AGAINST THE GRAIN:

COLLECTIVE IDENTITY AND

THE GRASSFED LIVESTOCK MOVEMENT IN

OKLAHOMA

By

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Abstract: Social scholars have given consideration to many aspects of the alternative agrifood system, but overall they have not engaged the emergent pasture-based, or grassfed, livestock movement. This shortcoming is addressed here by drawing on social movement and agrifood scholarship to examine how grassfed livestock enterprises function within local food systems in Oklahoma. Data for this research consist of in-depth interviews conducted with 31 Oklahoman grassfed producers raising cattle, poultry, and/or hogs. Interviews were coded and analyzed using a grounded approach. Results center on how grassfed ranchers' motivations, values, and agricultural techniques contribute to the creation and maintenance of a collective grassfed identity. Also considered are the roles grassfed producers play in local food systems and the tactics they utilize to navigate the agricultural regulatory environment.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the last forty years, scholars and activists have focused on better understanding food and farming systems in both local and global contexts. Interest in food production stems from concerns surrounding conventional agricultural processes as well as the legitimation of alternative food movements by mainstream audiences. Food and farming concerns have become mainstream topics in academia and the popular media alike, due in part to bestselling journalistic works like Fast Food Nation (Schlosser 2005), the Omnivore's Dilemma (Pollan 2007), and Food Politics (Nestle 2007), as well as the work of an increasingly-interdisciplinary group of scholars, resulting in the creation of the new field of agrifood studies (Hinrichs and Lyson 2009; Carolan 2012). A central facet of this field is the study of the alternative agrifood (AAF) movement, which is defined by Hassanein as "the social activity of sustainable agriculturalists, local food advocates, environmentalists, food security activists, and others who are working to bring about changes at a variety of different levels of the agro-food system" (2003:80). Researchers have addressed several facets of the AAF movement, including conventionalization of organic farming systems (Guthman 2004a), defensive strategies used to promote local agriculture (Winter 2003), and increasing power of consumer demand in alternative food systems (Marsden, Banks, and Brostow 2000).

A primary element of the AAF movement is concerned with the production of livestock. Actors concerned with animal welfare and food safety have organized to protest against

industrialized forms of animal agriculture, including confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs) and large-scale processing facilities (Constance and Bonanno 1999). Other AAF activists have spoken out against the negative environmental impacts on watersheds and rural air quality from some factory farms (Marks 2001), as well as the overall implications livestock have on the global climate (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations 2006). Associated with these concerns, a pragmatic group of alternatively-focused producers have begun to use unconventional methods to raise livestock in ways that aim to protect the environment and animal welfare and to engage directly with local consumers (Weber, Heinze, and DeSoucey 2008). These producers eschew modern feedlot models of livestock production in favor of grass-and-pasture-based models to raise cattle, hogs, and poultry for consumption. In light of recent outbreaks of several livestock-related food-borne illnesses, these producers have received more attention from the media and popular authors (Schlosser and Kenner 2009).

Factions of the AAF are growing in popularity and power, and are beginning to receive attention from social movement scholars. Some studies have utilized social movement theories to address issues of framing and the cooptation of AAF movement narratives (Adams and Shriver 2010) and to discuss the merits and characteristics of various AAF factions (Lyson 2004). Other authors have highlighted the importance of collective identity formation in agricultural contexts, including preserving regional authenticity through the consumption of traditional foods in France (Bessiere 1998), meaning creation through the enforcement of organic farming practices in Denmark (Alroe and Noe 2008), and the prevalence of farmer protest participation as a function of successful identity formation in Spain and the Netherlands (Klandermans 2002). However, there has been little scholarly attention paid by social movement researchers to the group of AAF producers working in the United States to raise livestock outside of the conventional marketplace.

For this project, I engaged in participatory observation and conducted semi-structured interviews with 31 grassfed producers in Oklahoma during the fall of 2012. Interviews addressed individual as well as structural factors relating to the dynamics of grassfed operations and their

influences on local food systems in Oklahoma. Conversations were audio-recorded, transcribed and analyzed using a three-step inductive grounded theory approach. Employing a social movement framework with special attention to literatures on collectively identity, my work addresses gaps in the growing body of literature on alternative food movements generally and the emergent grassfed livestock movement specifically. How are grassfed producers constructing movement grievances and creating a collective identity through their agricultural products and practices? In what ways are grassfed farmers influencing local food systems in Oklahoma?

Throughout this manuscript, I address how grassfed livestock producers are engaging in "identity work" to create a collective identity as "grassfarmers" through their agricultural products and practices and consider how grassfed producers are prioritizing cultural aspects of agricultural production (Snow and McAdam 2000). Additionally, I discuss how grassfed producers are utilizing informal protest techniques via "submerged networks" to organize within and influence local food systems in Oklahoma (Melucci 1996). My research contributes to the social movement literature by offering an in-depth examination of how the grassfed movement in Oklahoma is utilizing cultural protest and collective identity to pursue change in agricultural systems. Additionally, this study contributes to the growing agrifood studies literature by providing a detailed analysis of how grassfed producers are shaping local food systems in Oklahoma, and specifically how they are redefining the producer/consumer relationship.

In the next chapter, I review several literatures pertinent to my study. I begin with an overview of previous literature on the AAF movement, particularly addressing the emergence of the grassfed livestock movement and drawing comparisons between grassfed producers and conventional livestock ranchers in order to highlight the characteristics of grassfed production systems. In the second part of Chapter II, I address collective identity theories and the nature of submerged networks. In Chapter III, I provide an explanation of the research methods and data collection process. Chapter IV offers analysis and discussion of boundary formation and narrative construction within the grassfed movement and examples of how grassfed producers

internalize and prioritize cultural values over rational self-interest. Chapter V gives an explanation of the creation of collective identity in the grassfed movement, as well as findings regarding strategies and tactics used by the movement for promoting change. Chapter VI provides further discussion of grassfed farming in relation to food systems in Oklahoma. Finally, Chapter VII offers conclusions and suggestions for future study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This project draws theoretical grounding from two bodies of literature: agrifood studies and social movement scholarship. While these areas are not explicitly related, scholars from both disciplines offer complementary theoretical resources. Within the agrifood studies literature, two phenomena have captured the most attention from scholars: the expansion of organic and other certification processes, and the proliferation of local food and farming tactics. I will begin with a review of the central processes associated with both issues in order to contextualize the contemporary agricultural environment and to explain the processes occurring within the grassfed livestock movement in Oklahoma. Then I will offer a comparative overview of conventional and grassfed agricultural methods. Next, I will clarify the differences between resource-based and culturally-focused social movements, and how culturally-motivated social movements utilize informal protest methods to pursue change via submerged networks. Finally, I will address the importance of collective identity processes within social movement literatures and its impacts on movement structure and mobilization.

The Alternative Agrifood Movement

The AAF movement is made up of several progressively-oriented movements, including the modern environmental movement, the animal welfare movement, the environmental justice movement, the alternative/holistic health movement, and various other food-centric movements.

In the industrialized West, the AAF movement has existed for well over a century, embodied by the health food activities of the Grahmites during the early 19th Century (Haydu 2011), the populist farmer policies of the Grange throughout the mid-to-late 19th Century (Schneiberg, King, and Smith 2008), and the publications of organic farming advocates Rodale, Howard, and Steiner in the early 20th Century (Conford 2001). In the US, the early AAF movement first gained traction as a mainstream faction during the social and political upheaval of the 1960s, when the interests of New Left and counterculture activists began to converge (Belasco 2007). Concerns over modernization, the increasing power of agribusinesses, and the impacts of technology on various aspects of Western life became manifest in the environmental movement's push for reduced agricultural pesticide use (Carson 1964), the health food movement's implementation of communal food and gardening initiatives (DuPuis and Goodman 2005), and the organic movement's pursuit of smaller-scale, sustainable agricultural methods (Lyson 2004). Two major shifts have occurred within the AAF movement over the last 50 years: the expansion of certification schemes, and the proliferation of local food systems. I address these shifts here to provide context for the changing nature of the AAF movement and to highlight these processes later within the grassfed movement in Oklahoma. I end this segment of the literature review with a comparative discussion of conventional versus grassfed livestock models.

Certification Schemes: Conventionalization and Co-optation

Once the organic movement and its philosophies gained attention from mainstream sources during the 1980s and 1990s, the direction of organic agriculture changed dramatically. Rising concern over food safety and public health, along with an increasing demand for quality and niche food products, created more demand for organic foods among consumers (Guthman 2004a). Concurrently, the passage of the Organic Food Production Act of 1990 and the establishment of the National Organic Standards Board set the first legal standards for organic production in the US, and allowed for larger producers to gain entry into organic agriculture

(Gottlieb and Joshi 2010). The combination of demand and simplified organic standards resulted in the expansion of organics from $1 billion in domestic sales in 1990 to $31.5 billion in domestic sales in 2011 (Organic Trade Association 2011). Accordingly, the formal codification of organic standards and the verification of agricultural practices have become central concerns for AAF movement actors.

