

"WHY FARMERS MARKETS?" VIDEO

DIGGING IN: FACILITATING DIALOGUE AND ACTION

KEY THEMES AND TERMS

Farmers market, connections, community, organic food, organics certification, local food movement, self-sufficiency, canning, pickling, agroforestry farm, ecosystem management, francophone, anglophone

CATALYZING CONNECTIONS

DECODING QUESTIONS

- *Description:* What do you see/hear/feel while watching the video?
- *Personal Connection:* How does this story connect to your personal experience with markets?
- *Common Themes:* What are the social issues/themes that emerge from our personal stories? Is there a common issue that is shared among us?
- *Social Analysis:* How did this come to be? What are the historical and social processes that created this situation?
- *Planning for Action:* What can be done? What can we do?

SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

1) Values of farmers markets

- Dianne's suggests that "connections" is what farmers markets are about. What different kinds of connections are nurtured in markets?
- In your discussion, consider these quotes:
 - Dianne: "For me, it's not so much a way to make money. It's your community. The last two years a lot of people have said "thank you so much for doing this!" That kind of appreciation just fuels you, keeps you going."
 - Anna: "When I think back to Riverdale market, definitely that community feeling. That's what I wanted to recreate here and I think we've succeeded with that."
 - Marc (francophone farmer): "Farmers markets are important: there's a great exchange between farmers and customers. If they want to ask questions about the way we grow, they get a glimpse of what it is to be a farmer, our daily life."

- If there is a farmers market in your area, what would they say are the most important connections?

2) Accessibility

- The farmers and the consumers in the farmers markets shown in the video represent a primarily white population, raising the question of access and affordability. In Toronto, for example, there are farmers markets that engage racialized communities, but many markets remain a privileged site. Visit one of the Good Food Markets organized by FoodShare in areas considered food deserts and evidence of environmental racism (<https://foodshare.net/program/markets/>). Research anti-racism strategies within the local food movement (<https://foodshare.net/2018/11/05/dismantling-racism-food-movement/>).

3) The organic debate

a) Certified organic or not

- Anna: "It's more kind of expected that it's organic here. It's not a big deal because we're selling to local people. For the older people, when you say 'organic' they say 'oh, the way we've always grown it.'"
- For some farmers and consumers, it is not important if their organic produce is certified. It may be assumed, or it may also be too expensive a procedure. However, some markets require certification and consumers will often look for that as well. Investigate a market near you: what does the market management require? What are farmers doing? What do consumers look for?

b) Urban vs. rural markets

- Consider these comments:
 - Anna: "Definitely the debate is how accessible is organic food. In the city it can be extremely expensive and before you know it your pockets are empty and you don't have that much to show for it."
 - Anna also says: "Here I find the prices are a little more reasonable. We don't have city prices here, and...we have a lot of local people coming to buy their beans or potatoes, food for the community. We don't make a big deal out of being organic. It's just that we're selling real food."
- What might be some of the differences between farmers' markets in the city and in rural communities?
- What can we learn from the bartering practices that are being revived in Indigenous communities and in other communities who are facing limited food access? See also in commentary by Mexican collaborators.

c) Spending priorities

- Anna: “It seems like organic food is only accessible to people who either have a lot of money or put a lot of importance on what they’re eating. So maybe you’re not buying a lot of things, but you’re spending money on food because you want to eat good food, and maybe not spending it elsewhere.”
- Look at your monthly budget and calculate how much you or your family spends on food. Next calculate how much is spent on other necessities (housing, etc) and on telecommunications and entertainment (cell phone, internet, TV, etc).
- In “The High Cost of Cheap Food” (see reference below), Wayne Roberts, suggests that we have become accustomed to cheap food, prices that don’t take into account the full costs (labour and workers’ health, environmental degradation from industrial agricultural practices, fossil fuels for transport, etc). How do your other needs and priorities affect your food spending?

4) Reconnecting growing, buying, cooking and sharing food

- Dianne: “I think that’s the whole secret to good health, really, to connect people with their food. Elizabeth always said that I was her farmer, not only me but all kinds of other people. When you sat down to dinner at Elizabeth’s table, she knew individually the person who produced everything on the table. So what a great thing to start the meal: so and so grew this, Kirt grew that, and this comes from Prince Edward County and so forth. So it forms a community really.”
- In what ways have we become disconnected from the food cycle? What do you know about the people who have grown the food that you eat?

Hands-On Activities:

Visit a local farmers market: have a conversation with the farmers about their production practices and their produce. Compare the prices of vegetables there with the prices of the same vegetables in a local supermarket. Observe the other community-building activities in the market.

Better yet, arrange to visit one of the farms represented at the market. Some farms have CSAs, or Community Shared Agriculture programs, which can provide you with weekly boxes of seasonal produce, and sometimes offer an opportunity to volunteer.

Organize a potluck dinner with friends each bringing a dish for which they have researched the origins (who grew it, how was it produced and distributed, etc). Share those stories before eating.

INTERGENERATIONAL AND INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

- 1) Passing on knowledge from generation to generation

Anna is the living legacy for three people who have taught her over the years about food: her father John who sparked her interest in growing food as well as composting, her mentor Dianne who taught her to raise animals and do market gardening, and her mother Elizabeth who taught her to organize markets, cook large meals, and gather family and community around the table to enjoy food.

Who has taught you about these different aspects of food, from earth to table? What factors have made it less common for this knowledge to be shared across generations?

In the historical TV footage in the video, you see a young Anna learning how to make bread. She continues to make bread, but has also taught her kids to bake with her.

2) Intercultural differences

- a) Christian Besnier is one of the Francophone farmers in the farmers market in the Gaspé. His approach to farming, ecosystem management, involves stewardship of the habitats of all living things and the interrelation of forest and field.
- b) You may have noticed a Mexican visitor to the Bracebridge market. Fernando Garcia is another collaborator in the Legacies Project, who also learned organic farming from Dianne, when he came from Mexico for a season in the early 2000s. Organic certification processes vary from country to country; standards in Mexico are shaped by North American demand for the agroexport of Mexican produce (www.ccof.org/certification/services/international-programs/mexico).
- c) There is quite a difference between the availability of fresh fruit and vegetables in Canada and Mexico, given the differences in climate and growing seasons. Discuss the idea of eating seasonally, and the difference in taste between vegetables and fruit imported from Mexico and those grown locally.

INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

Marina concludes: "There's still a disconnect between the idea of local food and really committing to local food." What are the structural obstacles that keep people from committing to local food?

Seek out associations or groups (some listed below) that are organizing around farmers' markets and or organic eating. What are their positions? What models can you find that make organic food more accessible to people with low income?

DIGGING DEEPER: RESOURCES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH AND ACTION

VIDEOS

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Farmers Markets Canada. "Associations - Farmers Markets Canada." Accessed June 24, 2020. <http://www.farmersmarketscanada.ca/Links.cfm>.

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