agricultural production to an insubstantial income source, yet the 'urbanised countryside' in parts of Lombardy, Tuscany and Emilia-Romagna allowed the peasant-worker class to remain rural without becoming fully proletarianised: a factor with significant implications for the region's political as well as economic identities.

Politics in Emilia-Romagna, for example, have long emphasised collectivism, and the rhetoric of worker revolution has been a staple of discourse in the region's cities, particularly 'Red Bologna'. As a constituent region of the Third Italy, however, its functional performance is more complex than its popular profile. Local governments have been celebrated for facilitating experimentalism in the small-business and agricultural sectors, resulting in an internationally competitive regional economy with high levels of union membership, above-average wages, low commercial rents, widespread access to credit, inter-firm dependence and significant quantities of produce distributed through farmers' cooperatives (Fitch, 1996). The Lombardese of Bull and Corner's (1993) history generally belong to a populist Catholic tradition, less collectivist than the Emilian left but largely distrustful of the pre-war Fascist corporatism and post-war clientelism that have challenged local civic democracies and interdependent

economies (cf. Jones, 2004; Ginsborg, 2006). Agnew's (1996) critique of the 'myth of "backward" Italy' holds that the socialist and 'catholic-popular' traditions have maintained weak attachments to national political solidarity, situating struggles predominantly on the transnational and local scales. This economic and political context challenges the social construction of a 'modern' state, unified and industrialised, with the politically tame agricultural periphery in direct service of urban cores.

Although an uncritical celebration of the Third Italy runs the risk of legitimising some of the economic inequalities that authors such as Hajimichalis (2006) accuse it of concealing, it is nonetheless a valuable concept in reflecting on the challenges of identifying an easily-defined 'rural' in certain parts of Northern Italy. This poses a problem for counterurbanisation studies based on quantitative methodologies, but also hints at a potentially unique context in which ex-urban migration can occur. Such a context would contain resonances of Belasco's (1989) 'alternative infrastructure' that enabled back-to-the-land experiments in 1960s and 70s North America to succeed, at least to the degree that knowledge exchange networks were developed and markets existed for produce and crafts. A direct comparison between the alternative infrastructure and the Third Italy may be too great a stretch, but it raises interesting questions about enablers to counterurbanisation with an agrarian focus: Does an established economic network for artisanal goods and locally embedded craft enable new migrants to capitalise on such traditions? In the case of migrants with an expressed ethical justification for their adopted rural lifestyle or farming practices, how are the outcomes of their enterprises affected by prevailing local political cultures? Are the cooperative traditions of Emilia-Romagna, for example, more favourable than Lombardy, with its right-centrist political identity and considerable disparities in wealth? What research methods could best be employed to answer these questions?

4.1.2. Accessing case study farms

My membership of WWOOF Italia provided a felicitous alignment of methodological priorities and practical considerations. The Italian host directory provides access to an extensive and intriguing list of alternative agriculture projects. In Piedmont alone, the hosts seeking volunteers include traditional smallholdings, wineries, spiritual retreats, cooperatives with

several resident families, animal rehabilitation projects and producers of natural cosmetics. All involve some form of organic cultivation, and outline their projects in a one-paragraph summary (Appendix IV). My status as a WWOOF volunteer was an automatic guarantee of access to hundreds of potential participants, all of whom, by the very nature of their membership of WWOOF, actively seek the assistance of volunteer workers. They therefore expect to be contacted by WWOOFers seeking places to work and stay, something that I was able to offer in conjunction with my research agenda. In all cases I gave assurances that my intention was to work as any other volunteer without letting my researcher status conflict with my duties on the farms. Research participants were given a project briefing sheet to keep, and all interviewees signed consent forms and indicated whether they wished to remain anonymous.

In the WWOOF farm directory, the 'back-to-the-land' status of listed farms is usually more implicit than declarative. Often these entries, examples of which are given in Appendix IV, offer a biographical sketch of a farm's inhabitants, making the selection of potential research participants effectively a process of elimination based on the recurrence of certain key themes. Many WWOOF hosts mention how long they have spent at their present properties and give some insight into their motivations for undertaking organic agriculture. Following these leads, I contacted WWOOF hosts who by these criteria most seemed to fit the back-to-the-land label, though it often took e-mail and phone conversations to confirm their appropriateness for the research. The 'back-to-the-land' distinction was thus applied by me, rather than something that was announced by the WWOOF hosts in question. I did this with some apprehension, noting Escribano's (2007: 40) anxiety that 'purifying' counterurbanisers into distinct categories (e.g. lifestyle migrants, back-to-the-landers, retirees) presupposes certain outcomes, thus eliding the 'diversity of nuances, significances and experiences that may be hidden under the generic term of *counterurbanisation* or *urban-to-rural migration* (emphasis in original).' Escribano recommends an 'inverse' approach, in which categories are developed through the research subjects' own discourse, after interviews have been conducted and resulting themes developed. Admittedly, this strategy could be productively applied to a broad cross-section of rural newcomers but is arguably less useful when investigating a particular subset of migrants whose identity, as far as research is concerned, depends on action or intent that needs to be determined from the first phase of the research process. Therefore, making inferences about back-to-the-land status through the WWOOF host directory, and then confirming (or rejecting) that assumption proved the most reliable means of assessing the suitability of a farm for

research participation. Finally, a further filtering process was embedded into an online questionnaire of WWOOF hosts (Section 4.2.1), in which I specifically asked respondents to state the amount of time that they had resided on their current farms.

4.1.3. A note on intentional communities

My scope for this research has been limited to back-to-the-land *households*, which for purposes here can be characterised as the primary dwelling units of individuals, partners or families. I have purposefully excluded intentional communities, or farms where multiple dwelling units combine to form a collective agricultural project. The subject of intentional communities emerges periodically in subsequent chapters, as it is difficult to divorce back-to-the-land from such projects (cf. Belasco, 1989; McKay, 2011). It is my feeling, however, that intentional communities are a broad enough subject in their own right to warrant separate investigation. They can be linked to spiritual convictions, political movements or gender separatism. Others are less restrictive with regard to membership, but still maintain their own complex internal politics. Negotiating access to, and building the trust of, such communities would have required a far more complicated process than that which I followed for individual households via the WWOOF list. On reflection it seems that for a project of this size and scope, a researcher must choose one cohort or the other: individual households or back-to-the-land communes. Combining the two would result in data that was variegated to the point of incoherency, and mount considerable methodological challenges. I acknowledge, however, that eliminating intentional communities from this study means that I am only able to tell a partial back-to-the-land story. That said, the story of agrarian communes has been told perhaps more often than that of the individual initiatives that followed the collective living experiments of the 1960s and 70s.

My exclusion of back-to-the-land communities in Northern Italy is in some respects regrettable as they would no doubt provide a rich seam of information on some of the key themes of the following chapters, namely motives, skill development and economic sustenance. Their

absence here, however, hopefully creates more space for elements of the back-to-the-land experience that have received comparatively scant attention in previous studies.

4.2. Overview data: The WWOOF questionnaires

Online questionnaires were distributed to WWOOF hosts and volunteers in an effort to obtain a general profile of both groups and so that back-to-the-landers and aspiring farmers could be identified for further analysis and future contact. This exercise was particularly useful for gathering preliminary data about potential research participants, as well as identifying some themes in the biographical sketches of WWOOF hosts and some attitudinal issues worth exploring in depth. Although the questionnaires were intended simply to provide supplementary data to immersive ethnographic fieldwork, they proved a valuable tool for obtaining a profile of host farms and gaining access to willing research participants.

Some considerable negotiation was necessary to establish the value of my research to the WWOOF organisation itself, and the questionnaires have been modelled on some principles of the 'participatory' approach, defined by Kesby et al. (2005: 144) as '...working *with* rather than *on* people; about generating data and working in ways that increase participants' ability to bring about positive change in their own lives.' In this respect I have endeavoured to offer participating institutional actors, such as WWOOF and Slow Food, access to anonymised research findings and assistance using in those findings to further their own interests, which I view as supportive of alternative agriculture. However, a major objective of this research is to assess *how* these organisations' relationships with new farmers can be mutually beneficial, meaning that the benefits of participation in the research were not always clear from the beginning. To this end, all participating organisations have been provided with a summary report on the research, tailored to specific themes that link their interests with empirical findings.

4.2.1. The WWOOF farmer questionnaire

A questionnaire design that was mutually beneficial to my research and the WWOOF organisation took several attempts, particularly in the case of the questionnaire for farmers. Its early drafts offered little information of value to the organisation, at least according to the WWOOF President. Accordingly the questionnaire was revised through several drafts, with input coming from the WWOOF President, myself, a relative raised in rural Italy and an Italian colleague in the School of Geographical and Earth Sciences at the University of Glasgow. A final edition of the questionnaire, intended to provide a general sketch of backgrounds and attitudes of farmers participating in the WWOOF scheme, was posted online (at www.surveymonkey.com) in January, 2010 in both Italian and English versions. I composed an introduction to the survey, again in both languages, and the President distributed the introduction and links to the questionnaire via the WWOOF host e-mail list, to which he retained exclusive access.

The final edition of the survey (Appendices I and II) is brief and simple, and was designed to solicit general overview data about the experiences, activities and outlooks of host farms. Furthermore, contacts for ethnographic research could be collected through an option that asked respondents whether they would invite further involvement with the project. I analysed the responses of willing participants to determine their appropriateness for this research project on criteria primarily related to their location (North v. South and general accessibility) and backgrounds (urban v. rural).

The WWOOF farmer questionnaire was distributed to 450 farms in both Italian and English versions and received 54 completed responses, a 12% response rate. The WWOOF officials and I expected a fairly low response rate on account of farmers' often limited access to high-speed internet connections and antipathy for form-filling, a consequence of the excessive bureaucracy frequently remarked upon by farmers. Although a higher response rate would have been desirable, the results have nonetheless been useful, particularly for making further connections based on the responses. Of the survey participants, 93% invited further contact for

research purposes and several wrote to me directly to share their stories and invite me to their farms. [2] I performed quantitative analysis of the data, relating mostly to demographic, biographical and attitudinal themes, the results of which are spread throughout subsequent chapters and compiled in Appendices I and II. These results have been shared with the WWOOF Italia officials, and are intended as an impression of contemporary economic practices, levels of involvement in WWOOF, other network affiliations and attitudes to organic farming in Italy.

4.2.2. The WWOOF volunteer questionnaire

After casual discussions and semi-structured interviews with the WWOOF Coordinator and President in August, we jointly embarked on the creation of a second questionnaire, in this case for WWOOF volunteers. It was hoped that the survey would offer the most comprehensive overview yet of WWOOFers' experience of farming (before and as a result of WWOOF membership), their geographical backgrounds, satisfaction with WWOOF as an organisation and the place of agriculture in their outlook for the future. The questionnaire was launched at the end of August, 2010 through the WWOOF Coordinator, who sent the appropriate web link to 2391 volunteer members. Despite a reminder e-mail being sent in late September, the responses never exceeded 91 forms, accounting for a very low response rate of 4%. This rate was both surprising and disappointing. The most likely explanations for the muted response reside in the fact that WWOOFers are by definition mobile, with internet access restricted by their frequent migration between farms. Furthermore, there is a strong possibility that members of the organisation who had finished their period of volunteering, or had yet to begin, were less likely to respond than members collaborating with host farms at the time the questionnaire was distributed. Those who are not currently participating in WWOOF have less reason to check the regular e-mail updates that come from the organisation, and would thus have been prone to missing the questionnaire link. This suggests an unfortunate double bind, with past and future as well as current WWOOFers disinclined or unable to respond for differing but valid reasons. Results of the questionnaire are again embedded throughout the text, but

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[2]   This high percentage of interested respondents suggests a likely bias in the data. There is a strong possibility that those who completed the questionnaire were particularly inclined to respond to a call for participation in back-to-the-land research because it spoke to their own experiences. Given this fact, coupled with the low response rate, the questionnaire respondents are not generally regarded as a representative sample of WWOOF hosts as a whole; rather, this data is used selectively throughout the study to support or challenge observations that have arisen through predominantly qualitative methods.

given the weak reliability of the data, little emphasis is placed upon them. The resultant data, then, should be regarded not as a comprehensive overview of the WWOOF experience but as suggestive of certain themes that may stimulate further analysis.

Despite the limited success of the questionnaire in comprehensively providing this information, the online questionnaire is still considered by all parties to be the most logistically practical method of communicating this data between WWOOF and its volunteer members. WWOOF Italia officials were disappointed by the poor response but agree that the online questionnaire method offers the most direct means of obtaining this kind of information.

4.3. Action, participation, observation

My strategy for getting beyond some of the 'surface data' like that provided by the questionnaire literally involved heading as deeply 'into the field' as was possible. To take the kind of humanistic approach argued for in the introduction to this chapter, one that is attuned to the specific nuances of locality and regional distinction, I developed a participant observation design through the selection of willing farms in the WWOOF host directory. By taking up a position as a volunteer worker I was able to employ ethnographic methods ideal for understanding the quotidian practices that constitute back-to-the-land lifestyles. However, the classic ethnographic methodology of negotiating access to and dwelling in a particular *community* was not easily applicable in this context, given that locations were disparate and the question of back-to-the-landers as a strong or weak social category is one that guides this research. Since the existence of a back-to-the-land 'community' was indeed a question in itself, the most practical and methodologically advantageous tactic was to spend time working with individual back-to-the-land farmers, interpreting their lived environments through field journals, conversations and interviews. As I have stated, because farms on the WWOOF directory actively seek contact from potential volunteers, obtaining cooperation from host farms was unproblematic. Beginning in February 2010, I worked at 9 farms for a total of 10 weeks (Table 4.3), with all of the four regions represented by at least one farm. My intention was to cast myself in the role of a would-be back-to-the-lander, somebody seeking to enter

agriculture but with no practical training. One key focus in this research concerns how the skills required to become a farmer are developed and transmitted, so I used myself as a test subject to observe the process in action. Having spent half my life in the California suburbs and the other half in various urban areas, *practical* farming knowledge is something of which I had been previously ignorant. I had an interest in food and agriculture but could only indulge it as a consumer and occasional cultivator of window-box herbs.

Figure 4.4 – Locations of case study farms (Participant observation)

In my confessed ignorance of the day-to-day methods of running a farm, my approach was to learn by doing rather than discussing (or, more fully, to use discussion to complement what I was discovering through practice). This approach borrows more from ethnomethodology than traditional ethnography, where a veneer of scientific distance - however artificial - separates the observer from the observed. In ethnomethodology, encounters with 'practical sociological

reasoning' are used to explain the world without imposing totalising theories. As Garfinkel (1967: vii-viii) writes, ethnomethodology is 'directed to the tasks of learning how members' actual, ordinary activities consist of methods to make practical actions, practical circumstances, common sense knowledge of social structures, and practical sociological reasoning analyzeable; and of discovering the formal properties of commonplace, practical common sense actions, "from within" actual settings, as ongoing accomplishments of those settings.' By this reckoning, 'alternative' farming is something *made* through materials, decisions and social contact. Ethnomethodology sees the conceptual as produced through the mundane, and there is much mundane work to be done as a WWOOF volunteer. Favouring the quotidian over the rarified and abstract, ethnomethodological studies draw on a rich collection of empirical observations to critique and establish the credibility of claims as to how livelihoods and environments are experienced (cf. Laurier and Philo, 2004). A few of my field journal extracts indicate how more generalised observations and inquiries have been developed through mundane activities:

After lunch I helped Elisa cut wild lettuce from a field across the street from their house. There are chives and other cultivated plants growing there but a lot of the space is fallow. The wild lettuce and other herbs are sold every Friday at a market in Bologna… I was pretty surprised that this wild lettuce would sell. For one thing, it's a bit spiny, but it's also the kind of plant which is in total abundance in a field like that. I respect that Romano and Elisa have the knowledge and drive to sell such a plant, but I'd feel a bit silly buying it if I knew how easy it was to acquire, and that it wasn't even cultivated. I think this shows less a disconnection from farming, since they seem to have regular and supportive customers, than a general disconnection from natural food resources.

(May, Emilia-Romagna)

The donkey was hurt after sliding down a muddy hill and we helped bring her up to another stable in the village. Quite interesting to see how integrated Walter's project and agricultural activities are into the life of the village, as nobody really batted an eye when a donkey appeared tied up to a tethering ring on someone's summer house.

(February, Tuscany)

Got up to start work at 8 and begin prepping a planting bed where Karen plans to put onions and basil. These are companion planted because the snails and slugs, apparently a big problem on her property, are attracted to basil but steer clear of onions. The glut of onions that she'll eventually produce is really more a result of local ecology than necessity. The damp soil and stone walls that surround the property are a haven for the pests, while onions and garlic are a positive solution. As a result of having to plant so many onions, Karen thinks that she'll have enough to sell this year, whereas they'd previously just been used by the family. She explained a lot about the way she'd made the garden profitable, even if that profit hasn't always been strictly monetary. She barters herbs and vegetables with local restaurants, exchanging the produce for food. She says that this is fairly common, and it sketches a little of the shadow economy in which a considerable proportion of small-scale Italian agriculture operates. A restaurant near the house, for example, apparently barters with hunters for wild boar, exchanging no money but also releasing both parties from quality-control restrictions. In Spello, where trust in local produce is strong, this works. Elsewhere it could be considered suspect, even unethical.

(April, Umbria)

WWOOF volunteers are typically assigned a farm's simplest and least risky work, a consequence of their inexperience as well as a strategy for allowing the resident farmers to tackle more skilled, complex or dangerous jobs. This changes, of course, when volunteers come equipped with special skills or reside at a farm long enough to develop a more advanced knowledge of the farm's operations. As my average length of stay was between one and two weeks, the jobs I was given on the farms were fairly restricted. Typical duties that I performed include feeding animals, weeding plant beds, digging trenches, seeding, transplanting and harvesting salads and herbs. Less routine tasks included olive harvesting and pruning, livestock slaughter and assisting at a farmers' market. Sometimes I worked alone and on other occasions I worked alongside other WWOOFers or the WWOOF hosts. A degree of independence and comfort in solitude is a value appreciated by hosts, as they often need to leave WWOOFers unattended. Most farms ask WWOOFers to work from early morning until lunchtime, and possibly for a few hours in the afternoon.

The routine and repetitive nature of the jobs I was assigned proved to be a source of both enlightenment and frustration. The work asked of WWOOFers is almost always essential but tends to be unchallenging and labour-intensive. In Chapter 6 I discuss in detail the rhythms of organic agriculture and their wider resonance, particularly in relation to the work ethic. Here

it is important to note that the simplest of jobs (such as feeding the animals) were among the most vital to a farm's functioning. However, the repetition of the work and its consistency across several sites meant that the range of manual skills that I was able to develop was limited. As an apprentice farmer I would have fared poorly. Because I never spent more than two weeks at a single farm, my 'immersion' into agriculture was shallower than I had hoped for. With hindsight I accept that I could only have ever gained a somewhat superficial insight into the working reality of a single farm. To have spent several months on one farm would have strengthened my understanding of a particular place and the practices that allow it to function as an economic and ecological unit. That would have to come at the expense, however, of comparing sites across regions, comparing perspectives and strategies of different farmers and exploring a key question of this research – whether back-to-the-landers speak as a collective voice or cacophony of individuals. To achieve the above it was necessary to broaden the territorial scope of the study and add in-depth interviews to the methods by which such objectives were met.

4.4. In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews form another major component of the research methodology, sharing roughly equal status with participant observation in terms of how fieldwork data are integrated into the text.

Table 4.3 – In-depth interviews by region

Location	Back-to-the-lander interviews	Institutional interviews	WWOOFer Interviews	Weeks of participant observation
Piedmont	1	5	0	1
Umbria	10	2	0	2
Tuscany	4	3	1	4
Emilia-	3	1	2	3

Total interviews: 32
Total participant observation (weeks): 10

As Table 4.3 shows, the majority of these were conducted with back-to-the-land migrants, usually on their farms. Other interviews took place with WWOOF volunteers and

representatives of AAFNs with which back-to-the-landers have substantial involvement. These are Slow Food, APE and WWOOF.

4.4.1. Institutional interviews

This project examines how back-to-the-land migration is a connected and cooperative phenomenon, and thus uses institutional or AAFN interviews to cast light on the networks and structures that enable back-to-the-land livelihoods. The 32 total interviews therefore encompass conversations with not only back-to-the-land migrants themselves, but also people involved with AAFNs who, whether wittingly or not, may facilitate the sustainability of new farming enterprises. With no organisation offering specific representation for back-to-the-landers, however, these institutional interview subjects were comparatively few relative to the migrants themselves.

Institutional interviews generally took place in formal settings, such as the offices of interviewees. It was a priority to observe some of the workplace contexts of these actors in an effort to understand their practical operations within a particular environment. In the case of Slow Food, for example, I made three trips to the Piedmontese town of Bra, where the organisation's head office is located, to conduct interviews in what could be described as the most 'indigenous' environment of this global operation. The region's gastronomic and agricultural heritage is regularly invoked in Slow Food's literature (cf. Petrini, 2007; Parkins and Craig, 2006) and often given credit for shaping the foundations of the movement. Indeed, on my first train journey from Turin to Bra, I noticed an increasing prevalence of allotments, mixed-use (as opposed to monocultural) farms, and home gardens with edible vegetation. This became a subject of discussion between myself and one interviewee, eventually leading to a conversation on the relationship between Slow Food and the town itself, including a discourse on the organisation's successes and failures in its home territory.

4.4.2. Back-to-the-lander interviews

Settings for back-to-the-lander interviews were also carefully planned. I always gave advance disclosure of my researcher status to any host farmers with whom I volunteered, and suggested the possibility of an interview ahead of my arrival. In some cases interviews were conducted early in my stay at host farms, with follow-up interviews taking place later, after specific questions and topics had been generated through participant observation. In others I considered it more appropriate to work the length of my agreed stay, thus demonstrating a commitment to the hosts' cause and establishing my credentials as a WWOOF volunteer before asking for their participation in a semi-structured interview.

Having demonstrated a commitment to shared goals through the voluntary labour negotiated between myself and the hosts, I structured some interview questions around shared experiences, such as particular farming techniques, while teasing out other information during the course of conversation. This provided a chance to probe more deeply into subjects not already covered during previous exchanges, such as attitudes toward life in rural Italy or biographical details. Such a strategy embraces Valentine's (2005: 113) call to balance between formal researcher and trusted confidante roles. She suggests that prior assumptions about commonalities between interviewers and subjects may actually weaken the rigour of an interview, which ultimately relies on the researcher obtaining quality information not otherwise available. In my own experience, it has proven an effective technique to maintain the semi-structured format, even with interview subjects whom I may consider friends, and with whom I find it awkward to converse in such a structured manner. This was certainly the case with a couple I interviewed in November, 2009 whom I had known before initiating my formal fieldwork. Urban to rural migrants now living near Città della Pieve in Umbria, they responded to questions about alternative food networks, self-sufficiency and back-to-the-land ambitions in far greater detail than I would have expected based on our previous casual

discussions. This experience convinced me of the need to uphold some semblance of thematic structure in every interview, despite the natural deviations that occur in this format.

Questions concerning the farmers' work and home environments prior to rural in-migration were always included, as were speculative discussions on their futures. These themes were not included to build over-arching generalisations about back-to-the-landers but to add some emotional and experiential flesh to the rather bare bones of this categorisation. As Valentine (2005: 111) claims, '...the aim of an interview is *not* to be representative (a common mistaken criticism of this technique) but to understand how individual people experience and make sense of their own lives.' This consideration, among others, influenced my decision to interview as many members of a household as possible. Interviews were often arranged with whoever I happened to be working with most closely, though I always requested to involve other members of the family or household when appropriate. This approach averted any gender-based assumptions about authority and power within a household, and allowed for differing opinions to be aired. Seven of the 18 back-to-the-lander interviews were conducted with more than one person, meaning that at least 14 voices (other than my own) are captured within those 7 recordings. As Valentine (2005: 115) notes, 'there is often widespread disparity between household members' (both other adults' and children's) accounts of a range of topics. Interviewing families together can provide more spontaneous, richer and validated accounts than those with individuals alone because different household members can corroborate each other's stories or challenge inaccuracies in each other's memories.' Riley (2009; 2010) also makes a case for this approach specifically in regard to interviewing farmers. Disclosing transcripts and interview notes, he demonstrates how 'unofficial' interview participants make valuable contributions to 'farm life histories' by filling in memory gaps and contradicting or embellishing the accounts of the primary interview subjects. Citing Morris and Evans' (2004) complaint that interviewing the 'principal operator' of the farm can result in a gender and age bias, Riley (2010: 653) argues that a more inclusive approach renders 'visible' the involvement of other actors, particularly women, children and farm employees. He challenges the 'commonly received wisdom' which holds that an interview should take place in a neutral environment where the risk of distraction is minimised: 'Rather than "placeless" approaches that dematerialize and often depersonalize the research encounter, we should seek to celebrate, and employ, place.' (Riley, 2010: 659)

For practical reasons as well as methodological ones, most of my interviews with back-to-the-landers were conducted in places that were full of distractions and far from neutral. I have mentioned integrating my interviews with WWOOF hosts into the natural routine of our shared time together. There were also several interviews with back-to-the-landers with whom I did not volunteer, but contacted through the WWOOF directory or mutual acquaintances. In almost all of these cases, interviews took place at their farms, where I was given a tour of the site and often some food or wine produced there. This approach had a simple practical dimension in that farmers can often struggle to leave their property when simultaneous tasks must be juggled, and interviewing them at home required the least sacrifice on their part. It was also consistent with my desire to remain attentive to place and to understand the less visible social and economic processes under discussion as having a corresponding spatial dimension, one best understood by conducting our interviews in that environment. The resulting recordings and transcripts are a traditionalist's nightmare, with conversations frequently broken by animal bleating, family interruptions, telephone calls, meal arrivals, birdsong, children's squeals, the rumble of passing traffic and sudden appearances of unexpected visitors. In addition to providing an evocative and naturalistic backdrop to sonically situate the research encounter, these 'interruptions' reveal aspects of the lived environment of a given farm.

This deeply situated approach is likely to be appropriate only to select research contexts; there is certainly a strong case for a neutral interview environment when privacy concerns are paramount, or in which researchers must impart a sense of security and seclusion to interviewees. Furthermore, it must be recognised that the naturalism of my chosen settings did leave me wanting for greater clarity and an easier conversational flow. A participant's commitment to the interview could be somewhat compromised when other distractions were present, and there are a frustrating number of muffled or drowned out segments of conversation that would have been clearer in another setting. Reflecting on the cumulative content of the transcripts, however, I feel that this has been a price worth paying.

Perhaps this compromise is best illustrated by an interview conducted with a back-to-the-lander in Emilia-Romagna, taking place just after lunch, a time on which we had settled that

morning. Expecting a certain degree of solitude and concentration, I was disappointed when the farmer asked if we could continue some work while we spoke. She needed to prepare dozens of bags of dried herbs for sale at the following day's market, a process that included weighing, labeling and closing the bags with a hand-tied ribbon. Initially I was apprehensive about this, worrying that the diversion of attention would result in less considered answers to my questions and the noise of the cellophane packaging could clutter our recorded speech. I quickly realised, however, that the job itself – manual, repetitive, slow – facilitated a kind of contemplation that might not have been achievable in a more pressured atmosphere. Eye contact was minimal as we focused on the job, and there were some long pauses between responses. Rather than being problematic, this allowed space for contemplation and elaboration, the result being a rich, highly informative two-hour interview. I can only speculate about other outcomes, but my feeling is that had we done the interview in a more conventional fashion it would have been a quicker, less thorough conversation. This assumption rests on the fact that the interviewee was one of the WWOOF hosts who initially appeared least interested in my research project. Some hosts were very engaged with the subject throughout my stay, asking regular questions about the research and keen to offer as much assistance as they could. Others, particularly veteran WWOOF hosts who had seen literally hundreds of volunteers pass through their farm over several years, were in no way hostile but remained relatively indifferent to my dual position as researcher and WWOOFer. The fact that this interview was conducted while working - instead of requiring a donation of her time away from work - was key to eliciting the kind of open and thoughtful discourse I had hoped for. The persistent crinkling of cellophane throughout the recording, however, made for a tortuous transcription effort.

4.4.3. WWOOF volunteer interviews

WWOOF volunteers were something of an improvised addition to the interview portfolio rather than a strategic part of my research design. In my early volunteering experiences I worked primarily alone but when spring arrived more WWOOFers began to appear on farms. I worked alongside several but limited my interviews to three on the grounds that they were actively seeking a life in agriculture and were using WWOOF as a kind of apprenticeship. Other volunteers were far less committed to agriculture, using the farmstays mainly as a cheap form

of travel. I approached my interviewee volunteers as potential back-to-the-landers whose insights from the WWOOF experience I saw as particularly valuable to the themes of knowledge and skill that emerge in Chapter 7. In all cases the interviews were conducted on the farms where we worked together.

Box 4.1 – Finding a *lingua franca*

Research is inevitably complicated when any of the participating parties are required to solicit or provide information in a language other than their native one. The online questionnaire for WWOOF farms went through numerous drafts and was passed between several native Italian speakers before finally going 'live' in its final form. Certain nuances of expression had the potential to significantly affect outcomes. It was difficult, for instance, to settle on a direct translation of 'host' farms, since 'host' refers more literally in Italian to hospitality. A colleague assisting with the translation also suggested a change from the verb form used in early drafts. The 'voi' form of verbs addresses the plural 'you', and was initially thought the most appropriate for addressing the questionnaire to households rather than individuals. However, use of this form has never been popular in certain regions of Italy, particularly since Mussolini's Fascist party enforced its use in the 'official' Italian of the Fascist era. I was advised that using 'voi' would not make a good impression on left-leaning respondents, particularly in the famously 'red' region of Emilia-Romagna. Such sensitivities were certainly taken into account, and the general satisfaction among contributing colleagues with the quality of the questionnaire suggests that the final product was not significantly compromised by my intermediate level of Italian. However, I do acknowledge that linguistic dissonance can impact research results in any case, and that the framing of my research may have a distinctly anglophone bent, emphasising certain issues and overlooking others that native Italian speakers may consider of relevance.

Participant observation and interviews were generally conducted in a mix of English and Italian, English being the *lingua franca* of many back-to-the-land migrants who have moved to Italy from abroad. Host farms were never specifically chosen on their owners' language capabilities; indeed, I attempted to reflect the diversity in the national and linguistic backgrounds of back-to-the-landers, and wanted to include many Italians as well as non-Italians in the mix, regardless of their English abilities. It happens to be the case, however, that many Italian back-to-the-landers do possess some knowledge of English, no doubt strengthened through participation in the WWOOF programme. WWOOF hosts often tell of the many nationalities represented by the volunteers

they have hosted, making it clear that a functional knowledge of English is certainly useful for hosts.

Multilingualism often reflected a level of formal education and cosmopolitanism that contributed to my interest in a household's potential as research participants. That the people in question chose to articulate some kind ambition in rural Italy, whether personal or political (not assuming that the

Box 4.1 cont.

two can always be so easily divided), offers rich material for investigation into both urban and rural life, and suggests possibilities for a future countryside that may contradict common stereotypes of *contadini* (farmers or, more generally, country people) as 'backward' and irrational. Such derisory views are encountered regularly in Italy, and I took the position that researching educated farmers with life experience outside of the countryside might help to challenge them. I therefore sought research participants whose backgrounds seemed likely to counter these stereotypes, and one significant indicator of this potential was an English language capability. A fair amount of guesswork was involved in selecting participants on this basis, but in many cases an initial hunch proved worth following. In other words, candidates for research involvement were never selected or eliminated based on their English capacity, though it proved a propitious circumstance when that capacity was strongly developed.

As a final note on language issues, I want to mention that quotations in the text have been transcribed verbatim, a fact that can account for occasionally awkward phrasing when the interviewee does not speak English as a first language. I have tried to remain as faithful to the intended meaning of the quotations as possible while editing for clarity. In instances where I have translated interviews from Italian, statements are often paraphrased to convey meaning without risking an inexact quotation.

4.5. Events

The previous sections have detailed a research design that required careful planning, with schedules, interview questions, consent forms and budgets all prepared in advance. There

were, however, some more spontaneous site visits that informed the research results, as well as attendance at events that I hoped might guide or inspire research questions more than answer predetermined ones.

4.5.1. Farmers' markets

Figure 4.5 – Slow Food Earth Market, Bologna

Source: Author

At several farmers markets I found myself conversing with farmers about topics related to my research. Often these were discovered more or less by accident, or perhaps when a WWOOF host advised me to attend a local market on my day off. To the best of my ability to recall, I visited two farmers' markets in Umbria, three in Piedmont, two in Emilia-Romagna and two in Tuscany. Sometimes my investigations amounted to little more than a discerning shopping trip, while other encounters, such as that with an organic wine-producing cooperative at Turin market, produced fruitful conversations and, in that particular instance, a proposal for future research participation. Visiting farmers' markets offered a chance to explore what types of products and producers were represented there, how markets varied across localities and how producers interacted with customers. The format of Slow Food's Earth Market in Bologna, for

example, differed significantly from the municipal markets in Umbria, a fact that I anticipated would have an impact on the consumer-producer dynamics articulated at each site. After visits to markets (often unplanned), I sometimes added observations to my field journal, considering this part of my overall ethnographic methodology. Additionally, I worked one afternoon at a market organised by *Campi Aperti* (Chapter 8) in Bologna. One of the WWOOF hosts with whom I volunteered gave me the opportunity to help her at her weekly market stall, where I loaded, packaged and assisted in the sale of her farm produce.

4.5.2. La Dolce Vita

Other events required more planning and more definite objectives. In March, 2009 I attended the La Dolce Vita trade show in London, an event that claims to 'bring Italy to London' through 'food, drink, style, travel and property' (La Dolce Vita, 2011). My original aim in attending this show was to explore how rural Italy was being marketed to a predominantly urban clientele. In all of the product categories listed above, what features were emphasised and what discourses employed to make them appealing? I had considered performing some content analysis on the marketing of rural Italy in magazines such as *Country Life*, *Italia* and *Italy*. Because these publications were aimed at a primarily anglophone audience, however, I concluded that a content analysis would reflect a very particular discourse that was not was not necessarily representative of the back-to-the-landers that I would be meeting in Italy. I had also hoped to meet some back-to-the-land food producers at the trade show, given that many artisan cheese, wine and oil producers were featured on the exhibitor list. This proved to be something of a lost cause, however, as that year's food section had a special focus on the South of Italy and I did not meet any farmers from the North. However, the event proved worthwhile in helping me to identify a certain 'aura', or recurrent terms and images, cast upon rural Italy by those seeking to promote it for their own specific reasons. Although this understanding has been difficult to translate into empirical evidence, the aura created by such events and publications has informed certain themes and discussions, such as property prices (Section 6.4) and the tourism industry in rural Italy (Section 8.2.1).

4.5.3. Salone del Gusto and Terra Madre

I did have an opportunity to converse with many Northern food producers in October, 2011 at the Salone del Gusto in Turin, Slow Food's biannual trade fair. This event features Slow Food-affiliated food producers from all over Italy who use the 4-day fair to sell and promote their regionally distinct produce. Running in conjuction with the trade show, which is open to the public and heavily promoted to Slow Food members, are debates, panel discussions and keynote speakers addressing food quality, sustainability and justice. These discussions at the Salone del Gusto are open to all attendees, while a concurrent conference, Terra Madre, is restricted to invited participants. My experience of coordinating a workshop at Terra Madre is recounted in Chapters 6 and 7. During the hours I spent there, the Salone del Gusto itself was exceptionally busy, making conversations with vendors specific to my research rather difficult. I did speak to many about the unique qualities of their foods, however, and used some of the dialogues (and sampled products) to inform a sense of how individual producers situate their produce within a regional or national identity. The Salone del Gusto also offered an opportunity to experience one of Slow Food's flagship programmes, an event that engages the public beyond its membership base and concentrates the varied products and production methods it sanctions in a single time and place.

4.6. Creating tasteful research: Exploring taste as methodology

RM: Some of those sage plants are for medicinal use, some for cooking. We grow 7 varieties.

AW: I didn't know there were so many that were commercially grown.

RM: Well, we want to grow as many as possible as long as there is a market for them. Some of them grow wild around here, but we've started taking cuttings and planting them here. You can tell the medicinal ones because they smell different... Here, have you tried this yet, this dark mint? Try it, it's like chocolate. We grow three kinds of mint but people love this one.

AW: Wow! I've never had that before. It *is* like a chocolate mint. What's it called in Italian?

RM: I don't know, *menta cioccolata*? That's what we call it when we sell it. Sometimes I only know the Latin names and I have to take them to the market to find out what people call them.

-   Extract from a video tour of a farm, Emilia-Romagna

Taste is both flavor and knowledge, *sapore* and *sapere* in Italian: the alliteration of the two terms says a lot about the close connection that exists between the perceptual and cultural spheres.

-   Carlo Petrini, *Slow Food Nation* (2007)

I have argued thus far for an approach to studying alternative agriculture that maximizes immersion 'in the field', literally and figuratively. I maintain that details of personal history, economic sustenance and socio-political ambitions have particular material dimensions - a direct, physical relationship with local ecologies - that are best explored through intensive practical interaction as well as reflective conversations. These embodied experiences, while recorded in line with some methodological norms, are generally more complex than a journal entry or interview transcript can reveal. Ethnographic fieldwork has long privileged sight and hearing as the senses most capable of 'truthful' representation, a tradition that Stoller and Olkes (1989: 25) attribute to Enlightenment efforts to 'create from the chaos of appearances constructed systems of "reality"' Tuan (2005: 226) argues that because hearing and sight are 'distant' senses – that is, they make less proximate phenomena accessible – they are considered more trustworthy in classic scientific methodology. The 'proximate' senses – touch, taste and smell – are, by virtue of being more intimately associated with corporeality, considered more subjective and therefore less scientifically valid. Kant (1798 [2005]) drew a clear distinction between objective and subjective senses, with taste and smell occupying the 'second class'. Taste and smell were of marginal value to empiricism because 'the idea obtained from them is more an idea of enjoyment, rather than the cognition of the external object. Consequently, we can easily agree with others in respect to the three objective senses. But with respect to the other two, the manner in which the subject responds can be quite different from whatever the external empirical perception and designation of the object might have been.' (Kant, 1798 [2005]: 210)

The difficulties in recording these senses, in contrast to the mimetic capture enabled by audio-visual technologies, must be another factor in minimizing their credibility as tools of research practice. Additionally, the social sciences can be said to lack a developed language for applying the sensations of touch, taste and smell toward empirical evidence. Yet 'reality' for ethnographers and their research subjects must always be multi-sensory, a fact rarely accounted for in academic writing. Curiously, this absence is maintained in food and agriculture research, even where notions of quality form the principal research questions. Calling for more taste-conscious (or 'tasteful') ethnographies, Stoller and Olkes (1989: 29-30) write: 'There are probably many anthropologists who do engage in tasteful fieldwork. Despite their scientific objectives, they become sensually immersed in their field surroundings. These impressions, however, are usually cast aside… in their published theoretical and ethnographic writings.'

Back-to-the-landers and institutional actors in AAFNs mobilise taste as a tool for promoting ideas and action, as do other social actors, even if less overtly (cf. Stoller and Olkes, 1989: 16-19). In an effort to acknowledge the role of taste in the livelihoods of the research participants, I have tried to employ this sense as a method for better representing the ideas and practices of the human actors studied, as well as the particular environmental qualities of the localities in which they dwell. Because this study is concerned with how back-to-the-landers and AAFNs attempt to configure natural processes toward social, political and economic outcomes, taste cannot be considered a marginal or frivolous concern. Taste (em)powers many facets of back-to-the-land migration, where the particular characteristics of food act as the material basis of multiple relationships.

The transcript extract at the beginning of this section gives a real-world dimension to Carlo Petrini's (2007: 99) epigraph that follows it. In this small exchange, we can interpret complex dynamics of back-to-the-land migration at work through multiple sensory techniques. The city-bred farmer, Romano, verbally directs me to *look* at the rows of sage plants, later implying that the differences between varieties are not readily visible to the untrained eye. He remarks that the smell can be used to distinguish between varieties, a piece of knowledge that allows him to capitalise on their distinct properties. Romano's ability to identify certain varieties in

the wild demonstrates his adoption of local knowledge (Chapter 6) as well as an understanding of contemporary market demand: the seven varieties, produced with minimal capital expenditure, have a known commercial value. When he encourages me to taste the 'chocolate' mint, its organoleptic qualities are presented as a given fact, with implications that its novel colour, scent and flavour make it an attractive commodity. By stating that he often knows only the Latin names of plant species, and relies on 'popular' knowledge to inform him of their vernacular terms, Romano reveals his limited experience of market-orientated food production. His status as an 'outsider' or at least a newcomer to farming is reinforced in the confession that his botanical knowledge is sometimes more textbook than vernacular. That he considers the '*menta cioccolata*' worth cultivating and selling – despite an initial lack of experience with the product – supports Petrini's claim that flavour and knowledge are mutually constitutive: Romano can identify value in the plant because it brings pleasure. A reflection by anthropologist Tim Ingold (2000: 20) supports the view that tasting place is part of knowing it:

> When I was a child my father, who was a botanist, used to take me for walks in the countryside, pointing out on the way all the plants and fungi – especially the fungi – that grew here and there. Sometimes he would get me to smell them, or to try out their distinctive tastes… Now, many years later, as an anthropologist, I read about how people in Australian Aboriginal societies pass their knowledge across the generations. And I find that the principle is just the same!

Though I want to leave little doubt as to the conceptual importance of taste, its application as a research practice is more ambiguous. In *The Taste of Ethnographic Things,* Stoller and Olkes (1989) make a critical intervention in the discourse of sensory ethnographies, but offer only a few suggestions as to how a 'tasteful' ethnography might be presented. 'In tasteful fieldwork,' they write, 'anthropologists would not only investigate kinship, exchange, and symbolism, but also describe with literary vividness the smells, tastes, and textures of the land, the people, and the food.' (Stoller and Olkes, 1989: 29) Human geographers are arguably better positioned to escape 'operational' fixations of classic anthropological ethnography. In geography, the attention paid to space and place invites precisely the kind of sensuous engagement with those concepts enabled by the recognition of taste as a cognitive technique. For my part, the incorporation of taste into this text may not quite follow the call to 'literary vividness', but its importance and omnipresence should hopefully be apparent. Food and drink catalysed many discussions with the research participants, the consumption and conversation taking many forms: touring farms, sharing bottles of homemade wine, tasting just-pressed olive oil,

exploring the gastronomic spectacle of the Salone del Gusto in Turin, preparing and consuming meals, sampling farmhouse produce, picking ripe fruit and visiting restaurants, bakeries and cafés. These actions constitute a form of knowledge transfer enabled by the conscious and critical use of taste, and dismissing that experience as inconsequential or superfluous would leave the following chapters conceptually incomplete and less methodologically transparent.

It is therefore essential to understand taste as a tool or strategy actively employed by the people participating in this study, as well as other actors in food networks more widely. The organoleptic qualities of a plant or animal species are significant factors in their evolution, the promotion of particular properties through domestication and breeding being fundamental to their continued survival. There is a co-dependence between these properties and their cultivators, with continuity contingent upon careful and conscientious management. This can also be conceived of as the utilisation of taste toward specific goals where, as Crouch (2003: 23) writes, 'nature is mobilized... as a partner in action; its character progressed into multiple possibilities of significance through what the individual does.' If we accept that food assists in the structuring of social relations[3], we must acknowledge the significance of taste in this process. In the chapters that follow, taste will be directly invoked as an active constituent of events, observations and themes, including the contested alterity of 'alternative' agriculture, back-to-the-land economic strategies, AAFNs as an oppositional force and tradition as resistance.

Box 4.2 – Killing for research – an ethical conundrum?

Standards of research ethics across nations and disciplines take a unified stance on issues of harm and beneficence. The American Association of Geographers' Statement of Professional Ethics, for example, declares that research should promote 'the maximization of benefits and the minimization of harm' and that 'geographers' quest for understanding through field research should be accompanied by consideration of the long- and short-term effects of research projects

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[3]   That food serves this purpose is a rather obvious point, and one that could justifiably be taken for granted. The flexibility of food as a mediator of social roles and its often understated centrality in structuring relations, however, is nonetheless a subject of fulsome academic inquiry. There are many studies on the subject, but those of particular relevance to considerations here include Mintz, 1985; Stoller and Olkes, 1989; Goodman and Redclift, 1991; Camporesi, 1998; Counihan, 1999; Crouch, 2003; Parkins and Craig, 2006: 18-37; Kerans and Kearney, 2006: 148-163; Blythman, 2006; Petrini, 2007; Belasco, 2008; Kneafsey et al., 2008.

on the people, places, flora, fauna, and environments under investigation' (AAG, 2009). In its Code of Ethics, The Royal Geographical Society warns that the study of non-human animals and vulnerable environments should demand extra consideration and care (RGS-IBG, 2006). The American Anthropological Association's Code of Ethics (AAA, 1998), which deals most specifically with fieldwork conduct, insists that anthropologists are obliged to 'avoid harm or wrong, understanding that the development of knowledge can lead to change which may be positive or negative for the people or animals worked with or studied' and that 'researchers

Box 4.2 cont.

working with animals must do everything in their power to ensure that the research does not harm the safety, psychological well-being or survival of the animals or species with which they work.'

These standards are laudable but the issues they address are nonetheless relative and subject to the researcher's best judgment. This is particularly true when working with animals reared for meat. Avoiding harm until the moment of slaughter may be easy, but there is no 'harmless' method of conducting the slaughter and no guarantee that an animal will not undergo psychological, as well as physical, suffering in the process. For a researcher uncomfortable with animal slaughter and its associated ethical issues, the path of least resistance would be simply to disengage from the process, leaving personal and professional principles unaffected. This position is compromised, however, when ethics are at the heart of the killing ritual and every slaughtered animal symbolises a set of practices essential to the cultural identity of the group under study.

Many of the farmers who participated in this research project took considerable pride in their treatment of livestock and contrasted their methods of rearing and slaughter to the high-density production lines of industrial agribusiness. Few farmers were vegetarian, and those who ate meat tended to raise animals for that purpose. When asked about their feelings toward this component of their work, almost all gave similar responses: however unpleasant, they would rather do it themselves and guarantee humane treatment than leave the responsibility to someone else. Evidence from the farms stands as a testament to their commitment. Animals reared for meat and eggs were always given ample outdoor space and shelter at night. Shelters were clean and outbreaks of infection were uncommon. They generally ate mixed, natural diets and grew to the traditional age of slaughter. Furthermore, several farmers chose to raise 'heritage' or rare breeds (primarily of poultry and pigs), which in some cases are slower-growing and supply less meat but offer exceptional taste and perpetuate species diversity. For economic as well as ecological

reasons, farms with livestock tend to recycle manure in pursuit of a 'closed circle', or self-supporting ecological cycle with an in-built economy that generates value and disincentivises waste. These factors considered, it would therefore seem that participation in livestock production – and its necessary phase of killing – is completely compatible with the American Association of Geographers' imploration to respect 'ecosystems, biodiversity, natural resources, climate, landforms, and the principles of sustainable environmental stewardship' (AAG, 2009). Officially, is it therefore permissible to commit harm to an animal in the interests of environmental

Box 4.2 cont.

stewardship? Philosophically, is there a moral disconnect between this 'ethic of care' for animals and their environment and the act of killing that turns them into a commodity or, at the very least, a meal?

To be consistent in my work as a WWOOFer and researcher performing participant observation, as well as a meat-eater concerned for animal welfare standards, I resolved to offer my help in the first slaughter opportunity that presented itself. The first time I was asked to help kill chickens for food, it was made absolutely clear to me that the activity was completely optional. The help would be appreciated but for all WWOOFers it would always be an elective act. I decided to assist, accompanying Simone, the eldest son of the Cascina Frutasé homestead in Piedmont, as the first job of the morning on my third day at the farm. In a later chapter I present an extract of my field journal in which I describe my first experience of slaughter in which we killed several chickens (Box 7.1). It is included, and sketched in vivid detail, because killing is a visceral, sensorial act, something situated in place as part of routines that affect the economic and cultural attributes of those who perform it. To present killing as a philosophical abstraction without acknowledgement of its role as an embodied, even mundane practice is to indulge the ignorance that my participation in it seeks to overcome.