While many researchers expound the benefits of transitioning to organic production systems, others object to the conventionalization of organic processes. The conventionalization process involves large producers entering the organic market and utilizing capital as a method of bypassing some of the tenets of organic production such as chemical-free pest control, diversified crop rotation systems, and the promotion of fair labor practices and other social justice causes (Buck, Getz, and Guthman 1997). This is exemplified by agribusinesses establishing large monocultures of organic products and substituting man-made inputs for natural ecological controls (Guthman 2004a). Researchers claim this leads to the bifurcation of the organic marketplace into two types of producers: smaller producers that adhere to more traditional organic prescriptions and operate within local markets; and larger producers that use input substitution and globalized commodity chains to produce organic products (Carolan 2012).

While economic opportunity is partly responsible for these dynamics, others identify the development of national and international certification programs as the catalyst that propelled agribusiness into organics (Lockie and Halpin 2005). Some claim that regulation schemes cater to agribusiness interests by removing some of the harder to actualize tenets of organic agriculture, like social justice and polycultural cultivation, thus resulting in organic models that emulate conventional agriculture (Guthman 1998; Tovey 1997). Others dismiss these critiques, stating that government and third-party backed regulation and certification standards create an equal plane for all participants, enabling smaller producers and larger producers to play by the same set of rules (Constance 2008). Still, others rebut these statements and claim that certification schemes force smaller producers to compete with agribusiness, pushing them into a treadmill-like

system where standards are out of reach (Guthman 2004b). As a result, some producers have elected to forgo organic certification and use other terms that have not yet undergone certification, such as "natural" or "biodynamic," to label their products (Guthman 2004a; Tovey 2002).

Local Food Systems: Elitism and Defensive Localism

As corporate interests have entered into the AAF marketplace, certain movement actors have thrown their support behind localized agricultural systems in an attempt to retain "food and agricultural sovereignty" (Guthman 2004a). Local food schemes, while always existing in various forms, have grown since the expansion of corporate organic agriculture (Belasco 2007). The sales from farmers markets, community supported agriculture (CSA) programs, and other local marketing formats have increased from $551 million in1997 to $1.2 billion in 2007 (Economic Reporting Service 2010). With the expansion of local food systems has come the emergence of the complementary concepts of short food supply chains (SFSCs) and economic embeddedness. Both concepts emphasize the inherent social relations underlying economic transactions and the importance of building trust through producer-consumer interactions (Winter 2003; Murdoch, Marsden, and Banks 2000). Local food scholars suggest that through direct purchasing and economic embeddedness, SFSCs reduce the social and spatial barriers of conventional food systems and imbue products and processes of food production with value and meaning. This creates new and powerful social connections between producer and consumer, and builds stronger food systems and communities (Marsden et.al. 2000). As an extension of this concept, some scholars identify alternative certification schemes and consumer cooperatives as methods of lengthening SFSCs (Renting and Marsden 2003). These alternative labels are seen as legitimated processes that convey the trust and values of such a localized producer-consumer connection, but at a greater geographic and social distance.

Direct marketing initiatives are the primary mechanisms through which local food systems shorten food supply chains to connect producers and consumers and achieve economic embeddedness (Winter 2003; Gottlieb and Joshi 2010). Initiatives such as farmer's markets, farm-to-school programs, and CSA memberships all have common goals of bypassing middle men and selling products directly to the consumer (Renting, Marsden, and Banks 2003). In addition to the abovementioned production schemes, others equate local food systems with concepts of quality or value-added production paradigms, sometimes with the overarching goal of increasing profits (Marsden et.al. 2000). This has led to many different types of producer-initiated branding programs that aim to capture niche markets and secure a greater economic return for their products (Winter 2003).

The proliferation of local food systems has sparked concern about accessibility and sustainability by some, causing the movement to be accused of elitism and defensive marketing practices. Scholars are questioning the reasoning of some local food proponents, accusing them of having fallen into the "local trap" (Born and Purcell 2006). They suggest that some advocates of local food unfairly assume that the local is inherently more ecologically friendly, healthier or of higher quality, or more beneficial to communities and economies. In contrast, conventional models are portrayed as the epitome of globalization and capitalist exploitation. This creates a global-local binary that some claim is detrimental to the local food movement's future (Hinrichs 2003). Opponents say through exaggerating the proposed benefits of local food, local food advocates have become "defensive" and "unreflexive," blinded by utopian visions of an idealized alternative food system (DuPuis and Goodman 2005).

Similar to the organic food movement, others criticize local food models for catering to a wealthier, elite demographic that can afford to pay higher prices for niche items such as local, organic foods (Hinrichs and Kremer 2002; DuPuis and Goodman 2005). Others address the geographic inequalities inherent in many local food schemes (Niles and Roff 2008). Still, other scholars are concerned with the consumerist turn that alternative agricultural models have taken.

They worry that encouraging democratic consumption and individual actions discourages political action to change food systems (Niles and Roff 2008; Carolan 2012). Producers have also levied critiques of emerging local food systems, stating that some direct marketing techniques are economically unreliable, unevenly distributed across spatial and socioeconomic planes, or unable to satisfy consumer demand (Hinrichs and Allen 2008). For a growing discontented faction, the local food movement appears to shut out or price out struggling consumers and producers in favor of wealthier, elite demographic, leaving those lacking socioeconomic power without access (Hinrichs 2000).

Livestock Agriculture: Conventional versus Grassfed Models

Straddling the ongoing debates concerning organic and local food and farming systems is another central theme beginning to emerge from the contemporary AAF movement: the question of sustainable livestock agriculture. Facets of this theme concern the welfare of conventionally-raised livestock (Kirby 2010), the safety of products produced by conventional livestock systems (Gurian-Sherman 2008), the environmental impact of large-scale livestock facilities (Constance and Bonanno 1999), and the socio-economic implications of increasing corporate consolidation in the livestock industry (Hendrickson and Heffernan 2007; Lobao and Stofferahn 2008; Hinrichs and Welsh 2003). The AAF movement has been instrumental in using formal social movement activities to tighten environmental and animal welfare regulations on CAFOs and hold corporate agribusinesses responsible for the environmental damages some of these facilities have caused (Ladd and Edward 2002; Stretesky, Johnston, and Arney 2003). Previous movement strategies have relied on the use of litigation to force changes in Federal and state legislation, and have enlisted the help of scientists and other experts to lend legitimacy to the movement's grievances (Pew Charitable Trust 2008). A smaller group of activists have taken more radical action by posing as employees to infiltrate livestock facilities to secretly document and later publicize violations occurring within factory farms and slaughterhouses (Nocera 2008). Many others

protest conventional livestock operations in a more individualized, but no less effective manner, by politicizing their dietary and lifestyle choices (Adams 2010; Carman 2012).

At the fringes of these prominent movement activities exists a set of farmers and ranchers employing another individualized type of protest, utilizing production methods that run counter to conventional feedlot models. These grassfed producers rely on grass-based grazing methods to raise livestock (Hassanein and Kloppenburg 1995, Nation 2012). This grassfed agriculture, also referred to as pasture-based or rotational-grazing systems, requires that livestock producers feed only grass and grass-based forage products to ruminant animals, such as cattle, goats, and sheep, for their entire life after weaning (United States Department of Agriculture 2007). Although not required by USDA certification, many shun the use of antibiotics, growth hormones, and other chemical and artificial additives on their animals (Gwin 2009). Grassfed producers usually abstain from using synthetic fertilizers and pesticides on their pastures, but do not always obtain organic certification. In contrast to conventional feedlots, grassfed animals are not confined in pens or fed processed grains, but instead allowed to graze at will on pasture forages. During winter months when grass may be scarce, animals are fed other pasture products like hay and silage. For non-ruminant animals raised in pasture-based models, such as hogs and poultry, the grass-based diet is supplemented by various sources of agricultural feedstuffs in order to meet the nutritional needs of the animals (Salatin 1996).

Raising animals on only grass takes much longer than raising an animal on a grain-based diet in a feedlot. It also takes much more space, since animals are required to obtain their own food as it grows from the ground, rather than be fed imported grain at troughs (Riley 2011). Working within these natural limits means raising grassfed livestock is not only a lengthier process, but it yields a much different product. Whereas corn-based diets yield standardized cuts of meat that can be produced year-round, grassfed methods produce meat of various qualities on a more seasonal timeframe. Since grassfed operations are limited by access to land and labor and subject to natural processes, they are almost always smaller in scale than conventional operations

(Gwin 2009). According to their supporters, this enables them to avoid many of the environmental, social, and public health consequences that sometimes accompany conventional feedlots; however, it also limits their potential to reach consumers, enter wholesale and retail markets, and ultimately turn a profit (Weber et. al. 2008).