5. The Case Study Networks: APE, WWOOF and Slow Food

This chapter provides background information on three alternative agro-food networks (AAFNs) that have offered support and participation in this research project. My aim here is to provide an introduction to philosophical and operational components of Associazione per Esperienze (APE), Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF) and Slow Food. In so doing, I hope to offer further clarity as to the nature and structure of the organisations, all of which have been mentioned in previous chapters, and to establish a context in which the activities of back-to-the-landers can be interpreted through their involvement with these networks. Therefore the facets of each organisation most relevant to this research are those addressed below. This is necessarily to the exclusion of some others, but the contextual background offered for each group is intended to cover their most essential dynamics. Finally, I want to support some of the claims raised in Chapter 3 through illustrative examples of contemporary Italian AAFNs operating on a range of geographical scales. While many examples in Chapter 3 reflected the international composition of the authors who have contributed to the debates on AAFNs, this chapter focuses exclusively on Italian organisations.

Slow Food, WWOOF and APE vary considerably in size and renown; Slow Food, for example, is internationally recognised and highly influential, while APE is confined to one small region of Tuscany and consciously bound to localised practices. The academic literature on the organisations therefore reflects the organisations' relative profiles. Plenty has been written on Slow Food, accounting for the longest of the three sections below, while there are a small number of publications on WWOOF and none yet on APE. Information on all the groups comes from a combination of internal publications, secondary literature and interviews with members of the organisations.

5.1. Associazione per Esperienze di Autoproduzione e Collaborazione in Campo Agricole, Culturale e Sociale (APE)

To give the organisation its full translated title, APE is a shortened acronym for Association for the Experience of Self-reliance and Cooperation in Farming, Society and Culture. It is by far the smallest of the case study organisations in both membership size and geographical reach. Based in the vicinity of Cortona, Tuscany, it began as a way of meeting particular needs that were, in the opinions of the founding members, being addressed either too disparately by larger organisations or not at all. One signatory to the founding statute describes it as a coalescence of interests among already acquainted farmers. APE's purpose, according to this statute, is to 'engage, promote and develop a system of life based on an economy of self-production, collaboration, self-sufficiency, solidarity and simplicity' (APE, 2009). Practically this has a number of dimensions. In essence, APE seeks to promote a more intensive and extensive integration of small-scale agriculture and urban consumption, which in everyday terms means creating opportunities for non-farmers to participate in certain rituals of food production. 'The scope is really to develop relations between farmers and people who are interested in our activities,' a founding member states (Personal communication, 2010).

There are eight farms that regularly participate in APE activities and about 10 non-farmers who attend events regularly and communicate with the group, while individual events such as harvest feasts (Section 8.2.2) are likely to attract many more participants. There is no strict format or schedule that defines APE's engagement with the public, so the nature of that engagement varies considerably. One APE member has initiated a project in which he advertises organic chicken for sale in the nearby city of Arezzo, a condition being that buyers come to his farm and participate in the entire process of choosing the chicken and then slaughtering and cleaning it. This project has both an educational and ethical function. 'I'm happy to sell my chickens to people from the city,' he claims, 'but I want them to know how it's done. I don't want to reinforce consumer ignorance by doing all the dirty work myself.' Another member hosts semi-regular social events at his property, from film screenings to harvest parties, in an attempt to draw in people who possess a limited knowledge of

agriculture from Cortona and Arezzo. At one of his harvest feasts, for example, an old-fashioned, mobile threshing machine from the 1940s was used to separate the recently harvested local wheat, followed by a show of labour-intensive pre-industrial methods. This stage of the event, both essential for the wheat production but also serving an educational purpose, was quickly followed by a social one, where about 60 people were served a feast prepared by local farming families. Using this farm as a social and gastronomic destination engages non-farmers in an open and non-intimidating way, and is partly designed to demonstrate what is believed to be the superior quality of fresh, locally-produced food.

APE's activities are flexibly organised, though there are some frequent and formative practices that strengthen the group's mutualistic ethos. The most regular of these would be the work parties held most Wednesdays at alternating member farms. These are designed to pool labour and tools collaboratively, focusing on large jobs such as weeding, tree pruning and chestnut, grape or olive harvests. Resources such as machinery are also shared so that capital expenditure can be minimised. For example, a member needing a gas-powered pruning saw would contact other members of the group to ask if one might be borrowed before investing in their own. The Wednesday work parties often provide the foundation for sharing the machinery, with members transporting specific tools or machines to the farms where they are needed for jobs that are best performed collaboratively. Production facilities on farms for making jams, honey, bread and other products can also be shared.

The five signatories to the founding statue also constitute a form of council or steering committee for the group, but APE does not generally adhere to any formal governance procedures. It is largely regarded by members as an experimental enterprise, one whose structure and operational dynamics can change so long as it does not lose sight of its ambition to promote self-reliance and cooperation.

5.2. Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF)

Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF) Italia is a national network affiliated to an international umbrella organisation, more generically known as WWOOF. The first local WWOOF network was founded in the UK in 1971 as Working Weekends on Organic Farms. Its founder, Sue Coppold, had been working as a secretary in London but 'always hankered to get back' to her uncle's farm in the English countryside, where she spent her school holidays. After cold-calling several farms, she found one in East Sussex that was willing to accept 'unskilled but willing townie labour' (Smithers, 2011). Coppold's ambition to connect volunteer workers with host farms, who would provide room and board, would lay the foundation of the WWOOF organisation, which now has national networks in more than 50 countries. The national networks are self-governed but adhere to a consistent *modus operandi*. Farms pay a membership fee to be listed on a directory (Appendix 1) while volunteers also pay an annual subscription to access the list and – in the case of WWOOF Italia – receive accident and injury insurance. Volunteers (WWOOFers) stay with host farms for an agreed period and work according to terms established between the two parties, with the host always providing accommodation and meals in exchange for the farm work. Guidelines suggest that WWOOFers work four to six hours per day, five or six days per week, but actual arrangements vary from farm to farm and also by season. Harvest periods, for example, will often require longer hours though ideally any extra work should be compensated with increased time off.

As WWOOF has grown in popularity and geographical reach, the nature of the organisation has changed. Its name later morphed into Willing Workers on Organic Farms as the farmstays expanded beyond weekend work and the local focus became somewhat lost, with many volunteers selecting relatively exotic locations to visit. At an international conference of national WWOOF coordinators in 2000, the name was changed again, this time to Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms, to avoid the suspicion and legal complications associated with non-paid agricultural labour (WWOOF, 2011). In fact, the words 'labour' and 'work' are now often avoided in official WWOOF documents, having been replaced by 'collaboration', 'volunteering' or 'apprenticeship'.

Figure 5.1 – WWOOF Italia Volunteers by Country of Origin

WWOOF Italia Volunteers by Country of Origin, 2004-2009
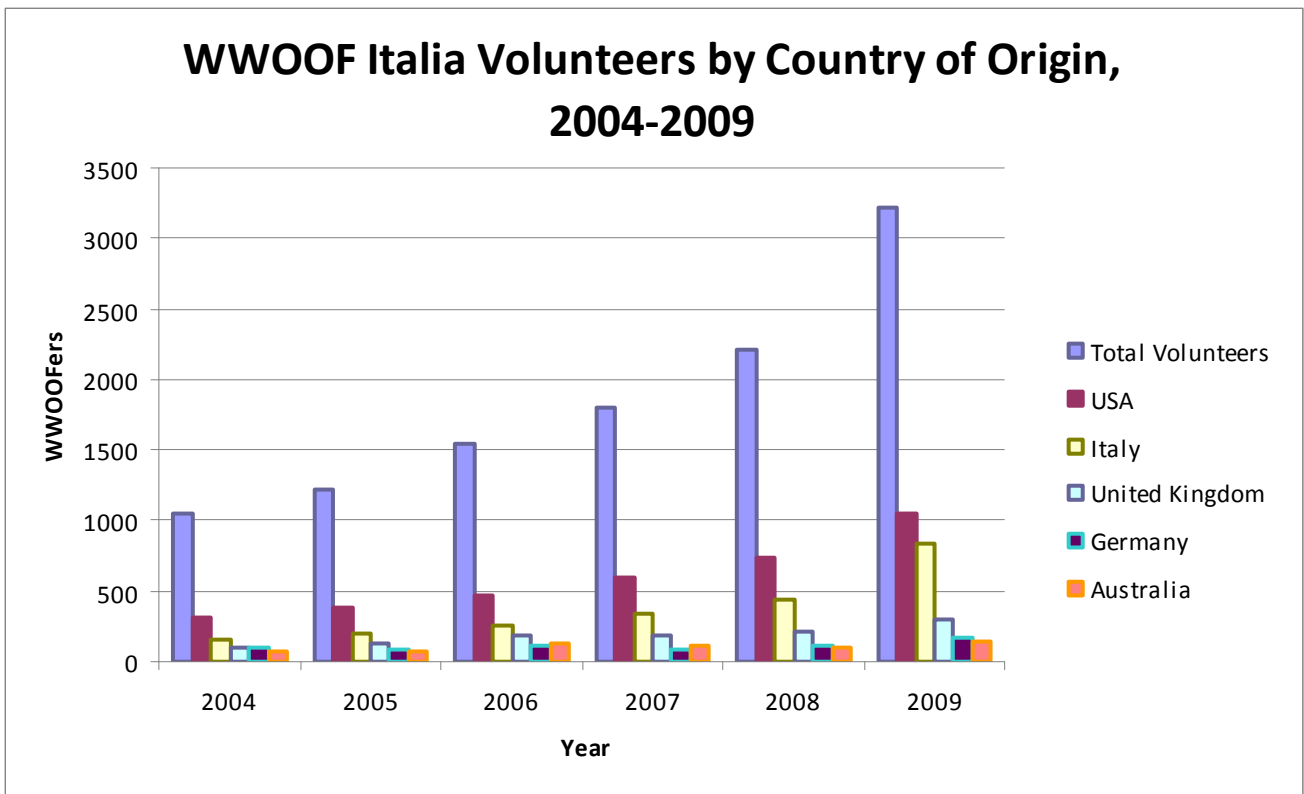
WWOOF Italia is the largest WWOOF network in Europe with 478 farms (as of July, 2011) and more than 3,000 volunteers (Fig. 5.1). It is administered by a paid Coordinator and unpaid President. Along with a few other voluntary members, the President and Coordinator together form a kind of steering committee. The President is largely responsible for ensuring WWOOF complies with Italy's complex working and immigration regulations, and for promoting WWOOF to other organic and sustainable farming initiatives. The Coordinator processes all membership applications for both host farms and volunteers, updates the host directory and mediates disputes between WWOOFers and hosts. Most regions have a Regional Coordinator, a WWOOF host who serves as a liaison between the organisation and individual farms. Regional Coordinators are also responsible for inspecting each new farm that applies for WWOOF membership, ensuring that they are genuinely organic and demonstrably committed to the ideals of WWOOF.

Volunteers from the Unites States comprise nearly a third of all WWOOFers in Italy and have formed the dominant national group for several years, though there was a five-fold increase in Italian WWOOFers between 2004 and 2009. The increased participation of Italians in WWOOF volunteering may not have a single direct cause, and is likely simply to reflect the expanded number of host farms and consequent visibility of WWOOF within Italy. One WWOOF Italia official suggests that Italians are increasingly discovering WWOOF as both a cheap form of travel and a way of connecting with the rural (Personal communication, 2010). The former motivation – and related lack of dedication from volunteers – has become a problem for some WWOOF hosts, particularly those who need year-round help and are less able to selectively screen their volunteers. This issue is addressed in some detail in Section 7.6.

WWOOF has been the subject of a small amount of academic research, often within a tourism / hospitality disciplinary frame. The work of McIntosh and Campbell (2001) and McIntosh and Bonnerman (2006), for example, examines relationships between hosts and volunteers and asks how organic farmstays can serve as a template for sustainable tourism practices. Their work also points to how WWOOFers might make changes in their lives that are influenced by the WWOOF experience. '[V]isitors staying on WWOOF farms,' claim McIntosh and Bonnerman (2006: 93), 'reported personal meaningfulness or self-reflection from the experiences they had gained... [These] provided the opportunity to take "time to think", get "close to nature", "watch", to "compare one's own lifestyle" [with predominantly unconventional lifestyles]... and to assess what is personally meaningful to them.' Where WWOOF has been examined by geographers, it has primarily been as a practice related to economic sustainability for farmers (e.g. Holloway et al., 2006; Maxey, 2006; Kneafsey et al, 2008). Because many small, independent farmers operate with little capital available for labour, WWOOF volunteers provide an obvious benefit in offering extra hands to help perform essential tasks. Although most WWOOF farms are small enough to be worked by families or intentional communities, there is considerable variation between them in terms of commercial orientation and by extension the direct economic benefit that WWOOFers bring. What WWOOFers principally offer is a significant saving of time. If weeding a few rows of strawberry plants takes about three hours, this can be done by a WWOOFer in the morning, allowing the host to work on more skilled or specialised tasks. In some cases the simple arithmetic of extra help can have a dramatic impact. When harvesting olives, for example, it would typically take about an hour for one person to clean a tree of its fruit. With a partner that time is halved, while two teams

of pairs can harvest the fruit of four trees in an hour. As I describe in Chapter 7, farmwork can be characterised by essential – and often simple - but time-consuming jobs. When handled by volunteers, who are ideally learning something useful in the process, farmers are able to concentrate on the trickier, more strategic aspects of running their homesteads. To use the olive example, this could involve making arrangements with the local press to schedule oil production, ensuring adequate transport and storage conditions, measuring quantities and dealing with paperwork. Applying that administrative focus while volunteers assist with the manual work should give some kind of financial return, permitting small organic farmers to remain in agriculture even if that return is variable and difficult to measure.

Concerns about the use of free labour surround the WWOOF project and will probably remain controversial for the foreseeable future. At the international and national levels, WWOOF officials must be vigilant against farmers whose intentions are merely to exploit the labour of volunteers. There are guidelines for working conditions in place, but due to national networks' minimal resources they can be difficult to enforce. The WWOOF Italia rules stipulate that any farm that receives three complaints from WWOOFers within a two-year period will be temporarily suspended. The complaints are investigated and, depending on the outcomes, the farms in question can either be reinstated subject to certain improvements or permanently struck off the host directory. One WWOOF Italia official acknowledges that WWOOFers probably do not complain enough and unfortunately let poor examples of WWOOF farms colour their experience of WWOOF as a whole. That said, this official claims that the small number of farms that are banned from WWOOF Italia (on average about three per year) may simply be an indication that the system is working very well (Personal communication, 2010).

5.3. Slow Food

Slow Food, based in Italy but with representatives on multiple continents, collects varied strategies for enacting social and environmental change based on the shared need for food (or, *good, clean* and *fair* food, as the organisation would specify). The Slow Food network therefore serves as both a localised case study, rooted in Italian culture and influential in regional public

policy, as well as a product of globalisation, a disparately realised unity of purpose and collective will. In the discussion that follows, 'Slow Food' will generally refer to the formal institution, represented through its own publications, the writings of Carlo Petrini and secondary analysis. It is important to note, though, that in a more casual sense, 'slow food' also refers to a movement, a set of ideas and actions inspired by a parent institution but practiced diffusely and without central control. As comprehensive investigations of slow principles by Honorè (2004) and Parkins and Craig (2006) show, it can be practiced in multiple forms and scales, as a politically-committed act of resistance or simple restructuring of personal priorities, with more time given to 'quiet material pleasure' (Slow Food, 2009), an idea that Slow Food defends.

Slow Food is both a formal network and a nodal point between other networks. As an AAFN it is very different in form to community-supported agriculture (CSA) schemes or organic box deliveries, though it supports such local initiatives in principle and sometimes offers material assistance to such programmes. As a diverse operation, Slow Food is rarely referred to as an AAFN in its own right, but can perhaps be conceived of as a kind of meta-network, a lens through which to view the strategies of other, smaller assemblages. Although the organisation is administratively based in Italy, its structure is decentralised and cellular, claiming to represent members in 132 countries. A self-described 'non-profit, eco-gastronomic, member-supported organisation' (Slow Food, 2009), its mission extends from biodiversity protection, restaurant certification and conference sponsorship to 'taste education' and the development of a 'co-producer' framework, whereby it is hoped that informed interaction between producers and consumers will dissolve this binary into an interdependent hybrid.

Slow Food's history says much about the cultural position of food and agriculture within Italian political traditions. The popular version of Slow Food's birth tells of an epiphany at the Spanish Steps in Rome in 1989. Journalist and left-wing activist Carlo Petrini, passing by the iconic Roman location on foot, discovered that a new branch of ubiquitous American fast-food chain McDonald's had been proposed for the site. To Petrini McDonald's represented the aggressive encroachment of low-quality, uniform homogeneity into Italy's historically unique cultural and gastronomic landscape. The sacrifice of the Piazza di Spagna's quintessential sense of place at the altar of globalisation was considered an infringement that could not pass without resistance. Debates were ignited and protests organized, with some activists slowly eating

bowls of pasta at the site of the incipient fast-food restaurant (Parkins and Craig, 2006: 19). Despite being unsuccessful in their bid to prevent McDonald's from opening in Piazza di Spagna, in November, 1989 delegates from 15 countries gathered in Paris to sign the Slow Food Manifesto. This declaration sought to position a nascent movement in opposition to the 'insidious virus' of '*Fast Life,* which disrupts our habits, pervades the privacy of our homes and forces us to eat Fast Foods' (Slow Food, 2009, emphasis in original). At first glance the Manifesto can appear to celebrate conservative values and the gluttony of a privileged elite. It calls for a 'firm defense of quiet material pleasure' and asks that 'guaranteed sensual pleasure and slow, long-lasting enjoyment preserve us from the contagion of the multitude who mistake frenzy for efficiency.' In the following sections I examine some of the critiques that Slow Food has faced in regard to its position on social justice, and relate some of Petrini's defenses against the charge of elitism. To put this into context, however, it is first necessary to reflect on the origins of Slow Food in the political culture of 1980s Italy.

Carlo Petrini's profile as a food activist was built through his involvement in the Recreative Association of Italian Communists, or Arcigola, developed by the Italian Communist Party (PCI) to offset the influence of the Italian state's leisure and recreation bureaucracy. (Slow Food, 2009; Leitch, 2003: 448). In the 1980s, Petrini and other Arcigola activists deployed their self-taught expertise in gastronomy to produce two unlikely outcomes. Firstly, they applied a modern countercultural spin to the pleasures of the table, challenging the deeply embedded asceticism and suspicion of material pleasure that had long characterised the PCI. The most visible flirtation between pleasure and leftist politics in the 1980s occurred in *Gambero Rosso* (Red Shrimp), a monthly lifestyle supplement of the Communist daily *Il Manifesto*. The *Red Shrimp* gave voice to young leftists who fought the perceived decline in their party's relevance by appropriating not just food and wine, but the broader popular culture that 'pleasure-allergic' party elders had treated as a distraction from the great project of proletarian revolution (Parasecoli, 2003: 33).

The influence of Arcigola, *Gambero Rosso* and Slow Food in the 1980s can be viewed within the frame of broader cultural change in Italy. Parasecoli (2003) and Leitch (2003) argue that the Left's embrace of gastronomy reflected an awakening to the new political realities of Italy's burgeoning affluence and consumerism. Italian cuisine until the 1950s had been one of scarcity, a perpetual challenge of adapting to scant resources. Postwar economic development not only created a cuisine of abundance but also strengthened the 'national' identity of foods (such as certain cheeses and pasta shapes) that had previously been strictly 'regional', thus

expanding both the range of consumer options and disrupting local culinary identities (Helstotsky, 2006). The expanding market for mass-produced types of 'quintessentially' Italian pasta shapes and other foodstuffs, combined with the growth of McDonald's in Italy, precipitated a reaction against culinary homogenization, labour exploitation, ecological disregard and the decline of small-scale agriculture that would characterise the leftist gastronomes' position (Parasecoli, 2003; Helstotsky, 2004; Leitch, 2007). As Parasecoli (2003: 34) puts it, 'Many leftist intellectuals… began to consider food not in terms of appropriation and exploitation (the fat bourgeois sucking vital energy from the workers), but within a conceptual framework in which collective enjoyment, sharing, and community became the main points of reference.' Petrini's optimism and embrace of pleasure reflects Hardt's (1996:6-7) characterization of post-1980s radicalism in Italy: 'All too often, leftist cultures have identified a revolutionary life with a narrow path of asceticism, denial, and even resentment… [The new radicalism] involves no such self-denial, but rather the adoption and appropriation of the pleasures of capitalist society as our own, intensifying them as a shared collective wealth.' In a 1987 interview with Gambero Rosso (in Parasecoli, 2003: 35), Petrini made this declaration:

> Many would like to teach communists the right way to act. According to these 'masters of life', a good communist should mortify himself in clothing, in enjoyment, and above all in frequenting good restaurants… [This position] favours those who believe that the precious elements of Italian gastronomy should always be a privilege for the usual few.

This quote's final sentence represents an important intellectual coup for the nascent progressive gastronomy movement. Not only is Petrini demanding a modernization of party priorities, but claiming a *universal* right to eat and drink well, to reclaim material pleasure from the privileged and redistribute it to everyone. This is a fundamental principle of the Slow Food movement, and is central to its defenses against charges of elitism. For Petrini, the enjoyment of food is a biological fact: every culture attempts to extract pleasure from the basic act of physical sustenance, while scientific evidence supports connections between human longevity and a varied, nutritious diet. Thus, gastronomic pleasure and collective well-being are not mutually exclusive, but co-dependent (Petrini, 2007). According to Slow Food, crises of social and economic justice are not a consequence of pleasure-seeking itself; rather, institutions and ideologies can skew the distribution of pleasure so that it remains the preserve of an elite. Petrini's (2007) book *Slow Food Nation* repeatedly counters the charge that the

Slow Food philosophy is an elitist one by arguing that this accusation can become a self-fulfilling prophecy: 'That is like saying that only those who can afford it have a right to pleasure, and that everyone else, the poor, must simply eat to keep themselves alive and cannot experience pleasure' (Petrini, 2007: 105).

5.3.1. Good, clean and fair? Slow Food in principle and practice

Chapter 3 critically examined how AAFNs can perform as structures for promoting quality, environmental sustainability and social and economic justice. Slow Food's foundational mantra of 'Good, Clean and Fair' is an explicit framework for steering production and consumption practices toward these outcomes. The following sections consider how Slow Food defines these principles and directs its operations accordingly.

5.3.2. Good

The quality of a food product is necessarily assessed on myriad factors. Taste is both a sensorial and social response, making a notion of *good* accountable to both physical and intellectual expectations. On the one hand, a product can be judged 'good' because it produces a pleasant sensation when consumed; on the other, the conditions of its origin *and one's knowledge of them* are likely to bear a strong impact on one's judgment. Petrini (2007: 96) acknowledges that these intersecting influences on quality are justly viewed as highly relativistic, particularly in a context of unprecedented choice such as that which exists in wealthy consumer societies. There is a hint of paradox, then, in Petrini's attempt to subvert homogenisation and celebrate the local while trying to define what constitutes the 'good'. Standardisation of taste, however, is not Slow Food's objective. Petrini (2007: 106-107) advocates a health-aware, culturally-specific definition of quality: 'I seek what is good for me, what is good according to my culture, but at the same time I hope that everyone all over the world will find what is good for their cultures.' Using examples such as the wild rabbits of

Ischia, a pungent fermented fish sauce from Piedmont, and the protein-rich insect larvae of Burkina Faso, Petrini argues for the nutritional and cultural benefits of these products: they promote human vitality, encourage social bonds, are cheap to produce and preserve ecological balance when consumed in sustainable quantities. Their organoleptic qualities are a pleasure to some but not all; this is inevitable and even desirable, as variance in taste will promote experimentation with new breeds and varieties and extend existing networks of gastronomic knowledge. The good, then, is an assemblage of memory, pleasure, sociality, ecology and intellect.

Slow Food frequently attaches its conception of quality to biodiversity. The most prominent manifestations of this are Slow Food's Presidia and Ark of Taste projects. Part of the organisation's Foundation for Biodiversity, the Ark of Taste aims to document and catalog native, regionally unique foodstuffs considered 'at risk'. In the post-industrial economies, the main risk is likely to result from market preference for standardised varieties of plants and animals, reducing the market share of less familiar competitors and making their production seem increasingly less viable for farmers. Hygiene and regulatory issues also come into play, with the Ark of Taste giving visibility and endorsement to unpasteurised cheese and cured meats produced without artificial preservatives (Slow Food, 2009). Environmental degradation is also a threat addressed in Slow Food's promotion of certain traditional products which, by virtue of their cultural longevity and small-scale production, are more likely to meet objective standards of sustainability. The official 2011 British entries for The Ark of Taste, for example, contain 35 products, including species of fish whose stocks are threatened, several types of rare breed livestock, nine types of cheese, regionally unique varieties of fruit, vegetables, and cereals and two artisan alcoholic drinks (Slow Food, 2011). Section 8.5 looks into the Ark of Taste and Presidia in Italy in more detail, focusing on the economic opportunities the programmes offer for back-to-the-landers.

5.3.3. Clean

Sustainability for Slow Food pivots on a rejection of the industrial ethic and an encouragement of biologically diverse, ecologically-sensitive production and consumption. The objective of *clean* is linked to sustainability, but, like *good*, is co-dependent on material pleasure. Recalling some of the key concepts of the 'quality turn' in AAFN discourse, Petrini (2007: 102) makes the argument that *naturalness* ('the natural integrity of the raw material') is proportional to goodness. This leads to a familiar claim among food writers that produce at its peak ripeness, locally produced and in season, embodies the principle of naturalness most strongly and thus the highest state of goodness. The natural is free from extraneous inputs, such as chemical fertilizers, artificial additives, manufactured preservatives and technologies that compromise the original flavour of a product. Again, a degree of subjectivity applies, but Petrini (2007: 127) is committed to equating sustainability and cleanliness with taste:

> Clean, sustainable production creates all the right conditions for the good... Soils that are not stressed, cheapened and killed by unnatural substances bear better fruit. Animals raised in a natural way, without haste and without exceeding the structural limits of an activity such as stock farming, can produce meat and milk (and hence also cheese) with sensory characteristics far superior to those of animals that have been exploited, 'drugged,' and kept in miserable conditions in small stalls without any consideration for their well-being.

Slow Food is supportive of organic agriculture, but not at the total expense of conventional production. Petrini notes early in *Slow Food Nation* that industrial agriculture and the so-called Green Revolution which immediately followed the Second World War, as Italy was rapidly industrializing, have helped to resolve the 'crisis of production' in which the food supply could not meet global demand. This argument holds that current demand for food could not be met by a total regression to exclusively free-range livestock rearing and organic crop production, as these both demand more space and labour than global agriculture currently possesses. Petrini, similarly, does not advocate one universal organic model, with the pre-Green Revolution food shortages that this could entail, but a widespread deindustrialization of agriculture and return to ecologically managed farming. This includes recycling (antibiotic-free) animal dung, using historically local (and thus ecologically adapted) crop varieties and eliminating monocultures

(which reduce biodiversity) as the standard capitalist farming model. A rejection of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) is also encouraged, with Petrini characterising GMOs as the perfect embodiment of industrial agriculture: standardised, corporate-controlled, invasive and antithetical to naturalness. Slow Food also argues that sourcing foods locally could reduce air pollution and carbon emissions caused by food transportation.

Using local specialties as a basis for regional agriculture and shared culinary traditions, Petrini envisions a network of producers and consumers, 'food communities' that will promote the sustainability of natural resources. That this project is an alternative to the current industrial paradigm is made explicit; Petrini calls for a clear rejection of current structures, a resistance enacted through consumer choices, 'green' farming practices and information exchange. For agriculture, he claims, the goal is no less ambitious than the creation of a new rurality, a task of political and practical will. Slow Food's efforts in this respect involve the active construction and maintenance, through projects like the Presidia, Salone del Gusto and Terra Madre, of social and economic networks that facilitate these practices.

5.3.4. Fair

The Slow Food Manifesto regards 'quiet material pleasure', 'guaranteed sensual pleasure and slow, long-lasting enjoyment' as universal rights and fundamental human values. Carlo Petrini has regularly stated, with varying degrees of defensiveness, that this principle forms part of Slow Food's social justice framework. It is a position that has incited much criticism, with Pilcher (2002: 407) claiming that it 'offers little to single parents working overtime to support a family in the collapsing ruins of the…welfare state.' After 2008's massive Slow Food Nation convention in San Francisco, California, a community activist told the *East Bay Express* (01/10/2008), '…I have nothing against increasing the awareness of quality food… but I don't want that conversation to drown out more important issues, like the fact that a lot of people have no place to buy a tomato, let alone an organic heirloom.' The expansion of McDonald's in Italy indicates that consumer demand for fast food is real, as the restaurant franchises have more than doubled since 1996 (Murdoch and Miele, 1999: 315). Helstosky (2004: 160) attributes

part of this growth to successful public relations campaigns which emphasise the company's efforts to provide simple solutions for cash- and time-pressed families.

'In food production,' writes Petrini (2007: 135), 'the word "fair" connotes social justice, respect for workers and their know-how, rurality and the country life, pay adequate to work, gratification in producing well, and the definitive revaluation of the small farmer, whose historical position in society has always been last.' As this quote indicates, Slow Food's approach to social justice is primarily focused on food producers, a fact that prompts some criticism concerning the consumer end of the fairness scale. As Guthman et al. (2007) argue, 'squaring farm security with food security' is an ongoing challenge for AAFNs, and one that has yet to find a widely satisfactory resolution.

Slow Food's Earth Markets embody one attempt to guarantee a fair income to farmers, though the organisation is also supportive of other, less conventional initiatives, such as CSAs, collective buying groups and cooperatives. Many employees at Slow Food's Bra headquarters, for instance, are members of what in Italy is called a *gruppo di acquisto solidale* (GAS) or 'solidarity buying group'. Using voluntary 'product coordinators' to interface with farmers, members of the GAS work out what is fair to both buyers and growers on a case-by-case basis. Depending on the structures of individual initiatives, these potentially give more power to consumers to negotiate with producers and decide mutually what constitutes a just price. Chapter 8 analyses some of these initiatives in greater detail, focusing on the contribution toward economic sustainability that they might offer to back-to-the-landers.

Concepts of fairness and justice are also put under scrutiny at Slow Food's Terra Madre conference. Run concurrently with the Salone del Gusto trade fair in Turin, Terra Madre assembles small farmers, academics and food activists from around the world and places them into close proximity with one another to share and debates strategies for just and sustainable agri-cultures. In addition to the conference, a flagship event, Terra Madre casts itself as a 'network for food communities' (Terra Madre, 2011) and serves as a communication platform for farmers, agronomists and activists linked to the network. Practically it seeks to advise on technical, economic and political issues affecting members while always remaining conscious of the particularities of place. Terra Madre's literature refers frequently to the value of local knowledge, particularly in relation to a sub-network called Indigenous Terra Madre, which aims

to facilitate 'local food systems, traditional knowledge, diversity of indigenous languages and conservation of agrobiodiversity' (Terra Madre, 2011). An Indigenous Terra Madre conference in 2011 hosted representatives from 6 continents and nearly 30 countries, ranging from Scottish crofters to Mexican coffee growers to Ethiopian pastoralists.

Given its geographical reach, Terra Madre offers a case study for how rural localism can be articulated on a cooperative, global scale, though it is very much a work in progress and demands further analysis, relating real outcomes of the project to the counter-hegemonic ambitions expressed in theories of social justice. The same can be said of Slow Food in general. The organisation, particularly through the figurehead of Carlo Petrini, is highly proficient in publicising the inequities and ecological cost of industrial farming, linking both issues to an overarching concern for quality. Its proposed solutions must be treated as experimental, however, and also subject to a degree of bureaucratic sluggishness on account of Slow Food's administrative bulk. Nevertheless, there is potential for back-to-the-landers to take advantage of Slow Food's programmes, and for Slow Food itself to benefit from the flexible and adventurous attitudes often carried by new farmers. How back-to-the-landers interact with Slow Food and the other AAFNs discussed in this chapter will form a major component of the discussions that follow in subsequent sections of this text, particularly Chapters 7 and 8.

6. Common ground? Profiling back-to-the-landers in Northern Italy

The complications of defining back-to-the-landers were addressed in detail in Chapter 2, with particular reference paid to the typology developed by Jacob (1997). As I have previously stated, the confusion surrounding categorical criteria for back-to-the-landers requires some clarity in determining who qualifies as such for the purposes of this study. To that end it is important to restate that the research participants herein described as back-to-the-landers are defined by two fundamental commonalities: 1) the act of migration to the countryside from an urban or suburban (predominantly non-agricultural) region, and; 2) their adoption of agriculture as a significant component of the household economy. This definition allows for some variation and remains inclusive of those who have performed the migration and are working toward greater involvement in agriculture, but who may still be reliant on other sources of income to sustain their rural livelihood. As with Jacob's categorisation, *intent* is the key, though in contrast to his research subjects, there are no 'weekenders' included here; that is, these research participants are all living fully agrarian lifestyles to the extent that farming is the dominant activity in their schedules.

Does establishing these commonalities imply that back-to-the-landers are a distinct social group, categorically linked through shared migration choices? If not, then what justification exists for researching an invented category such as this? Jacob (1997) refers to a back-to-the-land 'movement', but what kind of *transition* or direction is actually referenced by that term, other than physical relocation? These questions require consideration before it is possible to address what this potential 'movement' might mean and how it operates. It is significant that although Jacob's work on back-to-the-landers is exclusively focused on North America in the 1980s and 90s, many of the same ideological and biographical consistencies are shared among contemporary neo-farmers in Italy. Rural in-migrants in both contexts tend to keep one eye on the future (evinced in their commitment to sustainability) and another on the past (in their wilful adoption of a simplified lifestyle, alternative technologies and localism). This outlook is neatly expressed by the American publisher Jd Belanger (cited in Jacob, 1997: 29), founder of *Countryside* magazine:

It's not a single idea, but many ideas and attitudes, including a reverence for nature and a preference for country life; a desire for maximum personal self-reliance and creative leisure; a hostility toward luxury; a belief that the primary reward of work should be well-being rather than money; a certain nostalgia for the supposed simplicities of the past and an anxiety about the technological and bureaucratic complexities of the present and future; and a taste for the plain and functional.

As with Jacob's (1997: 26) assessment of North American 'new pioneers', Italian back-to-the-landers are recognisable in 'their philosophical point of view rather than their demographic profile.' Because institutional representation of back-to-the-landers is weak, there is no direct source that can supply either demographic or political / philosophical profiles of back-to-the-landers in any comprehensive way.[1] Similarly, there are few key texts, ideologies or campaigns that crystallise their shared beliefs into a neat statement of principles. The sections that follow attempt to locate consistencies and contradictions in who back-to-the-landers are and why they have chosen a life so different from the one to which they had been accustomed, this new lifestyle often being marked by vulnerability, geographical isolation and limited financial reward. By exploring their origins, motives and gendered experiences, I have compiled their pre-migration biographies and perspectives on the future to help bring their group identity into clearer focus.

6.1. Origins

Who are back-to-the-landers and where do they come from? Of all the questions posed in this study, this remains one of the most basic and yet perplexing. Some understanding of their origins is necessary to establish how their past experiences shape their current lifestyles, philosophies and social networks. As a demonstrably heterogeneous group, however, it is

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[1] Back-to-the-landers are not generally represented in their capacity as new farmers by any organisation established for that specific purpose. Farmers who have come from non-agricultural backgrounds do, of course, have the same representation as other farmers, through trade unions, political organisations and professional associations. That institutional support, and the role of new farmers' idealism in stimulating these organisations to particular kinds of action, forms a major segment of this analysis. It is essential to recognise, though, that these groups do not exist for the benefit of new farmers specifically, and therefore represent a plurality of interests.

important to approach with caution when attempting to draw generalities from such diverse biographies. This section, then, aims to elicit some consistencies in the backgrounds of back-to-the-landers in Tuscany, Emilia-Romagna, Umbria and Piedmont, while acknowledging when contradictions complicate a homogenous profile for the group.

6.1.1. Early pioneers

Early theorisations of counterurbanisation held that urban deconcentration and rural population growth were linked to economic development. Counterurbanisation was posited as a process related to postindustrial economic transition. The growth of the service-sector economy dissolved some of the spatio-temporal binds of work, with commuting, remote working and flexible scheduling (including the growth of part-time employment) replacing the site-specific and time-managed models of heavy industry. To earn an urban salary one no longer had to live in the city; put another way, one could occupy a house in the country without living like a peasant. Although I have tried to isolate back-to-the-land migration within the broader counterurbanisation narrative and present it as somewhat unique (Chapter 2), patterns of migration to rural Italy seem to bear some relation to stages of economic development in the home countries of urban to rural migrants. The occupational profiles of back-to-the-landers and the time periods in which this kind of migration has been popular among different nationalities suggest that moving from urban to agricultural lifestyles is a postindustrial phenomenon, as early counterurbanisation theories had claimed, with service sector workers constituting the majority of those relocating to the countryside (Table 6.1).

Table 6.1 – Backgrounds of farmers interviewed

Country of Origin	Male	Female	Occupations prior to farming	Cities of Origin
Italy	5	4	Electrician, lawyer, engineer, geologist, factory supervisor, teacher, secretary	Turin, Lecce, Bologna, Bolzano, Rome, Milan, Perugia
Switzerland	3	2	Accountant, international aid worker, teacher, photographer, advertising director	Bern, Geneva, Zurich
Germany	3	1	Software engineer, doctor, international development consultant	Stuttgart, Munich
England	0	2	Nurse, secretary	London
Scotland	1	1	NGO consultant, lawyer	Glasgow
USA	1	1	Doctor, lecturer	Washington D.C., Chicago

Note: Several interviews were conducted with more than one member of the household. The number of interviewees separated by gender does not imply separate interviews, but accounts for the total number of participants. These numbers relate exclusively to back-to-the-lander interviews and do not include WWOOFer or AAFN interviews.

All German interviewees discussed a 'wave' of immigration to Tuscany in the 1970s when individuals and intentional communities were able to take advantage of cheap agricultural land. One German equestrian technician who has been living in Tuscany since the 1970s said, 'We were called the Tuscan brigade. Every weekend in cities like Munich and Stuttgart, you would see big caravans of hippies driving out of the city and you knew they were going to Italy. Sometimes they just stayed for a short while… but many never returned home.' A Swiss (and primarily Swiss-German) wave occurred simultaneously though it was spread more evenly throughout several northern Italian regions. Belasco (1989) describes American back-to-the-land experiments in the 1960s and 70s often beginning as intentional communities, but rarely surviving as such into the 1980s. Similarly, some predominantly German agrarian communities

continue to exist in Tuscany and Umbria, but many have since been subdivided into individual farms or fully taken over by single families. These early intentional communities often served as the springboard for individual back-to-the-land initiatives. Walter, a former software programmer from Munich now farming in Tuscany, credits his exposure to intentional communities for his later decision to become an independent farmer:

> I came for the first time to Italy... by means of friends in 1978, when friends of mine, ex-university colleagues, wanted to found a self-sufficient community in the area of Cortona. My wife and me, we were just curious to see what they intended to do. We originally planned to reactivate the small farm of my wife's family in the Black Forest, or to buy a small estate in southern Bavaria, but then lots of people moved towards Tuscany and Umbria, and we were curious to have a look… That's the way it began, in 1978.

Traces of the collective ethos still linger in the farms of several research participants who are technically independent. Giorgio, from the Italian-speaking region of Switzerland, arrived in Umbria in 1972 to establish a communal farm with friends, but by the end of the decade he and his wife Margarete were the last remaining members. They have since passed the farm, which is owned by a local church diocese and rented for 300 euros per year, to Sebastian, who moved from Geneva in 2007 to try his hand at farming. Sebastian lives alone but frequently fills the farmhouse with WWOOFers, friends and relatives who all contribute to working the land. Martina and Stefan, an English woman and her Swiss husband, bought a piece of land in Umbria in 1975 and built a house on the site, one designed to accommodate the frequent short- and long-term guests they expected to work the land with them. They now participate in WWOOF, which simplifies and systematises the volunteering and accommodation, but also promote their farm as an 'open house', where people needing simple accommodation at short notice can pay a small fee to stay in the guest quarters or do a day's work on the farm and stay for free. Stefan and Martina explain:

> S: For the last 30 years, even before WWOOF, we did something where after too many discussions about who drinks the wine and who's using the gas and not smoking and who's whatever, we decided to make it a fixed price that more or less just covers the shopping. So that's been basically going on for the last 30 years. The WWOOF is just an extra thing which is very similar.

M: It used to be more like 300 but now it's probably about 200 people per year... Of course there are a lot of people who are old friends or friends of friends, or just on holiday, but I think there's an increasing number of people who are looking for a piece of land. Certainly we have an amazing number of young people coming through, all the time, seriously looking for land.

'At that time it was still agricultural prices,' claims Martina, 'and people were *leaving* then, and nobody could understand what we were doing.' The low cost of agricultural land is consistently emphasised by people who arrived before the 1990s. A long growing season and fertile soil are two reasons that the hilly central regions of Tuscany and Umbria have long been popular choices for back-to-the-landers, but the availability of cheap land and abandoned farmhouses, consequences of Italy's major post-war urban migration, were significant for factors for many.

Framing early back-to-the-land migration in terms of national waves does not provide a complete picture of the situation at any given time, as experiments in communal and self-reliant living were varied in themselves but also undertaken by Italians at home and abroad. The significance of the early arrivals of Germans and Swiss does demonstrate, however, different perceptions about the possibilities afforded by rural living. Germans and Swiss would have had greater exposure to organic agriculture by the 1970s, as well as alternative farming techniques such as biodynamic production. Walter, who moved to Tuscany from Munich in the early 1980s, says, 'It was a condition of coming here to have the possibility of organic farming... I was interested all my life in organic agriculture. It just seemed the normal way of doing things.' Of course, farming without chemicals had been practiced in Italy for centuries before industrial agriculture had been developed, but the connection between organic farming and the counterculture simply arose later than it did in other parts of Europe and North America. In other words, farming as a social or political project was underdeveloped as a realistic prospect for Italians, who were leaving the countryside *en masse*. As a predominantly rural country before WWII, post-war Italians were possibly too few generations removed from rural poverty to yearn for a return.

Box. 6.1 – Back-to-the-land profiles: Walter (Tuscany)

Ristonchia is a hamlet which has been almost completely abandoned, about 500m in the hills between Cortona and Castiglion Fiorentino. Once home to over a hundred people, only five households are currently inhabited. The gradual abandonment of Ristonchia both enabled - through cheap land prices - and benefited from Walter's stewardship of the surrounding land. Starting small after moving to Tuscany from Munich, Walter initially harvested some local olives and grapes and raised sheep. As more land became available Walter's agricultural activities expanded to encompass 500 olive trees, a vineyard, chestnut grove, woodland for foraging, as well as chickens, guinea fowl, goats, donkeys and a horse. He also keeps bees and produces his own honey, and maintains a small organic vegetable garden.

Walter is not completely self-sufficient but his production and bartering of basic foodstuffs have hugely reduced his dependency on market-rate products. For instance, goats love to graze on the leaves of olive trees, so the annual pruning of the groves provides ample food for the animals at no cost. Food waste from the house also goes to the goats. Heavier limbs from the olive trees are cut into firewood that will eventually find its way into Walter's *stufa,* or stove, which heats not only the kitchen but also the house's water supply and the radiators in other rooms. Manure, of course, is returned to the land as fertiliser. Nothing is wasted and a use can be found for nearly anything the land offers.

The degree of self-sufficiency that Walter has achieved – while not complete – is more of a relaxed, simplified way of life than the strained asceticism that marks some experiments in self-reliance. Winters can be tough in Ristonchia, where the stone houses are several hundred years old, but Walter's lifestyle is characterised by slow, quiet contemplation and good food and wine, all achieved through dogged labour but minimal financial cost.

6.1.2. Italian arrivals

The motivations for back-to-the-land migration are considered in detail in the following section, but merit a mention here as reflecting some disillusionment with contemporary capitalism and the work structures it imposes. This discontent is expressed by research participants with varying degrees of directness, but manages to remain a dominant theme in discussions about initial motivating factors. Because Italy's industrial development lagged behind other Western European nations and the growth of its service-sector economy was similarly slow until the 1970s, it is possible to conclude that widespread disenchantment with urban work and consumption patterns had not set in on the same scale as it had in Switzerland and Germany. Another possibility is that the frustration was typically expressed through workers' struggles and the traditional Marxism of the leftist political parties, whereas back-to-the-land migration largely represents a disengagement from workerist politics and the capitalist structures that enliven them. Post-war rural depopulation was dramatic in Italy, with less than 6% of the workforce concentrated in the primary sector by 1998 (Ginsborg, 2003: 340), down from 43% at the end of the Second World War (Bonifazi and Heins, 2003: 24). According to analysis by Bonifazi and Heins (2003: 27), negative population growth in Italian settlements of less than 10,000 has been consistent since the 1960s. These stark facts offer some explanation as to why 'nobody could understand' what people like Martina and Stefan were doing when they arrived in the Umbrian countryside to set up as farmers. Martina describes seeing the 'ugly face of capitalism' in her job as a secretary for a pharmaceutical company in London, and her choice to go back-to-the-land was effort to create an alternative to what her urban life symbolised. It may not be the case that the 'ugly face' took an exceptionally long time to reveal itself to Italians, but rather that the reaction against it was dominated by urban actions – namely strikes, factory occupations and street protests (cf. Hardt, 1996; Ginsborg, 2003: 54-62).