Grassfed methods challenge the conventional livestock production model in several ways. First, grassfed producers reject the use of grain products to feed their animals, as well as other feed additives commonly used by conventional livestock producers. Second, grassfed producers rely on free-range or intensive grazing systems, rather than confinement systems used in feedlot operations. Third, grassfed producers typically reject the use of growth hormones and antibiotics on their animals. Finally, grassfed producers tend to operate within niche and local markets, selling their products through direct marketing schemes, local grocery stores and restaurants, and farmers markets, rather than through conventional sale barns or corporate agents. Through these methods, grassfed livestock producers contrast dramatically with many conventional livestock operations.

Several grassfed agriculturalists have become de facto leaders within the pastured livestock movement through exposure in various media outlets, most notably Joel Salatin and his Polyface Farm (1996). Other proponents of grassfed livestock like Greg Judy (2008), Jim Gerrish (2010), and Allan Nation (2005) have worked to disseminate the principles and ideas motivating grassfed livestock producers through more farmer-oriented avenues. Grassfed movement narratives and production techniques are spread through mass-marketed books and manuals, regularly-published journals such as the *Stockman Grassfarmer*, and a variety of internet-based instructional videos and webinars. In addition to their authored publications, these well-known movement leaders frequently travel to large cities for interviews and lectures. However, much of the grassfed movement's techniques and ideals are spread through on-farm demonstrations and workshops of various grazing and processing techniques held at movement leaders' as well as

other movement members' farms and ranches. It is through these processes that the broader grassfed movement engages producers with its broader ideals, goals, and grievances.

The grassfed movement has gained the most public attention by protesting specific public health issues, such as concerns about the possible spread of harmful pathogens through processed meat products like "pink slime" (Moss 2009) and the health benefits of consuming unpasteurized dairy products like raw milk (Neuman 2011). Consequently, media outlets have held up grassfed animal products as potential solutions to the alleged ills associated with some conventionally-produced meats and dairy (Purdum 2005; Parker-Pope 2010). This type of media attention has increased the grassfed movement's public exposure, but as a movement they have generally remained outside the formal activist sphere. Unlike other AAF activists that have organized public political campaigns against the sale of genetically-modified foodstuffs (Harmon and Pollack 2012) and the spread of transgenic seed (Moskin 2012), grassfed producers have chosen to focus on establishing their operations and building a customer base. Their actions, although important in terms of social movement development, are qualitatively different from most types of social movement mobilization and protest. As a result, while a handful of academic studies have focused on particular aspects of the grassfed movement, specifically the issues of scaling up grassfed operations (Gwin 2009), knowledge exchange among grassfed producers (Hassanein and Kloppenburg 1995), and the development of grassfed cooperatives (Lozier, Rayburn and Shaw 2004, 2006), for the most part grassfed agriculture has been ignored by sociological researchers. Having provided some context for the AAF movement itself, I now turn to a conceptual and theoretical discussion of the social movement literature informing my study.

Social Movement Frameworks

Social movements have been characterized in countless ways throughout the sociological literature. A working definition distilled from the broader social movement literature describes a social movement as a collective group acting in coordination for or against change (McAdam and

Snow 2010:1; Snow, Soule, and Kriesi 2004; McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996). While this description is helpful in categorizing social activity in terms of effective mobilization or access to resources, it can be limiting when movement activities are less-coordinated politically or economically (Eyerman and Jamison 1991). As a response, some scholars have shifted their focus from how movements mobilize resources or secure political power onto how social movements work to produce and influence culture (Taylor and Whittier 1995; Buechler 2011). This focus on the cultural facets of social movement activity expands the definition of social movements to include groups that lack the structural requirements to implement formalized change-seeking or protest activities (Johnston, Larana, and Gusfield 1994). Melucci (1985) clarifies the culturally-focused definition of social movements by emphasizing the informal conflict collective actors engage in and how they work to break the systemic barriers of the dominant system through establishing group solidarity outside of formal institutions. This cycle of conflict, solidarity, and resistance is the basis of most culturally-focused social movement activity. In the following sections I offer a discussion of the literatures addressing submerged networks and collective identity to better provide a framework for my understanding of these concepts in application to the unique characteristics of the contemporary grassfed movement.

Submerged Networks

Much social movement activity has been analyzed in terms of a group's ability to mobilize resources and attain political power in order to formally implement the changes collective actors seek. The resource mobilization and political process paradigms are the primary theoretical vehicles social movement scholars have employed (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Tilly 1978). These structurally-focused paradigms have been successfully utilized to explore how movements attain the wherewithal and political capital to implement specific changes in formalized institutions. Examples include the American labor movement and the civil rights movement (Buechler 2011).

However, other social movement scholars have criticized resource mobilization and political process approaches for their dismissal of cultural explanations of social movement activity (Buechler 1990, 1995). These critics claim that in some contemporary movements the nature of collective action has changed drastically, taking a symbolic rather than political form (Johnston et. al. 1994). In such movements, mobilization takes place within "movement areas" consisting of groups linked through "submerged networks" that are connected through a common interest in various cultural and identity-focused concepts and conflicts (Melucci 1989:60). Movement groups are diffuse and decentralized, with rotating or non-existent leadership positions and various organizational forms (Melucci 1995:113-4). United by these networks, movement actors and groups begin to form a nebulous social movement, differing structurally from more visible and institutionalized social movements. Scholars have demonstrated that social movements can effectively mobilize issues of identity, values, and culture utilizing cultural critique and other submerged behaviors, rather than tangible resources and formal political avenues, as primary forms of resistance (Cohen 1985; Melucci 1996; Marcus and Fisher 1999; Buechler 2011). In such instances, social movements become less like a campaign intent on capturing the most votes and more like "a sign…signal[ing] a deep transformation in the logic and the processes that guide complex societies" (Melucci 1996:1).

Mobilization through submerged networks utilizes symbolic and cultural codes, rather than overt political action, as the primary form of collective action. Through "cultural protest" behaviors, language, and values become the primary protest activities (Melucci 1989:60-61). Protest can take many shapes including the terminology collective actors use to identify themselves and the spaces they decide to claim and define as their own (Melucci 1996). These types of cultural protests challenge the logic of the dominant systems they seek to change. While movement goals may still be delineated, movement success using this culturally centered model is not usually measured in terms of the political power or resources the movement may accrue, but rather through the impact movement actors can have through non-material factors such as the

recognition of a disenfranchised group or the reclaiming of a previously-derogatory vernacular (Taylor and Whittier 1992; Eder 1993). By linking like-minded actors and groups together through "cultural innovation," rather than focusing on accruing sufficient funds and political tools, submerged networks of protest are subverting the classical methods of movement mobilization and formal change-seeking as well as the dominant systems they seek to change (Levitsky 2007).

The Development of Collective Identity

Central to the effective mobilization of cultural issues is the successful formation and maintenance of a group's collective identity. Previously de-emphasized by the resource mobilization and political process paradigms, collective identity is the centerpiece of the analysis of many newer social movements (Snow 2001; Hunt and Benford 2004). Broadly-defined, collective identity is "the shared definition of a group that derives from members' common interests, experiences, and solidarity" and "connects it to a broader community, category, practice, or institution" (Taylor and Whittier 1992:105; Polletta and Jasper 2001:285). Collective identity is primarily expressed culturally through actions, symbols, and narratives, although not all of these "cultural materials" necessarily express collective identity (Polletta and Jasper 2001:285). By avoiding the "old versus new" debate, scholars have salvaged this key theory from the new social movement paradigm and made it a central component of much social movement work in the past decade (Owens et.al. 2010).

Collective identity is a crucial concept to the analysis and understanding of social movement mobilization for several reasons. First, the concept helps identify why, rather than how, social movement actors come into being. Thus, collective identity helps get at the core motivations individuals have for mobilizing (Polletta and Jasper 2001). Second, in relation to Melucci's concept of submerged networks, collective identity addresses why actors choose to utilize unconventional or non-institutionalized protest tactics instead of more conventional

avenues for seeking change (Taylor and Whittier 1992). Finally, collective identity offers a multi-level framework from which to understand social movement activities. Instead of solely focusing on how a movement uses resources or secures political power, collective identity approaches focus on the micro-level values and beliefs individual social movement actors hold and how those are translated into motivation for social change in relation to the macro-historical context in which they exist (Levitsky 2007). Thus, collective identity is a dynamic concept from which to view and analyze historical and emergent social movements.

Collective identity can be difficult to measure empirically, resulting in the overextension and misuse of the concept in some recent studies (Polletta and Jasper 2001). However, by working to observe practices and discourses within particular social movement communities, researchers can observe the processes through which movement actors conceptualize movement identities and push forward their cultural agendas. Social movement scholars have developed multiple frameworks with which to analyze and dissect collective identity processes (Taylor and Whittier 1992; Taylor and Whittier 1995; Adams and Roscigno 2005; McVeigh, Meyers and Sikkink 2004; Roscigno and Danaher 2001). Generally, these frameworks share three central processes. First, through the formation of "boundaries," a social movement makes evident the differences between opposing groups and establishes "the social territories of group relations" (Taylor and Whittier 1992:111; Gamson 1992: 181). These boundaries work to reject the values of dominant groups while simultaneously creating supporting value-structures or institutions. Second, boundaries take on increased meaning as actors infuse a "consciousness" into their actions (Melucci 1989; Taylor and Whittier 1992). Primarily imparted through narratives, this process involves situating the group's grievances in a macro-historical context, making clear how their discontent relates to "structural, cultural or systemic causes rather than personal failings of individual deviance" (Taylor and Whittier 1992:114). The resulting narratives reinforce the previously-formed boundaries between challenging groups and imbue movement actors with a

collective consciousness that motivates social movement activities and makes clear the movement's interests, grievances, and goals.

The third aspect of collective identity frameworks involves the internalization of group interests through the "politicization of everyday life" (Taylor and Whittier 1992:117; Cohen 1985). In this stage social movement actors blur the line between group and individual actions, thus blurring the distinction between "doing and being" (118). While mobilization tactics can take the form of more traditional protests or rallies, more often movement members choose to use behaviors and cultural aspects from their everyday lives as protest opportunities. Using subversive language, rejecting norms and mores, or choosing a particular food or beverage can all fit under the umbrella of politicized protest. Through the everyday act of "practicing cultural innovation," movement actors are embedding cultural codes in activities ranging from the spectacular, such as massive protests, to the mundane, such as choosing what one's name should be (Melucci 1985:800). Thus, the movement's agenda is furthered by creating identities that reflect the collective's cause.

Through the construction of collective identity, social movements are creating and defining cultural codes which work to construct movement issues and grievances (Snow 2001). Through this framing, collective identity processes work to solidify the motivations of movement actors and impart "cultural toolkits" which can be used to affect social change (Melucci 1989). By creating and politicizing commonplace cultural processes, such as language or eating, movement actors use collective identity to create physical and cultural protest areas in which they actively resist the identified oppositional other (Melucci 1995; Adams and Roscigno 2005). It is within these areas, not formal political arenas, that collective actors actively create "cultural laboratories" in which they "self-consciously practice in the present the future changes they seek" (Melucci 1989:18). This turns the movement's goals towards changing the everyday life of its members, in addition to the structural system in which it exists (Taylor and Whittier 1992; Pizzorno 1978). Accordingly, this is a very different type of social movement activity, and one

that is increasingly important in a contemporary society where individuals are aligning based on specific cultural, rather than material, concerns (Taylor and Whittier 1992).

Analytical Framework

In this work, I provide an analysis of attitudes, grievances and actions leading to a collective grassfed producer identity and consider the mechanisms through which this cultural movement influences local Oklahoma food systems. The grassfed movement represents a group of alternatively-minded livestock producers concerned with the current state of conventional agriculture. Through the employment of grass-based grazing systems and localized economic transactions, they attempt to raise livestock in ways they identify as healthier, more humane, and less-conventionalized. They also strive to embed their businesses into the local economies in which they operate. The actions grassfed producers take are examples of the manifestation of submerged networks and an emerging cultural movement. Grassfed producers organize outside of formal institutions, avoid centralized leadership structures, and prioritize the cultural aspects of their agricultural operations in accordance with broader movement narratives. The development of a collective identity among grassfed farmers is important to the perpetuation of the movement because it works to establish solidarity among a disparate group of producers and unites them under a common cause. Collective grassfed identity formation is important to understand because, if successful, it has the potential to forge a stronger social grassfed movement, which could then have a larger influence on local food systems in Oklahoma, and even inspire grassfed mobilization in other areas of the country. With these concepts in mind, I now turn to a discussion of my research design.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Data for this research project was collected and analyzed using a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz 2006). This methodological approach was selected for several reasons. First, grounded theory removes the boundaries between data collection and analysis, allowing for simultaneous and interactive engagement with various phases of the research process. Second, grounded theory is appropriate for use in exploring fields that either lack proven theories or are in need of greater theoretical exploration (Charmaz 2004; Creswell 2007). According to several scholars, the agrifood literature is such a field in need of further theoretical development (Carolan 2012). Third, the constructivist grounded theory advocated by Charmaz allows for a flexible research design amenable to multiple paradigms, interpretations of data, and final results frameworks (Charmaz 2006). These deviations from the original methodology developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) allowed the end result of this project to take forms accessible to both scholarly and lay audiences.

The study population consisted of farmers and ranchers using pasture-based methods for raising livestock for human consumption within the state boundaries of Oklahoma. Since there is currently no universally-recognized standard for raising grassfed livestock, grassfed methods were operationalized as any livestock operation that feeds only grass and forage-based products to ruminant animals, and any operations that allow non-ruminants such as poultry and hogs unrestricted access to pasture along with supplemental feed. These producers are commonly

listed as grassfed, grass-finished, or pastured livestock producers. Purposive sampling was used to select participants from public listings of farmers and ranchers maintained by two well-established state-level alternative agrifood institutions: the Oklahoma Food Cooperative and the Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture. These two directories were selected due to their high visibility to the public, their comprehensive and current lists of producers, and their Oklahoma-centric focus. Farms were utilized as a proxy for individual farmers for recruitment purposes.

Initially, 22 farms were solicited for inclusion through a mailed recruitment letter followed by a phone call. Farms were approached in order of their physical location to three major metropolitan areas in the state of Oklahoma: Stillwater, Oklahoma City/Norman, and Tulsa, respectively. This geographic stratification method was used because alternative agricultural operations often cluster around the metropolitan areas which they serve (Duram and Oberholtzer 2010). Individuals from 13 of the initial 22 farms agreed to participate, resulting in 18 individual participants and a 59% recruitment rate. Following the initial recruitment, snowball sampling identified 9 other individual producers from 5 different farms. Two additional interview transcripts were supplied by the project's academic advisor. These interviews represented four individuals from two different farms that were approached during the original recruitment phase but did not respond. The final dataset included 31 individual producer interviews representing 20 unique farms and ranches in Oklahoma. Recruitment efforts then ceased due to the achievement of theoretical saturation as indicated by Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006).

Following initial consent to participate in the study, individual interview appointments were arranged with producers. All but three interviews took place at the respondent's farm or ranch. Each participant took part in an in-depth interview that lasted from 45 minutes to well over two hours. Interviews were semi-structured and organized around an interview guide according to the methods described by Rubin and Rubin (2012). All questions except basic demographic questions were open ended, allowing for participants to shape the dialogue.

Interviews were digitally recorded, and audio recordings were transcribed immediately following the interview session. On-farm interviews included a tour of the respondent's operation and facilities, thus providing another layer of data in addition to the verbal responses to the interview questions. Information obtained throughout the tour was documented both during and afterwards with extensive written field notes. On one occasion I was a participant observer during an on-farm processing event, which required my direct involvement with the slaughter process. This event was audio recorded and documented afterwards with written field notes.

All data was organized and analyzed according to the procedures broadly outlined by Charmaz (2006). Initial thematic coding occurred immediately after each interview session in order to identify emergent themes in the data including identity concepts, local regulatory and certification concerns, and the connections between food, farming, and health. After initial thematic coding, each interview transcript and its matching field notes were heavily coded line-by-line from which themes and corresponding thematic categories were developed. This facilitated a constant comparative analytic process and the recalibration of the interview guide to reflect emergent data trends. Finally, a third round of coding helped solidify the thematic categories and linked them together for further analysis. Individual code sheets were developed and corresponding text and quotations from the coded interview transcripts were compiled and aggregated for final analysis.

Of the 31 participants interviewed for this study, 13 were female (42 percent), 31 identified as white or Caucasian (100 percent), and the average age was between 40 years and 50 years. In regards to their agricultural background, 8 were first-time farmers with no previous agricultural experience (26 percent) and 17 were full-time farmers (54 percent), while the remaining 14 claimed some sort of dual vocational status (46 percent). 28 individuals had attained a college degree or higher (90 percent), which is potentially related to the high percentage of dual vocational producers in the sample as well as the tendency for AAF actors to have higher overall educational statuses (Carolan 2012). 7 respondents had operations that were

certified by either government or nongovernment certifiers (23 percent), with only 2 adhering to USDA Certified Organic standards (6 percent). Although respondents were forthcoming with some demographic information, many were not willing to share their financial status, possibly due to the informal transactions in which many producers engage. This sample contains a diverse and interesting group of pasture-based livestock producers from Oklahoma, but due to the sampling methods employed it cannot be considered a representative sample of all pasture-based producers operating in the state, and thus the results of this study cannot be extrapolated to other areas of the country. Despite these limitations, this study does provide a regional glimpse of the grassfed movement and echoes some of the findings of other collective identity and agrifood scholars. I turn now to my findings and analysis.