Figure 6.1 – WWOOF hosts' length of time on current farm
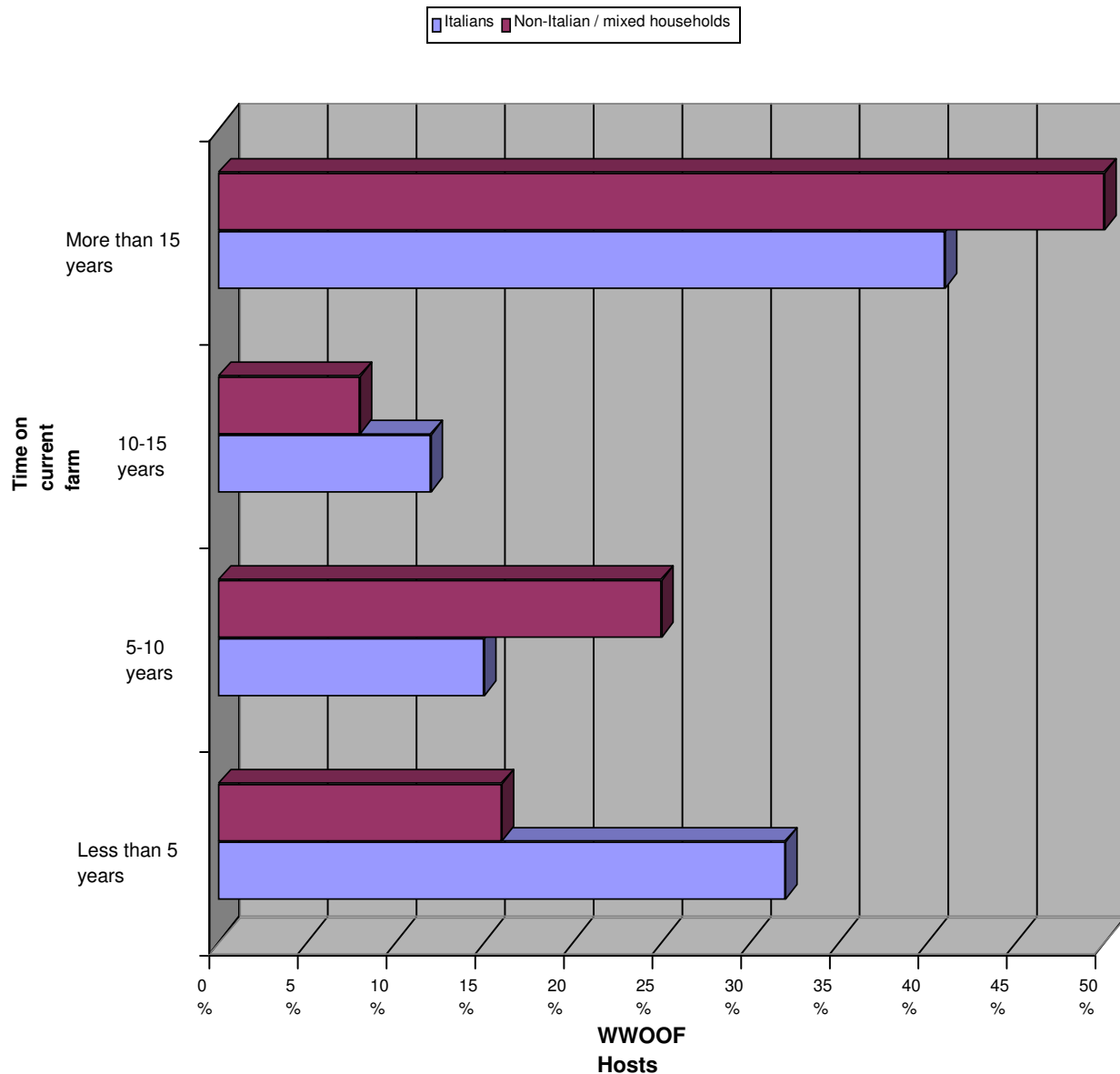
Source: Questionnaire data

All of the Italian back-to-the-landers who gave interviews or acted as WWOOF hosts for this research began farming after 1995. Figure 5.2 shows that while nearly half of all WWOOF hosts have been on their current farms for over 15 years, a larger percentage are relatively new arrivals. Segregated by country of origin, 30% of Italian respondents have been on their farms

for less than 5 years, with less than half (41.5%) resident there for 15 years or more. This marks a notable contrast to non-Italians, who make up a quarter of questionnaire respondents. Among non-Italians, over 90% claim to come from non-rural backgrounds but over half have been on their farms for more than 15 years. Clearly there has been a time lag in Italians returning back-to-the-land, though the fact that only 19.5% of Italian respondents claim rural upbringings demonstrates that the movement has taken root in Italian culture. In fact the phrase *contadini ritorni* (return farmers [or in some readings, return peasants]) is widely understood by Italians to refer to both young people returning to ancestral farms as well as new farmers with no prior connection to the land.

The adoption of back-to-the-land ideals among Italians is possibly linked to the development of what Ginsborg (2003: 43) calls the 'reflexive' middle class. Following sociologists Lash and Urry (1994: 31-59, cited in Ginsborg, 2003), this group distinguishes itself as comprised of skilled workers who have been 'turning an increasingly critical eye on modernity, upon [the middle class's] origins and activity.' The reflexive middle class, though relatively affluent, eschews much of the 'enrichment and the material consumption of the modern world... [and] has shown a growing awareness of global dangers, of the damage wrought by unthinking consumption on the quality of everyday life, of the connections between private choices and public consequences.' Later in his study, Ginsborg refers to these values as 'post-materialist'. Increasing proportionally from the 1980s (Figure 6.3), a period of accelerated economic growth, Italy's urban middle class was concentrated in sectors such as education, artisanal manufacturing and the arts. According to Ginsborg, the reflexive among this cohort became increasingly vocal about their concerns, though the action they took in response was highly diverse. The idea of progress as synonymous with efficiency and growth, a culture of ravenous and conspicuous consumption, rampant political corruption and environmental degradation were all challenged by these workers and still find correlates in the discourse of Slow Food, which originated within the mainstream Italian Left (Ginsborg, 2003: Parasecoli, 2003; Parkins and Craig, 2006).

Figure 6.2 - Italy's urban middle class as percentage of working population, 1951-93
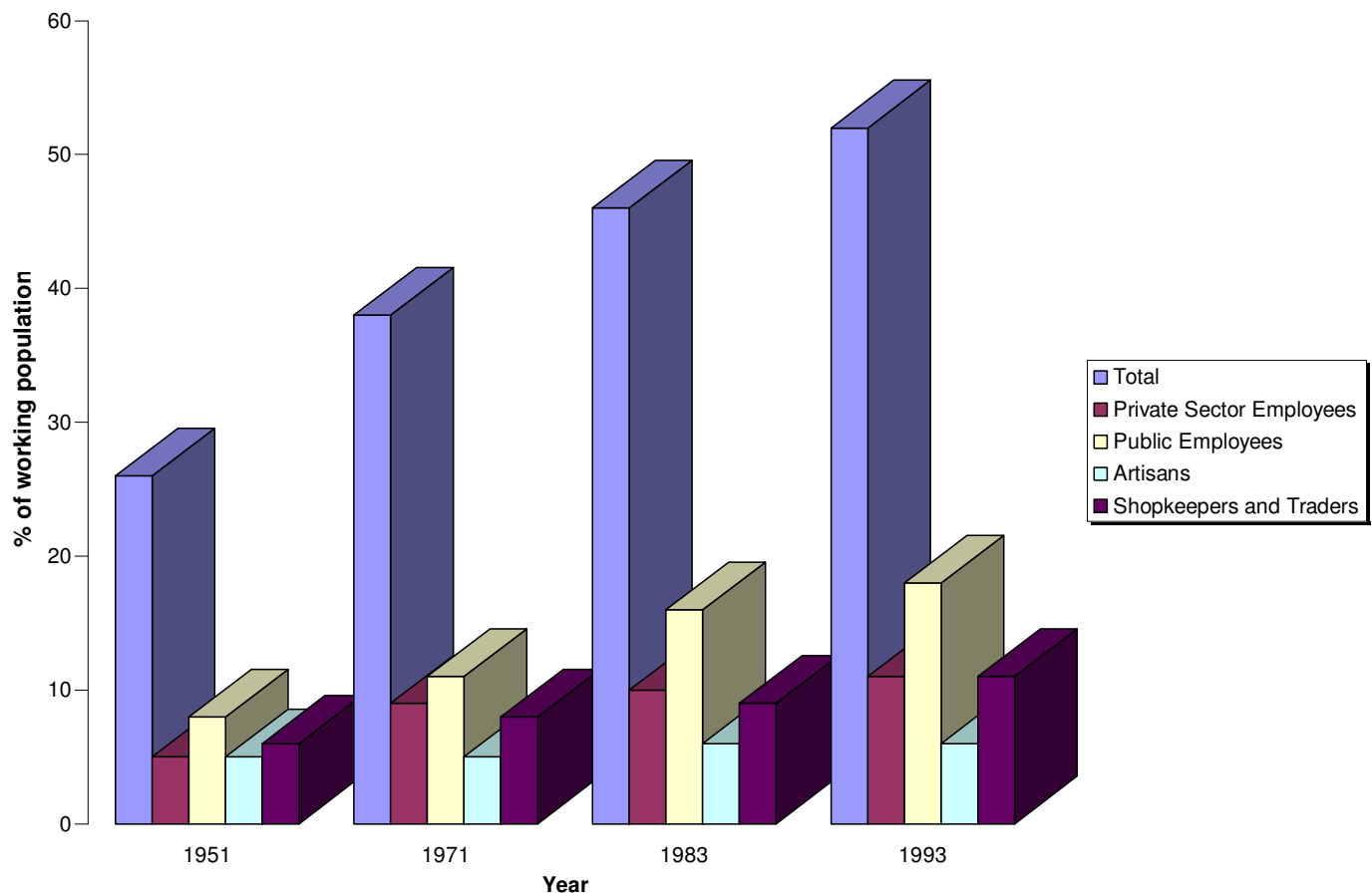
Source: Ginsborg (2003)

Statistics compiled by Ginsborg (2003: 337) show that in 1986-87, 14% of Italians aged between 15 and 44 could be said to express post-materialist values in social attitudes surveys, a figure that falls dramatically in older age cohorts. Interestingly, the growth in these values corresponds to the growth of structured or dependent employment for much of the working population, primarily service and public sector jobs with 'enduring structures of command and obedience, and… rigidities of time'(Ginsborg, 2003: 51).

The Free Association (2010: 1023) writes that social movements 'typically grow from "cramped spaces", situations that are constricted by the impossibilities of the existing world with a way out barely imaginable.' The idea of dependent employment as a 'cramped space' is applicable to the social contexts in which back-to-the-land migration begins to look like a desirable course of action. As Table 6.1 shows, a broad range of occupations had been attempted by back-to-the-landers before decisions to move to the countryside were activated. My intention is not to locate some essence amongst them that produces an urge to relocate and begin life anew. Rather, I want to establish a context in which back-to-the-land migration appears as a realistic opportunity for some urban workers, a chance to leave the 'cramped space' and experiment with alternative or 'open' spaces. I am cautious about using the 'reflexive middle class' descriptor too categorically, as I do not wish to imply either that this is a consciously embraced group identity, or that it is in itself sufficient to explain back-to-the-land migration among Italians (see Section 6.4). It nevertheless provides a window on preliminary contexts in which radical change is desired, but where familiar ideological footholds of resistance, such as organised labour, have lost traction.

Because a broad range of age groups and nationalities are represented by the research participants, I have not attempted to explain the back-to-the-land phenomenon by way of demographic consistencies. Where sufficient context has been established, such as the accounts of German and Swiss 'waves', and in analysis of Italian social history, this has been addressed directly. Framing back-to-the-land migration as closely connected to socio-economic contexts at the national level, such as I have done with regard to Germany, Switzerland and Italy, is admittedly problematic as there will always be anomalies. There are still Germans arriving in Tuscany and there were pioneering Italian *contadini ritorni* as early as the 1960s. It is not possible to contextualise the origins of every back-to-the-lander as part of a wave, but where waves did descend on rural Italy they form an important part of the back-to-the-land story. Section 6.2 attempts to distil some of the motives for back-to-the-land migration and provide a fuller picture of the migrants' origins and explanations for the lifestyle changes that they have made.

Figure 6.3 – Ristonchia, Tuscany

Almost entirely abandoned by the 1980s, the village's old houses and surrounding land made an affordable base for a back-to-the-lander in 1982.

Source: Author

Box 6.2 - Back-to-the-land profiles: Giorgio (Umbria)

Giorgio moved to the Umbrian countryside from Switzerland in 1972, part of a sweep of Swiss and Germans that took advantage of the cheap and plentiful rural property in central Italy. A freelance photographer with a portfolio of commercial and gallery work, Giorgio found an abandoned house, completely without modern facilities (water, electricity, etc.) and rented it from the church for a nominal fee. He describes this as a symbolic charge, just enough to make the contract legal, when in actual fact they were effectively given the property to look after. Giorgio and his friends began restoring the property, eventually installing water, electricity and heating, as well as bringing the land back to productivity. Many houses and farms had been left derelict in the area, and the region's leftist political disposition proved favourable to back-to-the-land projects. In Switzerland, Giorgio claims, 'you would find some doctor and university professors preaching revolution', but family life remained politically conservative or generally disengaged. In 1970s Umbria, he says, ordinary families truly believed in the spirit of collectivism that characterised both the administrative approach of the region and the back-to-the-landers' philosophy. He credits his neighbours as far more helpful than hostile, and received a lot of instruction about farming from local *contadini* who were living an extremely simple lifestyle.

More people joined Giorgio, including his future wife Margarete, a couple of years after the farm's founding, once it had become more habitable. They raised goats, pigs, chickens and donkeys and grew grapes wine, grain, sunflowers and vegetables. Giorgio continued to do professional photography work, but he could afford to lighten his workload considerably once the land became productive enough to satisfy his basic needs.

Giorgio and Margarete moved into a nearby town in 2003 and turned the farm over to Sebastian, a younger, single Swiss man whose own experiments in self-sufficiency are now being articulated on the land.

6.2. Motives

> Even where jobs remain steady over some years, work is controlled by the intense pace of machines and / or the expectations of one's 'teammates' / co-workers. There is little room for autonomy, a human pace, values and needs unmeasured by company profits or remuneration. Concurrent with the dispersion of production across regions, nations, and the planet, new technologies have been deployed to sap the work of human skill.
>
> Carlsson (2008: 27)

Employing a classic trope of migration studies, it is useful to frame back-to-the-land migration in terms of basic push and pull factors. The desire to leave the city, move to the countryside and adopt farming should be understood within two distinct but complementary streams of influence: the push factors that drive people from the city and waged work and the pull of not only rural localities but the act of farming itself. Understanding the lure of *farming* in particular should help to contextualise back-to-the-landers as a distinct social group, putting them in a different frame from other migrants to the country. Addressing how work in the city is experienced by those who wish to leave it, and what role farming plays in their eventual decision to do so, should bring to light more of the specific attributes of this particular group.

6.2.1. Work and (in)dependence

The most frequently cited push factor relates to the nature of dependent employment and structured work relationships. Back-to-the-land migration is often rooted in some essential dissatisfaction with the work-life (im)balance of urban capitalist society and its connected norms of consumption. Migration narratives often feature a gradual acknowledgement of frustration and the desire for a radical lifestyle change, usually paralleled by an increased interest in 'connecting with nature', an experience mediated through physical emplacement in

rural environments. Meaning and self-determination, as well as a sense of making a material contribution to the world within clear ethical boundaries, appear regularly in accounts of why the lifestyle change was made.

S: I didn't do much work as an accountant because already when I was doing the training I realised that that wasn't going to be what I was going to do… And so when I'd finished I did a thing where I worked to make money to travel. To travel in order to go places where I could also stay and learn to do something practical…To give you a sense of significance, so that you're not just spending your day inside an office and coming home tired like my father did. Not having time for your children or your family… Just working for weekends and holidays, and basically hating the rest of your life. I thought, What do you actually like to do? rather than, What would make you enough money to be able to live?

Stefan, Umbria

D: Previous to [self-employment], I'd worked in the voluntary sector, the public sector with social work departments... I think being self-employed gave me an opportunity to think, Right, you're kinda master of your own destiny. You can decide, Right what are we going to do in the next few years? So that was a wee step on this long journey, I suppose… So it was good from the point of view of being a bit of a change to go from salaried to self-employed. It kind of shifted your whole way of doing things and it made this whole way of doing things possible…Going from salaried job, pension, etc…

T: [I was a] criminal defence solicitor... I didn't really enjoy it anyway…It was a lifestyle move but it was also a sort of lifestyle / work choice because we knew we weren't going to just retire here, it was to work… So it was a completely different focus to what a lot of other UK people come over here to do. I agree with David, I think if you're more settled in your employment, your outlook has got to be different. I've got a lot of friends who think they just can't do it because they're stuck in that trap of 'I've got the car, I've got the mortgage. A good standard of living in Scotland…'

David and Tanya, Umbria

E: I think that of course we are changing our lifestyle but then also maybe... hmm... in a small way we can also change something else, apart from our lifestyle. For

example we are trying to promote the wild herbs and so we are trying to reintroduce the use of these herbs. This can be a little change toward something big.

R: And also I think that... people who work with us or talk with us, or friends, also... I think this is also a way to communicate with other people that maybe you too can do something, some kind of change.

Elisa and Romano, Emilia-Romagna

Sebastian, a former advertising director in Zurich, tells of having an epiphany shortly after buying a BMW. 'I only had it for a few days, but when I pulled up into the driveway and said hello to a neighbour, a woman who worked for a children's charity and didn't make much money, I felt ashamed of myself.' Sebastian learned of the opportunity to take over an organic farm in Umbria run by a Swiss couple who had decided to move into the local town and leapt at the chance. Before he left Switzerland, Sebastian claims, he donated the BMW to his neighbour, sold his stake in the advertising business and arrived on the farm with less than €5,000. 'The point was to see if I could do it without a lot of money. What would be the purpose if I could buy my way out of trouble? ...That's when I made up my mind – better to give it all away and do something myself.'

Many migration accounts are framed by a disappointment in the life prospects afforded by urban work opportunities and the culture of materialism that the city inspires, but there is surprisingly little evidence of a strongly anti-urban current within them. Motives for moving to the countryside are typically expressed positively, as new possibilities and opportunities, rather than as negative reactions to urban life like those commonly articulated in earlier research on urban to rural migration. Discontent in the workplace and a longing for autonomy are common themes in new farmers' life stories, while some anticipated complaints about cities (crime, overcrowding, cost of living) are voiced less often. 'Quality of life' considerations are frequently linked directly to agriculture, expressed as a desire for proximity to food sources and life-affirming practices of nurture and care. The issue of independence has been

noted by some interviewees as rather paradoxical, given that taking responsibility for a piece of land is deeply binding and the financial returns are minimal. Back-to-the-landers' definitions of independence, then, are largely conceived around factors such as determining one's own routine, working outdoors, reduced status anxiety and consumer pressure, experimentation opportunities and increased self-sufficiency in food. These are the attractions of farming, the pull factors that excite the back-to-the-land impulse. Independence is key to understanding the lure of the rural.

> It's the freedom. It sounds strange because, like, if you live in a town you don't have the responsibility of nearly anything… If you miss one bus there is another bus after five minutes. It's easy to find a reasonable job and maybe make a lot of money and live a perfectly easy life. On the other hand, I think town gives you a kind of freedom which is completely closed. During your free time at home, during your time at work and transport to and from work, you are always closed... Of course it's just a kind of freedom because you are limited in some kinds of ways, especially when you start to have kids. You have to take them to school, you have to have a car, you have to pick them up from places, if you want to go shopping you need to jump in the car… For me this is the price for [country life], and I'm willing to pay it.
>
> Klara, WWOOFer, Emilia-Romagna

> I just thought to myself, you can either work and get paid for it or else you can go and make your own food. And I just thought that the survival skills of human beings can't be that difficult, right, 'cos we're all human beings. So I came out here and started and fortunately… When I came here there were people who were self-sufficient in a much more profound way than anybody nowadays. These people made their own shoes, they did everything. They had no money economy.
>
> Martina, Umbria

Interestingly, there are no touchstone texts or philosophical foundations that run consistently through back-to-the-land migration narratives. Bruno, a farmer in Piedmont who relocated from Turin in the mid-90s, claims that he had been influenced by philosophies of non-violence and the essays of Mahatma Gandhi when he was struck with the idea to adopt an agrarian lifestyle. Cultivating grain and baking bread, he says, seemed the antithesis of violence: a productive, socially useful and ecologically sustainable act. Other back-to-the-landers,

however, tend to be less direct about influential ideas. Writings on self-sufficiency from the 1960s and 70s, particularly those of American farmer John Seymour, were noted by a few interviewees as providing both philosophical inspiration and practical how-to advice. Karen, an American migrant from urban Washington D.C., had used the writings of Seymour as a model for previous smallholding and hobby farm projects. In creating an 'urban farm' in the town of Spello in Umbria, her lifestyle was somewhat preformulated on ideals of self-sufficiency and 'cities feeding cities', as she puts it. This directness of intent is not universal, however. The general lack of commonality in sources of inspiration indicates that back-to-the-landers do not necessarily view themselves as part of a defined social movement. In fact, many new farmers revealed their surprise at discovering, once they had relocated to the countryside, how many others had also moved from city to country with similar ambitions. Lifestyle models and farming practices, then, are not always predetermined by beliefs. During the first few years at his farm in Tuscany, for example, Walter simply used the land in the way that previous owners had, growing the same crops and restoring old buildings to their former use. Over time he felt confident enough to experiment with new techniques, but to a large extent his early experience was one of simply falling into the pattern of what had come before.

Mid-career malaise is certainly not unique to would-be farmers, and it should not be read as an essential precursor to back-to-the-land migration. It is not a new phenomenon either, though it has been treated to new analyses in publications such as *The Idler* and recent bestsellers like psychologist Oliver James's (2007) *Affluenza,* a study of the socially damaging effects of overwork and materialistic individualism.[2] The push factors in back-to-the-land migration often begin with this general discontent; this is not, however, sufficient to explain the adoption of farming. Parkins and Craig (2006: 67) recognise that non-economic migration within affluent societies increasingly involves 'downshifting' in order to gain a simpler, slower lifestyle. While back-to-the-landers could be classed in this category they are unlike the migrants described by the authors in that their intention is not to remain 'connected to work contexts through the uses of communication technologies that overcome the tyranny of distance.' Rural relocation is an option for many professionals (as Berry [1976; 1980] suggested in the earliest counterurbanisation studies) but a relatively small number choose to adopt an agricultural

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[2]   In fact, it says something interesting that no less than three books with the title *Affluenza* were published by independently of one another between 2005 and 2010, while several more referring to the 'condition' have followed suit.

lifestyle. What, then, is the attraction of *farming* that pulls a certain type of urban to rural migrant toward it?

6.2.2. Dispositions

In six case studies of alternative producer-consumer relationships[3], Kneafsy et al. (2008: 83) describe food producers as having a 'disposition' that directs them toward this vocation: 'an association with farming and, in most cases, the rural, is central to the producers' identities – their sense of themselves and their place in the world.' The authors cite rural upbringings and family farms as a constitutive force in this sense of self. Because back-to-the-landers by definition come from other backgrounds, they will in many cases have a dramatically different disposition. In profiling back-to-the-landers in Northern Italy, then, it is important to determine what kind of dispositions influence the decision to migrate to the countryside.

For some, youthful experiences of the rural resonated throughout their adult lives:

> R: I had just many memories of my grandfather, and also my brother has olive trees, so we used to quite often go to the countryside.

> E: But before we started this experience we were thinking about going to the country and started reading a lot of things, trying to study wild plants or trying to understand some things that were only theoretical things – nothing practical.

> R: I started working offshore, and we were thinking, What can we do? I can't work offshore all my life. So this idea, this - let's say, *good feeling* for the countryside was always inside. So I started thinking about doing something with medicinal herbs and we started talking about this in 2004, I think. Then we started looking for a farm. We had many discussions about it and then we realised that we couldn't buy and so we found this farm here and thought, Okay, we can try and if it doesn't fit for us then we can try again somewhere else [laughs].

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[3] Since one aim of the volume by Kneafsey et al. (2008) is to critically explore the notion of 'alternative', a simple summary cannot do justice to the fulsomeness of the authors' ideas. However, in the interests of clarity, the alterity of the case study relationships is construed through direct selling (such as organic home delivery box schemes and on-site farm shops), CSA subscriptions, and an urban growers' collective.

AW: So was your idea that you wanted a change from the city or you really wanted to become a farmer... maybe a little of both?

R: No, we wanted to become farmers. After talking to Elisa she also wanted to do this. It's not just to move away...

<div align="right">Romano and Elisa, Emilia-Romagna</div>

I studied political science, so... some people would go work in a bank, or at the university. A lot of my colleagues who studied this are working in diplomatic jobs, which for me was not really interesting. It's interesting, I know now, but then it was too much formal dressing [laughs]. For me what was important was to do something useful and interesting and varied, not boring. Working in a bank would be boring. But farming has always been for me something which I like, because during my studies I regularly went to a farm near the town where I grew up in Switzerland, the farm of a friend of mine, an organic farm. I went there several times for a week during my studies, and after I finished university I went there for one year. So it's been something that I always kind of liked. My father is from a farming family, a very poor one, but he really went out of that lifestyle, though it seems that there is something there for me.

<div align="right">Greta, Emilia-Romagna</div>

We made hay at the farm that my father managed, some 60 years ago, and I always had some farming interest, so on my holidays I volunteered near a farm, and I lived near the countryside in Munich, and I had some farming friends. I had beehives in Germany. So for beehives, haymaking and having animals, I didn't have to learn very much.

<div align="right">Walter, Tuscany</div>

An interest in gastronomy also foregrounds the desire to grow one's own produce for numerous back-to-the-landers. Nicla, a former secretary in Rome and Sydney who has recently returned to work the land she has taken over from her ailing uncle, was partly persuaded to move into the farmhouse by her childhood memories of the farm's *prugne di Montepulciano*, small, exceptionally sweet, bullet-shaped plums native to this small corner of Tuscany. 'People would think I'm crazy for saying that I wanted to become a farmer because I liked the taste of this plum, and it wasn't the only reason, but I couldn't stand the idea of letting this farm

disappear. I don't want it to be sold to someone who doesn't care about these things, who will tear up the plum trees and put a swimming pool in. I know about all the hard work my uncle put into this place and how he cared for the soil so that these trees could keep producing forever.' Over many unrecorded conversations about food - often during the course of a meal - back-to-the-landers described how an interest in farming developed through their own gastronomic predilections. Aspiring farmers often gain early experience as window-box gardeners and back garden cultivators before graduating to full-time farming. This transition is often pushed by a simple desire for better food.

Even if you go to the best organic food market, it's still going to be limited to what they have and there's the expense as well. So there is only so much you can do in a place like Glasgow to get the best produce. So coming here was fantastic in that way… People need to see where their meat comes from, what it looks like. A lot of people say, 'No, I don't want to see that…' but you've got to so you have control over it… Certainly, I think I'm a lot healthier, or a lot thinner, certainly with working the land and everything, and the fresh air.

Tanya, Umbria

I know it is the taste that is the most important [reason for farming organically]. But it's also important to know who is the producer. To be confident of the traceability, more than the organic, the traceability of the producer. That is important with food. And we have this amazing climate… and soil… If you go down to Sicily, you find this cherry tomato that you don't find anywhere else, the *patino*. Every region is special – here we have got these lentils. They grow only here and have this taste that is amazing. The olive oil from Umbria and Tuscany is for me the best olive oil in the world.

Lorenzo, Umbria

The desire to produce unusual varieties of fruit, vegetables and meat is usually catalysed through a taste experience. Madeleine, a young WWOOFer from the USA volunteering on Elisa and Romano's farm near Bologna, discussed having her back-to-the-land ambitions stimulated by the food she enjoyed on the farm:

It's made me appreciate how much I like being close to the source of my food, especially the vegetables. I really like how here Elisa and Romano grow fruits and vegetables which they grow from seed, but they also go around their property and collect wild herbs. They'll point out to you, 'Oh yeah! That can be used for this... cook it this way...' I think it's really important for people to know what the local plants are and what they can be used for, so I would definitely get some kind of a book or find somebody who could tell me about local wild edibles and try to incorporate those [on my farm].

A passion for animals and commitment to animal welfare forms another important stimulus to entering agriculture. Brigitta and Hans, a Swiss couple living in Tuscany since the 1980s, claim that before moving to Italy they longed for space to rear animals. Unable to have children, they participated in a programme that brought troubled teenagers from Bern to stay on their farm in Tuscany for a summer. This gave some satisfaction where their infertility problems had caused grave disappointment, but they also were also able to focus some nurturing energy onto the sheep and chickens that they raised. In Emilia-Romagna, Romano claims that animals 'complete' a farm and are foundationally embedded in the historically-attuned, ecologically sustainable lifestyle that he has tried to create: 'I think it's important that we see that in some way, we are looking into the past, looking to the old farms... So we are trying to make an experience based on history, and in all these stories there are animals.' Rearers of ducks, rabbits and rare-breed hens, Romano and Elisa claim that despite initial discomfort with animal slaughter, they have adjusted to it and are comfortable knowing that the animals have been treated well. They eat only meat produced by themselves or other farmers whom they know personally.

Romano's perspective on the past mingles with optimism for the future, 'even if it's hard now,' he claims. 'We see that there's a lot of interest [in our produce], so the problem isn't doing something that nobody's interested in, it's to organise the farm. It will be difficult, but anyway, there will be something to sell.' Like other back-to-the-landers, he is focused on sustainability and nurturing an indefinitely fertile ecosystem. This stage was arrived at through circuitous and unlikely routes, however, given that he had spent years training as a marine geologist and was living near his family home in the southern Italian city of Lecce. All back-to-the-land stories involve similar disruptions in expected life trajectories, usually precipitated by disillusionment with chosen paths and a longing for reconnection with nature. Causes and

motives are therefore unique to particular individuals, but almost always invoke what Crouch (2003: 23) calls 'the desire to cultivate the plants and work the ground, and thereby involve escape, self-discovery and self-assertion in relation to nature.' Sebastian, one of the 'newest' of the new farmer interviewees, affirms this:

I always had a craving to do this. I was living two different lives. Having an advertising agency, you're stuck in this advertising field and I had this little space in my mind where I should be living... I was always interested in wild plants, and I used to collect wild plants and I used to always grow in containers, these sorts of things... Because it makes sense. It really makes sense.

Figure 6.4 – Homemade preserves, Tuscany

Olives and fruit preserves made on site from farm produce at Azienda Belmondo, Tuscany

Source: Author

Box 6.3 - Back-to-the-land profiles: Bruno and Milena (Piedmont)

A common strategy for back-to-the-land migration involves the diversification of economic activities. This is put into practice in various ways by farmers in Italy, but Bruno and Milena's family offers a notably successful example. Bruno and Milena both lived and worked in Turin until the early 1990s, when they decided to uproot to the local countryside.

They began growing wheat, spelt and lesser-known grains traditional to the Alps, milling the cereals themselves and baking bread for retail at the farmers' markets of Pinerolo and Turin. This was their primary activity for about 10 years until they purchased their current farm, a former fruit orchard that had fallen into neglect. Here they began to diversify their operations, designing terraces for growing leafy plants such as lettuce, cabbage, radicchio and valerian, as well as onions, garlic and other vegetables. Few of these vegetables find their way to local markets, however, as most get used by the family and in the restaurant they built as part of the house.

They keep donkeys, two horses, a mule and about 50 hens for eggs and 50 chickens reared for meat. There are two polytunnels for growing fruit and vegetables, clusters of fruit trees whose annual bounty is transformed into jams and marmalades. A workshop sits next to the house where grain is milled and dough produced for the 80 loaves of bread that are baked every week in a traditional wood-fired bread oven and sold locally. Finally, the family uses what little spare space they have left to offer bed and breakfast hospitality.

Bruno and Milena have multiple economic strategies operating simultaneously and are able to secure a sustainable income through tough and time-consuming labour but little capital expenditure.

6.3. Gender, migration and farming

I have remarked elsewhere that research on back-to-the-land migration faces a serious challenge in proposing to represent a distinctive cohort of people, rather than disparately linked individuals. This difficulty is compounded by giving due attention to gender, which, as I aim to show, can elicit notable differences in the back-to-the-land experience. In the following section I give consideration to the tensions between the domestic and work spheres for back-to-the-land women, recognising the relativity of notions such as liberation and independence that often give rise to back-to-the-land impulses. I then explore how researchers have attempted to align the practice of farming with gender-conscious theorisations, and question whether a 'feminine ethic of care' is a valid and useful lens through which to view the performance of alternative farming. Such a concept has been used to theorise alternative approaches to agriculture; I argue, however, that the relationship between care and femininity may not be easy to discern in practice.

6.3.1. Back-to-the-house? Domesticity and (dis)empowerment

'I never wanted to be a *mama*,' says Elisa. She and her husband Romano have been farming here since 2008, having traded their lives as geo-engineering consultants for the lean economic rewards of organic horticulture. The adaptation to a more hand-to-mouth existence is not the greatest challenge for Elisa, however; an educated professional, she complains of having to adopt the duties expected of a traditional Italian country wife:

> Usually at lunchtime I would be happy with just a sandwich or something light, but because I have to feed the WWOOFers – and then again at dinner – I feel like I'm in the kitchen all day. I don't really mind cooking, and I'm better at it now, but it was never really my passion. This has been the hardest thing for me, harder than working in the fields or cleaning spiders and scorpions from the house when we moved in... I never thought I would be a *mama* like all the women around me when I was growing up, but that's what has happened to me here.

Elisa is not using *mama* as an informal substitute for 'mother'. In her activities around the farmhouse she gives every impression of enjoying motherhood and appears selflessly and unconditionally devoted to her three young children. The *mama* figure is a specific social category in Italian culture, one associated with a deep-rooted and complex set of expectations and responsibilities. A matriarch with multiple overlapping roles in the domestic economy – irrespective of any potential role in the formal economy – the *mama*'s obligations in managing the household seem Sisyphean compared to the time-managed structure of formal employment. The *mama* is a consummate organiser, an administrator of highly structured cooking, cleaning, shopping and childcare routines. While this reflects the expectations placed on women in many cultures, the rigidity of gender roles has lingered longer in Italy than in many other European nations and is particularly pronounced in rural areas. A recent United Nations report on women and inequality lists the difference in time spent on domestic work between men and women in Italy as 4 to 5 hours per day, a ratio similar to Pakistan, Turkey and Iraq (UN, 2010: 17). A survey from the late 1980s, quoted by Ginsborg (2003: 80), indicates that the division of household labour is unaffected by whether women are also working *outside* the home. Reviewing historical, anthropological and psychoanalytic studies of Italian family life, Ginsborg (2003: 78) concludes that the mama archetype elicits 'a picture of Italian motherhood couched in terms of sacrifice, purity and possessiveness, with a further key element being the intensity of the mother-son relationship.' The dependency created through mothers' self-sacrifice, argues Ginsborg, is extended down the generational line, with grandmothers retaining some active involvement in ordering their sons' domestic lives. Camporesi (1989: 164) acerbically refers to these women as 'angels of the hearth' and uses of metaphors of magic and sorcery to imply a male ignorance of how domestic work is accomplished. He writes, however, that 'those angels are nearly extinct: women are seeking early retirement from housework, or simply abandoning their role as domestic slaves.'

Camporesi's observation is supported by recent changes in the gendered profiles of Italy's professional and political spheres. In 2009, Italy had the world's third-lowest birthrate (IndexMundi, 2010), a remarkable condition for a country with a strong Catholic heritage and historical tendency toward large families. In 1951, a third of Italian families could count 5 or more members, but by the 1990s that figure had shrunk to 11% (Ginsborg, 2003: 327). Ginsborg

(2003: 68-82) attributes some of this change to increased reproductive rights and expanded legal parity between the sexes following the Second World War. He argues, however, that the traditional *mama* role offers little appeal to Italian women now experiencing unprecedented opportunities to travel other pathways through life. Between 1980 and 2000, the ratio of female to male graduates of Italian universities increased by 15%, with women now constituting a majority of graduates. The proportion of women in parliament, while still well behind some European countries, has increased from 11% to 21% in the last ten years (UNECE, 2010). Figures from Istat, Italy's national statistics bureau, report more official unemployment and economic 'inactivity' among women than men, but the 2010 female unemployment rate of 10% marks a significant decline from previous decades, with the total unemployment rate for women having remained near 20% throughout the 1980s (Istat, 2010; Ginsborg, 2003: 345). Considering the increased presence of women outside the domestic sphere, and the opportunities that have been achieved as a result, it comes as little surprise that a dwindling number of women find becoming an unpaid, full-time *mama* an attractive prospect. Ginsborg concludes that women who witnessed the thankless domestic toil of their forebears, particularly when coupled with 'authoritarian, absenteeist fathers', are less inclined to bear their own children in an era of greater reproductive freedom. Although opportunities for women have increased outside the home, there is little evidence to suggest that the imbalance of domestic labour has been redressed. As Sharp et al. (2003: 282) argue, 'Women's rights in the work force simply mean a double burden for women who must tend to responsibilities for household reproduction after a day at work. What might appear as empowerment might simply add extra burdens to a woman's work day.'

Several conversations with back-to-the-landers, including the one with Elisa recounted above, support these observations. Counhian (1999: 44) describes a condition of 'strong and debilitating identity conflict' affecting contemporary Italian women 'because of the unresolved contradiction between their public and domestic roles.' Due to inevitable limitations on time and energy, she argues, 'they cannot materially perform both roles effectively. Hence they suffer frustration and self-doubt.' While Counihan analyses this phenomenon from the perspective of women's entry *into* the public sphere, it is interesting to consider how these same 'unresolved contradictions' emerge when back-to-the-land women retreat *from* formal employment and urban social milieux. The distribution of labour in back-to-the-land families tends to fall along broadly traditionalist lines, if out of necessity rather than design. While

some women farmers certainly participate in the physical labour of agriculture, others feel simply unable to match the pace or endurance of men, resulting in a greater distribution of household chores falling into the female remit. This is true of a back-to-the-land family in Umbria where Karen, a former university lecturer in her early 50s, is limited in her physical capacity for farmwork and so takes care of nearly all of her family's domestic necessities. She expressed to me a mild discontent about this situation because she enjoys outdoor work, but is reliant on her husband and WWOOFers to complete the most physically demanding jobs (of which there are plenty on her land, with its rocky, compacted soil). Like many back-to-the-land women, she is well-educated and has worked as an urban professional, and claims that the role of primary cook and cleaner has posed a challenging adjustment. As with Elisa, these duties have become codified through participation in WWOOF as membership obliges host farms to ensure that WWOOFers are adequately fed and housed for the duration of their stay. Research by McIntosh and Bonnerman (2006) on WWOOF farmers in New Zealand suggests that this is issue is not confined to Italy; among their research subjects, it was women who had the most contact with WWOOFers while men remained relatively detached from the hosting process.

It is inconclusive as to whether these examples illustrate imbalanced, patriarchal relationships or necessary practical reasoning. It needs to be made clear that not all back-to-the-land women work primarily in the domestic sphere, and among those that do, a sense of confinement or disempowerment is not necessarily the norm. Milena, an educated woman her 50s, moved from Turin to the Piedmontese countryside with her husband Bruno in the mid-1990s. They have lived on two farms, with their current property better reflecting their efforts toward self-sufficiency and diverse economic activity within a small rural space. She has gradually taken a less active role in food production as her sons, now in their early 20s, have grown older and become more capable of accomplishing the majority of the farmwork with their father. Milena is nonetheless hardworking, an astute manager of the household economy and the public face of the family's on-site restaurant and hospitality operations. Her daily schedule seems occupied by a tyranny of domestic chores: preparing breakfast and swiftly clearing away its remnants, washing laundry, shopping for food, cleaning the house, ferrying Bruno's elderly parents between their home and hers, preparing fulsome lunches and dinners, attending to guests in their B&B, and working as chief host, cook and cleaner at the restaurant, which is open for four sittings between Friday night and Sunday afternoon. In their early years

at the farm, this routine would have also included school runs. Although exceedingly busy, Milena claims to much prefer her current responsibilities to the farm work, for which her physical energy has dissipated. She laughs about never wanting to pick an onion again while claiming that she feels no urge to trade her current life for a return to the city, where she felt claustrophobic in a small apartment and work left her feeling oppressed by the clock and separated from her family. As with other back-to-the-landers, Milena describes her new life in the language of liberation, her relocation to the countryside an escape from the 'cramped space' of her city life.

The extent to which women may feel empowered or repressed by their work – domestic or otherwise – may in large part depend on the sense of reward that comes from it. Women like Elisa and Karen left jobs in which they were externally acknowledged for their achievements, both financially and in professional status. The rewards of rural living described by back-to-the-landers are typically of a less material or formalised nature. Though this view is shared among both men and women, a lack of recognition for hard work is possibly felt more acutely where labour divisions are regimented along gendered lines, with the female or domestic sphere being more enclosed and less visible. However, because the economic activity on back-to-the-land farms is rarely confined exclusively to agriculture (with tourism or off-site part-time work often providing extra financial support), back-to-the-land women are likely to be involved in some form of economic production, however informally (Whatmore, 1991). [4] Trauger's (2007) study of back-to-the-landers in the USA reveals a similarly traditionalist division of labour, but one in which women are nonetheless responsible for multifarious contributions to the family economy, from bookkeeping, communications and marketing to part-time work off the farm.

Mitchell (2000: 204) writes that feminists have been mobilised to liberate the 'spatial entrapment' of women, a condition of physical distance from public life and power

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[4]   Gibson-Graham (1996; 2008) note that unwaged domestic work *does* constitute economic activity. Its omission from standard econometrics is interpreted as the enforcement and extension of patriarchy through capitalist processes. I wish to acknowledge the 'active' status of domestic work while maintaining that the shift from formal employment to the varied responsibilities of household management, with its lack of direct financial reward, still has significant psychological effects for the women in question. The distinction between formal and informal economies, then, recognises the contributions of those who participate in the latter while denoting its lack of codified reward systems. See also Whatmore (1991).

concentrations, most visibly manifest in the suburbanisation and associated 'cult of domesticity' of postwar America and Europe. On farms, it can be argued, a sense of entrapment may be diminished by the fact that economic activity radiates *from* the land (and home), preserving a degree power within the social unit that controls production on site. Gibson et al. (2010) insist that this power – both economic and social – be recognised. Failure to do so, they argue, subjects rural space to a modernist development narrative in which power is legitimated primarily through a transition to waged labour. For back-to-the-land women, 'entrapment' may represent a system that physically distances them from the home and family rather than sequestering them within it. Furthermore, this inversion of the entrapment theory is not exclusive to women. Back-to-the-land men also place a high value on rootedness as a positive outcome for the family. In Umbria, Stefan recalls: 'I grew up after the war and that was a period where everybody was desperately trying to make money and find a career, the result of which was that I basically saw [my father] at weekends. And when I think about him in my childhood there are a lot of absences. So I thought, If I'm going to have children then there's no point [in following a similar path].' Milena's husband Bruno describes engineering his farm production so that there would always be on-site jobs available for his two sons. Matteo, his younger son, wants to attend university but claims that he would like to return to the farm after studying agriculture. Simone, Matteo's older brother, is gradually taking on a greater responsibility for certain farm tasks such as animal care and firewood collection. Like several others, Bruno is concerned that without sufficient opportunities, the already small number of young people remaining in the countryside will diminish even further. The fact that Bruno's sons wish to stay on the farm confirms its greater appeal than distant city opportunities, thus challenging the idea that farm life necessarily represents a restricted existence.

For back-to-the-landers, freedom from employment hierarchies, urban congestion and consumer culture comes in the self-contained rituals of farm life. For women, domestic impositions may be seen in this context as virtues re-appropriated from a capitalist socio-economic condition that values work, money and status above family, attachment to place and engagement with nature. This does, however, suggest some potentially problematic views, particularly concerning normative family roles. As Belasco (2008: 43) writes of Carlo Petrini and Slow Food, 'one may be struck by his clear nostalgia for the pre-modern "family conviviality" of the time *before* women entered the workforce en masse' (emphasis in original). These

concerns are strongly expressed in Laudan's (2001) 'plea for culinary modernism' in which she argues that women will disproportionately bear the burden of the 'Culinary Luddism' of Slow Food and other traditionalist food movements. Similarly, Montanari (1996) warns against a romantic or nostalgic understanding of 'lost' rural traditions, given that many of those customs were abandoned by sufficiently empowered farmers in favour of modern, less labour-intensive methods of domestic and agricultural production.

While these cautions are best heeded, there is a dearth of empirical evidence, either from this study or in the critical literature, of new farmers adopting an exclusivist, discriminatory or overtly patriarchal stance that militates against the interests of working women, single or unmarried women, or sexual minorities. Some farms on the WWOOF directory, for example, explicitly welcome gay volunteers and some are operated by openly gay and lesbian couples or communities. One research participant in this study is a single gay man whose motives for farming and values concerning work and reward largely conform to the general themes expressed by back-to-the-landers in nuclear families. Furthermore, critiques of patriarchy in farming households may inadvertently express the biases of professional academics, who equally impose a normative view of female emancipation in their interpretations of rural gender roles. Of particular concern here is Little and Austin's (1996) claim that wives and mothers in rural areas seem to value the aspects of rural living that restrict their life choices, orienting their identities toward local norms of maternal domesticity. Using a case study of urban to rural migrants in southern England, the authors remark that

> aspects of the rural idyll operate in support of traditional gender relations, prioritising women's mothering role and fostering their centrality within the rural community. Those aspects of the rural way of life most highly valued by women appear to be those that offer them least opportunity to make choices (for example, about employment or domestic responsibilities) outside their conventional roles. Many were seemingly aware of the limiting nature of the rural idyll in this sense. Restrictions on choices of, for example, employment, were acknowledged by these women, however, as a small price to pay for a rural way of life as they perceived it.

> (Little and Austin, 1996: 110)

There is a value judgement implicit in Little and Austin's paper, one that views the choice of rural domesticity as regressive in comparison to careerism. By understating or denying the level

of autonomy exercised by women who are unwaged, the authors silence the self-determination that female back-to-the-landers often associate with their decision to adopt such a lifestyle. The equation of employment with empowerment has been subject to critique by feminist scholars, with Sharp et al. (2003: 282) noting that '[f]or many women, the issue of empowerment does not revolve around the ability to leave the home to be admitted to the labour force; for them their lifeworlds have always spanned both public and private spaces.' Although Little and Austin's paper is dated, it nonetheless reinforces a persistent view that women's disengagement from the workforce should be challenged by feminists, and that the retreat to the domestic sphere is necessarily disempowering. The experiences of back-to-the-land women in Italy suggest a more complex conclusion.

Figure 6.5 – Lunch for 10

The mother of a back-to-the-land migrant distributes lunch for her family and two WWOOF volunteers.

Source: Author

6.3.2. Women and alternative farming in context

The focus on women and domestic responsibilities is necessary and relevant to broad considerations of gender and back-to-the-land migration, but it tells only a partial story. Many women *do* work the land and in multiple social and economic contexts – independently, with other women, as equal partners with men, and as farm owners, tenants or paid labourers. Because this research is focused on homesteads run by individuals and families, the results inevitably reflect that bias and cannot offer accounts of, for example, intentional communities and women's roles within them. Within the scope of this research, women's contributions to the agricultural work on the case study farms should not be understated. It is somewhat more challenging, however, to decode their experiences from the general to the gendered, as it is rare that their accounts consciously invoke a discourse of difference when discussing agricultural practices.

Historical research by Schmitt (2006: 62) reveals that an 'astonishing number of female researchers contributed to the advancement of alternative agricultural science in the first generation of biodynamic and organic agriculture' in the early 20th Century. Schmitt traces correspondence between 'early women pioneers' to demonstrate how new networks of knowledge were developed simultaneously with, but separate from, the work of established agricultural science, a domain to which women's entry was highly restricted. Across national borders and between independent associations, women from organisations such as the Soil Association in the UK (founded by Lady Eve Balfour) and the Biodynamic Association in Germany communicated their accrued understanding about ecologically balanced farming and gardening practices in a collaborative manner. Schmitt (2006: 65) writes that a 'culture of correspondence opened up new possibilities for self-confirmation for women who had scarce other opportunities' and also elicited an attention to care and nurture that permeated the communication.

Schmitt's research, however, does not attempt to engage with *why* women were attracted to alternative agriculture practices beyond the issue of inaccessibility to formal science

institutions. Other scholars have been more concerned with the emotional and socio-political connections between women and alternative agriculture. Kneafsey et al. (2008: 41-49), for example, draw some inferences about gender and food production by viewing the activity in relation to an 'ethic of care'. The authors derive their perspective from feminist studies that consider moral decision-making as an emotional process informed by feelings of empathy, responsibility and connectedness. Care in this context is a process of feeling and doing that makes the 'concerns and needs of others (and not necessarily, or only, human others) a basis for action.' (Kneafsey et al., 2008: 43). Care is used as a framework for analysing alternative agriculture and food networks by the authors because the expressed motivations of many participants in these systems are built around issues of ecological sustainability, economic justice (such as 'fair trade'), animal welfare and conviviality. These represent critical, reflexive forms of consumption and production that consciously model themselves as an alternative to a reductionist, industrial system that regards food as mere biological fuel and its production a simple question of economic efficiency. The authors' conception of care 'implies reaching out to something other than self and implicitly suggests that it will lead to some kind of action – therein lies its political potential' (Kneafsey et al., 2008: 42). Care certainly seems to be the dominant ethic in, for example, the back-to-the-land journal *Country Women*. Produced throughout the 1970s by an exclusively female commune in California, Herring (2010: 85) describes the content of the magazine as offering 'how-to guides for collecting shellfish, sowing fields, raising sheep, chopping wood, bartering, welfare rights, building hotbeds, and raising calves.' Coupled with this practical information, however, were radical anti-capitalist and feminist critiques, content considered entirely compatible with the day-to-day practicalities of agrarian life.

The specifics of gender, emotion and alternative farming are approached by Bjorkhaug (2006), whose quantitative work on organic farmers in Norway aims to assess whether there is a 'feminine principle' in organic farming. She theorises this principle around gender studies that understand women to 'hold holistic attitudes to the use of natural resources, encompassing the principle of conservation. Men on the other hand are more focused on economic issues such as output rather than on ecological systems' (Bjorkhaug, 2006: 197). This proposed difference, closely related to an ethic of care, is tactically employed by Indian activist and scholar Vandana Shiva (1989), who argues explicitly for a distinction between reductionist, Western and patriarchal systems of resource exploitation and holistic, indigenous and feminine

management. 'Nonviolent alternatives [to industrial farming] exist,' writes Shiva (1989: 164) 'but… a feminine and ecological perception [is needed] to see them, and feminine priorities of sustaining and enhancing life to sustain them.'

In her efforts to cast industrial agriculture as a patriarchal project, Shiva (1989) maintains that rural women have been replaced by machines – literally removed from the land and often directed toward low-paid wage labour, a disempowering process that erodes traditional knowledge and female agency. Independent, small-scale farming of the kind practiced by back-to-the-landers can therefore be seen as in turn replacing women from structured employment back *onto* the land. For some women this instils a sense of independence and self-reliance that serves as a source of personal empowerment:

> I'm not saying we want to be totally self-sufficient, but I think it would good to have a sort of whole spectrum [of produce]. Make sure you've got something every month and plan it that way…. I love the fact that it's free, the fact you just go to your land and get a bag of lovely tomatoes, and you can do what you want with it and you're not having to worry about the cost, or whether it's good quality. And it's the control as well. You have complete and utter control. I suppose there's certain variables – the weather and soil and things – but you're not going into a shop and buying blind, effectively.
>
> Tanya, Umbria

> I know I have to take it slow because, unlike so many other careers, you have to take a big financial risk at the beginning, and there's a lot more to make it successful and be able to support yourself. You don't just contract yourself to a company like regular workers… If it's possible, I really like the lifestyle and I think it's a really positive contribution… I just feel really comfortable in organic agriculture and I think it's a really important thing for me to stay close to the source of the food that I eat, and be respectful to the environment in the way that you cultivate. So if I don't end up having my own farm *per se*, I could see myself working on someone else's or trying to do something to support organic agriculture.
>
> Madeleine, WWOOFer, Emilia-Romagna

In a study of women in rural Cameroon, Hartwig (2005) writes that women relate the concept of *power* to themselves in their role as agricultural producers. Food production is an exercise of individual capability, knowledge and agency that gains women access to social and economic spheres where their abilities are recognised. By growing, selling and cooking food women act as 'gatekeepers' (cf. Belasco, 2008; Counihan, 1999) to sustenance for themselves and their dependants. Because this is a common role for women transnationally and cross-culturally (Whatmore, 1991; Belasco, 2008), its (dis)empowering potential is subject to the conditions of place. Shiva's (1989) argument contends that women displaced from the land are deprived of space on which to project their abilities and knowledge, leaving them only their (cheap) labour to sell. This is true of all displaced peoples, of course, and the resultant loss of knowledge is not exclusive to women, nor necessarily to the displaced populations themselves (cf. Hunn, 1999; Mohanty, 2002). The 'gatekeeper' role of women in agriculture, however, provides an agency and a necessary value to their work which is repressed and re-placed by industrial food. In its project of homogenising food production and consumption, traditionally female agricultural roles and domestic responsibilities (such as preparing family meals) have been increasingly outsourced to machinery or labourers and concentrated among large corporations. Depending on context, working the land can occupy a contradictory role as a repressive disabler of women's opportunities outside the home and as a facilitator of agency, allowing women's knowledge and abilities to flourish. As Hartwig's (2005: 157) research shows, rural women 'certainly experience pride in what they do and their increasing skills and abilities, but also in the results of their agency, and they do it with a certain goal. It is not only the product as such that they are proud of. Above and beyond that, they act and produce, conscious that their production and produce form an important means of gaining access to other forms of power.'

The forms of power that Hartwig refers to will be culturally specific and context-dependent. For back-to-the-landers in Italy, they are generally expressed as economic independence, control of food supplies and mastery over one's time. I remain worried, however, as to whether a gendered interpretation of empowerment and ethics among back-to-the-landers might rely too heavily on an essentialist reading of 'feminine' and 'masculine' principles. Shiva (1989) mounts an interesting project in appropriating and subverting a long-standing justification for gender discrimination, one that sees women as more 'natural' then men – and consequently less rational, having not transcended an assumed nature / culture boundary so

completely. By reclaiming a 'feminine perspective' or ethic, ideas of care and nurture can be mobilised toward radical ends, recalling the claim of Kneafsey et al. (2008: 42) that the political potential of care lies in 'reaching out to something other than self'. There is too little evidence from my own fieldwork, however, to support a view which sees care is a distinctly 'feminine' ethic so much as an ethic that has been feminised in particular contexts.

6.3.3. The ethic of care

Fieldwork data from Italy shows an ethic of care being put into action by a highly diverse set of actors representing a complex and pluralistic demographic profile. This suggests a certain universalism in the ethic, challenging an explicitly gendered view such as Shiva's. It may be the case, then, that superimposing a 'feminine principle' on alternative agriculture is simply an attempt to claim for feminist theory an ontologically independent array of practices. Bjorkhaug's (2006: 27) survey of Norwegian conventional and organic farmers collates a wide spectrum of attitudes and degrees of care, without any absolute gender distinction:

> The analysis has shown that female organic farmers expressing traditionally feminine values can be placed at one end of an attitudinal scale and male conventional farmers expressing more typically masculine values at the other end. In the centre of the scale farmers negotiate and interpret their roles and identities, with conventional female farmers expressing femininity in flux (Brandth, 1994) and male organic farmers exhibiting feminine values through dialogic masculinity (Peter *et al.,* 2000).

Back-to-the-landers in Italy expressed a range of views that both support and contradict the notion of alternative agriculture as imbued with feminine principles. Certainly the notion of care for the environment was paramount in the stated reasons for farming organically among both questionnaire respondents and interviewees. Asked to rank their motivations for deciding to farm organically, over half of all respondents to the WWOOF host questionnaire put 'concern for the environment/ecology' as their foremost concern. Health and food quality ranked second and third respectively, while nearly 90% of respondents listed profitability as the least important factor. Private conversations and interviews with both male and female back-to-the-

landers largely correspond to the survey results, with a couple of notable exceptions. One female farmer, asked if she had ever considered non-organic agriculture, responded:

> No, it would always be organic… basically for the simple reason that you are not competitive otherwise. You have to offer something which gives added value to the product, because you're producing in a much more expensive way than other farms than what intensive farmers in the flatlands can produce… Of course you're also convinced because you want to live in a healthy environment… But economically speaking it's necessary to be organic.

Interestingly, my own experience of working on this farm stands out as imparting a weak sense of care or nurture. My field journal describes some surprise and frustration early in the stay:

> Not made to feel particularly welcome here. I guess this the inevitable impact of [the host couple] having hosted hundreds of WWOOFers over the years... [The female farmer] seems nice enough, not a fundamentally indecent person, but is just too preoccupied to be more than cold and distracted most of the time... I haven't learned anything, just taken orders. It definitely feels like I'm *working* rather than 'volunteering' or 'collaborating' as the WWOOF ethic would have it.

A few months after my week-long stay, I learned that this farm had been suspended from WWOOF after the organisation received three complaints about it from other WWOOFers. It has since been re-instated, conditional upon promised improvements to its treatment of volunteers. Only one other farmer gave an indication that self-interest superseded other concerns in his enterprise. A former lawyer from Bolzano in the far north of Italy with whom I volunteered plainly stated that his passion is more focused on his *agriturismo*[5] than the organic horticulture practiced on the property. He grows organic vegetables for the on-site restaurant and lavender plants to make massage oil for the therapy suite available to *agriturismo* guests. His reasons for producing organically are not so much cynical as simply strategic. He claims that he needs to meet the minimum requirements for running an officially recognised organic *agriturismo* to qualify for tax breaks and restoration subsidies, and so produces to these standards. 'Of course it's nice to not use chemicals,' he says, 'and many organic farms around

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[5] An *agriturismo* is a bed and breakfast service on a working farm. Subsidies and tax breaks are available for *agriturismi* as part of Italy's plan to diversify the rural economy in line with post-productivist EU objectives. To qualify for government assistance, one must meet certain standards (number of hectares cultivated, etc.) to prove that the primary function of the site is agriculture. Italians often complain that regulators are easily deceived.

here are very beautiful. But for me it's just something I have to do. I don't want to get into the politics of organic and non-organic... This is just what I do to keep the *agriturismo*.'

These examples are brought to attention only for their deviation from the typically expressed concerns of back-to-the-landers. For both men and women, an ethic of care is cited as a primary reason for their entering agriculture and choosing to farm organically, as reflected in the quotes in section 6.2. Based on the overall consistency of replies among interviewees - of both sexes, interviewed independently or as couples – I am not confident that stable conclusions can be drawn as to whether the ethics embraced by back-to-the-landers have a strongly gendered dimension. Bjorkhaug's (2006) study uses a relatively objective method of measuring attitudes with attention to gender difference, but is of course dependent on subjective interpretations of 'feminine' and 'masculine' principles. These interpretations carry significant risks of essentialism. The idea of women as leading a more harmonious existence with nature has faced critiques for its essentialism (cf. MacCormack and Strathern, 1980), with scholars arguing that notions of both nature and gender are too culturally contingent to be universal.[6] More empirical substance, in my view, may be derived from studying the effects of agricultural practice – as opposed to initial motivators - on individual identities.

Later chapters will explore how the material act of food production and the strategic mobilisation of natural processes contribute to the attainment of this power. How it is then channelled into broader political projects – a process also contingent upon cultural and spatio-temporal dynamics - will become the subject of further analysis. This section has sought to lay some groundwork for making critical observations about back-to-the-land farms as gendered spaces, with theoretical support drawn from empirical studies conducted in several global regions. This reflects the lack of contemporary research specifically relating to women farmers in Italy and the gendered dimensions of back-to-the-land migration, but also interrogates the universality of certain values and supposedly gendered principles. The 'agrarian dream'

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[6]   Strathern's (1980) anthropological study of the Hagen of Papua New Guinea, for example, reveals much fluidity in the linguistic gendering of terms related to nature, culture and social values. In Hagen society, nature and culture as feminine, masculine or neutered are dependent on situational context. She concludes: 'Neither male nor female can possibly stand for "humanity" against "nature" because the distinction between them is used to evaluate areas in which human action is creative and individuating... Representations of domination and influence between the sexes are precisely about ways of human interaction, and not also about humanity's project in relation to a less than human world.' (Strathern, 1980: 219)

(Trauger, 2007) of back-to-the-land migration has considerable cross-cultural and inter-generational pull, and therefore demands a degree of scepticism when general claims about issues such as class and gender are made. The evidence presented in this chapter suggests that the applicability of certain speculations is highly sensitive to the experiences of particular individuals. As I argue in the next section, this holds true for socio-economic class as well as gender.

6.4. A class of their own?

There is no question that privileged class status can facilitate the accumulation of rural property, disengagement from the formal labour market and utilisation of economic networks that support small-scale farming. Economic (dis)advantages bear a significant influence on the ability to buy land, pay administration costs and taxes, make capital investments in new tools and materials, and travel to markets. I have avoided, however, trying to cast back-to-the-land migration as a phenomenon that can be definitively linked to class. Despite connecting some Italian back-to-the-landers to the country's growing 'reflexive middle class' earlier in the chapter, I have been careful to frame this as a background context more than a quantifiable process. In some respects this forms an attempt to explore beyond the literature placing rural in-migration as a middle-class phenomenon connected to post-productivist reimaginings of rural space for leisure, tourism and retirement. It also comes from an inability to honestly apply any kind of categorical class distinction to such a heterogeneous group as my case study farmers, and reflects my reluctance to essentialise back-to-the-landers through such a definition.

In *The End of Capitalism (as we knew it),* Gibson-Graham (1996: 59) argue that class identity 'can be understood as decentred and diverse', noting that '[i]ndividuals may participate in various class processes, holding multiple class positions at one moment and over time.' What class processes are visible on back-to-the-land farms are certainly diverse and contingent. WWOOF hosts and their volunteers temporarily enter into a kind of feudal relationship, with agricultural labour exchanged for room and board, but abandon this structure at the end of an

agreed period. As I demonstrate in Chapter 8, 'pluriactive' back-to-the-landers can and do work simultaneously as wage labourers, capitalist entrepreneurs and semi-subsistence farmers. The shifting activities and relative economic power of the case study farmers demands a perspective which looks beyond upper, middle and working classes. In Table 6.1, the professional backgrounds of interviewees suggests middle to upper-middle income strata. What this does not say, however, is how these nominal positions relate to power and exploitation, the class *processes* that influence more formalised relations. They give a superficial impression of socio-economic status but that impression is complicated by some basic facts about the back-to-the-landers' day-to-day lives. Upon becoming farmers, for example, they take greater control over the means of production. Yet in all cases examined for this research, the back-to-the-landers earned less income than they had while they were working in structured employment, when their control over the means of production was weaker. Despite becoming farmer-entrepreneurs, rather than contracted workers, many have become worse off in terms of financial assets. Using annual incomes as a measure, it is highly likely that several would be considered poor. This is a highly relative form of poverty, however, and one which back-to-the-land migrants adopt willingly. The innovative methods by which new farmers learn to work within and outside of the formal economy (a subject of more direct scrutiny in Chapter 8) reveal the flexibility of economic positions that back-to-the-landers adopt. Prohibitive land prices, for example, might be seen from a more rigid perspective as restricting back-to-the-land migration to particular economic classes. Evidence from this study, however, uncovers a number of opportunities for people with limited assets.

When asked about obtaining land, several interviewees remarked that rural property in Italy was until the mid-1990s sold at 'agricultural prices'. What this means is that post-productivist development occurred slightly later in Italy than in other western European countries, but when it did it brought significantly increased land prices. Prior to the 1990s, back-to-the-landers could purchase rural (and often abandoned) properties under the expectation that the land would be restored to agricultural productivity. Many did precisely this, and in keeping with their counter-cultural dispositions, engineered their farms toward self-sufficient (rather than market-focused) ends. Currently, Italian rural property is often marketed for its potential as a retirement space, holiday home destination, speculative real estate investment or tourist attraction. At the La Dolce Vita trade fair that I visited in London in 2009, these post-productivist imaginings of the rural were given far more attention than any agricultural

potential of the land (although the food produced in the countryside was promoted as one the key draws of rural Italy). The post-1980s upswing in rural land prices can certainly act as a deterrent to those hoping to make a back-to-the-land transition, particularly given the limited financial rewards of small-scale, independent farming. Of the WWOOF volunteers interviewed, each one cited the expense of land as an obstacle to leaving the city for a rural smallholding, while 62% of respondents to the WWOOF volunteer questionnaire listed land prices as a factor that would dissuade them from taking up organic farming later. Such an anxiety is validated by the experiences of some of the back-to-the-landers interviewed. Those who arrived in the late 1970s and early 1980s are, on the evidence I have been able to gather, able to maintain a semi-subsistence household economy where food is provided almost entirely from their land or through bartering, and cash transactions are few. Tanya and David, on the other hand, took a mortgage on their Umbrian property in 2006 and underestimated the living costs they would incur, necessitating more time spent accumulating money in the formal economy than working the land. All of this points toward a condition in which plentiful upfront capital is required to embark on back-to-the-land migration, thus restricting who can undertake it.

There are nonetheless some opportunities to strike a balance between the overstretched mortgage and paid-off parcel of abandoned land. Elisa and Romano, for instance, have never owned a property and turned to organic farming when another business enterprise was liquidated. Unable to find an affordable property to buy in Emilia-Romagna, they located a semi-abandoned farm house, made inquiries about the owner and eventually tracked him down to Bologna. He had inherited the property and was not interested in using it for farming, so negotiated a very favourable rent at which they could take over the farm and restore the land to productivity. Somewhat similarly, while still working in Geneva, Sebastian was put in touch through a mutual contact with Giorgio and Margarete, former back-to-the-landers who have since moved into an apartment in Città della Pieve, letting Sebastian take control of the farm for a very small rent. These outcomes are, of course, due in large part to luck. They serve to illustrate, though, that rural real estate prices are not in all cases a prohibitive factor for aspiring back-to-the-landers.

For those who face the greatest financial barriers to an independent back-to-the-land lifestyle, communal projects offer a relatively low-cost option. Theoretically, one could begin as a volunteer (through an organisation like WWOOF) in an agrarian community and gradually work toward full-time residence. Klara, a WWOOFer with ambitions of starting her own farming project, has periodically considered moving to a community farm but has held back on account of the commitment it will require. Likewise Madeleine, another WWOOFer who acknowledges the prohibitive costs of buying farmland, sees membership of an agrarian community as one possible option but a less preferable one to owning her own farm. Joining such a project as a newcomer usually involves a subordination of individual lifestyle preferences to group standards, given that an intentional community's longevity can often be dependent on adherence to behavioural rules. Walter, who spent time among intentional communities in Tuscany in the 1970s, suggests that the conformity required by such groups (despite many flaunting non-conformist pronouncements) is likely to make many dalliances with the communities short-lived. Hierarchies form and 'gurus' emerge despite a group's best intentions to the contrary, he argues, resulting in personal conflicts and a high drop-out rate. Another potential problem lies in the fact that the communities' efforts toward collective self-sufficiency can mean that members have little contact with a cash economy. This could be troublesome for those using the communities as a stepping stone to an individual back-to-the-land project, since there is little opportunity to accumulate savings unless one commutes to a part-time job off the farm site.

Despite these concerns, there are examples of long-running agrarian communities in Italy, including ecovillages and cooperatives, which are democratically organised, unaffiliated to religious or political sects, regulated by WWOOF protocol and welcoming to newcomers, such as the Commune di Bagnaia in Tuscany and Valli Unite in Piedmont. These and other similar groups offer opportunities to experiment with back-to-the-land living for those that might not otherwise afford it. In the UK, Pickerill and Maxey (2009) have explored how low-impact development projects, such as ecovillages, have been enacted with small amounts of surplus capital. These should be considered part of a new phase in the back-to-the-land narrative, one which utilises new technologies, responds to historically specific political conditions and draws on a discourse of sustainability influenced by contemporary concerns such as peak oil and climate change.

When an individual, family or other group moves, with ethically guided motives, to the countryside and adopts an agricultural lifestyle, their subsequent economic and social activities rarely fall into any pattern that suggests a class dynamic engendering conflict or exploitation. Evidence from this fieldwork therefore runs contrary to some 1990s research on migration into rural areas, discussed in Chapter 2, in which middle-class incomers were seen as altering the character of the countryside through conspicuous consumption, NIMBYism and aloofness. On all the farms where I volunteered, the hosts seemed to socialise most frequently with other farmers rather than other in-migrants from urban professional backgrounds. In some cases social networks involved other back-to-the-landers but just as much time was spent with locals from multi-generational farming families. Consumption habits varied, from predominantly market-based to mostly self-sufficient, with prior professional status or asset wealth an unreliable indicator of these practices.

None of this is to suggest that integration into rural Italian communities is always a smooth process for newcomers; indeed, one interviewee's remarks in the next chapter indicate that 'outsider' status may be carried like a stigma for some back-to-the-landers, no matter how sincere their efforts to adopt Cloke et al.'s (1998b) 'cultural competencies'. Nor is it correct to imply that all back-to-the-landers possess such competencies to a degree that should immediately distinguish them from middle-class migrants of a less agrarian orientation. As I argue in Chapter 7, the process of becoming a farmer involves a very slow transition, one that could even be considered perpetual. The fact remains, however, that the everyday actions of back-to-the-landers are usually directed toward ends that imagine a future based on non-exploitative relationships of care and solidarity. As I argue in the next chapters, these values are expressed in the methods of production used on the case study farms and in some of the novel systems of exchange fostered by the AAFNs in which back-to-the-landers participate.

In this respect, the voluntary poverty adopted by back-to-the-landers is a reflection of the moral choices articulated in Section 6.2. Hypothetically, by controlling the means of production (especially over something so vital as food) independent farmers are in a position to maximally exploit those who desire their produce, and the landless workers (such as WWOOF

volunteers) who assist with production. The emotional and ethical rationales by which many back-to-the-landers make decisions, however, instead guide them toward systems of exchange, such as collective buying groups (Chapter 8), where market norms are subordinate to principles of mutual benefit. Moral reasoning in economic choice is also evident in decisions which invert the modern urban condition of being 'asset rich, time poor'. Lifestyles based around a slow ethic engender a surplus of time that is regarded as more desirable than a surplus of assets. Critics might argue that choosing time over material assets is only available to those comfortably nested within a certain standard of living, one that is not under serious threat of absolute impoverishment. There is some truth in this, and back-to-the-land as a lifestyle choice does indeed seem an unlikely one for those suffering the most abject material poverty. Yet work by Shiva (1989) in India and Gibson et al. (2010) in the Philippines shows a resistance among notionally poor rural communities to sacrifice semi-subsistence economic systems for waged labour, despite its seductive promise of improved living standards and increased cash assets. This is largely due to the support of 'other' economies that exist within these social structures, such as domestic work and child care. A proletarianised countryside sacrifices the time it can spare for these social supports, and back-to-the-land migration can be seen as one way of reclaiming them.

This may not be a satisfying view for those who demand more concrete results from projects described as 'radical' or 'alternative'. Recalling McCarthy's (2006: 809) statement that few alternative agro-food networks are 'so alternative that they eschew the circulation of capital in commodity form altogether', the back-to-the-land practices recorded in this study might be considered alternative only to a limited degree. They embody what Goodman and Goodman (2007) refer to as 'transformative potential' in prefiguring alternative systems of production and exchange, but it is difficult to measure what kinds of transformation – beyond the strictly personal – have actually been brought into being. This does not give cause to dismiss these practices as insignificant, however. Certainly, as I want to emphasise throughout, they cannot be written off as a middle-class dalliance with temporary poverty and self-reliance that demands no risk or hard graft. On this point I am strongly in agreement with Parkins and Craig (2006: 85), who in writing on the slow movement, argue that

…the mindful consciousness that we position as central to slow living generates an awareness of the specificity of place, and more particularly a material relationship with the land, as well as an attentiveness to those who co-exist in the same territory…This is not based upon a bourgeois, romantic valorization of either rural life or small, sophisticated towns in exotic locales, but is rather based upon a belief that in the contexts of our fast, deterritorialized modern lives, we need to retain an ethical and political disposition that is grounded in an awareness of our fundamental relationships to the specificity of place, the land, its produce and each other.

In outlining a case for a revised class analysis, I am aware that doing so may be interpreted as glossing over material inequalities. This is not my intention, and as I stated at the beginning of this section, it is an undeniable fact that a surplus of money can assist back-to-the-land migration while a lack of it can restrict mobility and limit the achievement of certain aims which require significant financial investment. Rather, my aim in adopting Gibson-Graham's (1996) non-categorical perspective on class is to emphasise the contingency of back-to-the-landers' socio-economic relationships. This should serve as something of a corrective to earlier studies on urban to rural migration which counterpose class categories and construe conflict from this relationship. In demonstrating that those who occupy a lower income strata may not be prevented from adopting a back-to-the-land lifestyle, I would argue against any tendency to see back-to-the-land migration as a predominantly middle-class phenomenon, even if the professional backgrounds of the research participants in this study encourage such a conclusion. More importantly, it is vital to understand the economic position of these case study farmers as being multiple and conditional based on spatio-temporal contexts. In the case of Elisa and Romano, for instance, their careers in environmental engineering were short-lived, to the extent that they have never had sufficient assets to buy a property or amass much of a savings surplus. Superficially, however, their qualifications and backgrounds might suggest a middle-class level of wealth. Class distinctions, then, should be applied cautiously, and always with an understanding of their diverse manifestations. In particular, class descriptors as I have used them in this chapter should not imply structural class processes and their associated tensions. Instead, diverse and contingent understandings of class might imply relative economic (dis)advantage, but such positions are conditional upon other factors as well. A back-to-the-lander with ample assets does not necessarily make a good farmer, and his or her longevity in the countryside might well be determined by abilities that have little to do with finance. What, then, are the other obstacles to transforming an agrarian impulse into a realistic strategy for lifestyle change? On the other hand, what enablers exist and are these

sufficient to make back-to-the-land migration a possibility for a wide span of demographic categories? These questions are addressed throughout the following chapters.

6.5. Conclusion

As I have argued above, back-to-the-land migration in contemporary Northern Italy is defined by both consistencies and contradictions. There is enough common ground amongst the migrants to establish a general profile of would-be or current back-to-the-landers. They generally possess high levels of formal education and many have achieved considerable professional prestige. They are, however, frustrated with work and the demands that formal urban economies impose. Key among these is a work/life balance heavily tilted toward the former. Back-to-the-land migration allows a chance to experiment with alternative ways of dwelling and living – alternative to what the migrants have done before, and when ethically or politically motivated, alternative to what they believe to be a mainstream or conformist lifestyle. A desire for independence, usually conceived as a disengagement from formal employment and steps toward greater self-sufficiency, is key to understanding why people go back-to-the-land.

Within these commonalities, though, lie numerous inconsistencies. For one, there is good reason to note the distinct experiences of 'agriculture' for different genders, given that for women the adoption of this lifestyle may imply a strongly increased domestic burden with little actual farmwork. Additionally, there are pronounced differences in the commentary of those who began farming in rural Italy before the 1990s, and those who arrived subsequently. Unsurprisingly, these differences tend to be largely predicated on factors such as age, nationality and relative wealth. Futhermore, while many back-to-the-landers share certain motivations in common, where their inspirations diverge, their approach to farming is likely to follow suit. Someone following predominantly gastronomic goals may configure their homestead very differently to someone seeking maximum self-sufficiency. In most cases, a mix of different priorities are likely shape individual farms. It is therefore risky to make definitive generalisations about why back-to-the-landers pursue their individual lifestyles and what kinds

of political, ethical and economic effects emerge from their sites of dwelling. At least, these kinds of generalisations are difficult to make based on the kind of wide-ranging profile exercise performed for this chapter. The following chapters, however, do interrogate these concerns, looking deeper into the ordinary practices that sustain back-to-the-land lifestyles, and how these practices can influence broader agendas.

Box. 6.4 – Back-to-the-land profiles: Elisa and Romano (Emilia-Romagna)

Elisa and Romano are a young couple with three children who relocated to rural Emilia-Romagna in 2007 to begin a new life as farmers. Romano had previously worked as a marine geologist and spent much of his working life offshore, a lifestyle he felt was taking a toll on his family commitments and real ambitions. Elisa, originally from Bologna, trained as an environmental engineer, another career requiring regular dislocation. A few years spent in Puglia in the south of Italy gave them time to incubate some ideas as they tried to find a path that would combine family stability with their interests in ecology and botany. After long periods of fruitless searching for an affordable home with enough fertile land to accommodate organic agriculture, Elisa and Romano eventually discovered the property that would become their farm, squeezed between high Appenine hills outside Bologna. The house was badly neglected and the land was worse. When they arrived their two hectares were completely smothered by weeds, requiring a total restoration effort. This is still a work in progress that will take a lot time and plenty of help from WWOOF volunteers.

Their main focus is on herbs, both medicinal and culinary, and they grow many unusual specialist varieties. They also produce potatoes, tomatoes, broccoli, cabbages, cauliflower and zucchini as well as heritage varieties of lettuce, chicory and other greens. In addition to their vegetable and herb production, they keep hens, geese and ducks for eggs, raise rabbits and chickens for meat and keep Tibetan goats for grazing around the perimeter of the property to keep unwanted growth in check.

The challenge for the family, says Romano, is not finding people who want to buy their produce – it is producing consistently and in quantities that can satisfy demand. They sell their produce at two markets in Bologna, one organised by a local farmers' association, *Campi Aperti* (Open Fields), and the other sponsored by Slow Food. Combined, these two markets form the family's main - and often exclusive - source of income.

7. Slow Transitions: Time, skill and knowledge

When back-to-the-landers leave the city for the countryside the process is one of both mental and material migration. They enter into new physical territory and must adapt to the conditions that it imposes. Because their work involves intimate, embodied interaction with local ecologies, they are particularly affected by these conditions and so alter their livelihoods accordingly. This adaptation has both cognitive and practical dimensions. Different localities will impose their own adaptive requirements, as will the particular kinds of farming that back-to-the-landers seek to undertake. There are consistencies in this transition process however, primarily relating to time, skill and knowledge.

There are no definite bookends on either side of the transitional phase of migration, no discrete dates or events that mark one's sense of being settled or accepted in the local community. Many back-to-the-landers describe their farming practices as perpetual periods of experimentation. This applies not only to the material production of food, but also to the social and economic relations that surround it. I call this ongoing experimentation a 'slow transition', a reference not only to the sense of perpetuity that defines it but also to the slow rhythms that natural systems impose on work that is both physically demanding and quietly contemplative, equally dependent on hard graft and specialist expertise.

This chapter explores the slow transitions that back-to-the-landers undergo in their migration to the countryside through interrogations of time, skill and knowledge. Looking first at how 'time disciplines' affect everyday practices, I make the case that in adopting a 'task orientation' back-to-the-landers establish particular rhythms of work that ultimately reflect the lifestyle, ethical and economic goals of their projects. This process is intertwined with the development of requisite skill, the nature of which is given theoretical and empirical consideration. A key argument here is that the skills required to perform high-quality food

production are based upon mental and manual capabilities, for without sufficient knowledge one's physical exertion is without a reasoned purpose. How knowledge is produced and transmitted directs the remainder of the chapter, which looks initially at local knowledge and formal scientific knowledge. Having set this context, I then explore the role of three case study alternative agro-food networks (AAFNs) in distributing the kinds of knowledge that help novices learn the practices of good farming. Finally, I consider the potential of WWOOF to act as a stage for the performance of agricultural skill and knowledge, and what opportunities this affords for volunteers contemplating a movement back to the land.

7.1. Time disciplines

In the late 1960s Marxist historian E.P. Thompson (1967) authored an influential paper arguing that 'important changes in the apprehension of time' had been effected through the disciplining routines of industrial capitalism. [1] The identification and homogenisation of 'workers', as distinguishable from their social capacities, marked an historical passage in which the organisation of time was brought into the service of capitalist accumulation. Marxian theory maintains that labour under industrial capitalism has evolved into a commodified abstraction, 'quantitative and homogenous' (Ingold, 2006: 327), an immaterial concept that can nonetheless be translated into a financial value. Thompson argues that the precise partitioning of time, specifically into units of work (abstract labour) and non-work, stimulated radical social transformations. Industrialised societies began to organise around patterned work and non-work cycles, leading to the 'eventual internalization of a specific "time orientation" to labour and life' (Glennie and Thrift, 1996: 277).

The new 'time disciplines' signified a cleft between social life and work, the labour or time orientation having supplanted a 'task orientation' in which social and work practices were much more closely integrated. The notion of task orientation can have a simple, literal meaning while also informing more complex strands of social theory. In its most basic

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[1] For an overview of the paper's significance and a thorough summary of the critiques that have followed from it, see Glennie and Thrift (1996).

definition, a task orientation refers to work structured by the time demands of particular responsibilities. Unlike the structured patterns of waged labour and its prescriptive units of clock time, task-based work cycles can vary according to myriad environmental and cultural factors. Ingold (2006: 325) outlines some further qualifications as to what constiutes a task-oriented society: 1) 'tasks are activities carried out by persons, calling for greater or lesser degrees of technical skill. Machines do not perform tasks, but people do'; 2) 'tasks are defined primarily in terms of their objectives, without necessarily entailing any explicit codification of the rules and procedures to be followed in realising them'; 3) 'the particular kinds of tasks that a person performs are an index of his or her personal and social identity: the tasks you do depend on who you are, and in a sense the performance of certain tasks *makes* you who you are'; 4) 'tasks are never accomplished in isolation, but always within a setting that is itself constituted by the co-presence of others whose own performances necessarily have a bearing on one's own.'

Glennie and Thrift (1996) and Ingold (2006) both offer critiques of Thompson's work while acknowledging its contributions to enduring perspectives on temporality. Glennie and Thrift, for instance, take issue with Thompson's anglocentrism and inattention to diverse notations of time that existed prior the rise of industrial capitalism. 'In short,' they argue, 'time-awareness, and a significant degree of time-orientation in everyday life did not await the imposition of regular, standardized, and coordinated time patterns associated with factory work-discipline.' (p. 283) Similarly, Ingold draws attention to the historical and spatial contingencies of time- and task-orientation, arguing that the two can co-exist and intertwine, and that work and social life may inhabit more fluid temporal boundaries than Thompson's work recognises. Time- and task-orientation do not represent a strict dichotomy, then, but do remain useful constructs for considering different forms of work and the values imbued within those forms. The shift from a time- to task-orientation is a significant transitional phase in back-to-the-land migration, with temporal relationships shaping social, environmental and ethical positions. They therefore serve as an integral expression of the values that back-to-the-landers carry throughout the transition from urban workers to rural agrarians.

7.2. Slowness, skill and craft

One of the early adjustments a back-to-the-lander must make after moving to a farm is an adaptation to a different time signature. Agricultural work is characterised by cyclical natural processes, demanding work rhythms that deflect the extrinsic units of clock time (Camporesi, 1998). The cyclical time of agriculture is composed of overlapping repetitions that structure the performance of particular tasks, a unique polyrhythm that permits contradictory modes of work: on a given day, tasks can be repetitive and varied, rote and improvisatory, formulaic and experimental. Because the fundamental nature of the work is (literally) rooted to specific places, conditions of place will set the tempo of the work. This generally leads to a stronger task orientation than conformity to clock time. Sunrise may signal the start of work in the summer, for example, but will signify less urgency in winter when fewer crops need tending. The feeding of animals usually follows a set pattern, a repetitive, unavoidable duty that helps to pace the necessary tasks of the morning. What is considered necessary or optional, however, may be determined by conditions beyond a farmer's immediate control. Days of rain can disrupt the rhythm of an annual harvest cycle or provide nourishment after a long dry spell. In either case, the response to this situation will reflect learned practice and some improvisation, a judgement based on past experience, input from peers, established scientific advice or a combination of these. New priorities may emerge, usurping planned activities while the rhythmical beat of animal feeding, collecting eggs, weeding and tidying continues uninterrupted. The farmer's work is inextricably bound with the ecological conditions of a given farm, making the skills required to manage the agroecology of that site highly specific.

Because I have not yet subjected it to any critical treatment, this would be a useful juncture to explore the meaning of the term 'skill'. Sennett (2008: 37) writes that an uncomplicated view of skill sees it as a 'trained practice' in contrast to the 'sudden inspiration'. Sound judgements and intelligence, then, can exist independently of skill. Can the reverse also be true? Sennett suggests not: 'Skill development depends on how repetition is organized... As a person develops skill, the contents of what he or she repeats change...' This results in the gradual building of capacities to make good judgements and intelligent decisions; to solve and – crucially - anticipate problems. In agriculture an individual may exhibit powerful manual capacities but so long as these are performed with poor judgement, it would be inappropriate

to label such a farmer as skilled. 'Skill opens up in this way only because the rhythm of solving opens up again and again' (Sennett, 2008: 38). Crawford (2009: 36, emphasis in original) makes a similar point:

> Knowing what *kind* of problem you have on hand means knowing what features of the situation can be safely ignored. Even the boundaries of what counts as "the situation" can be ambiguous; making discriminations of pertinence cannot be achieved by the application of rules, and requires the kind of judgment that comes with experience.

Without wishing to imply anything other than very basic farming capabilities, some of my experiences of volunteering on back-to-the-land farms support Crawford's argument. After ten days of feeding goats on a farm in Tuscany, for example, I had increased my understanding of their habits to a level that would have assisted in a number of essential responsibilities of husbandry: detecting unusual behaviour or illness, monitoring feed supplies, ensuring clean and comfortable living conditions and confirming that their defences were secure from predators. Needless to say, ten days is insufficient to attain anything approaching refined skill in managing these duties. The point is that the ritual performance of the simplest of actions, setting a steady, metronomic rhythm that over time becomes an expression of tacit knowledge, lays a foundation on which an intellectual capacity is built for the performer to detect, solve and anticipate problems. Where rhythms and expectations are disrupted, a process Lefebvre (2004: 67-68) calls arrhythmia ('a divergence in time, in space, in the use of energies'), the skills and intellect of the performer can be engaged to restore – or improve upon – the basic form of a practice and maintenance of an agreeable rhythm. Lefebvre (2004: 9, emphasis in original) writes that the 'bundle of natural rhythms wraps itself in social or mental function. Whence the efficiency of the *analytic* operation that consists in opening and unwrapping the bundle.'

In their respective writings on skill and craft, Sennett (2008), Crawford (2009) and Ingold (2000) stress that the experiences that build such capacities are often characterised by a unity of the head and hand, or cognition and practice. In part, this emphasis seeks to rehabilitate the intellectual value that exists in manual work. Crawford and Sennett, in particular, are highly critical of the Western political and economic trends that have outsourced manual

production to lower-cost countries while celebrating a 'knowledge economy' of service sector office workers. In asking 'why office work is bad for us and fixing things feels good', Crawford (2009: 5) seeks 'to understand the greater sense of agency and competence [he] always felt doing manual work, compared to other jobs that were officially recognized as "knowledge work."' Perhaps most surprisingly, '[he] often find[s] manual work more engaging *intellectually*.' This can be read as a more prosaic way of unwrapping Lefebvre's 'bundle'.

This marriage of mental and manual competencies is the essence of craft. I hope to avoid too many definitional tangles regarding craft by adopting Sennett's (2008) characterisation of it as quality pursued for its own sake. Complicated questions of originality and functionality attend any attempt to distinguish craft from art (Ingold, 2000; Sennett: 2008) and craft from skilled manual labour (Crawford, 2009). There is one distinction that I do wish to raise, though, and that concerns temporality. Although art usually involves a strong element of craft, Sennett (2008) points out that the inspiration that gives rise to art may come suddenly, and its social reception may be equally ephemeral. Craft, on the other hand, typically involves long periods of mentoring and experimentation and often seeks to achieve a predetermined social function. In the least pejorative sense, art has the potential to be relatively useless. Rarely is this true of craft, where its makers work toward fixed standards of form and function, relying on social, utilitarian or commercial measures to evaluate the quality of their work.

Where craft practices are evident on back-to-the-land farms, there is frequently an indication that this reflects a general disposition of the farmers themselves. This is a point touched upon by Jacob (1997) in his study of North American back-to-the-landers, where many of his case study homesteads combined farming with (often more lucrative) services for machine and clothing repair, artisan baking or carpentry. In Italy, Luigi and Francesca, former teachers who moved to rural Umbria in 2004 to renew their working lives as farmers, restored and built an extension onto their crumbling farmhouse without the help of any outside contractors. Using mostly materials from the local area, Luigi's manual dexterity and passion for building permitted them to save tens of thousands of euros on the cost of restoration, easing their transition to a back-to-the-land lifestyle. Such skills are considered highly valuable in this

context. In Emilia-Romagna, Greta's husband Gianfranco's capacities as a craftsman were instrumental in their ability to move to the countryside:

> He grew up in Milano. But he has a very good mechanical... He's a mechanical engineer or something like this, but it combined really well with the farming experience that I had, his being very handy, knowing how to fix everything. He also did all the work on the house. We had workers making the roof but when it came to putting in electricity, all the windows, this was all done from pieces of wood that he bought like this [gestures toward window]. This was really important otherwise we couldn't have afforded it. Though the other aspect of him doing everything himself is that it takes double the time [laughs].

In this research I use the terms 'craft' and 'artisanal' in relation to food not as convenient shorthand for the output of small-scale farmers, but as a conscious acknowledgement of the highly practiced interplay between head and hand that produces the food in question. This is not to say that such competencies are absent from technologically modern industrial farms, nor that all small-scale producers are equally worthy of such distinction. The choice to use this terminology is based on subjective observations and my own sensory experience, coupled with attention to the measures of time used in food production. Where such language is used, there is a tacit statement that the pursuit of quality has been a demonstrable motivating factor in technique, often at the expense of efficiency.

7.3. A slow ethic

Writing on hunter-gatherer cultures, Ingold (2006: 289-90) argues that 'technical skills are themselves constituted in the matrix of social relations... serving to draw components of the environment into the sphere of social relations rather than to emancipate human society from the constraints of nature.' While these relations arise organically in hunter-gatherer societies, the principle is analogous with small-scale organic farming, where interaction with nature is profoundly shaped by social dynamics. Small independent farmers are likely to have close connections to their customer base, both socially and in terms of physical proximity (Chapter

8), a fact that influences what they produce and how they work. The logic of market efficiency, by contrast, challenges natural limits in pursuit of maximum productivity. Food products subjected to a long supply chain are more likely to be characterised by homogenous taste and appearance, a lack of traceability and added value through marketing. The alternative exchange channels used by small-scale farmers embed trust and quality through different processes, frequently involving more direct sensory and social engagement. Knowing who is going to eat their food pushes farmers toward craftsman-like production, or the pursuit of quality for its own sake, because personal reputations and commercial viability are staked upon it. It would be misleading to suggest that bountiful harvests are not a priority for such producers, but concerns of quality may lead them to subordinate maximal yields for a superior product, particularly in the use of heritage plant varieties and slow-growing rare breed livestock. Production skills are thus entrained to the achievement of particular organoleptic qualities but are also shaped by social and ethical concerns. In describing a 'slow ethic', then, I follow Gibson-Graham's (2008: 620) understanding of ethics as 'not only continually choosing to feel, think and act in particular ways but also the embodied practices that bring principles into action.'

The work of Crawford (2009) and Sennett (2008) recognises a potential for ethically-oriented performance in the craft labour they describe. The pursuit of quality for its own sake leads, they argue, to reflexive performances of care and attention, while a monomaniacal drive for efficiency can degrade this capacity. 'Slow craft time,' argues Sennett (2008: 295), '...enables the work of reflection and imagination – which the push for quick results cannot.' Lefebvre (2004: 59) suggests that 'ritualisation frequently imposes slow rhythms' while Grimes (2003: 33-34) sees potential for ritual (secular and sacred) to influence environmental stewardship. Contrasting what he calls the 'liberal-Protestant' approach of 'formulating ethical principles and then putting them into action by drafting laws and challenging political institutions', ritual situates motives and actions within a localised frame of understanding:

> Attitudes are not merely emotional, nor worldviews merely intellectual. Each collaborates with the other in determining how people act, what they perform and therefore how they behave... For attitudes to become definitive they must be cultivated by practice. And the name for sustained, value-laden attitude practice is ritual.

Grimes (2003: 34)

Parkins and Craig (2006: 50) posit a similar argument: 'The daily practices which allow us to cultivate an attitude of wonder and generosity will vary according to our contexts and inclinations but require time, for reflection and attention, which reminds us of our connections to nature and others.'

The spatio-temporal rituals of small-scale organic agriculture are largely characterised by a *submission* to the external forces of nature and the ecosystems that farmers inhabit. As Crawford (2009: 64-65) states, 'whether it be gardening, structural engineering or Russian [language], one submits to things that have their own intractable ways.' Human agency, he argues, 'arises only within concrete limits that are not of our making.' Recalling the claim by Murdoch et al. (2000) that industrial food production seeks to 'circumvent' or 'outflank' nature, in their acts of submission back-to-the-landers demonstrate an alternative ethos to the technocratic mainstream. The act of submission to 'concrete limits' helps to form the basis for strategic planning and practices on farms:

> Things like what I had in my mind, doing crops like maize or potatoes, no one was doing it here and I was wondering why and it was later that I found out that it is really too dry in the summer, it's too steep for certain crops, there's no machinery available to do the work here... So there were a lot of experiences like this in the first 10 years where you have a certain idea but you have to learn that it doesn't work because of the climate, or because it's too steep, or because there is no one around doing the same thing so there is no machinery...
>
> (Greta, Emilia-Romagna)

> I like the idea that it's not just, the chickens are one project here and the vegetables are another project here, but I really like the idea of almost a mini-ecosystem in the farm… What I've seen that I really like is when people let the properties that animals naturally have go to their full potential. Instead of taking what *you* want from it, it's saying, 'Okay, what does this animal have to offer and how can it do that best?'
>
> (Madeleine, WWOOFer, Emilia-Romagna)

We need a relationship with the earth, not on a spiritual level but on a very physical level. And people just lose touch… The forces of nature you always have to live with. You are more ignorant when you think you can manage everything. Everywhere, really… It's just that here [on a farm] you're really exposed to it.

(Sebastian, Umbria)

Animal welfare is a concern that promotes an ethic of respect for limits. Romano and Elisa, for example, raise a local breed of hen called the Romagnola. They learned about the breed through a farmer they met at a Bologna market who has been trying to prevent its disappearance. The hens produce fewer eggs than those bred for industrial battery production and are relatively disinclined to lay in the henhouse, instead depositing eggs all over the farm. This is fairly problematic because the hens are well-adapted to outdoor living and display an inquisitiveness, strength and independence not normally associated with more modern breeds, meaning that many eggs are never recovered. For Elisa and Romano this is a price worth paying for what they call 'a more natural bird'. Romano remarks that their habits signify adaptation to an old style of farming, one that predates industrial egg production. Their eggs offer superior taste, with a higher yolk to albumen ratio than battery hens, giving a creamier, richer texture. The family has no trouble selling all of their eggs at local farmers' markets, but the slow pace of laying and collection imposes limits on the scale of this enterprise.

In Piedmont I helped to slaughter six organic, free-range chickens, an experience recounted in Box 7.1. During the process I asked Simone, the 21-year-old son of Bruno, the farm's owner, how he felt about this task. 'I hate it,' he answered quickly. 'But at least I know that the chickens had a good life. I don't like eating chicken that didn't come from this farm or someone we know.' As much as I felt uncomfortable during the slaughter, I respected Simone's craftsmanship. He tried to minimise the birds' distress before killing them and used a combination of trained manual practice and adopted knowledge to expedite their deaths. The chickens on Bruno's farm are reared in quantities that necessitate slaughter only once every few weeks, and it is rare that more than six are killed at one time. There is good reason to suppose that under more hurried conditions the slaughter would lack the 'reflection and attention' that Parkins and Craig (2006) associate with ethics of the slow, and that the animals would suffer for it.

Figure 7.1 – Recently slaughtered poultry

Five chickens slaughtered by a WWOOF host and the author in Piedmont.

Source: Author

Box 7.1 – On slaughtering a chicken

Simone brings me into the coop and casts about for the largest birds. They're given plenty of space to cluck around outdoors, but all are kept inside while the best ones are chosen. There's a slight sense of panic as Simone and I move around, and the chickens do appear to express fear, especially when Simone shoots his arm out to grab a chosen bird by the legs. The captured chicken is quickly turned upside down, where it goes into a strange kind of repose as Simone carries it out of the coop by its feet. Possibly frozen with fear, or maybe just confused, it remains completely still, wings folded tightly, while Simone fixes a little noose around its feet. I carry the bird by the looped string and we go outside to a mesh fence where several hooks await. The bird is hooked onto the fence by the string around its feet and Simone shows me how to hold its wings. It will jerk and panic, he warns, and its wings need to be held tight to prevent it from spraying blood or injuring itself further in its last seconds alive. We lift the wings up and I hold them together where the joint meets the shoulder. I instantly recognise this part of its anatomy – it feels exactly like a naked chicken wing you'd prepare to cook: a large joint, thin layer of skin and tender meat beneath. I don't know why but this is the strangest moment of the whole experience, my hands recognising a consumer product while my eyes see a living animal. Simone takes a very sharp knife, used exclusively for slaughter, and explains that he needs to slit a vein in its throat, not an artery, or else the blood will spray and squirt. He begins sawing into the red skin of the chicken's neck while the bird remains silent and still, as if it knows there is no point in resisting. Success is marked by the sound of a sizeable tear into the skin, followed by the steady flow of blood onto the concrete block below. It comes fast enough to give the chicken a quick death and, as Simone had hoped, flows smoothly rather than splutters. Its fight or flight responses kick into gear and it tries to flap its wings. I hold it steady, hating that I'm winning such an unbalanced fight but conscious that its fate will be worse, its death more gruesome and prolonged, if I allow it to flap away, hanging upside down with its throat cut. I look more directly at it before it dies and see it mechanically opening and closing its mouth, trying to take breaths that will never come. Its body swells and deflates, still searching for air, still employing its instinct to keep living, until it all stops forever. I'm holding it in my hands as its life force dissipates and this is a tangible sensation. I can *feel* that its nature has changed, that it has transformed from living being to carcass, from animal to meat. We do this four more times in less than 20 minutes. I am stunned by how quickly and quietly it has all come to pass.