CHAPTER IV

IDENTITY WORK: THE PROCESS OF DEFINING THE GRASSFED MOVEMENT

The grassfed livestock movement in Oklahoma is currently engaging in what social movement researchers call "identity work" (McAdam and Snow 2000). These processes primarily involve "strategic identity displays" that convey who the group is to outsiders, as well as intragroup discussions which explain "who we are" to group members themselves (Einwohner 2006:41). This type of internal and external identity definition is necessary to the formation of group solidarity and collective identity, which is the key to further mobilization and change-making as a social movement (Lichterman 2008).

Identity work within the grassfed livestock movement is taking place in three distinct stages. First, individuals within the movement are working to establish membership boundaries within the grassfed movement itself. These boundaries are being drawn in opposition to conventional livestock producers, as well as some livestock producers within the AAF movement, and are drawn primarily according to the agricultural methods used by producers. Second, actors within the grassfed movement in Oklahoma are developing narratives concerning the state of agriculture and food in Oklahoma and the nation. These narratives serve to justify their mobilization as legitimate alternative agricultural producers, rather than deviant agricultural outliers, and situate movement grievances in macro-historical context. Third, grassfed producers are actively politicizing cultural aspects of their agricultural methods and values. This cultural focus is exemplified through the prioritizing of producers' environmental, health, and animal

welfare concerns over self-interest and profit-seeking. These three processes are the preliminary steps necessary for successful collective identity formation and change-making activities, and are important steps in the creation of solidarity within the group of grassfed livestock producers in Oklahoma. I turn to each dimension here.

Establishing Boundaries: "Why Force Nature into Something It's Not Supposed To Do?"

Boundary formation is often the first step collective actors take towards forming a group linked by a common sense of belonging (Taylor and Whittier 1992). This boundary-forming identity work involves defining what does and does not constitute grassfed methods and how grassfed methods differ from those used by conventional livestock producers. When discussing their operations, grassfed livestock producers begin by identifying how they raise their livestock as more "natural." As a result, they tend to identify what they do not do as conventional and more unnatural. First and foremost, grassfed producers do not feed medicated grain rations to fatten ruminant animals prior to processing. Instead, they feed only pasture-based products. One producer explains that "what we actually do is manage improved pastures with peas, legumes, alfalfas and clovers. But we rely most on native, natural grasses, and some wheats and ryes, those types of grasses." In contrast, one cattle and poultry producer explains that "what we don't use is no growth implants, no hormones added, and no antibiotics," and that this abstention from using these products is considered typical for most local producers. Grassfed producers also refuse to confine their animals in designated feedlots on animal welfare principles, explaining "we don't want them to be just confined and doing nothing, it's not the way animals are supposed to be. It's not natural to see them like that." These methods begin to define producers as grassfed producers.

As a consequence of these alternative methods, grassfed livestock take longer to put on enough weight to be profitably processed. As one producer explains, grassfed cattle "take about 30 months to finish out, whereas a regular cow or steer you can do in 12 months, even less. So it

takes a long time. But it doesn't really cost anymore except in time 'cause they don't eat much!" In order to offset the longer time it takes to raise grassfed animals, many producers are diversifying their livestock herds to include multiple species. They do this as a way to take advantage of what they identify as more natural systems of pasture management and pest control. One producer explains how her particular system works with multiple species together:

> Now you see the thing you have to realize about animals…God put everything out here for a reason, and I'm not trying to get Biblical on you, but there is a *reason* for it. Goats don't like grass, they like roughage. Cows don't like roughage, they like grass. Pigs love to eat down, so that aerates, kind of rototills everything up, keeps everything moving. Cows don't digest everything, so the seeds that they eat actually come out in their poop, which turns into its own fertilizer piles which grows. Goats and sheep completely digest everything, what comes out is not nutritional. See? You have to know some of these little things, and then you run certain animals after each other. You run the chickens after certain things if you have worming problems, because they eat the worms, they love to scratch it out and eat the worms. So therefore when you put the cows back in there's no worms! And they all finish out at different times, so I can stagger my processing and keep product in the freezer all the time. So that way you can take advantage of everything there and, instead of being a cost, you're actually getting a benefit.

Diversified rather than single-species operations also begin to delineate grassfed producers from other producers.

Grassfed livestock producers also use specialized grazing practices to maintain their pastures. A cattle and goat producer explains that "what we actually do is more than just free-ranging. It's a pretty intense rotational grazing program." Rotational grazing programs involve moving livestock onto different pastures according to a specified grazing schedule intended to provide the maximum nutrition to the animals while maintaining the growth of the pastures. What this does is meant to imitate natural systems, to "mimic what the buffalo would do in the Great Plains 100,000 years ago. So what [is] left behind in our pastures is this churned up, beautifully brown stuff with lots of green fertilizer left in a mass that, maybe the next spring, or if it was in the summer after the next rain, just explodes with growth." This imitation of natural systems is intentional, with producers claiming they "just believe that you should somehow adapt to nature and make it work. Why force nature into something it's not supposed to do? Learn how

to work with it!" This adaptation to natural systems through the utilization of diversified herds and pasture management techniques also set grassfed producers apart from conventional livestock producers.

Splitting Blades of Grass: "The Issue Is If It Is Grass-Finished!"

As grassfed producers are establishing oppositional boundaries between themselves and conventional producers, they are also establishing boundaries within the group of self-proclaimed grassfed producers. A central debate within the grassfed movement is the question of grass-finishing ruminant animals such as cattle, goats, and sheep. In conventional livestock production, ruminants are fed grain rations at the feedlot for at least 60 days and up to 180 days prior to slaughter. This is done to increase the final weight of the animal and to improve the taste of the end product. Although this practice primarily occurs on conventional feedlots, some grassfed producers feed grain rations prior to processing for similar reasons. One self-identified grassfed producer described the method on his ranch:

> We grow 'em on grass and then I finish them on grain. Much like they do on the feedlots, just to a smaller extent. They have access to pasture and can roam around a bit more than they could on a feedlot. But I want them finished on grain for at least 90-120 days because I want that meat marbled, and I want it flavored. If you don't, it will have no flavor and it will be tough. In fact it will even be bad-flavored. If you pull cattle off a wheat pasture, you can't stand to be in the house where it's cookin' 'cause it'll stink! That meat will stink!

So although this producer markets his meat as grassfed, his methods are almost identical to those of conventional livestock producers, differing in scale and access to pasture.

However, other grassfed producers object to this type of practice on the premise that ruminants are not able to adequately digest the grain, and that it negatively impacts the health of the animals and the overall quality of the products. One physician and part-time grassfed producer explains:

> Ruminants were not developed to eat grain. Ever! They were meant to eat low quality forages and just churn that stuff over and over again and extract all they can out of it. So I laugh when I see these people talking about grassfed beef and then they talk about how they finish them on corn. Well that's not grassfed! How is that any different than the feedlot other than it's not a confined animal feeding operation? It's basically the same; you're still getting the same toxic effects from that sort of deal. Now yes, if it's at your own ranch there or whatever, it's probably more humane, but still the effects on the meat and then that effect on the human body, it's still the same.

Instead, grassfed producers emphasize the importance of feeding ruminant animals pasture-based feedstuffs for their entire lives. One grassfed cattle and sheep producer explained it like this:

> We *finish* them on grass. Oh, what slays me is, and I see this at the [Oklahoma Food Cooperative], is that so many of these people title their product grassfed beef, and then if you look at it they say they give them corn for 30 days, or 60, or whatever. You know, technically every cow is grassfed when it's young!! The issue is if it is grass-*finished*!

So although grassfed-grain-finished producers are in line with some of the animal welfare concerns held by other grassfed producers, they buck the norm set by other grassfed producers by feeding grains to their ruminants prior to processing.

As a result, grassfed-grass-finished producers object to other local producers listing their products as grassfed despite the fact that they finish the animal on grains. A grassfed cattle and hog producer explains that these grain-finishing producers may be sensitive to the debate and are attempting to mislead consumers by creating new titles for their methods:

> There's so many plays on words in the business. Grass-finished, grassfed, all different kinds of things. But then you go and look at their website and they say [they] fed them small grains. And they said *small* grain. But it's still grains, its milo or maize or whatever you wanna call it! And that's not grassfed in my book, and it shouldn't be in anybody's book. There's a *huge* play on words out there.

Finally, a grassfed and grass-finished producer suggests that this type of activity is making customers skeptical, and may even be negatively impacting other local grassfed producers:

> Customers are starting to do a little more asking about things, and they're starting to clue in. Because sometimes with grassfed, people will kind of fudge that a little bit, so when customers ask [some producers] say "well yeah we're grassfed…and grain-finished [whispered]." And so we're starting to have people ask us, look us in the eye and ask us if we are grassfed all the way, all the time. So these people have either been deceived or

> have heard of people who have been deceived—which is too bad, because farmers have a pretty high trust rating, especially farmers that you're buying from directly. And if farmers lose that trust, that's gonna be a problem.