- Field journal excerpt, March 2010

7.4. Local and formal scientific knowledges

Farmers learning a new craft are vulnerable to challenges arising from a lack of experience and technical knowledge. Individual skills are, except in the most intractable cases, likely to improve through embodied practice, as happens with herding animals, identifying beneficial and destructive fauna and flora, and judging weather conditions in relation to sowing and harvest times. As O'Connor (2007: 126) states, '[i]t is through embodied relations with the world, tacitly understood, that we accrue practical knowledge.' The tacitness of this knowledge is significant: it requires sufficient first-hand experience and subjective interpretation within a localised context to defy explicit replication. While tacit knowledge may arise through isolated performances of inductive reasoning, the social contexts in which farmers work, and in which agriculture has historically evolved, are likely to influence habituated practice. Skill development, then, is generally the result of both intuitive capacities and the adoption or adaptation of extrinsic technical knowledge. The sources of this knowledge give considerable insight into how back-to-the-landers learn to become competent farmers while also informing academic debates concerning local versus formal or institutional scientific knowledge.

Many back-to-the-landers in Northern Italy remarked that they had attempted some form of agricultural study before migrating to the countryside. Few believed this to be a worthwhile pursuit for any purpose other than a basic grounding in the principles of farming. The main point of contention concerned the inability to successfully apply formal scientific principles toward intended results in a localised context. 'We had studied but this is so different,' says Romano, who has been farming for less than three years. 'I think each field has its own characteristics and you have to know which tools to use, the real effort required.' Elisa elaborates:

> Before we started this experience we were thinking about going to the country and started reading a lot of things, trying to study wild plants or trying to understand some things that were only theoretical things – nothing practical... For example, at the beginning in the field where we are growing *erba medica,* we didn't treat it well

and we now have a lot of problems with the weeding. It's the lack of experience... because if we knew we could have done something more.

Wolfgang and Ursula, back-to-the-landers near the seaside town of Cecina in Tuscany, had both studied agriculture at university, despite coming from non-farming families, with the belief that there would 'always be work in agriculture, and this was something you could do anywhere.' The content of their studies in the 1970s reinforced the idea that scientific knowledge imparted in a classroom was universally applicable, and they eventually did apply their learning to agricultural development work in Africa. Both are sceptical, however, of the notion that what makes scientific sense in a laboratory or test site will bring universal benefit to all who embrace it. 'There was this feeling that it would make [African farmers] feel better to impose some rule that would prevent them from doing something that would brand them stupid or ignorant,' recalls Wolfgang, 'and then this started to be criticised when people realised that other techniques could be used. New approaches started which gave more credit to farmers, to their competency... but slowly, slowly.' The couple recognise that their background in agricultural science gave them an advantageous starting position when they came to Italy, but the type of farming that they wanted to do (organic mixed crop, with a commercial focus on wine and olive oil) required learning new techniques and optimal methods for their locality. 'It was part of our contract when we bought the place that the former owner should come up regularly and tell us what to do,' says Wolfgang. 'So he would come up and let us know when the peaches were ripe or whatever...'

Before Stefan and Martina bought their land in rural Umbria, Stefan had considered formal agricultural study to prepare for a life in which he could 'work outside and live with the natural world', only to reject its capitalistic focus:

> I was thinking at that point that I could go on to an agricultural college, and so I looked at a couple of the textbooks and realised that that was the last thing I wanted to learn, 'cos it was all about production units and increasing profits. So I said, 'Well that's definitely not what I want to learn.' If you do go to a place like that it's very difficult not to absorb some of it. So I thought at that point I could go and do some practical work in various places and pick out the bits that were most useful. Of course in the end, what was actually the most important method of learning was here. We were lucky enough that when we came, there were peasants who knew how to do all these things. We thought we were revolutionary but they'd done it for centuries.

The back-to-the-landers' comments reflect some of the academic debates concerning local knowledge and formal science. This is a wide-ranging and cross-disciplinary issue, one whose epistemological implications have long troubled geographers (Thrift, 1999; Briggs and Sharp, 2004; Briggs, 2005; Whatmore, 2009), anthropologists (Geertz, 1983; Geertz, 2000: 133-40; Hobart, 1993; Ingold, 2000; Escobar, 2008) and sociologists of science (Latour and Woolgar, 1979; Latour, 1987; Kloppenburg, 1991; Stuiver, 2006; Kerans and Kearney, 2006). The terminology surrounding local and scientific knowledges is somewhat inconsistent, with 'indigenous' sometimes substituted for 'local'[2] , though taxonomic questions are less relevant here than the commonalities that arise from studies in which tensions are detected between exogenous scientism and contextualised local understandings. Local knowledge, writes Barnes (2000: 452), 'now refers to the two-part idea that first, all knowledge is located and geographically and historically bounded, and second, that the local conditions of its manufacture affect substantively the nature of the knowledge produced.' It needs to be emphasised that this does not exclude formal scientific knowledge, produced in dedicated institutions and exercised through technocratic means. On the contrary, formal scientific knowledge is equally contextualised and produced within a 'community' of members whose methodologies and perceptions affect the outcomes of knowledge production and dissemination.

Analysing the socio-technical practices of a biological sciences laboratory, Latour and Woolgar (1979) demonstrate that it is as bounded and particular a community as an agrarian village. A key difference between understandings of, say, plant pathogens in either community is likely to be one of context and utility. The reductionist methodologies of formal science direct its conclusions toward universal or decontextualised explanations and applications, whereas local knowledge may apprehend such phenomena within a particular and contingent range of causative, practical and cosmological possibilities. The knowledge generated in a laboratory, claims Kloppenburg (1991: 537), 'is relatively immutable and mobile' – a reflection of community standards – 'whereas local knowledge, bound to the locality of a particular labor process, is relatively mutable and immobile.' Geertz (2000: 134) suggests that an opposition between universal and local knowledge is misleading, but 'if we must have an opposition...

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[2]   'Indigenous knowledge' is the preferred phrase in development studies, and as such has grown a life somewhat independent from the more generic 'local knowledge'. For brevity's sake it is not necessary to linger on these distinctions here, though Briggs (2005) and Briggs and Sharp (2004) do warn against using the term 'indigenous knowledge' uncritically, as does Geertz (2000) in regard to 'local knowledge'.

rather than a shifting focus of particularity' then it is between one type of local knowledge and another. Participants in a local knowledge network, argue Kerans and Kearney (2006: 170) 'will winnow out inconsistencies and check which of the competing facts and explanations have more power to lead them toward solutions.' This description could easily apply to formal science but outside of institutional networks, 'local knowledge will not be articulated the same way scientific knowledge is.' Similarly, van der Ploeg (1993: 210) writes that the syntactical expression of local knowledge 'is not the nomological one of science; the scope is not a presupposed universe but one specific to the localized labour process itself.'

For the reasons outlined above, it is sensible to avoid presenting local and formal scientific knowledges as neatly opposed binaries. The distinctions between them, however, come regularly into critiques of the latter's hegemonic applications, particularly when coupled with development narratives or transnational capital:

> Typically, 'development experts' from the West are brought in to analyse a development problem and to offer a solution based on scientific method. Just as in the colonial period, an assumption dominates that either Western science and rationality are more advanced or refined than other positions or, more simply, that they are the norm – "knowledge" in the singular form - from which others deviate in their fallibility.

> (Briggs and Sharp, 2004: 662)

Writing on shrimp farmers in Colombia, Escobar (2008: 88-90) portrays the socialised, embodied and historical judgments of small communities as under threat, a shared knowledge that 'is closer to art, pragmatic improvisation, or performance than to a scientific reading of signs afforded by instrumental rationality or the reliance on a body of context-free knowledge.' This example is offered not as a romantic fetishisation of the 'traditional' but in contrast to the hierarchical, technocratic, capital-intensive and externally controlled production systems that threaten to replace it. Married to this so-called modernisation is a loss of community self-reliance and a shift to de-skilled wage labour as managerialist production models supplant locally-rooted craft methods.

As in the scenario described by Escobar, for back-to-the-landers in Italy this is much more than an academic debate. Local knowledge is indispensible to new farmers learning the technical crafts of food production. In the WWOOF host questionnaire, 71% of respondents considered 'Neighbours / friends' an important source of advice and news on farming. Although respondents were similarly reliant on the internet for information, in interviews it was often reported that without the help of other local farmers certain objectives would never have been met. The casual exchange of information achieved through proximity with neighbours reflects a particular kind of knowledge, one that contrasts with the institutional knowledge promoted at de-localised levels. Greta, who runs a mixed livestock and horticulture farm in a region known for *parmaggiano reggiano* cheese, feels that institutions nominally supportive of farmers, such as the local union offices, are dismissive of the small-scale organic agriculture she practices. 'They're indifferent here if you do something other than *parmaggiano*,' she claims. 'There's no money so there's no technology or knowledge about doing anything else... I don't think we've learned anything from the institutions. What we learned is through our own experience.' Her successes in food production, which came after many years, were achieved through trial and error and advice gleaned from other local farmers:

> Well, for example in our case, we had a few neighbours that were still farmers. There weren't many more left. We would ask them maybe for a favour for something. And they would ask how you're doing. 'Oh, I'm going to load the wood' etc., 'But that tractor's too dangerous...' So exchange like this. Or you're cutting hay and someone says, 'This machine works much better...'

Tanya and David, who produce olive oil for resale and fruit and vegetables for their own consumption, have attended olive pruning courses run by the local authority and consulted internet sources for information, but also credit a lot of their knowledge to advice offered by neighbours:

> T: Neighbours, the Italians, tell you, like when we had that fly infestation, the *mosca*, I was asking everybody about it, and they all said, 'No, don't worry. It's just going to be more greasy this year, but it's okay.' And everybody had it. Not just our land. Everyone in Umbria apparently had this in 2007. So it's local information like that. There's no way I would have known that...
>
> D: And the knowledge comes a wee bit from confidence as well. We brought in help to prune the trees for two years, but we won't do that again, because we've done

this four years on the trot now, and we've started cutting our own trees, the fruit trees. We're gonna do our own pruning next year, starting in February and March. We've read up about it, we kind of know roughly what to do. So we'll end up doing more and more ourselves, whereas before, just through lack of knowledge –

T: We were intimidated.

Accessing knowledge through neighbours is not equally straightforward for all new farmers. In Tuscany, Nicla claims that the farmers nearest her are unhelpful and obstructive. 'Maybe it's because I'm a woman, maybe it's because I didn't grow up here,' she speculates, 'but they don't take me seriously as a real farmer, even though I'm out in the fields every day.' Unable to benefit from the knowledge held by farmers in her area, much of Nicla's instructive experience has come through membership of the APE organisation, whose knowledge exchange activities are detailed below. Her experience recalls that of some French back-to-the-landers interviewed by Mailfert (2007), who often joined external networks when the pre-existing social ties of a given area were exclusive and impenetrable. An initial sense of exclusion was reported by numerous back-to-the-landers in Italy, although this was seen as an obstacle that could be overcome through appropriate performances of agricultural activity. Being 'out in the fields every day' is an important process in establishing credibility, and the first stage in obtaining access to local pools of expertise. Visibility in one's agrarian role is considered crucial to earning the trust and respect of fellow farmers, a reflection of what Cloke et al. (1998b) refer to as 'cultural competence', or the performance of normative social and consumption practices in a given locality, though in this case *production* is a more relevant feature than consumption. 'They thought we were naïve foreign hippies and that we wouldn't last more than a couple of seasons,' remembers Brigitta, a Swiss back-to-the-lander in Tuscany, 'but after I gave them a basket of home-grown tomatoes I think they got the message, and after that they became incredibly helpful.' In Umbria, Stefan claims that a 'breakthrough' was required to establish cooperative dialogues with his neighbours, though this was achieved relatively quickly because 'they could come up to the garden and tell immediately whether you were really doing it or just pretending at it.' Accessing local knowledge was more than simply a case of proving one's 'cultural competence'; learning vernacular codes was also essential. As Martina comments:

It was extremely interesting how you have to ask for advice. At the beginning, I remember saying to Antonio up the hill, 'What are the main diseases that affect sheep?' He said, 'Have another glass of wine.' [laughs] What the hell does that mean? It doesn't mean anything. If you go and ask a specific question, like the ram has gone blind, then he tells you, 'That's what we call *la malatita della luna*… What you do is get the ram and flick sugar in his eyes and he should get better.' And you think, Good grief… So they know what they're talking about but they can't tell you unless you're very specific about what you're asking. There's no use in asking these sort of universal questions, because that means nothing at all.

7.5. Networks of knowledge and skill

The three formal networks analysed in detail in this research, Slow Food, WWOOF and APE, all promote some function of knowledge and skill transmission between farmers. Embedded in their capacity to do so is a recognition that traditional structures for mentoring, namely family and community, have been weakened by a depopulated and mechanised countryside. The kind of farming that attracts back-to-the-landers tends to be labour-intensive and focused on quality, in contrast to the industrialised farming reflected in the capitalistic and technocratic varieties of agro-science. It can be a consciously old-fashioned approach, requiring what Stuiver (2007) calls 'retro innovation' to align a preference for older practices with contemporary and future demands. Stakeholders, which can include connected networks of non-farmers such as consumers, academics and NGOs, 'gather around the problematisation of the present food regime and embrace old knowledge as a way forward.' (Stuiver, 2007: 163) This section considers how values are wedded to skill and knowledge in the Slow Food, WWOOF and APE networks, and what role these groups play in their dissemination. By extension, this line of inquiry also asks how back-to-the-land migration is enabled and sustained by the existence of these networks.

7.5.1. APE

The *Associazione per Esperienze di Autoproduzione e Collaborazione* (APE) provides a rich case study in how local knowledge is disseminated among back-to-the-landers in an organised

network. Based in the vicinity of Cortona, Tuscany, it began as a way of meeting particular needs that were, in the opinions of the founding members, being addressed either too disparately by larger organisations or not at all. Walter, a signatory to the founding statute, describes it as a coalescence of interests among already acquainted farmers. Members of APE have variously been involved with WWOOF, farmers' markets, the biodiversity and heritage seed variety organisation Seedsavers, the small farmers' network *Associazione di Solidarietà per la Campagna Italiana* (ASCI) and Coldiretti, the national farmers' union. Remarking that '...there is really no coordination between different farmers' movements', Walter and the other founders sought to pool the provisions offered by unrelated national organisations into a self-contained local network of mutual support.

There are eight farms that regularly participate in APE activities and about 10 non-farmers who attend events regularly and communicate with the group. Individual events such as harvest feasts (Section 8.2.2) are likely to attract many more participants, but for purposes of understanding the organisation's role in circulating skill and knowledge it is sufficient to limit discussion here to the activities of the farms at the core of its membership. Among these practices is the formalised sharing of manual capabilities, machinery resources and technical knowledge. Members of the group meet collectively on most Wednesdays from spring through autumn to perform the most resource-intensive tasks on alternating APE farms. There is no expectation that all members will attend every 'work party' but as a trial system for pooling labour, tools and knowledge for maximum mutual benefit, the participating farms have been consistent in their commitment. Some of the tasks performed collectively by the work parties include harvesting chestnuts from the woodland on Walter's property, weed-clearing in the semi-abandoned fields of Nicla's farm, tree pruning on all farms and assistance with grape, grain and olive harvests.

In late February, 2010 I participated in two APE work parties in Tuscany, the first at the Cortona farm of Louise, an English back-to-the-lander from Gloucester, and the second at Nicla's property near Montepulciano. On both days APE members Louise, Nicla, Walter and Marino, all back-to-the-landers, were present. Pruning olive trees was the main job at both locations and the one that commanded most of the attention of the farmers. Walter and

Marino each brought a gas-powered pruning saw while all the others came with a supply of *roncole*, or machete-like curved blades designed for shaving thin twigs from branches and logs. In this pocket of Tuscany there is considerable cross-pollination between WWOOF and APE. Nicla, for example, was invited to join APE after Walter, a regional coordinator for WWOOF, came to inspect her farm. At each work party there were three WWOOFers, including myself, all representing different host farms which were also affiliated to APE.

On both occasions the WWOOFers were given several small, relatively easy but nonetheless essential jobs to do while the farmers debated the best methods for pruning individual olive trees. While the WWOOFers did some weeding and bramble clearing at each farm, our primary tasks involved clearing and managing the arboreal debris from the olive groves. Pruning should ideally maximise the penetration of sunlight to a tree's foliage, so dense, overly leafy branches that crowd out others are thinned at least every two years. Dead and dying branches, visible to the trained eye, are also trimmed away. Theories on olive pruning emphasise evenly channelled air circulation through the foliage, an idea reflected in the smooth, rounded 'wine goblet' appearance of well-maintained trees. These key principles are taken into consideration any time an incision is made, meaning that lengthy deliberations sometimes transpire before any action is taken. On the farms, thick branches that could be used for firewood were shorn of their extending twigs and cut into portable logs. At Louise's farm, thin, leafy branches were reserved for feeding her goats. Goats relish masticating on olive leaves, explained Walter, and freshly cut branches provide a free source of food for the animals.

At both farms Walter and Marino were able to continue some of the pruning work while Louise and Nicla prepared lunch for the group. For the most part the food was entirely organic and made with ingredients grown on site or bartered with neighbouring farmers. Over lunch, the APE members continued to discuss pruning techniques, schedules for completing the groves and plans for the following week's work party. After lunch at Louise's farm several of us assisted in transplanting a bay laurel to a new location where the shade it cast would minimise impacts on other plants. Again, this was the subject of considerable debate before any actual work was performed. Following that task, Marino spent about half an hour guiding the whole group around the farm to identify and forage wild edible herbs and grasses. My field journal remarks

that 'many could easily have been mistaken for inedible weeds. We tried several and they were good, particularly the ones growing out of the stone walls.' Bags of the herbs were collected by each of the farmers and taken home to be used in salads that night.

The work parties described are an impressionistic rather than comprehensive depiction of APE's praxis. The mentoring, knowledge circulation, sociality and economic efficiency promoted by the work parties are also present in the group's other activities, often designed to extend these priorities toward non-farmers. Section 5.1, for example, describes Walter's project in which he invites city dwellers to participate in the selection, slaughter and butchery of a chicken that he has raised but the 'customer' will keep. This process, he claims, imparts skill, knowledge and an ethical foundation for evaluating animal welfare. The project is also an innovative response to the limited market opportunities accessible to small farmers whose products may not conform to certain regulatory protocols or bear standard organic certification (see Chapter 8). Walter knows that the chickens must be slaughtered and that he must find a market for them. His project applies the principles of APE toward necessary market exchange, thus redefining the character of that exchange as less instrumentalist (cf. Hinrichs, 2000) or 'capitalocentric' (cf. Gibson-Graham, 2003; 2008).

7.5.2. WWOOF

Several interviewees reported, on and off the record, that the potential for WWOOF to act as a medium for communicating practical farming knowledge is under-utilised. WWOOF hosts (apart from the most remote) in Piedmont, Tuscany, Umbria and Emilia-Romagna often live within close proximity of one another. Partly this is because they tend to concentrate in relatively marginal land, away from the industrial monoculture farms that place large distances between homes in agricultural regions. According to Walter, a regional WWOOF coordinator for the Arrezzo area of Tuscany, there are nearly 10 WWOOF farms between Castiglion Fiorentino and Cortona, a distance that could be traversed on foot in a matter of hours. Many WWOOF hosts know each other personally, either independently of WWOOF or as a result of membership. In this context dialogues about farming often arise and a strong potential exists to utilise such

connections. On a formal basis, however, the idea of WWOOF as a platform for exchanging ideas, rather than simply labour, remains under-developed:

> We tried a forum and it didn't really work. But there have been things where somebody's looking for a certain kind of grain, and I send out a message to all the hosts in their area… Or sometimes you're looking to share a mill… These sorts of things. There's not a lot of that but it would be a really good thing to do more of.
>
> (WWOOF official, Tuscany)

> I think you could probably use it more... The WWOOF farms that we have nearby here are doing WWOOF because we did WWOOF in the beginning. They followed the example that they saw on our farm. There is an exchange, of course, with these farms, and maybe some collaboration… The one down here brings us apples and we make apple juice that he gives to guests, things like this… But it's not because of WWOOF, it's because we knew each other before WWOOF.
>
> (Greta, Emilia-Romagna)

The lack of uptake in using WWOOF as a conduit for farming knowledge is attributed primarily to other organisations fulfilling that role. Elisa and Romano, for example, access some technical expertise of medicinal herb production through a dedicated national producers' association, Federazione Italiana Produttori Pianti Officinali (FIPPO). However, they have met other local WWOOF hosts through FIPPO, leading to friendly relationships and regular communication. They claim to have learned from these other farms, with Elisa commenting that '[WWOOF membership] is really useful for experience because we have an exchange of ideas and suggestions.' One of the WWOOF officials has been proactive in making WWOOF a visible member of Semi Rurali, an umbrella group of organisations concerned with sustainable farming and artisanal food production. This affiliation, it is hoped, will strengthen WWOOF's potential for connecting farmers and possibly steering collective energy toward the more overtly political aims of Semi Rurali. Presently, however, interaction between WWOOF farms remains fairly casual and unorganised, an opportunity that can be electively seized but is often not. As Walter remarks:

It's a way of connecting. Maybe it's not the easiest way, but it's one of a lot of networks. There are other networks – the Seedsavers network, or Small Farmers' Association or others. And everybody now has his name on a mailing list, and if you are connected to three or four mailing lists, you are connected to hundreds of interested farmers all over Italy. So if you need information you have a good chance of getting it.

Although the WWOOF network is reported as being under-utilised as a platform for knowledge exchange among *established* farmers, it plays a dynamic role in imparting skills and experience to aspiring farmers, making a considerable contribution to the viability of back-to-the-land lifestyles. According to the prescribed formula for WWOOF participation, hosts act as teachers, giving verbal instructions to be followed and physical demonstrations to be mimicked. Through repetition and practice, a repertoire of skills should ideally become instilled in the volunteers so that analytical judgments can be exercised toward productive, cost-effective and sustainable farming. Karen, a WWOOF host in Umbria, claims that she always refers to her volunteers as 'apprentices' rather than 'workers' and selectively chooses WWOOFers on the basis of stated experience or interest in the organic horticulture in which she specialises. 'Ideally,' says one WWOOF Italia official, 'it's the WWOOFer and the host working on one side, collaborating on a project together. It's not "How many hours did I do?" or anything like that. That's why we're always pushing this *collaboration* – working together to do a project with a host.'

The notion that WWOOF can serve as an effective apprenticeship comes through strongly in the regrets of back-to-the-landers who began farming with little practical experience. Although some were able to gain direct agricultural experience through other means, several interviewees remarked that they would have benefitted from working for at least a year or more as a volunteer before embarking on their own back-to-the-land projects. 'If we had known about WWOOF before,' says Elisa, 'we would have done it just to get some experience, just to see what farming is. When we began it was a totally new thing for us.' Romano continues: 'We started because we had an idea, so we followed this idea for a long time and we were focused on it for many years. So I think if you want to do it just to do something different it doesn't really work. You should have the right direction to follow.' Ursula, a German back-to-the-lander in Tuscany, had done a year's apprenticeship in Germany many years before buying her farm in Italy but feels that she did not fully take advantage of the

opportunity. Had she known that she would eventually become a farmer, her training as an apprentice could have been valuable in terms of practical experience:

> The practical knowledge [from her apprenticeship]… it's not there. But I regretted that later. Afterwards you're always more wise. I could have learned a lot. ... it's my own fault, because I did not ask the [right] questions. I had no idea what to ask. I should have done better, been more aware.

In statements about WWOOF's value as an apprenticeship facility, interviewees frequently emphasised that the most valuable knowledge cannot be attained through short stays at multiple farms. Rather, the most effective preparatory approach would involve remaining at a single location for a year or more. This way an aspiring farmer can gain experience of working to seasonal demands and participating in full cycles of plant and animal life. Put differently, short farmstays can habituate a WWOOFer in the staccato rhythms of daily chores but not the overarching time signature that determines a farm's seasonal or annual demands.

> I think as a WWOOFer if you're staying a short amount of time it's a little harder to understand the whole structure of how things work and why we do things. I would want to do a little bit of formal studying and definitely at least a year WWOOFing, and maybe trying to stay in one place where I can see the whole process... [WWOOFing] has kind of been an inspiration to me and I've learned a lot in terms of little bits of knowledge, but not in a comprehensive sense because I haven't been in one place long enough.
>
> (Madeleine, WWOOFer, Emilia-Romagna)

> I remember the many WWOOFers that have passed through here, there were always a few that were interested to become farmers and I always told them, 'Spend at least two years somewhere doing farming.' For me, I appreciate what I learned but I always thought one year was too short. If you stay one year on a farm to learn, you learn certain manual things, like you know how to, let's say, pick carrots for example, but you don't have the whole knowledge – when to feed them, how to feed them properly… You learn a lot in one year but not enough to start your own farm.
>
> (Greta, Emilia-Romagna)

People who are interested in the agricultural process... They need to work at a farm that can really teach, and stay probably at least six months of the year.

(Roberto, Umbria)

Wolfgang worked in Tanzania and Malawi for several years before settling in Italy. His experience of those projects' shortcomings echoes the view of other WWOOF hosts regarding their own farms:

To learn the local conditions, it takes at least one year. You have to have seen at least one cycle of the year. Many of these projects, the time they give you is too short to really know anything, to do it. The next one is coming and you've achieved nothing. Time is over or the project is ending... There are so many factors limiting your productivity to do something useful.

Some WWOOF hosts are inclined to take on volunteers for long periods of time, but stays of less than a month tend to be the norm in most arrangements. Among the 91 respondents to the questionnaire for WWOOF volunteers, none had stayed on a single farm for more than six months, with 72% listing their maximum time in one place as less than a month. This fact flags up a significant tension currently afflicting WWOOF: as the popularity of WWOOFing has increased, the demographic profile of volunteers has shifted from apprentice farmers to itinerant young people seeking a cheap means of international travel. Bridget, a host in Tuscany, remarks that this presents a major contrast from the early days of WWOOF Italia:

We used to get travellers and now we get tourists. And I prefer travellers... I had some a few weeks ago and it was such a relief to see them arrive in their van, and it was just like the old days. They said, 'Hi, we're just travelling around... What do you want done?' And it was great. I used to get a lot of people like that. There were a lot less farms, but we used to see more of that. And [now] it's these kids who just don't know what to do on their gap year or whatever, and they get financial support from their parents and come over to hang out on organic farms... It's not really to our advantage if we really want their help.

In spite of these sometimes negative reflections, one WWOOF official sees in the less enthusiastic novices an opportunity to change their attitudes. Knowing that not every volunteer will be a prospective farmer, 'you also have to see the point of view that these young kids who come over, you can try to turn them around, make them think about what it's all about.' These WWOOFers, she argues, 'are actually the kind of people we want to get to as well... I do feel that when they go away that I've changed something and hopefully they'll think about it.' This hope is justified, she believes, on the basis of having hosted 'hundreds' of WWOOFers and seen many of them develop more knowledge, enthusiasm and commitment than they carried upon arrival at her farm. Klara, a WWOOFer who had been working at a farm in Emilia-Romagna for several months, made a similar remark in reference to a first-time WWOOFer volunteering at the same farm:

> I'm actually impressed. For example now we have [a WWOOFer] from Australia, and she says that she's a city girl, but she's so willing to learn. She'll do any kind of job and she'll do the job very well. And it's the first time that she gets to experience life in the countryside, so she wants to know everything. So I'm so happy about that, and whatever I can explain to her I will.

As a further illustration of Bridget's point, only one of the WWOOFers interviewed for this research began volunteering to assist a pre-planned strategy toward a life in agriculture. The others grew such aspirations through time spent on the farms where they volunteered. For 23-year-old Andrew this desire grew from a definitive experience on a particular farm, constituted by a succession of moments and movements involving long, solitary treks with a herd of goats in the Appenine hills. He describes a sense of being unenclosed, connected to nature and able to drift intellectually, freedoms repressed in his previous work as a (recently redundant) IT worker in Connecticut. It instilled, he claims, a desire for greater self-sufficiency and a commitment to achieve that outcome following his time as a WWOOFer. Madeleine, a 19-year-old from Minnesota, admits that she had little interest in agriculture before she went to Italy as a WWOOFer. 'I just decided to travel for 8 months,' she says, 'but knew that I couldn't afford it unless I did some kind of work exchange... In fact before I left I was a little worried. I thought, Oh no, what if I'm not good at WWOOFing and I don't like the farms?' Her conversion, as such, was produced through several months volunteering on WWOOF farms in Italy and an Israeli kibbutz. At the time of our interview she intended to return to urban Minneapolis before

starting some kind of formal education in sustainable agriculture. She outlines her rationale as follows:

> I guess it's just seeing organic agriculture that reminded me that living in the city, I didn't realise how disconnected I was… I feel like in cities a lot of people are very separate from the source of where a lot of their food – a lot of their *things* – come from. And also, I'm pretty concerned about the environment and that's an ideological thing I've grown up with from my parents. But it just seems like the way society is going, in these really isolated and mechanised cities – that totally doesn't appeal to me... So I think it's important, if you're the kind of person who sees that and realises that and is attracted to organic agriculture, to go for it.... I don't know, it just feels a lot more *happy*. [laughs] The plants are happy, the people are happier… I like the lifestyle, I like getting to be physical every day and like being outside a lot. I love being outside.

7.5.3. A cautionary note: The changing face of WWOOF

While several WWOOF hosts emphasised that many aspiring back-to-the-landers had passed through their farms via WWOOF, the fact that WWOOFing can offer a low-cost working holiday can negatively impact the experience for hosts. I touched upon this subject above but want to explore it further here as it is particularly important in the context of how WWOOF can facilitate back-to-the-land migration, and what this means for long-term prospects. In the WWOOF volunteer questionnaire, 88% of respondents cited 'Opportunity to travel' as being 'Very important' or 'Important' to their decision to participate in WWOOF. This interest does not preclude an equal or stronger interest in farming, but does hint at some of the problems that WWOOF hosts have noted, where a lack of enthusiasm for farming can be detrimental to the host-volunteer relationship. Host farms recognise that they may be getting a WWOOFer with minimal interest in agriculture but are hesitant to sacrifice the extra help:

> E: Sometimes the fact is that someone is not interested so maybe he doesn't listen to you very well. You say what to do but you're not listened to. So things are badly done and you can't trust them....

R: What we've seen... is that some people are WWOOFing for travelling, others are WWOOFing because they're really interested in agriculture. This is the main difference, probably.

E: And also now, when we accept WWOOFers, we consider this. Because if they say, 'I'm travelling and I need a place', okay, maybe...

AW: So have you decided not to accept any WWOOFers because you've thought, Oh, they just want to travel, not work?

R: No, we haven't decided this - we would accept them, but if we had to choose between two...

(Elisa and Romano, Emilia-Romagna)

It's always a bit of surprise, who's coming... but WWOOF as an organisation can't do much about it. What I would change, maybe, is to put a limit on the age of WWOOFers, so that you have to be at least twenty [laughs]. It's very difficult to tell a girl of eighteen from Chicago that she can't come, but you already know that it won't work. So it's better if people are a little more mature than the eighteen-year-olds.

(Greta, Emilia-Romagna)

Writing on WWOOF in New Zealand, McIntosh and Campbell (2001: 120) suggest that the frustration felt by some hosts 'may necessitate a consideration of modifications to the WWOOF hosting experience, or the implementation of mechanisms to ensure a better degree of compatibility in the experience provided; for example, by requiring visitors to work fewer hours per day, or perhaps introducing screening mechanisms to ensure a better host/guest fit.' A WWOOF host like Karen in Umbria, who has a small property and the capacity to host only one WWOOFer at a time, can afford to be relatively selective in her choice of volunteers. Farmers needing virtually constant help are less able to be selective and therefore tend to receive more problematic guests. Issues usually arise when WWOOFers display a lack of interest in farming and a concomitantly indifferent work ethic. A regional coordinator for WWOOF attributes an increasing lack of respect shown to hosts to the impersonality of e-mail communication, the means by which many volunteering arrangements are now made. 'It's got worse,' she says, 'the people not showing up, just not taking it seriously. Taking no responsibility. It's incredibly rude. Apart from the fact that it puts people out, it's just

incredibly rude. Especially if you give them the train time and they're not on the train, it's unbelievable, really.' The problem of indifferent WWOOFers has been noted not only by hosts, but also some of the volunteers with aspirations to farm their own land:

> I'd say that WWOOFing has been a huge help in getting this second career jump-started (if that's what it's going to be, a second career) but with one caveat: on the farm in Italy, I noticed that most of the other volunteers were simply not interested in the ins & outs of growing grape plants. That's fine by me, of course, but it definitely set me apart from the other volunteers. It may have been just the dynamics of this particular group of people, but I did feel a little isolated as a result.
>
> (Joe, WWOOFer, via e-mail)

> What I don't like about the WWOOFers – well, some of them, not all of course – is that they don't actually read the description of the farm. So they are just picking farms by pointing on the paper and they don't actually think about what they're going to do. I was pretty sure about what I was going to do, so I chose this farm, which had herbs, because I was interested in the herbs, and I was interested in another two farms which had herbs as well.
>
> (Klara, WWOOFer, Emilia-Romagna)

The problem of indifferent volunteers affects prospects for back-to-the-land migration in two ways. Firstly, it steers much of WWOOF's resources, in terms of administration time, toward conflict resolution between hosts and WWOOFers. In some cases this is unequivocally the fault of hosts who treat WWOOFers poorly, but in many others it comes as a result of WWOOFers having expectations that do not match the reality of everyday farm work. One of the WWOOF officials to whom I spoke claimed that he would prefer WWOOF to spend its administrative energies on connecting with other, politically motivated networks such as ASCI and the *mercatini clandestini* (Chapter 8), thus maintaining the oppositional stance of small-scale organic agriculture and WWOOF as an emblem for it. Practically, however, this activity comes secondary to dealing with the fallout between hosts and volunteers, a problem that has grown in proportion to WWOOF's popularity. Secondly, WWOOF hosts who may be well-placed to offer substantive advice to aspiring farmers could find themselves increasingly frustrated with

WWOOFers and dissociate from the organisation. A few farmers with whom I spoke had considered this after repeatedly being let down by the dedication of their volunteers.

There may be cause for optimism as far as the hosts should be concerned, however. Although the results almost certainly reflect a self-selection bias, respondents to the WWOOF volunteer questionnaire generally show a strong interest in organic agriculture and consider it a possible path for their own futures. Out of 80 respondents to the question, 32 claimed that it was 'Quite likely' that they would attempt to become an organic farmer (either full-time or hobby) in the future, with 16 answering 'Definitely'. By contrast, only 10 responded that it was 'Not likely at all'. Significantly, 68% of respondents said that it was *more* likely that they would pursue this path as a result of their WWOOFing experiences. Such results should, at the very least, indicate that WWOOFing remains, despite the issues recounted above, one of the most effective means for stimulating an interest in or developing knowledge of organic farming for those from non-agricultural backgrounds.

7.5.4. Slow Food

The Piedmontese founder of Slow Food, Carlo Petrini, frequently and explicitly invokes network discourse to describe Slow Food's mission: 'In describing food as a *network* of people, places, and knowledge... we inevitably feel part of that network... which goes from the global to the particular, and which exists both on a universal and on a local level, both for those who produce and for those who co-produce.' (Petrini, 2007: 199, emphasis in original) As a transnational movement with diverse organisational structures and locally contingent practices and priorities, the network description is apt. Slow Food acts as a mediator of knowledge and discourse surrounding food, using rhizomatic structures to transmit and receive information through national groups, local *convivia*, international media and independent action. Once fed through the network, workers and advisors at its central node, the organisation's headquarters in Piedmont, strategise formal programmes for circulating new ideas and established practical knowledge.

One of the most elaborate expressions of this drive toward connectivity and accessibility is the biannual Terra Madre conference, held in Turin in conjunction with the Salone del Gusto, a trade fair promoting (mostly Italian) artisanal food products. 'The basic idea [behind Terra Madre],' states Petrini (2007: 201), 'was to bring together a large number of people from all over the world in a single place – important people, the so-called "intellectuals of the earth": farmers, fishermen, nomads, craftsmen, and others engaged in the production or distribution of food that is good, clean and fair.' The purpose of the conference is to initiate dialogues and promote cooperation toward systems of food production and exchange which are equitable and sustainable, between different global regions and within them. Some selections from the programme of the 2010 conference give a flavour of the content: Energy and Systemic Production; Biodiversity and Ecosystems; Goods, Exchanges and Shared Resources; Laws, Rights and Policies; Traditional Knowledge, Gender and Immaterial Values. For purposes of knowledge exchange the conference possesses a distinct and valuable utility. In requiring participants to leave their respective land bases and congregate in Turin, however, its focus is on dialogue and intellectual development, rather than practical, hands-on skill. That said, the design of the conference works on the premise that this latter form of knowledge is well established within the assembled 'food communities'.

I was invited to the Terra Madre 2010 to coordinate a workshop on collective buying groups and community supported agriculture (CSA), based on my academic research on *gruppi di acquisto solidale* (GAS) in Italy (Chapter 8) and practical experience of running an informal collective buying group in Scotland. Utilising headsets and dozens of volunteer interpreters, many sessions were simultaneously translated into multiple languages. The workshop that I moderated was attended by students and farmers from Mexico, Italy, Greece, the United States and Canada, with many representing communal or otherwise unconventional farms in their home countries. Several of the farmers were back-to-the-landers, while the students were looking to connect with farms for work experience. Most of our discussion centred on issues of economic sustainability, often considered from an angle of international comparison. Most of the North American farmers participated in subscription-based CSA schemes and were relatively unaware of the European models being discussed while the European students knew little about the practicalities of CSA. A result of the discussion was the creation of an e-mail

list whereby we could exchange ideas on novel methods of facilitating ethical, non-exploitative consumer-producer exchange.

The Terra Madre conference gives one example of how Slow Food's programmes can translate coordinated knowledge into practical, material outcomes for farmers. In this respect, though, it is arguably the weakest among the three organisations considered in this chapter. This is due more to the breadth of Slow Food's ambitions than any systematic failings. Terra Madre does act as an effective medium for knowledge exchange, and there is certainly much on offer that could potentially benefit back-to-the-landers. As a biannual event, executed on an ever larger scale with each successive conference, its format is perhaps restrictive on the kinds of knowledge generated there, especially in light of the practical learning engendered by WWOOF and APE. Nevertheless, the dialogues initiated by Terra Madre should be regarded as complementary to the experiential knowledge production that I have ascribed to the other networks, rather than somehow opposed.

Other areas in which Slow Food can act as a conduit for disseminating expertise between local farmers are its Earth Markets and Presidia programmes. The Earth Markets, discussed in the next chapter, assemble farmers and customers in a social as well as economic capacity, a fact that could help to develop informal channels of knowledge exchange, in the same way that casual encounters between neighbouring farmers often leads to practical advice. Presidia food products, again discussed in Chapter 8, are considered 'endangered' by Slow Food and therefore subject to special efforts at preservation. These products typically involve what could be called craft production, requiring slower, more labour-intensive and local knowledge-dependent methods. Back-to-the-landers, according to one Slow Food employee, are ideally placed to take advantage of opportunities afforded by Presidia production, given their receptiveness to experimental farming. Furthermore, production of novel foodstuffs can be a key part of economic strategies for new farmers (Chapter 8; cf. Jacob, 1997), a fact that is likely to draw them toward these specialist methods of production. Producers of official Presidia foods are put into contact by Slow Food with others in the locality working under similar conditions, as well as given access to the expertise of specialist agronomists. The Presidia project is therefore another extension of the Slow Food network that could serve to

mediate and distribute the local knowledge contained within small communities of craft producers.

7.6. Conclusion

Reflections from back-to-the-landers in the previous chapter made apparent the frustrations that some felt in their earlier lives as office workers, factory operatives, medical professionals, teachers and engineers. The reasons for and degrees of disillusionment vary, though in all cases they were sufficient to inspire these workers to seek an alternative. Some philosophical rationales were offered in Chapter 6 while this chapter sought to explore more deeply the practical transitions involved in making the city to countryside migration.

The issue of temporal adjustment may be an abstract one but it is nonetheless essential to the back-to-the-land narrative. Craft farming involves submission to a slow time signature that has been outpaced by both non-agricultural work and industrial food production. Working to this rhythm requires operating within limits, and respecting these limits often underlies the ethical motives and claims of slow food (as a general concept) and alternative agro-food networks (such as Slow Food, APE and WWOOF). The farmers interviewed were resolutely committed to producing without chemical fertilisers and pesticides, but several feel punished for their efforts by the heavy-handed bureaucracy described in the next chapter. Back-to-the-landers have been quick to adopt low-impact technologies, with some in the process of converting their farms to 100% renewable energy sources. A full-scale conversion is costly so for many it is another long, incremental process. Low resource use, however, often aligns with the financial austerity of independent farming, however, and back-to-the-landers are generally committed to minimising their ecological impact as well as their monetary expenditure. There is a growing market for 'slow' and low-impact tourism, and farms that operate 'green' hospitality enterprises may be well-placed to benefit from this trend.

Slowness allows for the development of skill and an attitude of craftsmanship. In some case study farms, a craftsman's disposition was a prefigurative force in the eventual livelihoods that were created in the countryside. In others it had to be learned from the beginning, when new farmers had no choice but to work as neophytes. In these cases, being able to access local knowledge is crucial for understanding how ecologically particular conditions will configure effective practices. Furthermore, the existence of formalised networks of knowledge exchange can strengthen the intensity and extensiveness of the exchange process. While unguided trial and error may produce desirable results and contribute to a growing knowledge base, some kind of structured mentoring is widely used and considered very valuable by back-to-the-landers in Italy. WWOOF, in particular, offers a uniquely intimate format for training would-be back-to-the-landers in the requisite skills of organic farming.

The next chapter maintains a perspective on the case study AAFNs, but advances slightly ahead in terms of back-to-the-landers' positions *vis-à-vis* their agrarian competencies. With only a few exceptions, most of the interviewees had been farming long enough to have developed sufficient skills to make some kind of income from the practice. While this chapter explored how ethical notions of good, clean and fair are performed through everyday practices, the next interrogates whether they can remain consistent while providing economic sustainability.

8. From lifestyle to livelihood: Achieving economic sustainability

This chapter considers the strategies employed by back-to-the-landers for generating the necessary sustenance to stay on the land. This is the primary marker of success for back-to-the-landers, who in many cases have relinquished livelihoods that provided more in monetary terms. Self-sufficiency figures prominently as a motive for stimulating migration to the countryside, and as an influence on how food production is designed and performed. An initial consideration of the role of self-sufficiency in back-to-the-land ideals puts into context the respective importance of feeding oneself through agriculture and participating in the formal economy. Since most back-to-the-landers will at some point have to earn money, the majority of this chapter will look at income-generating activities. Firstly, case studies are drawn to demonstrate how back-to-the-landers remain solvent through non-agricultural activities, particularly relating to hospitality and tourism. Then I examine how different variations on the traditional farmers' market provide inconsistent levels of opportunity for back-to-the-landers. Similar themes emerge in a discussion of *Gruppi di Acquisto Solidale* (GAS), or Solidarity Buying Groups, where the groups' *ad hoc* structures result in differing experiences for participants. Finally, after outlining why conventional retail has proven a difficult sector for back-to-the-landers to penetrate, I explore the possibilities raised by Slow Food's Presidia project, which seeks to incorporate products and farmers on the edge of the agricultural economy into mainstream distribution channels.

To contextualise how back-to-the-landers so often find themselves on the fringes of the food landscape, it is useful to revisit some characteristics of industrial food and its favoured methods of production, distribution and consumption. Large regional and multinational corporations require uniformity in quantity and quality to ensure a dependable homogeneity. These requirements select for consistency in production, minimisation of risk and advanced infrastructural developments. More directly, food production on the industrial scale is most efficiently achieved by large monoculture farms with heavy capital investment, where chemical inputs militate against natural threats and machinery accelerates the process of

delivering food from field to fork. Contracts with large distribution, retail or processing firms underpin the market devices by which farmers achieve reward for their labour and capital investment. For many conventional farmers, write Brunori et al. (2011), 'the product is standardized, the price is already given and there is no contact with consumers.'

Generally speaking, industrial systems exclude small farmers who operate independently (that is, without a contractual bind to a particular firm). They can rarely produce enough to satisfy industrial-scale demands but obtain specific benefits from polyculture or mixed farming, as I argue below. Small farmers, a category into which all my case study back-to-the-landers fall, inhabit the margins of the agricultural economy. This marginality not only reflects the countercultural origins of back-to-the-land migration but also serves as a niche location from which to experiment with unconventional economic as well as agricultural practices. Brunori et al. (2011) argue that new farmers have utilised their niche on the economic fringe to generate a series of innovative, novel, even visionary alternatives to mainstream producer-consumer networks. If, as Richards et al. (2011: 31) claim, the 'very essence of supermarket trading involves anonymous relationships between retailer and shopper, with a high turnover of both products and staff,' the following sections detail strategies that consciously aim to counter the deleterious impacts of such deterritorialised food systems and economic relationships.

Resilience and innovation are, as I aim to show, key to understanding back-to-the-landers' strategies for sustenance. Gibson et al. (2010: 241) characterise resilience in rural areas as 'the way that natural processes reassert a life force, heal wounds, create new habitats and move on from disturbance.' In Wilson's (2010: 366) view, resilience can be an '*outcome,* especially when linked to improved adaptive capacity of rural communities, or a *process* linked to dynamic changes over time...' Economic sustainability requires frequent adaptation and openness to unusual or alternative market structures, stimulating innovation in the form of practices that are original in conception and design, and often experimental in their execution. Therefore innovations in establishing and strengthening AAFNs tend to arise from necessity rather than any particular propensity for commerce. Experience of life in the city and exposure to pluralistic practices and values can, however, prove a major strength in aligning broad philosophical goals with everyday sustenance. Below I detail how socio-economic practices,

structures and networks demonstrate back-to-the-landers' attempts to create a symbiosis between their mission for a sustainable future and basic survival in a market economy.

8.1. The quest for self-sufficiency

Self-sufficiency is a principle that connects and concentrates multiple strands of back-to-the-land philosophy. Its meanings vary among individuals and are often diluted by practical realities, but the term generally refers to the ability to subsist on resources freely available (e.g. woodland, water, renewable energy) and produced through one's own resources and labour (e.g. food, milk, compost, warmth). As the previous two chapters have shown, there are complex emotional, physical and political values invested in the cultivation and consumption of home-grown food and crafting from natural materials. Back-to-the-landers typically identify self-sufficiency with sustainability, describing their own practices as 'models' or 'experiments' founded upon low-impact methods that ensure a cyclical renewal of the resources being used. Self-sufficiency has also been synonymous with autonomy since Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*, arguably the first back-to-the-land memoir published in English, and has remained a constant theme in neo-homesteading narratives, embedded in the principles of thrift that shape back-to-the-land lifestyles and symbolise a detachment from the market (Jacob, 1997; Agnew, 2006).