While grassfed producers identify clear boundaries between their operations and those of conventional producers due to their abstention of the use of antibiotics, growth hormones, and the practice of confinement, they are also drawing boundaries among other self-described grassfed producers operating within the local food system in Oklahoma on the basis of grass-finishing ruminant animals. The result is the establishment of a central group of producers that ascribe to strict grass-finished methods and define grassfed as the grass-finishing of ruminant animals. This type of "identity deployment" is common in the boundary-formation work of social movement actors (Bernstein 1997). By selecting specific aspects of the group's identity, collective actors are deliberating shaping their public image in accordance with the goals of the movement (Einwohner 2006:41). Accordingly, as grassfed producers increasingly seek to distance themselves from the practices of conventional producers, they deliberately and publically reject methods associated with conventional livestock production, such as confinement and grain-finishing. This meets the movement's preliminary goal of defining what is and is not grassfed, and thus who does and does not deserve the grassfed identity. Having establishing group boundaries, grassfed actors are turning their efforts towards the narratives they project to justify their alternative methods and values.

Crafting Narratives and Grievances: Contesting the Conventional

As grassfed producers fine-tune membership boundaries, they begin to create movement narratives. These narratives situate the grassfed movement's grievances in macro-historical context and construct their grievances in relation to specific structural forces in the conventional agricultural system. (Taylor and Whittier 1992; Gamson et. al. 1982). As group members create and replicate these narratives, they bring awareness of the group's cause to others. Most

importantly, through narrative creation collective actors reaffirm the movement's mission and tactics by identifying oppositional forces, not personal deviance, as the cause of movement grievances (Benford and Snow 2000; Snow 2004).

Within the grassfed movement in Oklahoma, there are three ongoing narratives through which movement actors are defining oppositional forces and structural barriers. First, grassfed producers are echoing other AAF narratives concerning the current state of conventional agriculture and the industrial processes that have changed the face of agricultural production in America. This narrative addresses the grassfed movement's grievances concerning conventional livestock agriculture and perceived issues with animal welfare, the safety and nutritional quality of conventional products, and the environmental impact of conventional agriculture. Movement actors are composing a second narrative concerning the role of agribusiness in agriculture. This narrative addresses the movement's grievances concerning corporate influence in government, local and national agricultural regulation, and the agricultural educational system. Finally, grassfed producers are constructing a third narrative regarding the current state of certification schemes, specifically organic certification, in the US. This narrative considers the movement's grievance concerning the how certification obscures transparency in local food systems. These three central narratives work to give meaning to movement's grievances and inspire the movement's protest activities.

Narrative 1—The State of Agricultural Production: "Now Everybody Wants Everything As Cheap As Possible"

The first central narrative grassfed producers are constructing involves the current state of agricultural production in America and the industrialization of conventional agriculture over time. Grassfed producers situate their practices in opposition to what they depict as the dominant, conventional agricultural paradigm in the United States. Grassfed producers begin by mixing their own unique narratives with those of more mainstream AAF leaders. When asked how they

became interested in alternative agriculture, almost half of the respondents in this study mentioned the works of Michael Pollan, specifically the book *The Omnivore's Dilemma* and the documentary "Food Inc." They described how these works awakened them to the general state of agriculture today, and convinced them that something was wrong with the way food is raised, marketed, and consumed. Producers also explicitly discussed how Pollan's advocacy of grassfed livestock products led them to either start a grassfed operation or to convert their current operation to a grass-finished model.

Despite their echoing of more mainstream AAF movement narratives, grassfed livestock producers have the experience to craft original narratives relating to their unique agricultural histories. Grassfed producers are sensitive to the changes that have occurred in the US agricultural system over the past 60 years. They begin by illustrating a how livestock agriculture has shifted to a grain-intensive system through the encouragement of vertically-integrated agribusinesses. One producer draws a connection between developments in conventional agriculture and the use of grain in livestock production, explaining:

> If you really get down to it and you do some homework…cattle were really set up for being forage fed. The reason that the whole system changed was the cost of grain was cheaper to put the pounds on them, and that's when the feedlot industry really came in. Agribusiness figured out they could feed 'em what farmers were planting, so they worked to rig the system and get it so that we had to buy everything through them. Changed the whole dang thing. And now they make money on every part of the whole process.

Many current grassfed producers in this study began their agricultural careers working on conventional feedlots or growing commodity crops like wheat and cotton. This agricultural history has given grassfed producers a unique point of view from which to analyze the current state of American agriculture, and while the portrait they paint is not completely unfavorable, it is not wholly-supportive of the mainstream agricultural paradigm. A long-time producer who started as a conventional wheat farmer discussed how he slowly became disillusioned with conventional methods because "conventional farming was such a routine to me; it was almost depressing to me. It was just so routine you didn't have to think. It was just so same-old-thing

year in and year out, where with grassfed it was a little different. I'm always changing and thinking about what I can do a little differently." Another former conventional livestock producer believes that agricultural production has become dictated by efficiency and profit margins, lamenting that "we've gotten to the state where now everybody wants everything as cheap as possible, and they just don't care what's in the food or how it's been produced. That's a big problem." This sense that agriculture has raced to the bottom is shared by most grassfed producers, and is a potent motivator of their alternative agricultural practices.

As grassfed producers refine their narrative concerning the state of conventional agriculture, they build the movement's central grievances with the conventional agricultural system. Understanding these grievances is important because they influence the movement's overall structure and orientation, including the change-making activities collective actors pursue in the name of the movement's broader goals (Benford 1997). Grassfed producers identify three grievances with the current agricultural system: the animal welfare implications of conventional livestock operations; the loss of nutritional density in conventional livestock products and the perceived subsequent negative impacts on public health; and the negative environmental impact of conventional livestock agricultural production.

Animal Welfare: "You Can Taste the Stress"

Along with these general complaints with the conventional agricultural system, grassfed producers justify their actions as a response to perceived issues of animal welfare within conventional livestock operations. One grassfed dairy operator explains how cases of livestock abuse at other dairies motivated his move to grassfed, and how it has galvanized the support of some of his customers as well:

> I think concern over livestock welfare is growing, I think there's interest growing in it. You know every time you have a video of a downer cow being abused in a huge big packing plant, interest grows. People are becoming more sensitive to that. That has

> caused people to ask about treatment of animals and things like that, and they have turned to grassfed as a result.

Some grassfed producers take issue with the size and density of conventional livestock operations, explaining that crowding animals and trying to raise more at once contributes to many problems. A former feedlot operator turned grassfed producer explains the difference in his neighbor's and his own methods this way:

> When you drive by there and he has about 500 calves in that lot, he's not looking at those calves on a daily basis. He's driving by and feeding them. And then when one is sick you'll know because he's off by himself or already dead. So I don't believe in that. I believe that you should know your animals, and by that meaning you can't have an overabundance of them. Why can't you do 100 acres well, and make a living? Same way with the animals, why can't you do a handful of them well?

Other producers articulate their concerns over the stress that conventionally-raised animals experience while in confined feedlot systems, and how their own operations are designed to prevent such stress:

> Well there are no antibiotics and there are no hormones, first off. But in addition to that, [the cattle] have a great life here, they have a very happy life. And if you're gonna eat meat, I think you're gonna want to eat an animal that's been happy because it's not gonna experience nowhere near the stress of a feedlot animal. You can taste the stress, and you can taste the difference.

Stress is a concern for grassfed producers not only because of the negative psychological impact it can have on the animal, but because of the negative impact it has on the products rendered from that particular animal. One producer equates animal welfare with the animal's ability to put on and maintain weight while grazing, explaining that "the animal has to gain weight in order to survive. Otherwise, the animal stresses, and when the animal stresses then you don't get the flavor in the meat that you want. So if I see an animal stressing, I worry about it, for both our sakes." A third producer reiterates this point, explaining that

> When you drive by and see all those feedlotted cattle lined up at the trough, they are stressed out. They're stressed as hell! The only way they gain is 'cause of the drugs they pump them full of, and the implants and so on. So we just cut all that out—no need to

> drug them to gain if they aren't stressed in the first place. So we give 'em room to graze and let 'em be cows.

Nutritional Quality: "These Things Are Killing Us"

In addition to concerns over the welfare of conventionally-raised animals, grassfed producers voice concerns about the nutritional quality of conventional products and draw a connection between conventionally-raised products and issues of public health. First, grassfed producers depict conventional operations as industrial operations that have sacrificed nutritional integrity for efficiency. One producer draws a direct connection between the consumption of conventional products and negative effects on public health:

> Most people in commercial agriculture think [grassfed producers are] silly, and they have no idea what motivates us, they have no idea that the product they are producing is probably causing health issues. And I'm getting closer to saying in absolute terms that those products they produce are causing *all* of our health issues. I'm more and more convinced every day that these things that are killing us are caused by our nutritional bankruptcy, and the corner-cutting going on in our food system.

Another producer furthers this concern, explaining how the nutritional quality of red meat is chemically altered by grain feeding:

> Now we know that when you put that grain in [ruminant's] diets you skew the Omega 3 and Omega 6s, you change the Conjugated Linoleic Acid content, things like that. A lot of people are fine with that, they don't care about that. But more people are starting to realize that there's a lot of things kind of wrong with the modern American diet and this is one of them. So when you have dairy and beef that are grassfed you've got those things in balance and you've got a product that truly is a healthier product.

A third producer draws a direct connection to how an animal is fed and the nutritional quality of its products, claiming that "it's not the red meat that's killing us, cause he says go ahead and eat grass-fed beef, it's not the red meat, it's what they're feeding the red meat before we eat it that's killing us."

"Sodbusting" and Environmental Degradation

Finally, grassfed producers are building an oppositional narrative against conventional livestock operations based on grievances concerning the environment. Many producers talk about the smell associated with feedlot systems and the impacts they had observed on their local water supplies. Others take issue with the crop production activities associated with raising grain for feedlot animals to consume. One producer talks about how conventional agricultural systems were connected in this way, and that tilling the ground for corn to eventually feed to livestock was contributing to soil erosion, elaborating that:

> You know people didn't worry about the ground blowing so much. But if I see ground blowing now it just makes me sick. So after reading those books and learning that there are better ways to do this and thinking well maybe we oughta try this, I started doing rotational grazing. It was somewhere thereafter I started figuring out that we aren't eating good food.

Another producer acknowledges that with the recent increase in grain prices due to drought and the expansion of ethanol production, more conventional farmers are "sodbusting," or planting fallow fields with commodities in order to receive larger subsidies from the government. This is contributing to the destruction of local water sheds by "muddying up" creeks and killing fish, as well as increasing agricultural drift from herbicide and fertilizer applications. One certified organic producer explains how she normally gets along well with her conventional neighbors, but since they began sodbusting she has to "go over there and give 'em an earful" to get them to stop spraying on windy days.

Grassfed producers are developing an oppositional narrative to motivate their operations by claiming that agriculture is not in need of chemical or grain-based inputs, but a system that is sustainable and self-supporting. As one producer elaborates:

> So I think a much better system is to let nature provide those nutrients, which it will. That's another problem, is that farmers today don't believe that nature can provide the nutrients to be able to sustain the kind of production that we're used to. So part of our trouble is a) fear that we can't and will never be able to give the plant the right kind or enough nutrition without some kind of input that we can buy from the store, and b) arrogance from the fact that we believe that we can give the plant enough nutrition

> ourselves and the fact that we believe we can rely on our own intelligence to provide for nature.

A long-time grassfed producer explains how this identity is not just internalized by the farmers themselves, but by those in proximity to the farms and the community as a whole.

> Especially in Oklahoma, we're not afraid of our food. Why? Because this is just how it's done, it's how it's always been done. You see? You don't see it as being unnatural to drive by and see all them cows in the feedlot. And that's just the way it's always been to us, see? And for the past almost 75 years that's how it's been.

This sense of complacency is troubling for grassfed producers for several reasons. While they are concerned about the overt animal welfare, environmental, and health issues, they also see conventional agriculture as a philosophy that permeates and influences the local culture. One producer explains that he saw these conventional philosophies reflected in the rural areas of Oklahoma:

> Everything is connected, so the knowledge that the farmers today have of how agriculture oughta be conducted in conventional agriculture is related and connected to the knowledge that the people in the small towns and the big cities have about local food. They are all part of the same system right now. We are so deeply entrenched in the old system…so the entrenching is the overarching problem that most other problems stem from.

The solution for grassfed producers involves not just changing agricultural practices, but embodying a different cultural paradigm altogether, claiming that "well if we're ever gonna get off this industrial food system it's gonna take a lifestyle change, for everyone! We built this lifestyle up over the course of 100 years, I don't know *if* we can get rid of it!" So grassfed producers are depicting a conventional system that is intent on convincing producers of their dependence on inputs and creating a counter-narrative depicting a grass-based system that is not dependent on outside inputs.

The grassfed movement is strategically positioning its own alternative methods by creating a narrative that negatively portrays the conventional agricultural system. This serves three purposes for the grassfed movement's broader change-seeking activities. First, it lends

legitimacy to their alternative methods by juxtaposing them with an agricultural system that, over time, has transformed into an oppositional system that they no longer recognize. Second, it gives context to their grievances over the actions of conventional agricultural producers regarding the environment and livestock. Third, it crafts a narrative that focuses on the cultural implications of agricultural production, and helps frame the movement's cultural protest activities. This provides collective actors with an alternative viewpoint around which they can rally their cause and can begin to unify their change-making tactics (Adams and Roscigno 2005). Crafting effective narratives is a crucial step towards creating a unified group of actors that can cultivate a collective identity for the grassfed movement, and involves the creation of several narratives that work in conjunction to further the group's goals (McAdam and Snow 2000).

Narrative 2—Agribusiness in Agriculture: "The Farm Bill Does Not Help Us At All"

The second central narrative grassfed producers are constructing in order to situate the movement's grievances concerns the corporate influence within regulatory and educational institutions. Grassfed producers are creating a narrative that depicts local agricultural regulatory agencies, specifically agencies in charge of livestock processing such as the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture and the United States Department of Agriculture, as corporately-influenced governmental bureaucracies that are overly-involved in livestock regulation. They also build a grievance concerning the state of agricultural education in Oklahoma and the greater US, with similar claims of corporate influence in the classroom.

Corporate Influence in Government: "Big Ag Has the Biggest Voice"

Grassfed producers echo a common theme within the broader AAF movement concerning the influence that corporate agricultural interests wield over agricultural regulators and educators. Oklahoma grassfed producers illustrate this common theme with their own examples of corporate influence in the local agricultural system. One example grassfed producers

use to illustrate corporate involvement with agriculture involves government aid to conventional farmers in the form of subsidies and other assistance programs. Grassfed producers object to these types of assistance because the majority of aid offered by the government to farmers and ranchers is only available to conventionally-oriented producers. Not only do conventional livestock operations receive direct tax breaks to build their operations, but since they choose to feed animals primarily on grain they also receive an implicit subsidy through the government's subsidization of crops like corn and soybeans (Starmer, Witteman, and Wise 2006). Grassfed producers claim this gives conventional producers an unfair advantage, and creates an agricultural system that is founded on politically-sanctioned institutional inequality. One producer explained that "you know how much [small farmers] see from the Farm Bill? Not even one percent. Not even one *tenth* of one percent! Tell me that isn't due to the corporate lobbyists up in Washington?"

Grassfed producers see these inequalities as perpetuated by corporate agricultural interests in an attempt to benefit their own companies through the institutionalization of their practices in government policies. Some producers identify the legislative roots of these inequalities, claiming that "big ag has the biggest voice [in government], and we [smaller farmers] have a very small voice." One grassfed producer elaborates that "the Farm Bill does not help [grassfed producers] at all, not a single bit." Another grassfed producer voices her concern over the government support of agriculture, saying that "agriculture ought to be able to support itself. The government shouldn't have to support agriculture with subsidies any more than they should have to support the light bulb industry or anything else. So somehow we've gotten into this big mess where the farmers are dependent on that commodity check." Her partner elaborates that this is a ploy perpetuated by corporations to keep farmers dependent on their products, saying "I just think we over do some of the chemicals and things, and the dollar is always involved, the big companies make millions and billions for their stockholders through the chemicals." Another

producer identifies how the powerful agricultural lobby is to blame for the inequalities in the agricultural system:

> There are lots of big companies out there that have no interest in seeing us move to a sustainable model. There are a lot of outfits there that have a vested interest in not allowing us in. Monsanto's big money ticket is genetically modifying seeds and selling them to people. That's a good business and they don't wanna see that go away! Well sustainable agriculture doesn't have any use for GM seeds, so they feel threatened and turn to the government for help. They spend millions to lobby Congress every year.

Regulations and Regulators: "It's A Big Joke"

Grassfed producers perceive corporate influence in agriculture via governmental involvement to spill over into the regulatory system as well. They depict an agricultural regulatory system that is written and designed by the large-scale corporate players. They particularly emphasize the role of governmental regulation in the processing and resale of livestock products. According to grassfed producers, these restrictions are designed to benefit larger producers at the expense of smaller competing producers. This not only shuts alternative producers out of the system, but it creates a regulatory environment that is ill-suited and at times even hostile to those that work outside the conventional system.