Autonomous islands of self-perpetuating natural bounty reflect a highly idealised conception of self-sufficiency, more aspiration than achieved reality for most contemporary back-to the-landers in Italy. Nevertheless, migrants to the countryside are driven by the lure of greater self-sufficiency and quickly attempt to model their habitats on this ideal. When Stefan and Martina first moved to a remote plot of land in rural Umbria their activities consisted, as Stefan put it, of 'just trying to feed ourselves', subordinating other concerns and pre-dating any involvement in markets or other social networks. Karen, also in Umbria, has explicitly described her project as an 'experiment in self-sufficiency', an attempt to generate all her

family's basic needs from a small plot of land and disengage from the money economy to the greatest possible extent. Brunori et al. (2011) refer to this kind of farming as 'semi-subsistence' and remark that it is characteristic of 'neo-peasants' or back-to-the-landers, although ratios of subsistence to market agriculture are highly variable among this group. The 2010 directory of WWOOF hosts, for example, contains many statements recognising the link between self-sufficiency and the adoption of farming:

> [We] are simply a family who needs a hand to realise our aim to improve the place and to live a simple and natural life based on self-sufficiency. We sell at markets and fairs, exchange work and co-operate with other families in the area – act locally think globally. We have woodland for firewood and chestnuts and one hectare of land around the house for a vegetable garden and orchard.

> The members of the Commune di Bagnaia share their space, economic resources and work in the house and are aiming towards self-sufficiency in food and energy in the running of their 70 hectare farm of fields and woodland.

> We live in an old farmhouse in the hills with 5.5 hectares of land. Our main aim is self-sufficiency. We produce honey, propolis, olive oil, fruit, conserves and grape juice. By choice we do not have electricity or water in the house. We work with only simple tools.

> Family-run organic farm of 5 hectares with a mixed cultivation of olives, vines and fruit orchard. The work varies depending on the time of year. We are a family of 4 (2 adults and 2 children), living in a partially restored old house. Self-sufficiency is our objective but at the moment we still have to buy some non-organic products.

> (WWOOF, 2010)

In Northern Italy the self-sufficient back-to-the-lander would typically desire some combination of the following: a minimum of 50 olive trees to supply a year's oil, animals such as chickens, sheep and pigs for eggs, milk and meat, a vegetable garden, fruit trees, grape vines, grain for bread, nut trees, apiaries and access to woodland for firewood and foraging. Proximity to a stream or lake is also useful for catching fish and reducing reliance on a municipal water supply, while an auspicious topographical position can aid the production of solar and wind

energy. Again, this represents an idealised vision more than a back-to-the-land norm, but is nonetheless a fairly accurate description of several of the farms that I visited. None can claim total self-sufficiency but a number are both bountiful and diverse enough to limit significantly the need for external inputs. In Tuscany, for example, Walter rears his goats for meat rather than milk, so needs to buy his dairy products. His property is being slowly converted to 100% solar electricty and is currently heated by wood from his own acreage. He has few fruit trees so generally trades his own produce for fruit with neighbouring farms, and purchases his grain from a local organic cooperative. The rest of his food consumption is largely provided for by his own farming and foraging. Similarly, Karen in Umbria claims that dairy, grain and wine are three staples that her property will never produce in sufficient quantities, but the large majority of her family's subsistence will come from their land. In both these examples, imported products such as sugar, tea and coffee are not renounced but constitute the primary focus of shopping trips.

Sufficient though these farms may be, the 'self-' prefix is possibly misleading since considerable labour power from WWOOFers is often required to realise the land's full productive capacity. Furthermore, the archetypal self-sufficient property requires several hectares of arable land, an expensive prospect for new farmers, especially in Tuscany and Umbria. Although early back-to-the-landers were able to take advantage of low rural property prices until the 1990s, freedom and self-reliance may come with an ironically high price tag for their contemporary kin. New farmers in the 70s and early 80s simply would not have faced the intense financial pressures imposed by the rural property market, and thus were likely to engineer their farms toward self-sufficient (rather than market-focused) ends. Giorgio, originally from Zurich, commented that he was able to survive on very little money when he arrived in Umbria in 1973, supporting himself through occasional freelance photography work and his home-grown food. That he rented his property for a tiny sum from a local Catholic diocese was a key enabling factor. Early back-to-the-landers who purchased, rather than rented, their land are quick to stress that it could be bought for *agricultural* prices rather than speculators' rates. This marks a notable contrast to the contemporary situation, where country properties are redeveloped and sold, with land, to people with no intention of farming. A buoyant rural property market, stimulated by what locals referred to as the 'Tuscan Sun' effect (people moving from abroad to the Tuscan countryside in pursuit of an idyllic rural – but not agricultural - lifestyle), has dramatically altered the dynamics of back-to-the-land

economics. Tanya and David, originally from Glasgow, bought their land in Umbria with an old farmhouse in need of substantial renovation. Envisioning a 'semi-subsistence' lifestyle supported by periodic income from David's freelance consultancy work and a B&B service offered from their farmhouse, the expense of their project quickly subordinated some of their farming ambitions. They have had to postpone many of their intended projects on the land to concentrate on making a sustainable income between the B&B, David's short-term contracts and teaching English in their house. Irrigation, animal rearing and planting more fruit trees are all ambitions but they may remain unrealised for some years. Their food production thus far has enabled them to reduce expenditure (particularly on olive oil, fresh fruit and preserves) but comes nowhere near satisfying the majority of their needs.

Although self-sufficiency remains a fundamental ideal held by back-to-the-landers, it is often compromised in day-to-day life, with the cost of living in rural Italy often necessitating entrance into competitive markets. Most of the participants in this research fall somewhere between Walter's established system of autonomous provision and Tanya and David's delayed back-to-the-land dreams. For the newest of farmers, operating costs and quotidian necessities require some kind of money-generating activity, a fact that cannot be avoided no matter how skilled in food production back-to-the-landers become. The adaptive strategy most commonly employed by back-to-the-landers is perhaps best described as *pluriactivity*, recalling Bull and Corner's (1993) characterisation of the rural family economy in Italy after the dissolution of feudalism.

8.2. Pluriactivity

In their historical analysis of rural family economics in 19th and 20th Century Italy, Bull and Corner (1993) describe a 'peasant-worker' economy in which some household members undertake waged labour in proximate urban areas while others tend the land, producing a semi-subsistence economy where basic consumption needs are supplied by agriculture while supplementary expenditure is afforded by labour. The authors argue that the capitalisation of farm skills such as artisan food production, machine repair and garment stitching engendered

an entrepreneurialism that diversified the rural economy of regions such as Lombardy, Piedmont and Emilia-Romagna. Peasant-workers became peasant-entrepreneurs, creating and sustaining market demand for their products and services and stimulating a shift toward a post-productivist rural economy. I do not wish to draw an unjustified likeness between the voluntary austerity of contemporary back-to-the-land migration and the structural poverty afflicting generations of Italian peasants, yet it is hard to ignore the continuities present in the semi-subsistence lifestyles of modern back-to-the-landers. They, too, must maintain varied economic activities – some waged, some entrepreneurial – in combination with small-scale farming, for which market opportunities are restricted. Table 8.1 sketches how this is accomplished, and is accompanied by further descriptions of the new farmers' adaptive strategies, particularly relating to hospitality and other farm-based enterprises.

Table 8.1 – Income sources for case study farms

Region	Hospitality / tourism	Restaurant	On-site shop / sales	Teaching / workshops	Food processing (bottling, baking, preserving)	Outdoor activities (trekking, guided tours)	Market participation	GAS participation	Off-site work
Piedmont									
Farm 1	☑	☑	☑		☑	☑	☑	☑	
Umbria									
Farm 1	☑		☑	☑	☑				☑
Farm 2	☑			☑					☑
Emilia-Romagna									
Farm 1					☑		☑		
Farm 2	☑		☑		☑		☑		
Farm 3	☑	☑							
Tuscany									
Farm 1	☑				☑	☑		☑	☑
Farm 2	☑					☑			
Farm 3							☑	☑	☑

Note: 'Case study farm' refers to sites where participant observation through WWOOF was conducted. Other sites were visited for interviews but exposure to their pluriactivity was limited, leaving data on the subject relatively incomplete.

8.2.1. Hospitality and tourism

As Table 8.1 shows, a common source of income for small organic farmers is the provision of farm hospitality. A series of laws dating from 1983 have progressively refined and codified distinctions between a generalised rural tourism and *agriturismi*, or accommodation and tourism services on working farms. Structural development for *agriturismi* reflects both specific Italian and wider EU priorities for diversifying rural economies and preserving sustainable agriculture through opportunities to augment farm income. As Agostini (2007: 4) notes, hospitality services are intended in law to be 'complementary to the agricultural production without becoming the main activity of the farm.' A package of grants and subsidies has been developed to support *agriturismi*, with qualification criteria designed to distinguish between working farms and non-agricultural rural retreats. One qualification measure demands that farmers demonstrate that more of their income is derived from agriculture rather than tourism. Several back-to-the-landers told me, however, that this rule was easily flouted. Because small farmers in Italy so often trade in informal economies, their financial records are estimates at best and completely invented at worst. Despite semi-annual inspections and periodic paperwork, a number of research participants confessed that their *agriturismi* effectively subsidised their farms and comprised the largest proportion of their cash incomes. Indeed, a small minority of the farms I visited left me wondering how they could possibly qualify as primarily agricultural enterprises, so elaborate were their tourism components in relation to the farming activities.

The circumventing of regulations in rural Italy reflects a national irony in which laws are numerous and highly detailed yet widely ignored. Journalist Tobias Jones (2004) details this phenomenon in *The Dark Heart of Italy*, a book that portrays the national government as ineffectual and clientelistic, fixated on officious regulation that is often impossible, costly or counter-productive to implement. The excessive red tape that attends so many transactions, Jones argues, simply encourages a culture of cheating and corruption since the honest route rarely pays its intended dividends. A vicious circle then develops whereby the state responds to the inefficacy of previous laws with a raft of new, even more complicated ones. Back-to-the-

landers' views largely support this position, as many made clear when discussing their own *agriturismi* and other projects mediated by state bureaucracies. Those who 'rebalance' their earnings to suggest a greater proportion from farming are unapologetic, arguing that it is a necessary action if the state wants to promote genuine rural economic diversity and keep farmers on the land. They argue that it is not farmers' fault if agricultural prices are such that a sustainable living cannot be made from the land; ergo, if Italy wants to protect small producers at all then it needs to support other income sources. Of course, this support is explicit in the original language of the law - in reality, some complain, those legal measures are unrealistic.

Other farmers were critical of how the *agriturismo* designation has been appropriated by non-farmers. Tanya and David, for instance, registered their property as a bed and breakfast to avoid legal complications arising from any use of the *agritursimo* label. Any income they made from the land, they reasoned, would be minor compared to potential earnings from a hospitality enterprise, so they chose the path of full transparency. This disqualifies them from restoration subsidies and the low tax bracket occupied by most farmers. Agostini's (2007: 6) research considers different facets of the tourist experience that *agriturismi* in Lombardy use in their marketing. She writes: 'The problem stands out immediately if we look at how farms promote their business, where their agricultural aspects remain marginal compared to other services [primarily catering]… [T]he farm, which should have in agri-tourism a support for its real activity, becomes instead a subsidiary, altering with its own real image that of the territory and the context in which it is inserted.' Stefan and Martina echo this conclusion with a complaint about investors using the designation to create luxury rural retreats while leaving fertile land fallow, thus driving up the cost of agricultural property for prospective farmers.

> S: It's very expensive. It's not agricultural, it's all set up for people who do second houses, *agriturismi*... Of course they have nothing to do with agriculture, they're hotels in the country. They've got lawns and swimming pools and the whole lot.

> M: What would be really nice would be if the people who ran *agriturismi* would get their heads round actually giving a piece of land to somebody who really wanted to use it, because usually there's a lawn and a swimming pool and a little bitty

[agricultural] thing, and the rest is abandoned... I mean you've got huge numbers of young people looking for land and it's extremely difficult.

In spite of the complications and controversies described above, *agriturismi* generally offer positive opportunities for both small-scale farmers and tourists looking for a change from standard holiday options. Many farmers produce 'transformed' products (jams, conserves, oil, wine, bread, juices, sauces, cheese, dried herbs, etc.) which are sold direct from the farm (with *agriturismo* or B&B guests making an ideal customer base) and generally turn over a higher rate of profit than raw produce, such as milk, fruit and vegetables, grains and nuts. Reflecting on new developments in rural tourism, Cloke (2007: 45) suggests that through tourism, 'rural space is brought performatively into being' and 'instead of regarding nature as a backcloth to rural tourism we can begin to ask questions about how nature performs interactively with humanity in tourism, and vice-versa.' With back-to-the-landers and *agriturismi*, an educational function can be served by the right mix of instructive farmers and interested guests with further implications for sustainable production and consumption. Back-to-the-landers, as we have seen, are usually driven by particular values that they seek to enact through farming and disseminate via social and economic exchange. Drawing guests to organic farms is generally considered one of several methods for creating harmony between the economic needs and environmental ambitions of small, independent farmers. Roberto, a former physician with an *agriturismo,* organic vineyard and horticultural garden in Umbria, claims that his city-based social network is a boon in both respects:

> The 300 people living around here are not going to make our market... The city people value this kind of experience and they also have the money... As we want to develop, the money will come more from the tourism than the farming, but if the wine thing – if we can get this off the ground then we will return there... And we want to make a difference in that way, you know. Basically we want to be a living example that it's possible to live in the land and from the land in harmony.

8.2.2. Other farm-based enterprises

Box 6.3 in Chapter 6 describes the farm of Bruno and Milena, a Piedmontese couple whose property vividly embodies the principle of pluriactivity. The family brings in money from

diverse sources of varying regularity and necessity. The weekly bread-baking operation, for example, demands consistency and commitment, with prices carefully calculated to generate a return on a precise capital investment. Their *agriturismo* operation, on the other hand, is sporadic and supplementary. Food production remains the core of their business, with supplementary income related to innovative uses of the predominantly agricultural space. This is characteristic of pluriactive farmers, who often use hospitality and catering to attract tourists and (predominantly non-agricultural) locals to their farms, where other services are then offered.

Educational activities are a common provision, frequently offered as a part of a hospitality package. Workshops on wild plant foraging, herbalism, bread-making, butchery, natural cosmetic production, essential oil distillation and permaculture were among the more conventionally pedagogical services offered on case study farms. Cooking classes, wine tastings and harvest feasts reflect a more hybrid blend of tourism and food education. In generating a turnover from these activities, farmers achieve what permaculturists would call 'stacked functions'; that is, they make one essential job (such as harvesting or foraging) provide multiple benefits. In other words, farmers can perform several interconnected tasks from the same site through careful planning and minimal additional expenditure of capital or energy. Like the symbiotic permaculture technique of supporting pea vines with the vertical stalks of maize, economic and ecological sustainability are often approached through experimental and multifunctional uses of space.

Bruno and Milena's donkeys offer a case in point. Managed by their oldest son, Simone, the Sardinian mountain breed bring a plurality of benefits to the farm. Their role in agricultural work is actually limited; Simone claims that they have occasionally been brought into service for plowing but this has been sporadic and not regularly required. They do offer plenty of manure for fertiliser, however, and daily it is deposited into a dung heap with that of the horse and chickens. An excess of manure can usually be sold to farmers who do not keep livestock. In spring they are allowed to graze in the pasture containing the fruit trees, keeping the long grasses restricted in height and managing weeds. Maintaining a space for grazing naturally reduces the cost of hay. Paying *agriturismo* guests are offered treks into the alpine gorges that

rise above the farm. Not only does this bring extra money for the family but offers exercise for the donkeys, which is difficult to provide in the small space of the farm. Simone also takes the donkeys to local fairs to provide rides for children. There, he can advertise the farm's other outputs – organic bread, preserves, eggs and chickens, plus the restaurant and *agriturismo* operations. During the school summer holidays, Milena looks after several children from the local school for a few hours per day, feeding them with fresh home-grown produce and educating them about farm life. This results in further supplemental income as well as a chance to promote their ideals regarding sustainable food production and animal welfare.

There are countless examples of back-to-the-landers stacking functions with integrated environmental and economic priorities. Near Cortona in Tuscany I attended a harvest feast hosted by Dino, a back-to-the-lander and co-founder of the APE network. A wheat thresher dating from the 1940s (Figure 8.1) was brought to his property by its owner, a neighbour and fellow organic farmer. Several local farms brought bushels of wheat to the event where wheat berries would be separated from its chaff for free. After the mechanical threshing, some men demonstrated the pre-industrial process of removing grain from its husks with flails, or two heavy rods attached by a short chain. There was an open invitation to the event which attracted about 60 guests, each paying €10. After the threshing demonstration several meal courses were served, all brought by neighbours in a pot luck fashion. This event deliberately connected multiple aims: 1) It served a practical agricultural need by threshing the wheat; 2) Guests were educated about this phase of grain harvesting and processing; 3) A once-common social event, the seasonal harvest celebration, was revived; 4) Marketing opportunities for local producers were created through serving their food and wine to guests, and; 5) A general promotion of local, seasonal, organic produce was articulated through the sensorial experience of consuming high-quality food fitting those categories, within an agricultural setting.

Figure 8.1 – Wheat threshing demonstration, Tuscany

Source: Author

Upon arriving at a highly pluriactive farm, one may presuppose a limited range of functions for the visible configuration of buildings, land and animals. In fact this configuration is often multilayered, embodying the diverse economic possibilities afforded by a particular location. Because the economic activities on these farms are often interlinked and seasonal, it is difficult to draw a clear line between farming and other activities. Incomes are drawn from multiple sources at different times of the year and are sensitive to supply and demand issues, as well as geographical differentiation. For example, a glut of olive oil in Umbria and Tuscany means that small farmers frequently struggle to sell their excess through traditional market channels, so integrate its resale through *agriturismi*, on-site farm shops and cooking classes. Emilia-Romagna, by contrast, produces smaller quantities of olive oil and offers different

market opportunities for local producers. In Piedmont farmers located near ski resorts may be able to take advantage of this tourism market during the winter months, when business is otherwise very slow. This opportunity is limited to only the Alpine regions of Italy, however, and *agriturismi* in other parts of the country experience major seasonal dips. The fluctuating and fragmented nature of pluriactive farming makes precise economic calculations difficult, both in terms of money earned and sums needed for future projects. Resilience is therefore a vital quality of farmers in this position, and one that leads to distinctive forms of practice.

In a recent paper Brunori et al. (2011) argue that 'neo-peasants', or back-to-the-landers, are uniquely primed for innovation. Despite the lack of immediate economic reward offered by small-scale farming, certain niche opportunities exist which tend to be taken by those bringing an experimental and flexible approach to rural economic activity, in contrast to entrenched practices conditioned by habit and uneven economic relations. 'What's needed are some outsiders who are not afraid of socialising with the outside,' says Greta in Emilia-Romagna. 'You need that – you need people to go out and believe again in what they're doing... Because they've done something else before!' Brunori et al.'s (2010) analysis of alternative and conventional farmers in Tuscany supports what Willis and Campbell (2004: 317) suggest about back-to-the-landers in France: '...a group of "neo-peasants" has constructed a "praxis of survival" which blends the survival strategies of the old peasantry with the skills and abilities of the educated urban elite.' This tendency toward innovation is evident in the highly adaptive economic strategies of pluriactive back-to-the-landers in this study. That said, sustenance is frequently derived from the real economy, even for those who have achieved a reliable basis for self-sufficiency. 'I would love to grow food just for myself,' says Romano in Emilia-Romagna, 'but just taking the children to school costs petrol money. So we have to sell at the market.'

8.3. Markets

A cautious approach is often advised when writing about markets since both authors and readers show a strong tendency to conflate the abstract market with concrete markets

(McMillian, 2002; Gibson-Graham, 2008; Berndt and Boeckler, 2009). Of course, the two are not easily separated: real markets provide the material and social infrastructure for the conventions of market exchange in the abstract, while those conventions underpin the form and function of real market events. As Gibson-Graham (1996; 2003; 2008), Hinrichs (2000) and Berndt and Boeckler (2008) point out, however, interpreting markets as simply an expression of capitalist relations elides the other forms of reasoning and sociality that markets project. This tendency, they argue, comes from a mechanistic understanding of markets inherited from neoclassical economics. Gibson-Graham refer to this as a 'capitalocentric' position, one which relies on an idealised function of markets and a totalising conception of capital. Leyshon and Lee (2003) and Berndt and Boeckler (2008) also criticise the blindness of scholars to the *multiple* functions of markets, sites where diverse ideas and practices are performed in coexistence with, but not defined exclusively by, the exchange of commodities and capital. For McMillan (2002), markets are socially produced as much as they are a hegemonic economic structure. While some market designs reproduce and extend socio-economic inequalities, as real assemblages of people, things and ideas, they need to be regarded as performing other functions additionally. For back-to-the-landers in Northern Italy, markets are significant components of economic sustainability. Increasingly, through the development of politically-aligned market networks, they are also becoming sites of empowerment and resistance where homogenous food, industrial agriculture and producer exploitation are openly challenged and alternatives are presented.

8.3.1. Farmers' markets

Regular farmers' markets in towns and cities are among the most common and popular measures to create and strengthen consumer-producer interaction. Hinrichs (2000), Moore (2006) and Kirwan (2006a; 2006b) have analysed the sustained popularity and strong growth in farmers' markets in the USA, Ireland and UK respectively. Such academic studies focus on a broad range of topics related to the markets, encompassing quantitative economic investigations as well as social dynamics. Conditions vary between markets and across national boundaries, but some common themes emerge. The face-to-face interaction fostered by the markets is generally given as a reason for their inclusion in the 'alternative' food paradigm, though this tendency has been critiqued by Kirwan (2006b), who argues that farmers' markets

risk being re-incorporated into mainstream processes of exchange, including obscured food origins and distant consumer-producer relations. Ideally, if not always in practice, the producer-consumer encounter at farmers' markets encourages consumers to ask questions about provenance, production methods and food quality, thus forming a subjective set of criteria for trust that does not rely on external intervention (such as food labelling). The shared information should serve to educate consumers about the production process, giving farmers an opportunity to explain, for example, why their prices may not be pegged to supermarket norms, or how the freshness of their products compares to supermarket counterparts. The aim is an increased marketshare for small producers and a fairer deal for all. In reality the attainment of fair prices and provision of satisfying, high-quality and sustainable food is a constantly negotiated process. Diverse strategies reflect different goals, as is evident in the variety of markets currently operating in Italy.

Small producers selling at local markets are common to many towns and cities in the North of Italy, though the means of establishing their presence is not universal. Most farmers' markets are coordinated by the local *commune* or council, or sponsored by Coldiretti, the national farmers' union. Eligibility for inclusion in the Coldiretti market is the most flexible, the primary criterion being that a vendor must sell exclusively Italian produce. Locality requirements are normal for farmers' market though their strictness varies. The back-to-the-landers interviewed were generally somewhat dismissive of both municipal and Coldiretti markets, preferring alternative sites organised by more politically engaged associations. In the Parma province, for example, municipal markets have a small number of vendors and have struggled to become an established shopping destination. Greta, who trades at the market every Saturday, believes that this is due to the dominance of monocultural farming in the region, most of which feeds nearby industrial food processors. Few producers have much experience with direct selling and she finds the institutional support inadequate:

> For example, now in Borgotaro, six or eight months ago they said, 'Okay, let's make a farmers' market'… There were no more than 6 farms there and already it's dying… They say we can continue it if [we] all come all the time. But in the winter what do you sell?

In Tuscany, Walter helped to establish a market in Arezzo which was ultimately brought under the control of the *commune* after years of management by the small farmers' association *Associazione Solidarietá di Campanga Italiana* (ASCI). '[The market] contained a part of ASCI, a part of Social Forum and independent persons,' he recalls. 'We kept these relations for a good time until this farmers' market was taken over by the town of Arezzo and was transformed into something that I don't identify with any more.' He contrasts this situation to the Fierucola, Florence's popular ASCI-affiliated organic market. Now in its 27th year, the market is a monthly event that attracts both locals and tourists and provides a forum for ASCI's political vision (largely pitched in opposition to big agribusiness) as well as Fair Trade handicrafts in addition to organic Tuscan food. 'Many people joined ASCI to have the opportunity to sell their products at the Fierucola,' says Walter. In other words, through providing market opportunities, ASCI has strengthened its membership base and political profile.

In Bologna the markets are frequent and diverse, with the municipality, *Campi Aperti* (Open Fields) and Slow Food organising several per week between them. *Campi Aperti* is a non-profit association that organises on behalf of small farmers who cannot afford the financial and bureaucratic impositions attached to organic certification (Section 8.3.2). Elisa and Romano, whose farm is less than 30 km from Bologna, sell at a *Campi Aperti* market in the city every Wednesday. The market was deliberately located in a low-income, densely populated area of the city poorly served by fresh food retailers. Vendors at the market are all organic but few are certified. *Campi Aperti* organises an *autocertificazione* procedure, where applicant farmers are visited by other members of the organisation at no cost. The farms are inspected through this process before farmers can sell at one of the association's three Bologna markets. For Elisa and Romano this has been a learning opportunity as well as a commercial one. Having only been farming for a couple of years, *autocertificazione* rituals have introduced them to other local farmers with whom they have shared information on growing techniques, regulatory matters and commercial possibilities. 'And usually,' adds Romano, 'we are offered some lunch or dinner so we all eat together.'

Shortly before my arrival at Elisa and Romano's farm they were approached by the coordinator of Bologna's Earth Market, organised by Slow Food and held every Saturday in a relatively

central piazza. They had been selling at the *Campi Aperti* markets twice a week but were hoping to give up their Friday stall to start working Saturday mornings at the Earth Market. The stall rental was slightly higher at the Slow Food market (€35 to *Campi Aperti*'s €25) but they expected to earn more in this new venture with its busier location and weekend schedule. An e-mail exchange after they had been selling there for a month confirmed that this optimism had been justified.

'Farmers' markets are organised by Coldiretti in such a way so that all the producers going there are sure that they are going to sell all their products. The main aim of their project is commercial,' explains Slow Food's Earth Markets official, Alberto. 'They are there to make sure that farmers sell all they have.' The intention behind the Slow Food markets, he insists, is different:

> Earth Markets don't have a commercial aim. So for example if a producer who comes to the Earth Market wants to sell somewhere else, they can. But we are very interested in association – where producers can meet buyers, exchange information and know each other. That's the main aim… So we are less interested in a market which is taking place two days per week, but which has only five producers there…That's why we don't struggle with competition from Coldiretti – we are very different.

The Earth Markets are one expression of practical measures Slow Food has taken to enact its principles of 'good, clean and fair.' Indeed, the regulations on selling at Earth Markets give due prominence to considerations of food quality, minimising chemical inputs and pollution and negotiating appropriate prices. Giorgio, coordinator of the Bologna Earth Markets, told me that officially the events are apolitical, but personally he feels differently. Citing poet-farmer Wendell Berry's maxim that 'eating is an agricultural act', he claims that the Earth Markets are essentially a political project, even if covertly.

Figure 8.2 – Artisan cheese vendor, Turin

A local producer sells cheese at a municipal farmers' market in central Turin

Source: Author

Alberto emphasises that the Earth Markets, of which there are 11 in Italy, provide ideal opportunities for new farmers. The Earth Market in Milan, for instance, is dominated by vendors who are relative newcomers to agriculture. Outside the city, he explains, is a protected natural reserve where agriculture is restricted to small-scale organic production. A long-time favoured destination of weekend hobbyists from the city, the presence of the Earth Market has given some of these producers the commercial potential to adopt farming on a more full-time basis. 'We are confident in these kinds of producers because they are in a kind of transition phase,' says Alberto, 'and most of them would like to get out of this position and

go back to the land.' However, because the Earth Markets project is young, dating from 2006, Slow Food is still reliant on measuring the benefits of market retailing through fairly crude means, such as anecdotal reports from vendors. 'We know that the Earth Markets are having some success because in Milan, for example, more and more producers are asking us to enter into this project. So if it happens, we have a confirmation that it's working,' Alberto says. Slow Food is currently developing a more rigorous analysis of what specific advantages Earth Markets bring to farmers' overall economic strategies.

The differences in Italy's farmers' markets reflect the uneven distribution of small farming opportunities in Italy, as well as the pros and cons of top-down approaches led by municipal councils. Small farmers may lobby (independently, or often through the Coldiretti union) for a city market, but the regulations placed on the market, as well as muted public support, may limit its impact. The more successful models (in terms of longevity, popularity and financial practicability) seem to be those implemented by campaigning groups such as ASCI or *Campi Aperti*. This may be because these groups have an established network of supporters in a given locality, and are therefore more able to persuade local officials of a market's merit when tied to broader campaigns. They may also be better able to mobilise the necessary financial and technological resources to design a market to best meet its supporters' needs. That being the case, there is still some justification for positioning farmers' markets within the orbit of AAFN theory. The Coldiretti and *commune*-sponsored markets are still dominant in Italy, however, and there is no question that some markets are more alternative than others.

8.3.2. *Mercatini Clandestini*

Whereas the alterity of conventional farmers' markets has been subject to critique, a new but growing phenomenon in Italy positions markets directly in opposition to mainstream distribution channels. Interviewees who participate in *mercatini clandestini,* or secret markets, characterise them as a sustainable form of trade that plugs leakages of money out of small communities, encourages social interaction and a closer producer-consumer connection, defies heavy-handed bureaucratic impositions and distributes food of exceptional quality at fair and

negotiable prices. The *mercatini* thus represent a symbolic site of alterity at which market devices are used to forge relationships that resist and counteract the exploitation of farmers and diminished consumer trust associated with industrial agribusiness.

'It started after Genova,' remembers Stefan, who founded a monthly secret market near Perugia in the central region of Umbria with Martina, recalling the G8 Summit protests in 2001:

> When everybody was back we thought, Everybody's driven up to Genova and spent loads of money, given money to the multinationals again - for cars, trains, buying petrol and all the rest… So what are we gonna do? Are we going to carry on going to these demonstrations with them beating us over the head, carrying on just the same? Let's try and do something positive. It's very easy to say, "Oh we don't want this…" But is the alternative there? Or is it always "We don't want this"? And so we said that one of the things that would really change things here would be to take the money away from the multinationals… And how do you do that? Well, for a start, you recreate the local economy, the very local economy.

'We were just making it up as we went along,' adds Martina. As relative newcomers to the countryside they lacked the extensive familial and social networks that had traditionally provided the basis of food exchange in rural Italy before the widespread adoption of industrial agriculture (and related rural depopulation). Friends, neighbours and fellow farmers were marshaled for the first market, which drew only eight vendors and a small number of invited customers. Martina says that this first result was dispiriting, but they felt determined to press ahead with a process of expansion that she describes as 'very, very, very slow.' They recently celebrated their 100th market, an event that marked the solidity of what is now an established network of dozens of famers and regular customers who, Stefan and Martina claim, see themselves as equal participants in a collaborative experiment.

Who can participate in the markets is ultimately decided by the organisers, but the criteria for inclusion are flexible. Most of the vendors represent organic family farms or artisanal producers of meat, cheese, bread, oil and wine. Sellers pay 15 euros a year to cover running costs (photocopying and postage, mostly) and the market's location rotates each month. The

invitations are photocopied and sent by post to trusted confidantes. They contain a note about which products and vendors will be present and a hand-drawn map. Efforts are made to ensure that a good balance of products is offered and that the markets do not have an excessive supply of one particular foodstuff, which could put the vendors in awkward competition with one another. Producers barter amongst themselves, trading their own surplus with other vendors and reducing the flow of money out of the community and into the hands of national or multinational chains. Many suppliers come to the markets with fixed prices in mind but negotiate with their customers on a face-to-face basis, both parties articulating a case for what is fair and reasonable. The success of a market trader ultimately comes down to establishing trust in both product quality and price fairness.

> That's the guarantee you have in a market like this, the fact that we all know each other and we're friends. So there's no piece of paper saying that [a vendor] sells good cheese, but he's a friend of yours. Not only that, but it's also part of a whole social network, and if you sold them something that was really rubbish you'd really ruin your reputation. That doesn't happen if you go to the supermarket. They get something wrong, you can bring it back but nobody gives a damn…

> (Stefan, Umbria)

Trust, of course, is fundamental to any market transaction and works as an essential mediator between supply and demand. It is a simple point but one worth emphasising, especially with consideration to how that trust is established and maintained. It is commonly argued that without some implicit sense of quality guarantee (communicated through all manner of assurances including verbal promotion, refund offers, labelling standards and brand identity) consumers generally reject transactions with too many unknown variables (McMillan, 2002). Signifiers of trust are therefore embedded at all stages of exchange, some delicately nuanced and others far more overt. As Muniesa et al. (2007: 8) claim, '[s]ettling the qualities of an exchanged good and determining who should pay what for it are central activities in markets. It is well understood by now that not only seller and buyers are engaged in such activities. They also involve entities such as classification tools, standardization bodies, consumer organizations, advertising agencies, etc.' The complexity of highly developed food chains may encourage an uncritical internalisation of quality guarantees, dissuading consumers from prying too deeply into the evolution of a product prior to resale (Sassatelli and Scott, 2001; Richards

et al., 2011). For many people, food passed direct from farm to fork suggests risk, especially in this age of BSE, salmonella, *e. coli* and other food-borne pathogens. As the food writer Joanna Blythman (2006) sardonically notes, '[w]e find it reassuring to think that our food comes from large, modern industrial factories, kitted out with cutting edge technology, staffed with men in white coats and policed by earnest inspectors with clipboards and lengthy checklists.'

Greta, who has been farming in Emilia-Romagna with her husband since the mid-1990s, argues that Blythman's characterisation, when extended to small, independent food producers, has extremely frustrating consequences. She claims that the farm's annual hygiene and organic certification bills run to nearly €900, basically securing her the right to use a certifying body logo. There are more than 20 authorised organic certifiers in Italy, a confusing jumble of varying prices and services. Greta has remained with the same certifier for years but feels exasperated by the annual ritual it imposes:

> They calculate that you have a certain amount of land, that you have a lab for processing food so of course this is extra... We decided not to certify our honey because that would have cost about €200 and that's just about the profit we can make in a year from 10 beehives. They came last September and the girl stayed like 3 hours. Piles of papers that I have to empty most of my office to find what she needs… She spends half an hour outside – she always comes late when there's nothing left in the fields in spring, where we do the main production of medicinal herbs and whatever. And then 6 months later you receive this paper which says you have to provide this and that and this document that was not there when the inspector came. This kind of thing makes you mad because already you produce tons of papers that will certify you as organic.

Complaints about the cost of organic certification are rife, but artisan food producers feel particularly persecuted by the strictures of food hygiene laws. The campaign *Genuino Clandestino*, which has made a public declaration of the fact that many small farmers are given no choice but to operate in the grey economy, has focused most of its ire on food safety regulations. Affiliated to *Campi Aperti*, *Genuino Clandestino* sponsors markets, public meetings and pamphlets to illustrate the tensions between high-quality food produced by small farmers and the wearying compliance regimes to which they are subjected (*Genuino Clandestino*, 2011). At Greta's farm, for example, she and her husband make bread, jam and apple juice for sale at the weekly Parma farmers' market. Her workshop, or *laborotorio*, meets all the standard regulations but this has again come at considerable cost, more than many farmers can manage.

> In Italy they wanted to dictate from the beginning exactly how you have to do things. The lab we have over there for the jam is a multi-functional lab. It has to be three metres high, there has to be a certain proportion between light and window and volume of the room… There has to be a bathroom, the bathroom can be without a window but the room in front of the bathroom needs a window where you change yourself. You need a cupboard for changing clothes… Of course it makes sense if your logic is not to check the product at the end.

The implication here is that these regulations serve the interests of big agribusiness. Emilia-Romagna is home to the multinational Parmalat and Barilla corporations, to name just two of the region's major food processors. 'The farmers' unions that we have are used to dealing with the bosses of these companies and factories…' Greta says. 'They don't spend their time on helping small farmers. Here in Borgotaro the office of the farmers' union has two people, and they have to deal with all the problems of the mountain. They are totally overwhelmed by the work. In Parma they have 10 times the amount of employees and these employees deal with the big bosses and big farmers and this gives the direction to their policy in the end.' The region can also boast an exclusive claim to *parmigiano-reggiano* cheese, balsamic vinegar of Modena, Parma ham and several protected varieties of wine and olive oil. The food industry is a major player in local politics and small farmers like Greta think that this gives them a license to write the rules. 'They can afford stainless steel machinery, other kinds of big tools to process food… And they have to have means to protect themselves. So if you want to compete with them and set up the same kind of thing, you have to have what they have… It's costly but that's not even the worst part. The worst is the paperwork. Hours and hours we spend on this stuff…' Elisa and Romano, also in Emilia-Romanga, agree. They emphasise the particularity of small farms as a reason for supporting the *Genuino Clandestino* campaign:

> E: …[W]e joined this association [*Campi Aperti*] also to try to change something. For example, laws in Italy about farming which are very strict. So the association is trying to promote the idea that…
>
> R: That small-farmer agriculture is different from industrial agriculture. The main difference we say is that small farms should have different laws in respect of industrial farms.
>
> AW: So this is the philosophy of *Campi Aperti*?
>
> R: And also *Genuino Clandestino,* which is a campaign -

E: This idea that we're trying to change something, trying to find a way through *Genuino Clandestino*. What it means is that what you produce may not be following the rules, but this doesn't mean that your product is not good.

The production facilities at Greta's farm were designed to satisfy regulators and built more or less from scratch in the shell of an old farmhouse. Farmers who retrofit or adapt an existing *laborotorio* will generally fail to meet these standards simply because the rules are realistically applicable only to new facilities. This means that their resale possibilities are restricted, at least if they want to officially market their products as organic. One representative of Slow Food commented that 'some wine producers are producing organic wine but they haven't got the certification just to avoid all the bureaucracy.' This summarises the condition of Luigi and Francesca, back-to-the-landers from Milan who produce honey, *pecorino* cheese, fruit preserves, olive oil and wine from their small organic farm in Umbria. Their lab has been adapted from an older workshop, with less efficient technologies replaced by modern equipment. Everything about the lab expresses a craftsman's attention to detail and the utmost care for quality. It is consummately clean, with gleaming tile floors, spotless work surfaces and a systematic ordering of materials. The food produced here, claims Luigi, could never make it to a mainstream market. Despite the appearance of care and professionalism, the room is just too small, the ventilation not quite right and the fire exit too narrow to please the authorities.

Inspired by Stefan and Martina's *mercatino clandestino*, about 50km away, Francesca and Luigi have initiated a new *mercatino* near the town of Città della Pieve. Like their forebears they have started modestly and cautiously, sending out a small number of invitations to friends and family and assembling about half a dozen farmers to sell their produce. They recognise that growing the market will be a long-term project, particularly if it is to provide a genuine lifeline to struggling farmers. According to Stefan and Martina, some producers who sell at every *mercatino clandestino* rely on the money earned there as a fundamental component of their income. In less established markets, vendors inevitably regard participation as a supplemental experiment with which to begin, potentially morphing into something more substantial. The markets' financial impact on participants will likely be secondary to the networks of solidarity engendered by the events. For both buyers and sellers, the markets represent a way to revive community through food and ensure that money is prevented from bleeding out of rural areas

and into distant city coffers. The goal, say market organizers, is not several large *mercatini* but hundreds of small ones, acting as multiple sutures over the large wound of a depopulated, industrialised countryside.

Having existed in the shadow economy for some time, secret markets are now beginning to announce themselves through the *Genuino Clandestino* campaign. It has organised some openly publicised *mercatini clandestini,* comprised mainly of self-certified organic producers, to reveal the illogicalities behind the ambiguous legal status of 'unofficial' food. The network-building potential of the secret markets holds greater transformative potential than their current economic impacts, at least measured in the crude terms of gross productivity. In other words, the underground artisanal food market makes a miniscule dent in the national food economy, but it nonetheless promotes creative resistance to corporate hegemony. The model of the *mercatino clandestino* is useful precisely as that – a flexible platform on which to socially organise, conceive alternatives and experiment with novel forms of exchange. Food provides an ideal focus for such experiments because it is absolutely fundamental – to physical survival, obviously, but also to social life and culture, so that its meaning, form and value are permanently subject to critical consideration. Participants in the *mercatini clandestini* should at the very least be inspired to question why buying high-quality food from local producers is such a novelty – and only a quasi-legal one at that.

Figure 8.3 – 'Self-certified' organic farmers' market, Bologna

Entrance to a farmers' market in Bologna organised by *Campi Aperti* (Open Fields). All vendors produce organic food but few have obtained official certification. The sign on the gate promotes the *Genuino Clandestino* campaign to redesign regulations for small-scale producers.

Source: Author

8.4. *Gruppi di Acquisto Solidale* (GAS)

In the Piedmontese town of Bra, headquarters of the Slow Food movement and hometown of Carlo Petrini, I was taken by three students, Serena, Ludovico and Renato, to the distribution point for the town's GAS[1]. Many Slow Food employees are members of the collective buying group and students from the nearby University of Gastronomic Sciences, affiliated to Slow Food, are strongly encouraged to join. Because of these associations with the venerable organisation, I expected the distribution hub to be short of spectacular but at the very least visibly well-organised and efficient, perhaps something resembling an old-fashioned cooperative store. The group's operations may well be efficiently managed, but the centre of exchange, where farm goods are distributed to GAS members, is a ramshackle garage on the ground floor of Serena's apartment block. A dartboard hangs above a reclaimed sofa and empty beer bottles rest on the ping pong table. Some cases of wine are stacked against one wall next to boxes of Po Valley *arborio* rice. To a large extent, this is where Slow Food's shopping gets done.

GAS are characterised by decentralised local management, an approach that results in amorphous and differentiated shapes and forms. Cinzia, a back-to-the-lander in Tuscany, coordinates a GAS comprised of only nine households in the rural surrounds of Cetona. They place orders and distribute only occasionally, when need is deemed sufficient for the next bulk delivery of oil, cheese, wine or grains. Normally the GAS member closest to the farm from where the products originate will agree to host the goods until individual members collect them. Most of the GAS members are farmers who circulate their own products in the exchange. The Bra GAS, by contrast, receives a weekly delivery of organic fruit and vegetable boxes to the garage, regularly supplemented by other products such as grains, dairy, wine and honey. There are a few dozen GAS members, drawn largely from Slow Food affiliations but also the broader community. Serena's garage is as much a site of social mixing as food distribution, and

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[1] *Gruppi di Acquisto Solidale* translates to English as 'Solidarity Buying Groups', although the more general way of describing the same principle in English is simply 'collective buying groups'. The acronym is commonly used in Italy in both speech and text. *Gruppi* is the plural for 'group', which leads to some awkward syntax in translation. In Italy people tend to homonymously refer to *a* GAS in the singular and GAS in the plural. Because so little has been written about the *gruppi* in English there are few conventions to follow. I have chosen, therefore, to adopt that set by Brunori et al. (2011), which conforms to the way Italians refer to GAS in speech.

the weekly delivery ritual often evolves into an occasion for eating, drinking, debating ideas and building solidarities.

In Tuscany, Walter is a GAS member as both a buyer and olive oil producer, although he insists that there is no formal distinction between consumers and producers in his local group. He reflects on helping to set up a GAS in Arezzo, a city of roughly 100,000, though he now participates only in a smaller group based around Cortona:

> ...I'm a member just from the fact that I'm on the mailing list of a GAS. I was on the mailing list of the first GAS of Arezzo, because I was just invited to participate, and they were beginning from zero, so I and others gave them indications of where to buy what... I gave them names of farms and so on, and also information, what could be good and could be not good... I don't go to the meetings of GAS [in Cortona]. Here it's just a question of time, and I could meet those GAS members anywhere. I know them and meet them at cultural events and so on, so there's no need to go to those meetings. Other people go, and that's the minimum structure of a GAS.

Walter's quote contains several important indicators as to how a GAS functions. The self-organisation ('beginning from zero') and local knowledge exchange are fundamental to an organisation with no central authority. Although a national network of GAS organisations exists and occasionally hosts meetings, it is a simple communication channel more than a hierarchy. Local groups are often organised by friends, colleagues or neighbours with a shared interest in promoting a localised, alternative model of food distribution. Who participates and how the group is structured is determined by factors unique to each GAS. Arezzo, an historically left-wing district of Tuscany that has long been a magnet for urban to rural migrants, has both a receptive consumer base and ready supply of supportive producers. Walter is an experienced farmer with a multitude of contacts, many of them back-to-the-landers like himself and already disposed towards organic production and alternative economic structures. The knowledge base shared amongst the initial organisers of a GAS is fundamental to how the project will take shape. Walter remarks that he knows the other members casually and so does not need to participate in formal administration. This implies a pre-existing level of trust between GAS members, or possibly a sense of trust developed through mutual involvement in the group. Furthermore, his comment on the 'minimum structure of a GAS' implies a kind of *ad hoc* approach to administration in contrast to a one-size-fits-all model. This supports Brunori et

al.'s (2010) claim that '[w]hereas conventional farmers have to strive with existing rules in the most efficient way possible, GAS farmers have to break the rules of the existing food regime and build new ones by trial and error.'

It has been reported anecdotally that some farmers are able to subsist entirely through sales to GAS, though case study farms in this project were all supplemented rather than fully supported by GAS participation. Proximity to an urban centre is crucial to the likely level of income a GAS can provide. Cities such as Florence, Pisa and Turin have large GAS, in some cases with hundreds of members. These gastronomic centres maintain a high demand for produce, and the convenience of a central collection point works well for urban GAS members, but supplying a city GAS may involve some compromise of the underlying GAS philosophy. The large and more bureaucratic urban GAS will necessarily limit the face-to-face contact between suppliers and buyers, thereby reducing potential for dialogue about production and consumption practices. 'The whole system rests on the relationship that has been established between the two sides,' write Brunori et al. (2011), 'through which a common base of values and principles as well as a better knowledge of respective needs is developed.' That said, they note that 'in some cases [communication] is limited to the management of orders and often it is mediated by GAS co-ordinators.' This is more likely to be the case with large urban GAS.

City GAS participation is reflected upon somewhat sceptically by Bruno and Milena's family. Bruno and his son Simone supply a GAS in Turin with 40 loaves of bread every Friday. Eighty loaves are baked early in the morning, left to cool for a couple hours and then delivered to the city by Simone. Sixty loaves in total are taken into Turin, with 20 supplying a health food store and the remaining 20 left at the farm for the next day's farmers' market. 'There are two kinds of GAS', says Matteo, Simone's younger brother. 'One for the idea – it's important to buy bread from Bruno because he doesn't use chemicals, doesn't use the car too much…The other kind of GAS says it's important to buy bread from Bruno because it's less than €3. This is not a *gruppo solidale*.' Walter experienced similar frustrations as the Arezzo GAS grew in membership:

> It became a problem at Arezzo where the GAS group grew and grew, and they joined people who were never to be seen, and used it as a kind of electronic supermarket, and they didn't want to be active or have any responsibility. They just wanted a

good product. So there were soon some conflicts and they tried to sub-divide the GAS into smaller, more manageable numbers.

Figure 8.3 – The bread of solidarity?

Freshly baked bread from Bruno and Milena's farm in Piedmont, ready for distribution to GAS in Turin.

Source: Author

Such problems are familiar to a range of AAFNs. Some British producers interviewed by Kneafsey et al. (2008) commented on problems experienced as a result of consumer fickleness and ignorance of the realities of food production. In these cases and in those of problematic GAS, price, convenience and quality are prioritised above solidarity. As Little et al. (2010: 1811) comment, 'a group's ethical position can change based upon the implementation of necessary enablers for growth. This negotiation, rooted in what is practical, influences how

people take part in AFNs and what they can achieve.' When I moderated a workshop on collective buying groups at Slow Food's Terra Madre conference in October, 2010, several North American farmers commented that producers' and consumers' conflicting understandings of what constitutes a 'good deal' left their operations vulnerable to inconsistent demand. Though some farmers interpret this as an inevitable consequence of growth, it risks diluting the sense of shared purpose that AAFNs seek to foster between producers and consumers, or the 'co-production' model espoused by Slow Food in which the two groups recognise their mutual stake in the management of agro-ecology (and consequently dissolve the consumer / producer dualism). A 'fair price', argue Brunori et al. (2011), 'means that agricultural prices should take into account the full cost (including the environmental and social costs) of food and therefore its real value. As sellers are not strangers to buyers… but rather are part of the same community, prices should reflect the willingness to take into account all the interests at stake, including the rights of farmers to a decent income.'

One solution proposed by a number of researchers is the development of regular and direct communication between suppliers and consumers (Kneafsey et al., 2008; Little et al., 2010; Brunori et al., 2011). This can involve regular e-mail updates, newsletters, blogs, farm visits and face-to-face meetings. Strengthening the sense of shared enterprise is considered crucial for determining a fair price for farmers. Despite the issues highlighted above, GAS are in a unique and somewhat advantageous position in having originated as a network for farmers to exchange products locally with one another, circumventing the intermediaries that sustain wide differentials between producer cost and retail price:

> The original purpose was for small farmers, who always have problems selling their produce to resellers, to calculate their activity better if they could trust on monthly orders, so they know every month. A shepherd [in this context, a pecorino cheese producer] maybe thinks, I could sell 20 kilos to this GAS… So he can plan. Also, a wine grower or any producer has more planning security. That's in the interest of the farmer. That's in the interest of a GAS – to have a good product, at a close distance, at a good price. A fair price. Let's say a fair price. It's not that it's necessarily cheaper. But a fair price. Of course it's on ethical conditions, and that's a value, too, not to be underestimated.

> (Walter, Tuscany)

Products in the Bra GAS are jointly sourced by the organising committee, who then contact the producer and enquire about the price. 'They know what they want to charge,' says Renato. '"This is my work, this is what I did… I need this price to sell the product.'" The cost is then discussed among the committee and if the ethos of 'good, clean and fair' is determined to have been met, orders for the product are taken from GAS members. Producers are thus in a more powerful position than they are with contractual industrial farming. Quantities and prices are sensitive to farmers' needs while consumers are educated about those needs in the process of negotiations. The Bra GAS insists that prices are in fact competitive with any other resale channels because the food chain has been shortened, thus reducing mark-ups attendant to intermediary stages between production and consumption. 'We always compare it with organic markets, never with conventional ones,' Renato claims. 'Normally it's around 2 euros per kilo [for vegetables] and what you'll get in your mixed box is all seasonal. If you go into the organic supermarket it's going to be more expensive.' GAS typically distribute everyday food, or locally common staples produced for regular consumption rather than speciality items (Brunori et al. 2010). Importantly, this ensures that GAS are not economically exclusive, a fact that contradicts popular associations of AAFNs and particularly organic produce with exclusivity. 'Fairness' is meant to apply to all GAS members, not just suppliers.

GAS represent a uniquely accessible and flexible form of exchange for small, independent farmers. For back-to-the-landers the model works well as the conditions of market entry are far more amenable than traditional retail. Quantities and prices are negotiable, social connections are stimulated and cost-effective trade and bartering with other farmers are encouraged. Furthermore, a GAS is a project that a farmer can initiate to promote local trade and generate interest in her produce, as with the case of Cinzia. Supplying rural and urban GAS come with different sets of benefits and disadvantages. A small rural group will only ever provide a marginal sales boost to a local farmer, but may assist in building a network of solidarity based on trade, information exchange and shared opportunities. A large urban GAS is likely to provide a more substantial financial return, yet will inevitably involve more work (and investment) as well as the increased risk of administrative complications. Furthermore, a city GAS may not engender the same sense of collective will as a group where members are in regular personal contact. This potentially compromises a group's alterity, limiting its momentum for innovation and faculty for care and causing it to stagnate as a novel but not radically alternative medium of exchange.

GAS in both urban and rural contexts largely reflect a broader fair trade ideal, summarised by Callinicos (2003: 75) as 'localist in the sense that it seeks justice, not (at least in the first instance) in system transformation, but rather in the development of fair micro-relationships among a series of market actors starting with the immediate producers through an alternative distribution system to the socially aware consumer.' Callinicos is critical that such practices are mildly reformist in nature but do not go far enough to undermine social and economic injustice. His position, however, may reflect what Gibson-Graham (2008: 618) characterise as a 'paranoid motive in social theorizing'. They argue that the 'strong theory' of Callinicos's anti-capitalism itself undermines efforts toward alternative social and economic relations by condemning 'experimental forays into building new economies' as 'capitalism in another guise or as always already coopted; [these forays] are often judged before they are explored in all their complexity and incoherence.' Given that it may be some time before systems like GAS can be measured in terms of the dent that they put in the formal economy, they remain complex and incoherent, relatively certain of their aims but speculative and experimental as to their outcomes.

8.5. Between centres and margins: retail terrains

Most of the strategies for economic sustainability described thus far have employed methods of connecting consumers and producers by minimising intermediaries. For back-to-the-landers this is a sensible approach as it: 1) establishes trust in products that may lack official certification and the labeling embellishments with which consumers are familiar; 2) builds social networks which generate a reliable customer base and; 3) produces a sustainable return on sales through the negation of an intermediary's take. Furthermore, because back-to-the-landers often take an experimental approach to crop varieties and production techniques, retailers depending on particular standards and quantities take an increased risk when sourcing from less conventional farmers.

These are just some of the reasons that back-to-the-landers have a small presence in mainstream retail markets such as supermarket chains. In keeping with the 'alternative' values typically espoused by back-to-the-landers, there may also be a general suspicion and dismissal of retail opportunities that do not harmonise with the principles of small-scale, organic farmers. Examining Slow Food's Presidia project, which brings unusual and 'endangered' products into more conventional retail channels, demonstrates some of the possibilities for economic sustainability afforded by affiliation with the network. As a structured agenda for developing the retail potential of alternative foods, some opportunities and challenges faced by back-to-the-landers, retailers and Slow Food are brought to light through the Presidia.

Part of Slow Food's Foundation for Biodiversity, the Ark of Taste and Presidia projects aim to document and catalogue native, regionally unique foodstuffs considered 'at risk' or endangered. In economies of the global North the main risk is likely to result from markets disposed to standardised varieties of plants and animals, reducing the market share of less familiar competitors and making their production increasingly less viable for farmers. Hygiene and regulatory issues also come into play again, with the Ark of Taste and Presidia giving visibility and endorsement to unpasteurised cheese and cured meats produced without artificial preservatives (Slow Food, 2009). Slow Food links the promotion of biodiversity to the preservation of other values and practices, particularly in rural communities. Fonte (2006: 229) writes that 'for Slow Food, stopping a typical [locally distinct] product and its very last few producers from disappearing means saving an economic, technical, social and cultural patrimony, but also a local variety and *agrobiodiversity*.' There are over 300 Presidia worldwide with the greatest number concentrated in Italy. Examples of protected products include Tortona strawberries (Piedmont), the Modenese White Cow (Emilia-Romagna), Prosciutto Casentino (Tuscany) and Trevi black celery (Umbria) (Slow Food, 2009).

The Presidia represent the operational arm of the Ark of Taste, and constitute customised programmes designed to protect and promote the threatened products. A single Presidium is a project that coordinates strategic and commercial efforts to foster 'co-producer' networks around an Ark of Taste product. The Ark itself '...recognises the cultural relevance of a product, but does not require any particular action or intervention from Slow Food beyond the

divulgation of the product information. The involvement of Slow Food in the Presidia, on the other hand, is much more active, and requires constant support and coordination.' (Presidium Vademecum, 2002) There is no single formula for such support, and strategies differ according to particular conditions of culture, finance and scale. Common methodologies do exist, though, and can include visibility through publications (the Slow Food website, *Slow* magazine), support from the Slow Food press office, a presence at the biannual Salone del Gusto showcase in Turin, direct marketing through business networks and, occasionally, the establishment of buying consortia to directly support the production of set quantities of Presidia products (Presidium Vademecum, 2002; Petrini, 2007). The intended outcome of all Presidia projects is, simply put, an increased market share and elevated profile of artisanal producers, ultimately directed toward 'co-production' networks and related food geographies that conform to the Slow Food principles of quality, sustainability and justice (Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity [SFFB], 2002).

Presidia are primarily concerned with preserving historic culinary traditions, and the vetting process for product applications investigates geographically unique values and associations. Accessing the food communities attached to these 'endangered' products may seem to pose a particular challenge for migrants to the countryside, whose personal and cultural links to these foods will be weak. Evidence, however, points strongly to the contrary. Francesca, a coordinator for central Italy's Presidia projects, echoes her colleague Alberto in stating that back-to-the-landers are in many ways ideal for the project:

> ...usually they are the more active people, and people who understand very well the importance of a Presidium project. Because for other people who live there for many years, you arrive and make this project... Yeah, they are interested but they don't understand immediately what the meaning of the project is and what they could do with it. But these [new] people are ready at the start.... They may come from other countries, other situations... they've lived in cities, they know about Slow Food... So these types of people are more active in this situation. They are very curious about how things are done and they also want to present their own products. So it's useful for us to have some people with a... [laughs] different mind about the situation.

Presidia are developed through a variety of mechanisms. Francesca and her colleagues sometimes develop the projects internally after identifying both risk and opportunities for a

particular product, and then approaching producers on behalf of Slow Food. In other instances a local convivium of Slow Food members will contact the organisation to promote a food that they feel is deserving of greater recognition. Furthermore, Francesca claims that producers of what would eventually become Presidia products have contacted Slow Food directly to ask for assistance. In these cases Slow Food would help the producers form a consortium that would work directly with Slow Food to promote the products. Once a product and its network of producers have been established as a Presidium, the farmers involved are given access to specialist agronomist advice and other technical knowledge, materials related to marketing and direct contact at Slow Food to assist with regulatory concerns.

There are manifold opportunities for back-to-the-landers who become involved in this kind of programme. For one, Presidia give some structured expression to a familiar strategy for economic sustainability in which a 'niche' or high added-value product forms a specialised part of a back-to-the-lander's growing operation (cf. Mailfert, 2007). In North American examples, products like maple syrup, blueberries, nuts, honey and peaches are listed as some of the more profitable cash crops with the potential to subsidise a semi-subsistence lifestyle (Jacob, 1997; Agnew, 2006; Belasco, 1989). In Italy back-to-the-landers applying this strategy tend to favour rare-breed animals (e.g. Elisa and Romano's Romagnola hens), unusual fruit and vegetable varieties (e.g. Nicla's Montepulciano plums and Bruno's rare Alpine grain) and value-adding production techniques, often involving old technologies and small quantities, such as Tanya and David's olive oil, stone-pressed in a traditional mill.

In addition to assisting with publicity, agronomy and regulatory matters, Slow Food has agreements with the Eataly and Coop Italia supermarkets to promote certified Presidia products. The latter, a consortium of consumers' cooperatives, is the largest supermarket chain in Italy. Fonte's (2006) research interrogates the tensions between the ethical and environmental underpinnings of Slow Food and a large retail chain. The Coop's governance structure and transparency commitments ensure that ethical and sustainability guidelines are followed, though Fonte reports that this can produce schismatic tensions between ideals and commercial realities.[2] The Coop deal emphasises the local and seasonal nature of Presidia

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[2] Fonte (2006) suggests that the Coop maintains an 'ambiguous' relationship with multinational firms that supply the chain. 'In the aggregate, according to a Coop manager, quality production may compete with mass

foods, running special promotions in branches closest to the source of production. 'Slow Food is positive about the possibility of Coop to free itself from a big retailing industry logic, adopting strategies more keyed to a localised model of development. The Presidia initiative goes in this direction: Coop, in dealing with small producers has to "localise" provisioning and distribution, to limit supply in function of space and time.' (Fonte, 2006: 219) With increased sales possibilities, however, producers and retailers may face temptation to scale up significantly, with a potential decline in quality as a result. Since Slow Food heavily promoted the cured pork fat product *lardo di Colonnata,* for instance, artisanal producers complained of massively increased competition and a consequent fall in standards (Leitch, 2003). Francesca admits that a surge in popularity for a Presidia product poses challenges for producers and Slow Food:

> ...sometimes our members say it's difficult to buy our products...'Every two years I go to Salone [del Gusto] and buy these products, but during these two years where can I get them?' It's a problem for me because we work with these small producers and they sometimes sell only in the country, and it's right, but a lot of people want to buy and our members are interested. Sometimes they try to sell and we can make a promotion but no more. We have a small number of these products and it's difficult to sell them because sometimes the law won't permit you to sell them to other countries.

The Presidia strategies seem to be working insofar as sales and production quantities have been boosted since the project was initiated. The *Presidium Vademecum* study (SFFB, 2002), conducted by Milan's Bocconi University, quantifies any sales gains or losses made by Presidia-sponsored producers over a two-year period, focusing on 54 Presidia in six areas of production: fish, baked goods and sweets, cured meats, cheese, animal breeds and fruit, vegetables and pulses. The results show large jumps in both quantities sold and price per unit, with averages increases of 63.5% and 32.6% respectively. Presidia in the 'Fruit, vegetables and pulses' category experienced the most significant gain in both tables, with a 74% rise in units sold and a 68% increase in price. Such results indicate a distinct opportunity for back-to-the-landers willing to experiment with novel food varieties. It also draws questions, however, into the justice and sustainability claims of the programmes. Measuring success through sales gains may mask potential sources of conflict, such as how those gains are distributed and whether short-

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production.'(p.210) Defending the provision of both industrial and artisanal products under the same roof, managers argue that sales of widely recognised, popular branded products subsidise the chain's national reach and its programmes for sourcing from small, local producers. Coop representatives are eager to stress their commitments to social, economic and environmental justice and refer Fonte to a 1999 case in which Del Monte Italia was pressured by the Coop to improve labour and hygiene conditions on pineapple plantations in Kenya or risk losing its contract with the chain.

term rewards result in long-term investment. Furthermore, the increase in sales price might give succour to critics of Slow Food who cast the organisation as elitist. Fieldwork conversations revealed both enthusiastic support for Slow Food and considerable skepticism. One interviewee complained about the fetishism he associated with Slow Food's focus on the rare and unusual, claiming that the organisation offers little support to 'ordinary' small farmers. As far as the Presidia are concerned, Francesca confirms that this type of project is in fact exclusive to specialist producers:

> For ordinary producers, we don't develop projects like Presidia... For example, at Terra Madre, you could map in Italy all these communities who produce garlic in their regions, but it's not a specific, traditional garlic. They do this garlic in an organic or sustainable way, so for that you can invite them to join a food community and invite them to Terra Madre which should be interesting for them, in order to let them know about our philosophy about agriculture and so forth. And sometimes [such producers] have become very involved – they collaborate with our convivia... We have lovely examples of food communities who became members of our association who couldn't become Presidia producers because they don't do the specialist production.

Martina is also critical of the organisation, which she regards as out of touch with farmers like herself. Here she describes an incident involving Slow Food representatives that occurred a week before my visit to her farm:

> We'd been contacted by them because they were apparently sending these small farmers from the US around Italy and having them see how small-scale organic producers did some things here. Part of the deal was that we would prepare lunch for everyone. We agreed to this but then the day before this group arrived I was told, 'No, it's not farmers, it's chefs...' Well-known, high-profile American chefs! I didn't know what to cook for people like this. I was very nervous about the whole thing and wanted to back out, but in the end I just got on with it and I think it worked out okay. They were all complimentary but I knew that what I could offer them was very different to what they'd be used to. There was one woman who told me she used an axe to cut pumpkins open so I knew she was actually a farmer [laughs]. But the rest... They kept going on about some wonderful Australian wine they'd been drinking at a restaurant the night before. I think they'd been in Florence. What are they doing drinking Australian wine in Tuscany? What's slow and sustainable about that? I'd been willing to give Slow Food a chance but that confirmed every prejudice I had about them.

Retail markets function as interfaces between producer and consumer, making available goods that are physically distanced from their origins. Successful retail matches the priorities of both buyer and seller, with resulting exchanges reflecting and reproducing those concerns. For back-to-the-landers to access the retail sector they must to some degree play by the rules of existing market structures, adapting their production to fit a given regime where consumer and retailer expectations are satisfied. Responsibility and accountability are passed from producer to seller, for whom the product becomes a vehicle for profit. Because this commoditisation is a natural part of the retail process and its spatial articulation, authors such as Crewe et al. (2003: 101) remain cautious about the potential for developing truly 'alternative' retail spaces. Traders of specialised or marginal products, they argue,

> no matter how progressive, distinctive, and pioneering their work plans may be, ultimately need to make enough money to stay in business and this, above all else, governs their market position, stability, permanence and positioning *vis-á-vis* the "mainstream". The all too common spatial outcome is to move up (into more mainstream commercial worlds), to move on (into more marginal and unpredictable spaces) or to move out…

Generally small-scale organic farmers tend to favour more personalised, face-to-face interaction with customers than that provided by mainstream retail channels. For example, only 17% of WWOOF host questionnaire respondents sold to a large retailer such as the Coop or Conad supermarket chains, while over half operated some kind of on-site farm shop and 43% participated in local farmers' markets. It is likely to be a combination of restricted access to the sector, a commitment to supplying local food circuits and low profit margins that distance back-to-the-landers' products from retail outlets. The result is an uneven terrain of distribution where, in a town like Cittá della Pieve in Umbria, the small farms that radiate outward from the city walls do not supply the two supermarkets contained within. Sales of locally-produced unusual and artisanal foods exist in marginal zones outside the city, improvised and relatively unstructured. Programmes like Slow Food's Presidia hint at possible connections between centre and margin as products promising the greatest financial returns for back-to-the-landers are slowly incorporated into mainstream channels. However, this will almost inevitably involve some form of compromise as the compatibility of strong ideals and economic necessities is challenged.

8.6. Conclusion

The case studies presented above reflect innovative adaptations to the dramatic reduction of income that back-to-the-land migration normally entails. While strategies for economic sustainability are presented here in a largely positive light, particularly as creative and rewarding, it should be remembered that they are often as necessary as they are innovative, a result of real need as much as entrepreneurial flair. With this in mind, it is important to caution against romanticising the austerity in which some back-to-the-landers live. Former back-to-the-landers such as Angew (2006) are particularly adamant that the poverty in which she and her fellow neo-peasants dwelled in the 1970s is shown as accurately as possible. For her, sustenance was often a grinding, depressing struggle that eventually caused her to give up her life of self-imposed simplicity and return to the formal economy. Some of these challenges that back-to-the-landers face in regard to sustaining their presence on the land have been addressed here, and will be reflected upon again in the final chapter.

With due caution taken, then, analysis of back-to-the-land economic strategies elicits a few key findings. Firstly, the 'Get big or die' mantra that defined post-war agriculture need not apply here. Small, independent farmers are managing to stay on the land provided they are adaptable. 'Diversify or die' might therefore be a better descriptor for the situation facing those on the margins of the agricultural economy. Tourism and leisure provisions have given life-sustaining boosts to many organic farms in Italy, without necessarily compromising on the primarily agricultural character of the properties. The pluriactivity demonstrated on case study farms is both a testament to ingenuity and an indicator of necessity. Secondly, markets are essential for back-to-the-landers. A perspective in which social and political activities coexist with the economic, with none subordinating the other, is useful for understanding the myriad influences that the abstract market and physical market sites bear on back-to-the-landers' lives. As the case studies show, there is considerable diversity in the structure and goals of markets themselves, and in the motives of those who participate in them. Finally, what should be clear by this stage is the extent to which certain networks support the potential for back-to-the-land migration. GAS, for example, enable market access for relatively excluded actors. Their individual structures may differ but the underlying cooperativism that defines them can build solidarities and distributes capital more fairly. The case of Slow Food's Presidia is one in

which a network can use its influence and relative financial clout to bring marginalised products and producers into the mainstream economy.

That so many of the initiatives described in this chapter are addressed through a prism of bureaucracy is telling. For many farmers, bureaucracy is the greatest source of their frustrations. Organic certifying procedures can be expensive and complicated while hygiene regulations for transformed products are deeply restrictive. Producers who cannot afford official certification (organic, hygiene-related or both) have adopted a number of strategies to circumvent the regulations. The 'grey economy' of secret markets and unofficial retailing offers a number of benefits to producers. Although risky, producing for the grey economy encourages face-to-face interaction with consumers, a process that generally promotes trust and loyalty, as well as mutual education. Although there are more than 20 officially authorised organic certification bodies in Italy, many autonomous non-profit groups have established *autocertificazione* or self-certification procedures. Organisations such as *Campi Aperti* and Semirurali promote such practices among their members. Endorsement of a farm as organic does not mean that farmers can apply a 'certified' label to their products, but it does qualify them for participation in projects such as *Campi Aperti*'s markets. Here, quality is supposed to speak for itself, without the aid of an expensive certification ritual.

There is no question that bureaucracy acts as a prohibitive force on small-scale farming in Italy. There is a need for change in national policy so that traditional producers are not subject to restrictive laws designed to govern industrial-scale food production. Consistency in the service and price regimes offered by different organic certification agencies would also be welcome. In the absence of these developments, however, the self-organised networks that have emerged to challenge the status quo are encouraging. These networks function as effective channels for social interaction and knowledge exchange, as well as building strong bonds between artisanal producers and dedicated customers. Many participants in Italy's underground food economy embrace its subversive potential, though exchange in the grey or semi-legal economy creates vulnerability for producers and consumers alike. It should be remembered, of course, that there are legal risks in trading goods that flout hygiene regulations, with an obvious corollary for consumer health.

In spite of the many complaints that circulate about Italian bureaucracy, 70% of Italian respondents to the WWOOF host questionnaire described themselves as 'Very optimistic' or 'Cautiously optimistic' about the future of organic farming in Italy, although foreign farmers living in Italy were more ambivalent. Respondents who had been on their farms between 10 and 15 years were the most optimistic, with less than a third of all WWOOF hosts expressing mild or strong pessimism about the direction of organic agriculture. It is likely that this general optimism reflects the growth of the organic sector in national consumption trends, which has stimulated structures like GAS and the Presidia. Despite the post-war 'modernisation' which gave rise to industrial agriculture, Italy remains a nation of small farmers, and boasts more registered organic farms than anywhere else on the continent. Complaints about intrusion notwithstanding, many government agencies, research institutes and NGOs work closely with famers to minimise their ecological impact without damaging their financial prospects. Additionally, the AAFNs described herein reveal localised versions of institutional support.

None of the strategies described in this chapter are foolproof or universally applicable, and the usual provisos regarding regional variation are appropriate. What the evidence presents is, in a very basic sense, a sketch of the economic opportunities available to back-to-the-landers in Northern Italy at a particular point in time. I have also tried to articulate a parallel analysis of how innovation and resilience materialise in unique economic conditions, and how those characteristics are aligned and projected through the values that give back-to-the-land its momentum. While aspirations like self-sufficiency or disengagement from the formal economy may be only partially realised for many migrants to the countryside, back-to-the-landers' ambitions nonetheless stimulate novel trading structures and social and political networks that will likely impact the opportunities for future agrarians.

9. Conclusion

The preceding chapters have explored several major themes that have arisen from fieldwork experience and secondary research. Most of the energy of this project has been devoted to addressing three basic questions: Why do people go back to the land?; How do they learn to become competent farmers?; How do they turn farming into an economically sustainable livelihood? Simple as the questions are, the answers are considerably more complex. In reflecting on the empirical evidence and offering some conclusions, then, I aim to be both informative and provocative, recounting the arguments expressed thus far and suggesting some new routes for further inquiry.

In my review of the literature on urban to rural migration and the back-to-the-land movement, I attempted to locate a space for contemporary back-to-the-land migrants in Italy within the existing discourse on urban to rural migration. Noting the relative lack of attention given to migrants who adopt primarily agricultural lifestyles, I argued that incorporating them into this body of theory could give the subject a wider purview, creating space for ethically-situated migrants who seek to refashion rural space toward progressive or radical ends. The structures that support these efforts were put under scrutiny in Chapter 3, where I examined the varied forms and contested politics of alternative agro-food networks. In Chapter 6, I attempted a wide-ranging profile of back-to-the-landers in Northern Italy, drawing on interviews, participant observation and questionnaire data. By wide-ranging I do not mean definitive; indeed, one of my key arguments holds that a tidy summary cannot be used to encapsulate the experiences of such a diverse constellation of individuals. Rather, the differences and inconsistencies in the life stories of the research participants can be used to inform a non-essentialist reading of back-to-the-land, where factors such as class and gender, and general demographic categories such as age and nationality, may be influential but are not deterministic. Chapter 7 should serve to reinforce this point, given that many back-to-the-landers, no matter what their backgrounds, begin from the same novice position when they move to the countryside and initiate agricultural projects. Using theories on craft and skill to

understand the 'slow transition' from urban worker to competent farmer, I argued that mundane, routine practice is essential to developing the requisite abilities needed to form competencies. Practiced abilities are enhanced by local knowledge, which often works in respect to local ecological conditions, a fact that ties with back-to-the-landers' pursuit of environmental sustainability. The case study networks, APE, WWOOF and Slow Food, all offer unique means of supporting this transition through the dissemination of skill and knowledge. These organisations also play a significant role in offering economic supports to new farmers. As I demonstrated in Chapter 8, structures such as farmers' markets, collective buying groups and the Presidia project serve as an infrastructure on which new farmers may transform their lifestyles into livelihoods. The back-to-the-landers studied for this project come from disparate origins and bring varied levels of skill, assets, knowledge and experience to the back-to-the-land ideal. Though their farms may be dispersed and in some cases isolated, they nevertheless remain connected through various projects such as Slow Food, GAS, APE and WWOOF. This hints at a question that I have reserved for the very last section of this thesis: Do back-to-the-landers represent a distinct social movement or are they simply a group of unassociated individuals, sharing similar ambitions but collectively dissolute?

I want to offer some further reflections and summary before tackling this final issue. Back-to-the-landers can offer insights into urban to rural migration that challenge existing theoretical precepts, such as those which frame migration to the countryside as a 'middle-class' phenomenon, implying a negative impact on the economically disadvantaged as a result. Because of their ethical or ideological principles, as well as material practices, back-to-the-landers collectively inscribe certain values on the countryside, such as environmental sustainability, collective labour or voluntary simplicity, values that may contrast with the consumptive, acquisitive attitudes frequently assigned to rural gentrifiers. Importantly, back-to-the-landers can act as test cases for strategies that weld these values to everyday practice, examples of which can be seen in each empirical chapter. As small-scale producers these individuals typically have restricted access to conventional markets for their produce and therefore must create new networks or configure their environments to reflect particular priorities, constantly negotiating the kind of ethical and economic considerations which form the basis of most literature on alternative agro-food networks. So, while authors such as Guthman (2004) and Johnston (2007), for example, take a highly critical view of organic as an alternative principle because of its appropriation by large agribusiness firms, in back-to-the-

landers there exists a potential to see new practices emerging, such as GAS and *mercatini clandestini,* that use organic food to reflexively reinterpret the question of what is alternative.

My inclination, in light of the above observations, is to adopt Gibson-Graham's (2008) proposal of 'weak theory' in offering some concluding thoughts on how back-to-the-land migration might exercise its transformative potential. 'Strong theory,' they argue, 'has produced our powerlessness in positing unfolding logics and structures that limit politics', whereas weak theory 'could de-exoticize power' and 'could not know that social experiments are doomed to fail or destined to reinforce dominance; it could not tell us that the world will never be transformed by the disorganized proliferation of local projects' (Gibson-Graham, 2008: 619). Back-to-the-land migration is not a formula for working-class revolution, collective seizure of the means of production, universal gender parity or an end, in itself, to discrimination or inequality. What studying the phenomenon shows, though, is the gradual opening of imagined and realised possibilities, of preconceived and spontaneous action that chips away (however slowly, incrementally) at structures that support coercive and hierarchical relationships. This is performed by active disengagement from those structures, such as formal employment, and by the creation of alternatives. Viewed dialectically, these alternatives are in a perpetual state of becoming, with notions of alterity evolving in synchronicity with the character of the 'mainstream'. Occasionally, plentiful surplus capital has been applied to such projects, relying on acquisitive means to make other economic activities possible, such as the corporate sponsorship of Slow Food's Salone del Gusto. At other times capital investment has been minimal and results have been achieved through cooperative exchange and tireless dedication, evident in the establishment of GAS networks. Sometimes these alternatives involve harnessing the 'intrinsic dynamics of capitalism to progressive political projects' (McCarthy, 2006: 809), while others attempt a more decisive break from those dynamics. I hope – and am convinced – that the evidence presented in preceding chapters works as something of a corrective to a view (particularly pronounced in Marxist or political economy approaches) which discredits the radical intent of certain initiatives on the involvement of a nebulous middle class (cf. Parkins and Craig, 2006). The diverse economies project proposed by Gibson-Graham (2008: 619) permits a way past this critique as an end point, asking that, as academics, we adopt an 'experimental approach to learning rather than judging. To treat something as a social experiment is to be open to what it has to teach us, very different from the critical task of assessing the ways in which it is good or bad, strong or weak, mainstream or alternative.'

Taking a non-judgmental perspective, then, allows for contradictions and inconsistencies to reveal themelves without facing condemnation. This is particularly important for relating the dilemmas of ecologically-minded food producers, who are faced with the double challenge of environmental *and* economic sustainability. They therefore require a sufficiently large market for their food, with profit margins that can keep pace with inflation and operational costs. For many independent organic farmers, issues of farm size and financial concentration present a more immediate threat than the continued use of pesticides and fertilisers. Several interviewees claimed that they felt more allegiance to small non-organic farmers than large-scale organic concerns. Large (often subsidised) farms with corporate distribution contracts enable major food companies to take advantage of economies of scale and therefore keep food prices depressed, a phenomenon which significantly impacts producers acting outside that system. Artisanal and organic producers generally charge more for their food but many argue that this still does not meet the real costs of production. As Chapter 7 showed, however, economic strategies among back-to-the-landers are diverse and in some cases well-developed, demonstrating the power of AAFNs to sustain back-to-the-land migration in all of the regions studied. Most interviewees who discussed the subject were convinced that markets provided the most effective means of stimulating high-quality production, sustaining the livelihoods of small farmers and reaching consumers. There is an added social dimension to markets that many participants acknowledge but instrumentalist readings overlook, evident particularly in the *mercatini clandestini*, which serve multiple functions beyond the economic. In this case, the basic structural support of capitalism, the market, is seen as necessary to maintain practices that are nonetheless promoted as oppositional by the networks' participants. As I have remarked elsewhere, this will not satisfy the ideological conditions of some commentators who seek to define and refine what is radical, progressive or alternative. These unresolved tensions, however, between principle and practice, ambition and outcome, offer the most faithful account that I can give of who the back-to-the-landers are, what they believe, how they pratically articulate those beliefs and how these practices affect the spaces they inhabit.

The emphasis placed on socio-economic diversity among back-to-the-landers throughout this thesis is motivated by more than anti-essentialist ideology, and is a reflection of the

ambivalence I have periodically felt in trying conclusively to identify back-to-the-landers as a distinctive social category. Throughout the fieldwork and writing processes I have been conscious of the difficulties in making the research subjects conform to a predetermined profile, particularly given the paucity of existing literature on back-to-the-landers in Italy. The primary research questions therefore grew as much from an absence as a presence. Before beginning the research I had been aware, through earlier encounters with the WWOOF Italia host directory, of a substantial number of back-to-the-landers in Italy, but struggled to locate academic literature that addressed this group specifically. Furthermore, existing studies on urban to rural migration often had a focus that was insufficiently inclusive of the diverse actors involved. By contextualising Italian back-to-the-landers in such a broad theoretical frame, my aim has been partly to renew research on urban to rural migration by posing some new questions and transplanting familiar ones to new locations. In the process, through specific empirical contributions, I have also attempted to broaden the scope of research which has been conducted specifically on back-to-the-landers. The risk in so doing is that I present my own research subjects as a more unified group than actual circumstances warrant.

When prompted to explain the nature of this research project, I have often been asked – usually in a surprised tone – whether there is actually a back-to-the-land movement occurring in Italy. This choice of phrase can be unintentionally provocative in that I am usually careful to not describe back-to-the-land migration as a 'movement', something that might imply a unified or formalised set of goals. For many people aware of back-to-the-land's place in post-war cultural history, however, it does indeed represent a movement: it is a set of commonly held beliefs and practices which seek to affect social and environmental change. Throughout every stage of the research process I have continued asking myself whether it is appropriate to consider the phenomenon I have been investigating in Italy as a movement, or simply a collection of related but ultimately independent values and actions.

As I stated above, my conclusions on this are ambivalent. Few back-to-the-landers I interviewed, apart from German and Swiss migrants who arrived in Italy in the 1970s or 80s, considered themselves to be part of any recognised movement, at least in their distinct capacity as back-to-the-landers. The lack of a common organising platform or institutional

representation for back-to-the-landers contributes to the fact that they rarely speak in a collective voice. Although many may live clustered within certain locales (particularly in Tuscany and Umbria), the geographical isolation of rural farming and its individuated economic nature means that back-to-the-landers rarely discuss their activities as a collective enterprise. So although a back-to-the-lander like Walter may refer to a 'we' when talking about a wave of German migration into Tuscany in the 1970s, for most of the interviewees, a collective 'we' will refer to a unit no larger than a single family. Even if only subtly, the relative atomisation of the back-to-the-land diaspora is likely to temper the ambitions of individual migrants. The early North American back-to-the-landers discussed in Chapter 2 were inclined to present their projects as a part of a broader attempt to change the world, in line with other countercultural ambitions. An historical awareness of back-to-the-land's limitations and an insufficient critical mass render modern back-to-the-landers more circumspect.

Contemporary disparateness is also reinforced by the multinational composition of Italy's neo-farmers. North American and British back-to-the-landers have drawn on folk canons (of varying authenticity), using common signifiers (architectural, musical, spiritual) to revive moribund traditions (cf. Jacob, 1997; Agnew, 2006; McKay, 2011). Folk practices are certainly celebrated on some back-to-the-land farms in Italy, such as the harvest celebration described in Chapter 8, yet these are more exception than norm. I attribute this partly to the diverse origins of the migrants who contributed to this research, given that, for them, a connection to such traditions is likely to be perceived as tenuous at best and pretentious at worst. This is not to suggest that old-fashioned rural traditions and lifestyles are always rejected for a more modern variant. On the contrary, the studied simplicity practised by back-to-the-landers often requires a submission to the practices, rhythms and expectations of another era. The semiotics which have bound back-to-the-landers in other countries and historical periods have been stronger, however, than they have been among recent migrants to the Italian countryside. Another reason for this may lie in a reluctance to excessively romanticise rural poverty, which, as I suggested in Chapter 6, may be a more recent memory for Italian families than, say, Germans or Brits. As a group, then, I would argue that back-to-the-landers lack a certain symbolic power which immediately and visibly connects their lifestyles to pronounced ethical principles or radical political aims (cf. Brunori, 2011).

None of this means that the ambitions of back-to-the-landers are blunted by the fact that they are not (yet) a clearly recognisable movement. The efficacy of what they do is not necessarily diminished by the fact that the back-to-the-land ideal may have a muted resonance. Interviewees for this study often understood their own actions within a context of other social movements, such as those promoting sustainable farming and fair trade, rather than (re)defining those movements through back-to-the-land migration itself. The adoption of farming thus becomes one expression amongst multiple forms of praxis relating to ethical, political and economic issues. Back-to-the-landers *can* be connected to one another, yet rarely does this happen by virtue of their status as migrants to the countryside. Instead they are likely to establish contact or remain linked through networks such as APE, WWOOF, GAS or Slow Food, which provide skill development and economic opportunities for farmers from all backgrounds, but which may offer specific benefits for newcomers to agriculture. Chapter 7 explored how these organisations can facilitate back-to-the-land migration through skill cultivation and knowledge exchange, while Chapter 8 outlined how they can enable and support economic structures that aim to marry financial needs with ethical concerns.

The connections that I have traced between particular agro-food networks and back-to-the-landers in the four Italian regions under scrutiny is, I believe, one of the more substantive contributions of this research. I argued in Chapters 2 and 3 that back-to-the-landers represent a cohort of individuals who are uniquely placed to provide insight into the workings of AAFNs. This is because their recent adoption of farming, and the scale on which they practice agriculture, is virtually certain to require novel structures for production and distribution, at least relative to the industrial paradigm in which they are unlikely to participate. Furthermore, the ethical positions from which back-to-the-landers initiate their migration and subsequent lifestyle changes often bear a close relationship to the stated principles of AAFNs. Studying how back-to-the-land migrants integrate their own ambitions into those of AAFNs can uncover important detail about both parties, particularly concerning the dialectics of principle and practice. Without due attention to the institutional supports that back-to-the-landers receive through AAFNs, I would wager that my understanding of their economic sustenance and skill development would be comparatively poor. It is therefore tempting, in spite of my preceding commentary, to situate back-to-the-landers within a more distinct social movement, given that so much of their experiences and relationships are shaped by the pursuit of specific goals, often involving an ethic of care that prioritises social or environmental benefit over material

gain, and which in turn require organised models. If contemporary back-to-the-landers in Italy do constitute a movement then perhaps what is needed is clearer definition about what defines the movement's current form and what may shape its future. In this respect it has been useful to consider back-to-the-landers through an historical approach, accounting also for evolving theoretical treatments of urban to rural migration. This scope permits a new perspective on modern European back-to-the-landers whose presence in the countryside is both part of a continuum and a unique, nascent phenomenon.

I would like to offer some suggestions as to how this phenomenon may be conceptualised in future research. Firstly, I would argue for a more temporally and spatially sensitive reading of back-to-the-land migration, one which is attentive to regional and historical variation. This may seem obvious, but my hope is that such attention could bring to light the reciprocal dynamics between human and non-human actors, in particular the agro-ecosystems in which the farmers work and the processes that shape the outcomes of that work. Therefore, *processes of reconfiguration* would become the guiding principle in how the relationship between rural land and its new inhabitants could be explored. These processes may be politically positioned, something which has long been taken into account in studies of back-to-the-landers, and which should ideally continue. The transformative potential of these configurations, though, can be rather ambiguous, as studies of the complex politics of AAFNs have demonstrated. I would therefore call for more research into how back-to-the-land actions and relationships can define a localised politics, rather than banner issues such as sustainability and anti-capitalism. The sections on GAS and the *mercatini clandestini* can offer some examples as to how this might be performed through qualitative research. Ultimately, the politics of back-to-the-landers should explore how research subjects reflexively question power and attempt to reconfigure existing structures. These processes will, as I argue above, have social, economic and material dimensions. Further research could also build upon my integration of back-to-the-land with AAFNs by exploring intentional communities and their relationships to such networks. Such a project could increase the extent of connection identified between AAFNs and experimental agrarian projects by looking beyond individual farms to communities with more explicitly political agendas.

Ecological metaphors lend themselves generously to a project of this kind, and I have resisted many temptations to impose a natural explanation for social phenomena. 'Seeding Alternatives' works, however, given the infancy of many of the initiatives I have described and their indeterminate results. Through the literal act of seeding, back-to-the-landers aim to create not only something new, but *different*. On occasion this desire for change may be limited to personal lifestyles, but in many cases it speaks to issues of social and economic organisation, the nurturing of the environment and a sustained, creative appreciation of Earth's edible bounty. When scattering seeds, the novice farmer or gardener might expect each one to produce a robust plant, ideal in form. The more experienced agrarian knows that some seeds will remain forever dormant, and that some green shoots may need to be thinned so that stronger plants can better absorb the resources of their environment. So it holds for attempts to plant these seeds into wider visions of social change. If the exercise is approached with the acceptance that not all seeds will take root, the attention is trained on those that do. Hope is invested in the seeds – whether they be sunflowers or ideas – that flourish in untested conditions.

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Appendix I - WWOOF Host Questionnaire Results (English)

WWOOF - English

SurveyMonkey

1. In which region are you located?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Piemonte		0.0%	0
Lombardia		0.0%	0
Trentino Alto Adige		0.0%	0
Veneto		0.0%	0
Friuli Venezia Giulia		0.0%	0
Liguria		0.0%	0
Umbria		0.0%	0
Toscana		20.0%	1
Emilia-Romagna		40.0%	2
Sardegna		0.0%	0
Le Marche		0.0%	0
Abruzzo		0.0%	0
Lazio		20.0%	1
Campania		0.0%	0
Puglia		20.0%	1
Basilicata		0.0%	0
Calabria		0.0%	0
Sicilia		0.0%	0
	answered question		5
	skipped question		0

2. How long have you lived on your farm?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Less than 5 years		40.0%	2
5-10 years		40.0%	2
10-15 years		20.0%	1
More than 15 years		0.0%	0
	answered question		5
	skipped question		0

3. Which of these would you consider your original background?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Rural		20.0%	1
Suburban		0.0%	0
Urban		40.0%	2
Mixed - You have spent time in many areas		20.0%	1
Mixed - Your spouse / partner comes from a different background		20.0%	1
	answered question		5
	skipped question		0

4. Where are you originally from?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Italy		20.0%	1
Another European country		40.0%	2
Outside Europe		0.0%	0
Mixed - spouse/partner from different country		40.0%	2
	answered question		5
	skipped question		0

5. How long has your farm been organic?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Less than 5 years		20.0%	1
5-10 years		40.0%	2
10-15 years		40.0%	2
More than 15 years		0.0%	0
	answered question		5
	skipped question		0

6. How important have the following considerations been in your decision to farm organic?

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Less Important	Not Important	Rating Average	Response Count
Environment / ecology	100.0% (3)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	1.00	3
Health	20.0% (1)	40.0% (2)	40.0% (2)	0.0% (0)	2.20	5
Profitability	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	40.0% (2)	60.0% (3)	3.60	5
Quality	25.0% (1)	50.0% (2)	25.0% (1)	0.0% (0)	2.00	4
					answered question	5
					skipped question	0

7. In addition to organic methods, please list any other type of production system you employ on your farm.

	Response Percent	Response Count
Biodynamic	80.0%	4
Permaculture	20.0%	1
Agro-forestry	0.0%	0
Aquaculture	20.0%	1
Renewable energy	60.0%	3
Other (please specify)		0
answered question		5
skipped question		0

8. Is farming your primary source of income?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	40.0%	2
No	60.0%	3
answered question		5
skipped question		0

9. Are you or is anyone else in your family employed off the farm?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		40.0%	2
No		60.0%	3
	answered question		5
	skipped question		0

10. If yes, is the off-site work part-time or full-time?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Part-time		100.0%	2
Full-time		0.0%	0
Variable		0.0%	0
	answered question		2
	skipped question		3

13. How long have you participated in WWOOF?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Less than 5 years		60.0%	3
5-10 years		20.0%	1
10-15 years		20.0%	1
More than 15 years		0.0%	0
	answered question		5
	skipped question		0

14. In your estimation, how often do you host WWOOF volunteers in a typical year?

		Response Percent	Response Count
45+ weeks		20.0%	1
30-45 weeks		0.0%	0
15-30 weeks		40.0%	2
5-15 weeks		40.0%	2
Less than 5 weeks		0.0%	0
This is my first year with WWOOF		0.0%	0
	answered question		5
	skipped question		0

15. Are you a member of any agricultural organisations or food networks other than WWOOF (e.g. Coldiretti, Slow Food, Gruppi d'Acquisti Solidale)?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	80.0%	4
No	20.0%	1
I have been previously but am not currently	0.0%	0
answered question		5
skipped question		0

16. Please list the organisations with which you are involved.

	Response Count
	4
answered question	4
skipped question	1

17. How do you feel about the future of organic farming in Italy?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Very optimistic	0.0%	0
Cautiously optimistic	40.0%	2
Satisfied with current conditions	0.0%	0
Slightly pessimistic	60.0%	3
Very pessimistic	0.0%	0
answered question		5
skipped question		0

18. Please select all of the following that you consider important sources for gaining advice, learning new skills and receiving news about farming.

	Response Percent	Response Count
Neighbours / friends	100.0%	5
Local markets	20.0%	1
WWOOF volunteers	40.0%	2
Internet	60.0%	3
Magazines, journals or other publications	60.0%	3
answered question		5
skipped question		0

19. Please list any favourite publications that you regularly consult for information about farming and agriculture.

	Response Count
	2
answered question	2
skipped question	3

20. This research will continue in 2010 with WWOOF participation and interviews with hosts. Are you willing to be interviewed in the future about your experience with WWOOF, organic farming and life in the Italian countryside?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		100.0%	5
No		0.0%	0
	answered question		5
	skipped question		0

21. Please provide your name, e-mail address and phone number here. These details will not be used or circulated for any purpose other than this research, and will be kept in strictest confidence.
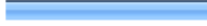
	Response Count
	5
answered question	5
skipped question	0

Appendix II – WWOOF Host Questionnaire Results (Italian)

WWOOF - Italiano
SurveyMonkey

1. In quale regione si trova la sua azienda?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Piemonte		10.4%	5
Lombardia		4.2%	2
Trentino Alto Adige		0.0%	0
Veneto		2.1%	1
Friuli Venezia Giulia		0.0%	0
Liguria		4.2%	2
Umbria		14.6%	7
Toscana		25.0%	12
Emilia-Romagna		2.1%	1
Sardegna		2.1%	1
Le Marche		4.2%	2
Abruzzo		4.2%	2
Lazio		6.3%	3
Campania		2.1%	1
Puglia		4.2%	2
Basilicata		2.1%	1
Calabria		0.0%	0
Sicilia		12.5%	6
	answered question		48
	skipped question		1

2. Quanti anni ha vissuto nella sua azienda?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Meno di 5 anni		27.1%	13
5-10 anni		14.6%	7
10-15 anni		10.4%	5
Più di 15 anni		47.9%	23
	answered question		48
	skipped question		1

3. Di quali, fra queste zone, lei si considera originario?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Rurale		17.0%	8
Suburbana		2.1%	1
Urbana		46.8%	22
Mista - Sono stato in zone differenti		27.7%	13
Mista - Il mio coniuge/socio ha un'origine diversa dalla mia		14.9%	7
	answered question		47
	skipped question		2

4. Da dove viene originariamente?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Italia		85.4%	41
Altro paese Europeo		14.6%	7
Un paese non Europeo		0.0%	0
Mista - Il mio coniuge/socio viene da un posto diverso		0.0%	0
	answered question		48
	skipped question		1

5. Da quanti anni la sua (vostra) azienda e' biologica?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Meno di 5 anni	29.2%	14
5-10 anni	18.8%	9
10-15 anni	16.7%	8
Più di 15 anni	35.4%	17
answered question		48
skipped question		1

6. La scelta della coltivazione biologica e' stata influenzata maggiormente da quali fattori:

	Il più Importante	Abbastanza Importante	Non molto Importante	Il meno Importante	Rating Average	Response Count
L'ambiente / ecologia	59.0% (23)	28.2% (11)	10.3% (4)	2.6% (1)	1.56	39
Salute	38.9% (14)	47.2% (17)	11.1% (4)	2.8% (1)	1.78	36
Guadagno	0.0% (0)	5.1% (2)	10.3% (4)	84.6% (33)	3.79	39
Qualita	30.6% (11)	27.8% (10)	41.7% (15)	0.0% (0)	2.11	36
answered question						48
skipped question						1

7. Per favore, elenchi altri metodi di produzione usati nell' azienda:

	Response Percent	Response Count
Biodynamic	25.6%	10
Permaculture	38.5%	15
Agro-forestale	30.8%	12
Aquacultura	2.6%	1
Energia alternativa	48.7%	19
Altri (cortesamente specificare)		11
answered question		39
skipped question		10

8. Il suo reddito principale e' la coltivazione?

		Response Percent	Response Count
SI		43.8%	21
No		56.3%	27
	answered question		48
	skipped question		1

9. Lei od un altro membro della sua famiglia fanno un lavoro diverso?

		Response Percent	Response Count
SI		64.6%	31
No		35.4%	17
	answered question		48
	skipped question		1

10. Se si, questo altro lavoro e' a tempo pieno o part-time?

		Response Percent	Response Count
A tempo pieno		40.6%	13
Part-time		34.4%	11
Dipende		25.0%	8
	answered question		32
	skipped question		17

11. Per favore elenchi tutte le attivita' che le portano un profitto

		Response Percent	Response Count
Turismo (bed and breakfast / agriturismo)		68.3%	28
Negozio d'azienda		43.9%	18
Istruzione (workshops / visite scolastiche)		26.8%	11
Artigianato		12.2%	5
Prodotti alimentari lavorati (conserve / imbottigliamento / panetteria / etc.)		53.7%	22
Altri (cortesamente specificare)		43.9%	18
	answered question		41
	skipped question		8
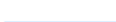
12. Per favore indichi con una croce tutti i modi di vendita e distribuzione dei prodotti che lei usa:

		Response Percent	Response Count
All'ingrosso, distributore nazionale (p.e. COOP, Conad, etc.)		19.0%	8
Mercati locali		42.9%	18
Negozio d'azienda		54.8%	23
Ristoranti locali		14.3%	6
Industrie alimentari		2.4%	1
Altri (contesamente specificare)		59.5%	25
	answered question		42
	skipped question		7

13. Da quanti anni ha participato nel WWOOF?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Meno di 5 anni		65.9%	29
5-10 anni		22.7%	10
10-15 anni		6.8%	3
Più di 15 anni		4.5%	2
	answered question		44
	skipped question		5

14. Di solito, per quanto tempo in un anno lei ospita volontari del WWOOF?

		Response Percent	Response Count
45+ settimane		11.4%	5
30-45 settimane		11.4%	5
15-30 settimane		27.3%	12
5-15 settimane		15.9%	7
Meno di 5 settimane		6.8%	3
Questo è il mio primo anno nel WWOOF		27.3%	12
	answered question		44
	skipped question		5

15. E' membro di un'altra organizzazione agricola o communita' alimentare diversa dal WWOOF (ad esempio Coldiretti, Slow Food, Gruppi d'Acquisti Solidale)?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Si		84.1%	37
No		15.9%	7
	answered question		44
	skipped question		5

16. Elenchi l' organizzazione a cui lei appartiene:

	Response Count
	32
answered question	32
skipped question	17

17. Che cosa ne pensa del futuro dell'agricoltura biologica in Italia?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Molto ottimista		20.0%	8
Aspetto a vedere		52.5%	21
Soddisfatto della situazione attuale		2.5%	1
Un po' pessimista		22.5%	9
Molto pessimista		2.5%	1
	answered question		40
	skipped question		9

18. Gentilmente marca i mezzi sotto elencati che ritene fonti importanti di consiglio, miglioramento, d'artigianale, e ricevere notizie correnti.

		Response Percent	Response Count
Communitari / amici		67.5%	27
Mercati locali		45.0%	18
Membri di WWOOF		67.5%	27
Internet		72.5%	29
Giornale, riviste o altre publicazioni		50.0%	20
	answered question		40
	skipped question		9

19. Per favore elenchi giornali e pubblicazioni di ogni genere che lei consulta per tenersi informato sull'agricoltura in Italia:

	Response Count
	22
answered question	22
skipped question	27

20. Questa ricerca proseguira' nel 2010 con interviste a contadini. Lei sarebbe disposto ad essere intervistato riguardo alle sue impressioni sul WWOOF, l'agricoltura biologica e la vita rurale in Italia?
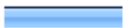
		Response Percent	Response Count
Si		90.2%	37
No		9.8%	4
	answered question		41
	skipped question		8

21. Cortesemente lascerebbe il suo nome, indirizzo di posta elettronica e numero di telefono? I suoi dati non saranno usati in nessun modo se non per questa ricerca e non saranno passati a terzi.

	Response Count
	35
answered question	35
skipped question	14

Appendix III – WWOOF Volunteer Questionnaire Results

WWOOF Volunteers

SurveyMonkey

1. How long have been a member of WWOOF Italia?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Less than 3 months	27.8%	25
3-6 months	28.9%	26
6-9 months	13.3%	12
9-12 months	8.9%	8
1 year or longer	13.3%	12
At various times over several years	7.8%	7
answered question		90
skipped question		0

2. At how many farms have you worked in Italy?

	Response Percent	Response Count
1-4	85.2%	75
4-8	11.4%	10
8-12	3.4%	3
More than 12	0.0%	0
answered question		88
skipped question		2
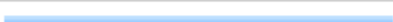
3. What is the longest amount of time you've spent on a single farm?

	Response Percent	Response Count
2 weeks or less	37.1%	33
2-4 weeks	36.0%	32
1-2 months	21.3%	19
More than 2 months	5.6%	5
More than 6 months	0.0%	0
1 year or more	0.0%	0
answered question		89
skipped question		1

4. Are you, or have you ever been, a member of WWOOF in another country?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		33.3%	29
No		66.7%	58
		answered question	87
		skipped question	3

5. Are you a member of any organisations similar to WWOOF (e.g. Help Exchange)?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		8.0%	7
No		92.0%	80
		answered question	87
		skipped question	3

6. Select all of the regions in which you have volunteered through WWOOF.

		Response Percent	Response Count
Val d'Aosta		3.5%	3
Tuscany		53.5%	46
Trentino Alto Adige		8.1%	7
Emilia-Romagna		14.0%	12
Sardinia		4.7%	4
Lombardy		9.3%	8
Umbria		19.8%	17
Sicily		3.5%	3
Lazio		4.7%	4
Abruzzo		4.7%	4
Piedmont		19.8%	17
Veneto		4.7%	4
Liguria		8.1%	7
Puglia		10.5%	9
Le Marche		7.0%	6
Molise		0.0%	0
Campania		5.8%	5
Basilicata		0.0%	0
Calabria		3.5%	3
	answered question		86
	skipped question		4

7. Please list any of the other countries where you have been, or are, a WWOOFer.

	Response Count
	39
answered question	39
skipped question	51

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8. Considering, for example, working hours and responsibilities, quality of accomodation, communication with hosts and support from WWOOF, how does your experience with WWOOF Italia compare with that of other countries?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Better	27.0%	10
About the same	27.0%	10
Worse	8.1%	3
Too difficult to make a meaningful comparison	37.8%	14
Please elaborate if you wish...		30
answered question		37
skipped question		53

9. Please list any other organisations similar to WWOOF of which you are a member.

	Response Count
	24
answered question	24
skipped question	66

10. Would you consider your background to be...

	Response Percent	Response Count
Rural	7.1%	6
Suburban	33.3%	28
Urban	26.2%	22
Mixed	33.3%	28
answered question		84
skipped question		6

11. Are you originally from...

		Response Percent	Response Count
Italy		1.2%	1
Another European country		33.7%	28
Asia		2.4%	2
Africa		0.0%	0
North America		43.4%	36
South America		6.0%	5
Australasia		13.3%	11
	answered question		83
	skipped question		7

12. Before volunteering with WWOOF (in Italy or elsewhere), how much experience with farming did you have?

		Response Percent	Response Count
None		50.0%	42
Some experience		44.0%	37
A lot of experience		6.0%	5
	answered question		84
	skipped question		6

13. Please rank the following factors in terms of their importance to explain why you chose to participate in WWOOF Italia.

	Very Important	Important	Less Important	Not Important	Rating Average	Response Count
Opportunity to travel	54.2% (45)	33.7% (28)	10.8% (9)	1.2% (1)	1.59	83
To better understand organic food production	57.8% (48)	28.9% (24)	13.3% (11)	0.0% (0)	1.55	83
To gain specific practical farming skills	44.0% (37)	34.5% (29)	17.9% (15)	3.6% (3)	1.81	84
To meet other travellers	22.9% (19)	31.3% (26)	34.9% (29)	10.8% (9)	2.34	83
To practice speaking Italian	39.3% (33)	33.3% (28)	16.7% (14)	10.7% (9)	1.99	84
To gain culinary skills	34.1% (28)	23.2% (19)	31.7% (26)	11.0% (9)	2.20	82
				answered question		84
				skipped question		6

14. Selecting as many choices as you like, please identify all the activities listed below in which you have an interest. In other words, which of these have you enjoyed participating in or would like to participate in?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Fruit and vegetable cultivation	92.6%	75
Medicinal herb production	65.4%	53
Livestock rearing	35.8%	29
Dairy / cheese production	71.6%	58
Land restoration	44.4%	36
Olive oil production	77.8%	63
Grain cultivation	37.0%	30
Breadmaking	79.0%	64
Building / carpentry work	49.4%	40
Winemaking	69.1%	56
'Transformation' (Preserves, juices, sauces, etc.)	80.2%	65
Equestrian activities	24.7%	20
Mushroom or wild food collection	74.1%	60
Tourism / hospitality	43.2%	35
Others (please specify)		19
answered question		81
skipped question		9

15. Do you feel that your interests in agriculture have been satisfied by your WWOOF experience?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Definitely	45.0%	36
Somewhat	38.8%	31
Not yet, but it could happen	12.5%	10
No	1.3%	1
My interests aren't really in agriculture	2.5%	2
answered question		80
skipped question		10

16. Generally, do you feel that WWOOF hosts are clear in offering descriptions of their farm activities and your role as a WWOOFer?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Always	30.8%	24
Sometimes	57.7%	45
Not often enough	11.5%	9
answered question		78
skipped question		12

17. How satisfied do you feel about your WWOOFing experience based on the following criteria? (Note: Experiences at different farms will naturally vary. Please try to give an overall impression.)

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Less satisfied	Not satisfied	N/A	Rating Average	Response Count
Standard of accommodation	51.9% (41)	43.0% (34)	5.1% (4)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	1.53	79
Working hours	39.2% (31)	53.2% (42)	7.6% (6)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	1.68	79
Nature of work (job types and responsibilities)	34.2% (27)	54.4% (43)	11.4% (9)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	1.77	79
Friendliness of hosts	64.6% (51)	31.6% (25)	3.8% (3)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	1.39	79
Meal provision	72.2% (57)	24.1% (19)	3.8% (3)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	1.32	79
Free / leisure time	45.6% (36)	36.7% (29)	15.2% (12)	1.3% (1)	1.3% (1)	1.72	79
Transportation / accessibility of farms	30.8% (24)	51.3% (40)	10.3% (8)	2.6% (2)	5.1% (4)	1.84	78
Support (if needed) from WWOOF Italia?	20.3% (15)	37.8% (28)	1.4% (1)	0.0% (0)	40.5% (30)	1.68	74
Feel free to elaborate...							17
answered question							79
skipped question							11

18. Based on your experience as a WWOOFer, how likely is it that you will attempt to become an organic farmer (either full-time or as a hobby) in the future?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Definitely		20.0%	16
Quite likely		40.0%	32
Not very likely, but it's a possibility		23.8%	19
Not likely at all		12.5%	10
I am already involved in organic farming		3.8%	3
	answered question		80
	skipped question		10

19. One major focus of this research concerns the factors that motivate new farmers to migrate 'back to the land'. If you were to start an organic farm yourself, how important would the following considerations be?

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not very Important	Not Important at all	Rating Average	Response Count
Self-sufficiency	68.4% (54)	26.6% (21)	3.8% (3)	1.3% (1)	1.38	79
Financial rewards	11.7% (9)	41.6% (32)	39.0% (30)	7.8% (6)	2.43	77
Personal or family health	75.6% (59)	23.1% (18)	1.3% (1)	0.0% (0)	1.26	78
Landscape aesthetics / rural setting	53.8% (42)	42.3% (33)	2.6% (2)	1.3% (1)	1.51	78
Stewardship of the land / ecological sustainability	73.4% (58)	19.0% (15)	6.3% (5)	1.3% (1)	1.35	79
Possibility of working with animals	27.3% (21)	32.5% (25)	35.1% (27)	5.2% (4)	2.18	77
Freedom from typical employment structure	67.1% (53)	20.3% (16)	10.1% (8)	2.5% (2)	1.48	79
Preservation of rural economy	48.7% (38)	38.5% (30)	11.5% (9)	1.3% (1)	1.65	78
			answered question			79
			skipped question			11

20. Which of these factors might dissuade you from taking up organic farming? Select as many as you think are relevant.

	Response Percent	Response Count
Rural isolation	49.3%	37
Lack of financial rewards	38.7%	29
Intensity of physical labour	30.7%	23
Bureaucracy / institutional constraints	54.7%	41
Pessimistic outlook for farming in the future	14.7%	11
Difficulties in gaining necessary skills / knowledge	21.3%	16
Land prices	66.7%	50
General lack of interest in agriculture	8.0%	6
Others (please specify)		17
answered question		75
skipped question		15

21. Based on your WWOOF Italia experience, are you more or less likely to consider organic farming as an option in your future than you were before you started volunteering?

	Response Percent	Response Count
More likely	68.8%	53
Less likely	2.6%	2
About the same	28.6%	22
answered question		77
skipped question		13

22. Would you recommend volunteering with WWOOF Italia to friends or family?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	96.3%	77
No	1.3%	1
Don't know	2.5%	2
answered question		80
skipped question		10

Thank you very much for your participation in this survey. The overall results will be shared with WWOOF Italia but all respondents will be kept entirely anonymous. However, the principal researcher for this project, Andrew Wilbur of the University of Glasgow, would like to invite respondents to get in touch. He would particularly like to hear from WWOOF volunteers who come from non-farming backgrounds and are considering a future in organic agriculture. There are many WWOOF hosts who have migrated from cities to the Italian countryside, and much of the research thus far has concentrated on their experiences. More input from WWOOFers contemplating a 'back to the land' lifestyle would be greatly appreciated. If this describes you and you'd like to participate further, please contact Andrew at andrew.wilbur@ges.gla.ac.uk or enter your name and e-mail address in the box below. This information will only be used to contact you regarding the research and never shared with another party. For information on the 'Seeding Alternatives' project, please go here: http://www.ges.gla.ac.uk:443/postgraduates/awilbur

Appendix IV – WWOOF Directory Sample

This is a sample of the WWOOF Italia farm list for 2011 without contact details for hosts. **Source: http://www.wwoof.it**

PIEMONTE

1. **14050, Cessole, Asti.**
   Farm and agritourism of 7 hectares in the Langa Astigiana . We produce wine, vegetables, hazelnuts, strawberries and make conserves and typical Piemonte antipastas. Help needed mainly in the vineyard, the synergic vegetable garden with firewood, playing with the children (10 & 4 years old) and with cooking. We live in a large restored stone farmhouse and still have some small restoration jobs to do on it. Meals with the family and can be vegetarian. No smoking in the house. Accommodation in the house in room with 2-3 beds and shared bathroom. We speak good English. We are interested in sharing our experiences and showing you this beautiful area!.

2. Avolasca, 15050, AL.
This small family run farm is situated in the hills in Piedmont near Avolasca, a town halfway between Genova and Milan. We mainly have a vineyard and produce wine but also have a vegetable garden and a restaurant at the weekends. We are a Belgium and Italian couple with a child and are very open to having people of different nationalities here. Accommodation in small apartment with kitchen but usually we eat meals together. No smoking in the house and you need to get to know the animals before you can look after them! We have a bicycle you can use and a bus stop nearby but there are no buses on Sundays. We ask you to be adaptable as we all have many different activities. Minimum stay 1 month, English, French and Dutch spoken.

3. 12050, Roddino, CN.
A small family-run farm which we started through our love of nature and our desire to leave a better world for our children to live in. We practice organic methods with respect for the environment. We are situated in Roddino, a small village in the Langhe (hills) surrounded by vineyards and hazelnut orchards, in the province of Cuneo, near Alba. We cultivate vegetables, wheat, maize, fruit, hazelnuts, grapes and make as much of our produce as possible into jams, desserts, fruit juices, salted vegetables, grape juice and wheat and maize flour. Accommodation in caravan with veranda (bathroom in house). Meals vegetarian but we can cook meat or fish on request. In exchange we need help in the vegetable garden and fields, weeding, hoeing and other farm jobs.

4. Cumiana, 10040 Torino.
B. and M. with their two children live in an old house near Cumiana. There are spectacular views from their house - woodland and hills as far as the eye can see to the Alps. They practice organic, sustainable farming and a simple lifestyle, rural and local. They are interested in old varieties of plants and animals, (and are experimenting with synergic agriculture) have chickens and go trekking with their donkeys and horses. There is also an agritourism where they accommodate guests (where the WWOOFers stay). English spoken.

5. Asti 14100 AT).
V.S is an agritourism located 10 minutes from Asti train station in the Monferrato hills with panoramic views. T. & R. own and manage the B&B along with 11 hectares of farm & forest inside a national park. We have a small vineyard of old vines with a new one planted and make wine in the traditional (old -fashioned) Piedmontese style, as well as a large orchard and vegetable garden. We are looking to expand our activities into beekeeping, market gardening, and animals; we are looking for WWOOFers who have experience in these areas and want to learn how we manage our little corner of the planet. We have been organic since our arrival 10 years

ago, and we implement bio-dynamics and Fukuoka philosophy when and where applicable and practical. Lodging for WWOOFers is in our luxury B&B, and is dependent on our B&B bookings; we can take one or two people (room sharing) at a time. English is our main language and R. is regarded by local Piedmontese as a gifted excellent cook and gives cooking lessons to our guests.

6. Caprile 13864, Biella.

Our small farm is situated in the foothills of the Alps in Biella at an altitude of 600m in the Sessera valley. It is an ideal place for people who love peace and quiet and walking in the woods. Our activity is mainly with the animals, we have 4 Jersey cows, calves, 20 goats, dogs, cats and chickens. Depending on the season we care for the young animals and make fresh and seasoned cheeses which we sell locally. Help needed also with grass cutting, wood cutting, with firewood, and with the care of the animals. The farm is run by two women, A. who mainly does the farm work and N. who does the work in the house. We ask for help in the house and on the farm, we do not consider this as work more as a choice of faith, we try to live with respect for the cosmos which builds the rapport between man, animals, vegetation and the visible and invisible worlds. We are vegetarian and offer accommodation in a room with shared bathroom. We speak English, French and Spanish. Gay friendly. People of all religions welcome which, as stated by Amma, are only different ways of describing the same God.

7. Viganell 28841, Verbania.

We are a family of five our three children 21, 17 and 14. In 1997 we moved from Berlin to north-western Italy, to live with other German friends in a beautiful little mountain village, 760 m above sea level, with old houses made of local stone, surrounded by uncultivated woods, fresh streams and high peaks, a rare spot of wilderness in overpopulated Europe. Until recently there was no road to the village. We transformed two little stables with haylofts into habitations and are reconstructing a third farmhouse built in the 17th century. We grow fruit and vegetables for self-sufficiency. For WWOOFers helping in early spring and late autumn we can offer a guest-room with toilet, washbasin and a well-heating wood-stove. During the long summer one can sleep in our open air attic with a tremendous view down the valley. Bathroom and shower can be used in our main house. We offer good, healthy vegetarian food, preferably from the garden. WWOOFers are welcome to help us in our greenhouse and the fruit and vegetable patches. Together we can tend the flowers and bushes, take care of the grass and paths, gather firewood and herbs, cook food and jam or transport material for further construction work. For recreation we offer a variety of equipment for juggling and acrobatics as well as facilities for table-tennis, volleyball and football. The Upper Valle Antrona with its beautiful mountains, lakes, rare plants and wildlife was finally declared natural reserve. WWOOFers are welcome from February to November. We speak English, German and a little French

8. Costa Vescovato, 15050, Alessandria.

V.U. is run by a co-operative of people who live on and work 100 hectares of land with respect to the environment. They have pigs, sheep, cows and (most importantly) a 20 hectare vineyard. Their politics are to have respect for people and to use as few machines as possible. Help needed mostly in the vineyard, fruit orchard and vegetable garden (from March to October). During the winter months they carry out building and restoration work. Help may also be needed in the slaughterhouse, preparing meat products, in the dairy and in the restaurant and shop. Accommodation by arrangement in tent, caravan (trailer) or mini apartment for adults and children. Meals organic using home grown produce. English, French, German and Dutch spoken. The co-operative is run on a communal basis with no boss . Respect for individuals as well as for the whole group is fundamental, as is their respect for animals and plants.

9. Quargnento, 15044, Alessandria.

Family-run 7 hecare organic/biodynamic farm in Piemonte, Monferrato. Their main produce is wine and hazelnuts. Situated 3 kms from the village, 15 km from Alessandra and 100 kms from Milan, Turin and Genova. The farm is very busy all year round and P. always works with WWOOFers. Meals mainly organic (meat and vegetables) but can cater for vegetarians. Have two children of 6 and 2 years. Jobs to be done: pruning, wood cutting and maintenance work (winter); in the vineyard (spring); the hazelnut harvest (August); the grape harvest and wine making (September) and all year round in the vegetable garden and garden. Possibility to help out at markets. Accommodation in room with bathroom, meals with the family English and French spoken.

EMILIA ROMAGNIA (divided into provinces)

PIACENZA

1. Bettola, Piacenza.
A small project of 1 hectare with the possibility to expand into the areas of surrounding abandoned land. We grow vegetables, walnuts and fruit mainly for our own use. Our project is also a centre where we practice Natural Hygiene Systems and care for our bodies without the use of medicines. We also host people who wish to come for depurative diets and fasting. We are vegans and vegetarians. We are in an abandoned village in the hills which we hope to repopulate and bring back to life. In all the reconstruction work we pay careful attention to 'green' building methods. My name is D. and with my son A. born in 2002) we look forward to your visit.

2. 29022, Bobbio, PC.
The co-operative Mogliazze is situated in Valtrebbia in the Apennines in the province of Piacenza. It consists of a small village of stone houses nearly completely restored and inhabited by 7 people. Jobs include cultivation, harvesting and preparing medicinal herbs and fruit, helping with the bees and sheep (not milk sheep) and activities with the tourists. As well as these, there are the daily chores to help with such as cooking, cleaning etc. The land (8 hectares plus woodland) is cultivated organically (certified ICEA). Meals with organic produce, can be vegetarian. Longer stays preferred, accommodation in room, older children welcome. Some English and French spoken.

3. Bettola, 29028, Piacenza.
Ancient hamlet situated in a panoramic position at an altitude of 750 m in the in the Piacenze mountains, near to interesting artistic sites in peace and silence. 24 hectares (16 ha woodland) which is 100% organic where they cultivate forage crops, saffron, trees and vegetables and will start to make goats cheese. In 2100 they will open a small agritourism, have teaching facilities and do cultural activities. They are cinema, art and nature lovers who want to host people from different cultures to exchange ideas and experiences. They have a small recording studio. Help needed with grazing the animals, grass cutting, firewood, clearing in woods, harvesting fruit (making jam), chestnuts, weeding, gardening, in the future also in the kitchen and with guests. In their free time they make fantasy films for tourism and other sectors. and they also have a small recording studio. Accommodation in room or occasionally in tent. Minimum stays 15 days. French and English spoken, can cater for vegetarians.

PARMA

1. Albareto, Parma.
This farm is in the Albareto district in the Taro valley halfway between Parma and La Spezia and is easily reachable by train. It is a family-run farm

centred on health and well-being, as the farm is run by a herbalist and a naturapath. The farm has been organic since 1998, it consists of 6 hectares of land with soft fruit, cereals, maize, vegetables and medicinal herbs. We have chickens, a few families of bees and we collect mushrooms, wild berries, chestnuts and wild herbs. We make jams, pickles, herbal teas and essential oils. This year some of our produce will be grown using the principles of permaculture. We are happy to have WWOOFers especially from March to October. We have a room for a maximum of two people with ensuite bathroom. Meals are mainly vegetarian and nearly always organic. We usually request your help in the mornings and you have a day off a week. We have bicycles that you can use. We are willing to have anyone who wants to give us a hand and spend some time with us. We speak fluent English and Czech, and quite good Spanish, German and Polish.

2. 43051, Albareto, PR.

30 hectare farm and agritourism situated in a panoramic position in the Appennino Parmense hills at an altitude of 600m, halfway between Parma and La Spezia (railway station Borgo Val di Taro). The farm has been certified organic by AIAB/ICEA since 1993. Our philosophy is self sufficiency and we exchange produce with other farms in a way to guarantee that we, our clients and friends have the most genuine produce possible. The main activities on the farm are: cultivating aromatic herbs in the greenhouse for farms that then plant them out outside (spring and autumn), caring for the sheep, pigs, cows -for meat (all year round) and forage crops for the livestock (June). We have a workshop where we transform various products to make jams, conserves and juices, bread, salami and meat (all year round). The house is also used for guests (agritourism). We have hosted WWOOFers since 1997, usually you help in the morning and have the afternoons free for walks, excursions etc. WWOOFers can help with any of the activities on the farm and are welcome to state their preferences although some of the necessary activities can be repetitive. We can accommodate WWOOFers from mid January to mid December in a room or caravan, meals are eaten together. English, French and German are spoken.

3. 43020 Campora di Neviano Arduini, PR.

Family-run farm of 50 hectares (organic for 5 years). We raise cattle and cultivate forage crops, cereals and hay, and also have bees. Help needed with cutting wood, hay making and caring for the animals and with the chestnut harvest. Also have a small carpentry workshop (make tables, benches and do some restoration work). Help wanted from single person, in own room. German and English spoken. There is the possibility for WWOOFers to go for a flight at the end of their stay in M.'s Delta plane (which is very light and can carry two people) as he is licensed to fly.

TUSCANY (divided into provinces)

MASSA

1. Fosdinovo, MS.

Farm (old mill and agritourism with 20 beds and restaurant) and 25 hectares of land. Olives, vegetable garden, herbs, chickens, donkeys, bees. Help needed in vegetable garden, cleaning around the house garden, swimming pool, etc., with preparation of meals when there are guests, maintenance jobs, in olive grove and woodland, making fences etc. Accommodation in room, children welcome.

2 54100 Massa.

This farm is at an altitude of 600 m on Monte Brugiana and is a large chestnut wood in the Parco delle Apuane facing the sea. There are 30 horses

which live free range in the woods, a stallion and foals. There is space for 30 people to stay on the farm. WWOOFers can help with jobs in the woodland, can learn how to ride and care for horses, how to take groups trekking, help with maintenance jobs on the farm, dry stone walling, wooden fencing, help with the hospitality. The contact and rapport with nature and the animals in this uncontaminated environment is an emotive experience. Basic English, French and Spanish spoken. Accommodation in a room in the refuge, independent house or tent depending on individual needs.

PISTOIA

1. Massa e Cozzile, 51010, Pistoia.
Small 6 ha farm 2,5 ha of olives, 1 ha abandoned vineyard, pasture and woodland). We are situated in central Tuscany between Firenze, Lucca, Vinci, Pisa and Siena. We have Sardinian donkeys, Mohair goats and Merinos sheep, barnyard animals, cats and dogs. Help needed with the olives and in vegetable garden, cutting wood, maintenance jobs, with the animals, harvesting and preparing seasonal fruits. Families and children welcome, accommodation in room for periods of at least 2 weeks. Meals genuine, possibly vegetarian, vegan and can cater for other diets if requested. English spoken and a little French, Spanish and German.

LUCCA

1. Stazzema, LU.
This farm is only reachable by foot along a footpath (1 1/2 hours). The land is of 7 hectares with a chestnut and beech wood and pasture. The farm has chestnut trees for fruit and wood, bees, varied cultivation and rabbits, chickens and horses. Help needed with dry stone walling, hay making, maintaining the vegetable garden, pruning and for the chestnut harvest. Accommodation in chalet, length of stays to be arranged, children welcome. Meals vegetarian or not, not all food organic. French & English spoken.

2. 55041 Lucca.
This farm consists of 4 has of land in the hills with woodland and olives in Orbicciano in Val Freddana and 3 has of fields in the plains where the land is more fertile and easier to work at Saltocchio near Lucca. We cultivate an enormous family vegetable garden so that we never lack for vegetables and fruit in season for ourselves and for the families who buy our produce directly from us. Respect for nature and social responsibility are at the basis of our work, the agritourism is a tool to help us to promote these beliefs.

3. 55051, Lucca.
Al Benefizio is a very small farm and agritourism situated in Barga and surrounded by the Apennine and Alpi Apuane mountains. We produce olive oil and honey (Acacia and Chestnut). The calmest months are Dec., Jan & Feb. but the farm never stops... Our activities are; bees, caring for the families, extracting and bottling the honey and selling on guided tours for tourists and schools. Olives; pruning, clearing the land, harvesting, pressing and bottling. In the winter months we also cut firewood and there is the small vegetable garden in the summer. We also have chickens and donkeys and a herb garden. A great deal of time is spent on maintenance jobs and the swimming pool. Our farm is not officially organic but we run it with the maximum respect for animals and plants without using any pesticides and using biodynamic principles. When possible we can take you to the nearest town (2.5 kms) or you can use our bicycles. We can accommodate 2 WWOOFers in an apartment with double room, kitchen and bathroom. Meals are eaten together, English and Spanish spoken.

LIVORNO

1. 57022 Castagneto Carducci, LI.
Family-run farm of 3 hectares in the hills near the sea in Castagneto Carducci. We run the farm with help from friends and WWOOFers. We have chickens, cats and 2 dogs. Our aim is to provide as much of our own organic produce i.e. olive oil, eggs, fruit, nuts and vegetables) as possible, and sell the excess which is generally only oil and eggs). We have a reed-bed system to recycle our water and hope to install photovoltaic solar panels this year. Need help for jobs in vegetable garden, fruit orchard, olive grove and various other jobs. We collaborate with a nearby WWOOF farm with a forest garden and reforestation project. Accommodation for 1-2 people in bedroom with own bathroom or comfortable caravan. English spoken.

2. 57027, San Vincenzo, LI.
We and our 6 children and we have an organic farm of 7.5 hectares with vines, olives and vegetable production near the coast. We also have an agritourism and a horse, donkey, goats and chickens. Accommodation in room, tent or with the family. Help needed all year round with the cultivation and harvesting of produce. Children welcome by arrangement. We speak a little English and German.

3. 57020, Sassetta, LI.
The farm is situated near the mediaeval village of Sassetta, 15 km from the sea and surrounded by forest. We have an organic farm. Over the last 20 years the farming has become less important and more and more our main activity is making wooden toys which we sell at markets or festas in the area. These toys all have movement. Although our production is small, it is very time consuming and our WWOOF guests would be given a wide variety of construction jobs, most of which we do outside, as well as some seasonal farm work (mainly raspberries) and help in the house. Accommodation in own room. English spoken.

4. 57020, Bibbona, LI.
Our small 5 ha farm is situated in the foothills near to the sea (6 kms). We have cultivated organically for the past 20 years: 2 ha of vegetables (winter and summer), 100 fruit trees, 300 olives. We are a family of 4: G, M., their daughter Giulia and dog Rudy. Help needed with cultivation and harvesting vegetables which are sold at the weekly market in Cecina and in November with the olive harvest. Accommodation in double room or caravan with own bathroom, heated in the winter. Excellent vegetarian food. Stays of not less that 10 days. No English spoken.

5. Suvereto, 57028, Livorno
We cultivate a small hill farm in Suvereto a few kms form the sea. We produce (not on a commercial level but for our own consumption) olive oil, fruit, vegetables, honey and firewood. We need help mainly with the olive harvest, in the vegetable garden and with clearing the land. Accommodation in room with bathroom, meals eaten together. We speak English, French, Spanish and German.

6. 57024, Donoratico, LI.
We have been cultivating our 7 hectare organic farm since 1972 and have been certified organic (SOT ICEA TOSCANA B 199) since 1993. Our main produce is olive oil and also wine and cereals. Help needed for a month with the olive harvest from 15/10 onwards. Accommodation in an apartment shared with other WWOOFers and meals with the family. Stays of one to two weeks. Some English, French and German spoken.

7. Bibbona, 57020.
6 hectare farm which mainly concentrates on the cultivation of chilli peppers. There is also a vegetable garden, some figs and olives. The farm is certified organic and in 2008 will also be certified bio dynamic. They make sauces and various other products from chillies and vegetables in a workshop on the farm. Help needed in the fields and

workshop. Would like a mother-tongue English speaking WWOOFer or someone who speaks good English. Accommodation in own room with bathroom and kitchen, meals organic and vegetarian.

8. 57022, Castagneto Carducci, LI.

Olive farm in Castagneto Carducci. Help needed with vegetable garden and agricultural work. Beautiful position with views over the sea. M. is an artist and is happy to give art lessons. English and French spoken.

9. Nibbiaia-Rosignano M.mo, 57016, LI.

Family run farm, 10 kms south of Livorno and 3 km from the sea, at Quercianella and 2 kms from Nibbiaia. Vegetable garden, fruit orchard and 750 olive trees. We do not take WWOOFers from June to September. The olive harvest is October/November and we work hard for 3-4 days and then have time off. Public transport is minimal but Florence is 1 hour away and Pisa 20 minutes by train. We prefer WWOOFers over 30 years old, max two people and prefer couples or friends who are willing to share a double bed.Internet available. Minimum stays 1 week. English, French and Spanish spoken. Meals organic and vegetarian. Accommodation in double room with private bathroom in a warm, comfortable house. Pisa airport or Quercianella Sonnino train station, we collect from the station

10. Suvereto, 57028, Livorno.

This certified organic farm specialises in the cultivation and transformation of herbs, and they also cultivate olives and vegetables for their own use. They also have two horses for manure and riding. It is situated in the countryside km from Suvereto; accommodation in room with bathroom for a period of time suitable to everyone. Meals are mainly vegetarian and organic. A little English and French spoken. Help needed with harvesting wild and cultivated herbs and making products from them in our workshop. Also in the olive grove and for the olive harvest. We need help especially in the spring (transplanting and harvesting wild herbs) and October to December (for the olive harvest) and all year round in the workshop.

11. Populonia, 57025, LI.

This farm is situated in the Etruscan Gulf of Baratti in Tuscany, in a very important archeological area. The main aim of the farm is to develop agriculture based on human wellbeing and recuperating ancient skills. The farm specialises in the cultivation of Italian Cannabis Sativa, flax, arundo donax and other perennial species. The farm is the headquarters of the "C. C. Centre" association which is concerned with environmental awareness and evaluation and hold regular workshops and seminars and offers an introduction to the Etruscan world. The farm is also an ethnic-botanical operation and produces gastronomic specialities based on flax and cannabis. The Country Communication Centre works to rediscover traditional weaving techniques and it is possible to study these techniques here and take part in the summer workshops (from June to October) in mud hut (adobe) building. A part of the land has been left fallow for several years and is now 'virgin ground' where many indigenous herbs and plants have grown. Accommodation in tent or mud hut from May to November. English spoken.

UMBRIA (divided into provinces)

PERUGIA

1. Passignano sul Trasimeno, 06065, Perugia.

This co-operative was established in '76 and they have 162 ha of land of which 133 are woodland, there is an olive grove of 12 ha with an olive press on the farm, a small fruit orchard with heirloom varieties, a vegetable garden with herbs, and the rest is pasture for sheep, goats and cattle.

WWOOFers are mainly involved in the agricultural side. The production is organic and certified. The co-operative also runs a farm school and an environmental education centre where they hold educational, productive, informative programmes on social agriculture.

2. 06055 Marsciano, PG.

This is an old convent which has been been restored and is surrounded by a mediaeval garden with antique plants and roses. It is surrounded by 36 hectares of hills where we cultivate 1200 olive trees, wheat, barley and sunflowers. Our main produce is DOP extra virgin olive oil. During the pruning and harvesting of olives (March/April & November/December) we can accommodate 4 people. During the rest of the year, we need help from 2 people with the vegetable garden, and in the less busy periods, to clear paths and care for the roses. Meals made mainly with home grown produce. Accommodation is in a double room with bathroom or an apartment in a neighbouring house. A little English and French spoken.

3. Spello, 06038, Perugia

On the train line between Florence and Rome and just minutes off the superstrada is the medieval walled town of Spello and our very small farm located within the centro storico. We grow medicinal and culinary herbs for market, run a small composting project, and create and maintain sustainable gardens for neighbours. We maintain a small olive grove just outside our town and sold our olive oil for the first time this year. Our long-term goal is to be self-sufficient, a model for city farms feeding cities. We need help with everything from seeding to weeding, digging and sorting compost. English spoken. We are ovo-lacto vegetarians.

4. Pontedassi, Gubbio, Perugia.

This farm and spiritual retreat centre has been run organically for over 10 years and is situated in the hills 6 km from Gubbio. B. and I., 2 kids, 3 cows, 9 goats, 1 dog and 2 cats look after the veg. garden. We welcome people who want to help and learn about natural agricultural methods and permaculture in the vegetable garden, We also have 4 horses, 2 lakes, woodland, fruit and olive trees. garden, planting and pruning trees, maintaining roads, creating paths and other tasks. Help is also sometimes needed in the agritourism, which holds spiritual retreats from March to October. Accommodation in room or tent. Meals are Sattwic and vegetarian. No smoking. No alcohol. English, French and Spanish spoken.

5. 06063 Magione, PG.

A. and A. (the 5 children have left home) live in a large house in the hills near Lake Trasimeno (16 km from Perugia). The 10 hectare farm (mainly olives, 5 sheep, chickens, vegetable garden, greenhouse, pasture and woodland) provides suitable surroundings and a family environment for young people who come from Germany for a year to experience various activities (woodwork in a well-equipped workshop, bread making, building, home economics, gardening etc.) as a pre-apprenticeship or professional orientation (visit web site). Help needed with olive harvest, grass cutting, in the pasture, with fences and pruning the olives and fruit trees (mainly during the winter months). French, English and German spoken.

6. 06029 Valfabbrica, PG.

Small 6 ha organic farm which was started in 1991. Situated at an altitude of 670 m in the Umbrian Appenines, near Assisi, Gubbio and Perugia (18-35 km). Cultivate cereals, forage crops, legumes, vegetables, herbs & fruit for own use and for the animals, 2 cows, calves, sheep, a horse, pigs, chickens, bees, cats and dogs... We are a large family and run the farm as a social project and host adolescents from abroad to help them learn and integrate. We are happy to accommodate anyone who would like to help with the varied jobs on the farm, in the textile workshop (we make felt from the sheep's wool), natural dying and in the house. Accommodation in wooden house for 2 people. Meals mainly vegetarian, no smoking in the house. People of all ages from all over the world are welcome. Minimum stay 2 weeks. We can tell our life story in English, French and German. **7. 06026**

Pietralunga, PG.
This is a centre which offers hospitality to groups for yoga and meditation, and to people who are looking for a peaceful holiday or retreat. It is situated in a sparsely populated area. Part of our activities include a centre dedicated to J. Krishnamurti. Help is required maintaining the area around the house, lawns and flower beds. We are creating a net of paths starting from the house and this require some maintenance. Accommodation is in room or in a tent (when there are a lot of people in the house). Minimum stay of two weeks or longer. Meals vegetarian and mainly organic. No smoking in the house. English, French and Spanish spoken.

8. 06040 Vallo di Nera, PG.
We're A. (44), D. (34), and B. (3), living on 22 hectares including organic olives, wine grapes, extensive orchards, woods, pastures with horses, donkey, milk goats, poultry. We are interested in permaculture and forest gardening , green building, edible wild plants, medicinal herbs, local traditions. Our 2011 projects include building a straw bale poultry-house, tending a large vegetable garden, running a tiny *agriturismo*, stonewall construction, increasing our collections of heritage-variety and rare fruits (we have 350 different varieties of apples!). Work for WWOOFers includes cutting-stacking firewood, planting trees, fencing, helping in the fields, irrigating, spreading manure and harvesting fruit. We prefer hosting people who are strongly motivated to learn about sustainable agriculture. Help with the *agriturismo* and childcare is not generally asked of WWOOFers, though it may be possible if you are interested. Accommodation in our house (or your tent if you prefer), meals mainly vegetarian, and organic when possible. Maximum 6 people, unable to accommodate children. Preferred minimum stay 1 week. English and Spanish spoken.

9. 06029 Perugia.
30 hectare farm situated at an altitude of 600 m between Assisi (18 km away), Gubbio (23 km) and Perugia (30 km), which is completely organic. Help needed with the cultivation of 10 hectares of cereal crops and legumes, the woodland, maintenance of paths, in the vegetable garden and fruit orchard, making jams and preserves, harvesting and distilling flowers (rose, broom, lavender etc.). We run courses in Italian cuisine and French. A large restored house with a bedroom (for 2) and own bathroom is available for WWOOFers. Minimum stay of 15 days. We speak excellent French and some English..

10. Umbertide, 06019, Perugia,
Small agritourism and teaching farm. Run by A. & T., two ex teachers, A. & E.. They also have chickens, dogs, cats and tortoises. The jobs in spring and autumn that WWOOFers can help with are caring for the garden and vegetable garden, harvesting fruit, making jam. looking after the animals, in the kitchen, with the Aloe they cultivate Aloe) and with workshops for the children. Obviously jobs vary according to time of year. They speak English, Spanish. Russian and Latvian.

11. 06020 Scritto, PG.
20 hectare organic farm/open house in the hills 10 km from Gubbio. Very simple lifestyle, bring sleeping bag, long stays possible. We breed Camargue horses and Sardinian donkeys, and keep milk sheep, hens, ducks, cats & dogs. Pasture, woods, olives, vines, vegetable gardens fruit. Work: gardening, clearing pasture, cleaning stables, fencing, harvesting, jam-making, working on firewood. English, Swiss German & French spoken. Big library, piano, active part of the Sentiero Bioregionale network and local barter group.

12. 06062 Città della Pieve, PG.
A vegetarian family of four (children who are not always at home) run this farm and agritourism. We produce, on 5 hectares, olive oil, honey, fruit juices, jams, vegetable stock cubes, cheese, herbs, vegetables (for the house), eggs and table olives. We have friendly animals: dogs, cats, 10 sheep, chickens and bees. We also have a kitchen/workshop for the

preparation of conserves etc. and a carpentry workshop, and often bake bread and pizza in our wood oven. We are situated near a wood in a completely isolated spot 2 km from the mediaeval town of Città della Pieve. Meals (vegetarian) are mainly organic using our own produce. Stays of longer periods possible. Accommodation in straw bale house in summer, apartment (if available) or in the house. A little English and French spoken.

13. Spello, 06038, Perugia.

We are a family and on this small farm and agritourism (6 has) we produce nearly all the food which we need for ourselves and our agritourism. Olive oil, wine, vegetables, and thanks to our sheep and cow Milly, milk and cheese. Our main project at the moment is to plant a permaculture orchard & vegetable garden of 2000 mt. Accommodation for single or couples in a double room with bathroom and three meals a day in exchange for a hand with the many activities on the farm for 5 days a week. We speak English, Spanish and Japanese. We can collect from Spello, Assisi or Foligno station or from Perugia airport.

14. 06024 Gubbio PG.

Certified (AIAB) 30 hectare organic farm and agritourism at an altitude of 660 m in the Umbrian hills 15 km from Gubbio and 27 km from Perugia and 30 km from Assisi. The land is partly woodland and partly cultivated with cereal crops, olive and fruit trees, a large vegetable garden and we have bees. We make jams, bread and cakes and cultivate a large garden with vegetable and flowers. Accommodation in room with bathroom or apartment, we are vegetarian, meals with the family. Help needed on the farm all year round. English, French and Spanish spoken.

15. 06080 Assisi, PG.

We are a young couple who run this agritourism with 16 hectares of land at an altitude of 500 m in the hills (7 km from Assisi). We have 6 hectares of olive grove which produces organic extra virgin olive oil. WWOOFers needed to help with general maintenance jobs, in the garden, the synergic vegetable garden, pruning and harvesting the olives. This year we intend to expand the synergic vegetable garden and garden. Accommodation in our house, we have a child (1 year). Meals mainly vegetarian and organic. We speak good English and German.

16. Città di Castello. PG.

A certified organic farm & agritourism with 3 hectares of olives, 2 h. of forage crops, fruit trees and vegetable garden and 1 h. of pine forest. Free range pigs, sheep, goats,chickens, geese, 2 cats and 2 dogs. Help needed with care and pruning of olives, in vegetable garden & with the animals, also in the kitchen and with guests if you like this work. Family consists of S. (37), A. (40), R. (8) & N. (5) and together they run the farm and enjoy sharing their house and work with others. Help needed from 1-2 people for a minimum of 15 days. Meals can be vegetarian, accommodation in own room with bathroom, English and Spanish spoken.

17. 06029 Valfabbrica, PG.

120 hectare farm on a hill at 500 m above sea level. 100 hectares are completely organic, and we cultivate wheat, spelt, barley, maize and oats. We practice crop rotation so therefore only 30-40 hectares are cultivated every year. There is also pasture and woodland. We have 400 Sardinian milk sheep, 6 horses, chickens, turkeys, dogs and cats. We make pecorino and ricotta cheese and also produce olive oil. We also make textiles (we have an antique loom with 8 heddles and pedals) and practise shiatsu massage. Accommodation is in a double room, minimum stays of two weeks. We also have a small, family-run agritourism. English, German, French, Finnish and Swedish spoken.

18. San Martino in Trignano 06049 Spoleto.

We have a small family-run bed and breakfast situated 10 kms from Spoleto in a peaceful area at the foot of the Martani mountains. Our family is made up of myself, C., my brother G. and my parents S. & M., my brothers children are also sometimes here and from Springtime on there are also

guests in the B & B. We live in an old house on the outskirts of S. Martino in Trignano. The house is comfortable, and the first floor is for the B & B guests, whilst we live on the ground floor. We have a vegetable garden, garden, vineyard, chickens and some animals all for our own consumption. We have in the past had a plant nursery and seed in our greenhouse using organic seeds and manure. WWOOFers can help for 5-6 hours a day in the greenhouse, with seeding and transplanting, in the vegetable garden, garden, and with small maintenance jobs in the house. In your free time I will be happy to show you around the area. Depending on the time of year accommodation is in the B & B or in our house. Meals eaten together (using our own produce as much as possible) but are not always organic. We have bicycles which you can use. We are very careful not to waste energy or water. Internet available for 1/2 hour a day. WWOOFers with interest in organic and biodynamic cultivation are particularly welcome. A little English, French & Spanish spoken.

19. 06026 Pietralunga (PG).
Family run farm on the Apennine Umbro at 6-700m above sea level. Uncertified but organic, we have sheep, cows, pigs, and we try our best to meet all their needs. We cultivate wheat and cereal crops and have a vegetable garden. we make cheese and cure the animals skins to make slippers, toys etc. We have bought a small house on the land we cultivate and are making it habitable with minimum intervention. Jobs for WWOOFers vary from season to season but are in the vegetable garden, caring for the animals, maintaining walls and some handcraft work. We have two children of 16 & 18 who help us. Accommodation in room, or in the summer in a tent for whoever prefers. Meals made mainly with our produce or produce exchanged with friends, sometimes the food we buy is not organic. We are happy to accommodate children, some English spoken.

20. San Biagio della Valle, (Perugia).
Agritourism and farm where we cultivate organically 60 hectares of land seeded in rotation with cereals, legumes & forage crops in fields which are flanked by 100 hectares of woodland. The various grains are milled on the farm using a stone mill to produce various types of flour. WWOOFers needed to help in the organic garden, to mill cereals, to press sunflower oil, etc. Also to maintain the woodland for visitors, clearing paths, enlarging straw bale huts in the woods, etc. Stays of at least a month, accommodation in room with bathroom (one double room / couple preferred) and meals using mainly farm products. Yoga twice a week, folk dance once. Piano in the dining room. English and French spoken.

21. Tuoro, (PG).
Small organic farm with a large house and 3 has of land situated very near Lake Trasimeno between the towns of Tuoro and Passignano. I and a friend have moved very recently to this farm which has been abandoned for a long time but which offers with its fields and large house the possibility to do many things, including a vegetable garden (which we have started to prepare), a fruit orchard and chicken run etc. Soon a donkey, horse, dog and other animals will be coming to join us. We need your help with varied jobs and your ideas! The house is near to Perugia and is easily reachable by train, there is also a bicycle which you can use. English and French spoken.