Processing regulations concern grassfed livestock producers because it limits their ability to label their products for retail sale. Regulatory restrictions in Oklahoma require producers to have their animals processed at specifically-certified slaughterhouses in order to legally sell their products to retail customers (Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry 2004a). One example of this is the regulation surrounding poultry processing. While the majority of grassfed producers primarily raise cattle, pastured poultry is a common side-business due to its faster timescale and compatibility with rotational grazing systems. However, producers are finding it increasingly difficult to comply with governmental regulations regarding the processing and resale of poultry. They attribute this to the influence of large poultry producers in the designing of processing regulations that make it prohibitive for smaller producers to raise poultry.

One producer describes how vertically-integrated companies have influenced the livestock processing laws in order to benefit them and to shut out smaller producers:

> But Oklahoma law is Tyson's law, Tyson has its hand all in this. For example, Oklahoma law says that you can't process chicken except in a Federally inspected facility. And I think the closest one is somewhere in Northeast Oklahoma. Well that makes it pretty difficult to do your chickens in Oklahoma, unless you're Tyson!

Another regulation grassfed producers focus on includes livestock identification laws which require small-scale producers to individually tag and band animals prior to processing. However, these laws exempt large-scale producers from identifying individual livestock, instead allowing for them to count all livestock from large plants as one animal. One poultry and cattle producer explains that these types of loopholes are engineered by agribusinesses to purposefully place "the onus on the small farmer who can't really afford it in terms of time, effort and money. I am the one that is negatively-impacted. Just put us all on a level playing field and we'll all find a way to exist. But don't make it so prohibitive for the small guy, and then let the big guy escape."

A third regulation involves restrictions on certified on-farm processing operations. Some small-scale producers are eligible to have their own on-farm processing facilities certified by the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, enabling them to process their own poultry for resale (Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry 2004b). However, grassfed producers claim that these regulations have been adulterated by large agribusiness interests in order to stymie the expansion of smaller producers into local markets. One tenet of this regulation that grassfed producers object to is the so-called "1000 chicken exemption." This law allows individual producers to legally process up to 1000 poultry in their certified on-farm facilities per year. However, 1000 poultry is what a typical small-scale producer could grow and process in less than half a year, which is why grassfed producers claim the exemption is designed to limit the operations of smaller producers in order to protect the market share of larger ones. One producer explains that "there are companies that have already started to complain that even the

thousand chicken rule allows too much competition. They don't want anyone selling chickens other than themselves! And they work hard to influence the [university agricultural extension] agents and put their bug in their ear." Another producer addresses how he feels regarding the regulations on processing livestock:

> It's a big joke. These [processing] rules have nothing to do with food safety, it's basically a regulation and a barrier to keep small entrepreneurs who are doing things the *right* way from breaking into the market and bringing down the big dogs who are vertically integrated. It's a closed system. They don't want anybody to know what's going on behind the walls of that chicken house, or what's going on in that beef processing plant. They don't want anybody to see that! Because if people did see that they would not eat the products, and so the last thing they need is some dude doing it right, being able to have free access to the market, because that endangers [agribusiness'] profit margins. The man is real in this particular instance; they are doing things to prevent people from knowing the truth and to prevent people from doing it the right way and being successful at it.

Another producer elaborates that increasing regulations on the processing of livestock will drive out smaller processors:

> You know what, pretty soon you'll regulate everyone out of business! And then who will be left? Nothing but the big guys. And eventually with them economies of scale, it becomes almost a monopoly. And I'm not big time against, you know if a guy creates a business and he grows it big that's good. But if it gets to where he's the only one, and he starts raping people with his price, then the government ought to get involved.

According to one producer, this "processor squeeze" prevents many producers from using their local processors, forcing them to travel across the state or to forego their business altogether. Faced with an injured animal and with no choice but to process it in a hurry, this producer found himself without any options:

> I couldn't find anybody that does on-farm slaughter anymore, like in the old days they used to come out in a truck and do it. But there ain't many of these mobile processing units, hardly anybody does it anymore, and again regulations just got to the point that it just wasn't worth it.

Producers object to these corporately-influenced regulations not only on grounds of unfair business practices, but because the regulations they are being held to are designed for

larger-scale operations in the first place. When grassfed cattle producers discuss the requirements of their processing plants, they immediately claim that all of the public health scares involving ground beef originated in large plants, whereas smaller processors have no history of contamination: "The thing that makes these regulations so bad is the fact that they've never had a small plant that's had an e. coli scare or recall or anything, it's always the big guys that are mixing millions of pounds a day. So that's the tough part." One particular producer owns and operates his own small processing facility, and discusses how the changing laws are impacting both producers and processors. He explains that regulations are becoming increasingly strict, resulting in his having to spend more time testing and ensuring compliance, which ultimately impacts his bottom line:

> And I mean my stuff is fairly expensive already, just 'cause we do things the right way, no growth implants or hormones or antibiotics, that kind of stuff. But now add another cost increase of 17% on there just for [USDA certified] inspection, 'cause I have to pay for all these tests that, for the big guys with thousand-head capacities, is no big deal because they have their own in-house labs and shit. Well now that they changed the laws, I have to pay to have my tests sent out more often. I've never had a contaminated case in all my ten years, so tell me who are these regulations really designed for?"

While producers admit that public safety is priority, they object to being held to the same standards of large scale plants, and of being judged by the records of these larger facilities. One grassfed dairy producer explains that "the regulations are important; I understand the need to protect public health and things like that. But the great irony is that the outbreaks of illness and stuff haven't been the Amish farmers sellin' the raw milk in Pennsylvania that's now headed for jail, it's these bigger industrial things."

Finally, grassfed producers see governmental regulations influencing alternative food institutions as well as more conventional marketplaces. When asked about selling locally, one producer explained that regulations are his biggest barrier:

> I think the biggest one is just the increasing amount of regulation on things. I thought I'd hit the jackpot when the [Oklahoma Food] Co-Op was founded and things were very regulation-free there, and it seems like even that nice conduit I had to customers is slowly

> having more and more roadblocks thrown in the way, processing restrictions and such, and making it more of a hassle to deal with them.

Another producer thinks the inhibitive nature of these regulations is intentional in order to slow the growth of local food systems, stating that "[agribusiness does] everything they can to put the small farmer out of business, by making regulations that don't apply to agribusiness but do apply to the small farmer, and to make it hard for them to sell even in their own community." This is the type of narrative grassfed producers are reproducing within the movement to garner acceptance of their change-making activities, which will be discussed in the following chapters.

Agricultural Knowledge Exchange: "They Don't Question It"

In addition to the narratives surrounding the state of conventional agricultural production, many grassfed producers are crafting narratives around perceived issues within the systems of agricultural knowledge exchange that perpetuate conventionalized identities. Once again, they depict a conventional system that has been debased by corporate interests, espouses outdated educational paradigms, and relies on government support and chemical inputs. These conventional practices are primarily reproduced by agricultural extension agents and land-grant university agricultural education programs. The result, according to one producer, is the notion that livestock agriculture is dependent on outside inputs. One respondent explains that this chemical-dependent agriculture still exists because:

> [Farmers are] not hearing anything different from anyone. Most of the farmers in the world today are going to college or receiving some kind of vocational instruction in agriculture, and all they hear is the conventional story: you've gotta till the ground, you've gotta apply chemicals, you've gotta apply fertilizer, or you're not gonna make anything. So I think education is the key. We're gonna have to find a way to educate the people that are doing this.

Another former conventional producer agrees, explaining "I hate that people, you know they're so closed minded cause that's all they've known, it's all they've been told. We believe

everything that some chemical company, or we believe everything that OSU Ag has taught us and they don't question it. And it's time that they start thinkin' on their own a little bit."

Regardless of the perceived injustice of the contemporary agricultural system due to corporate influence, some grassfed producers object to the government's involvement in agriculture in the first place. One producer explains that even if there are federal programs designed to help grassfed operations, producers would not accept them.

> To really be sustainable we think eventually the government should be out of [agriculture]. And a lot of it is because we don't want the government telling us what to do. But if it's really sustainable then why shouldn't there be a ton of money in it? Maybe we're in it at a time in our history where it's not even possible, and that would be a very sad statement if we can't manage to feed ourselves without involvement from taxpayer dollars. That's sounding more like socialism to me.

Other producers are in favor of agricultural assistance programs, but not at the expense of the American taxpayer:

> I would rather have a non-government grant just so that nobody's lookin' over your shoulder and that kind of thing. But I'm not that opposed, although we have friends that work for the government and wouldn't even read the papers, as soon as it said government grant they would rip it up and throw it away. So that's how they feel about the government. So that makes us a little wary.

While grassfed producers are wary of accepting government assistance for various political and personal reasons, they also object to government programs that sustain the status quo in agriculture and further entrench farmers in a conventional and corporately-influenced mindset. One long-time grassfed producer claims that, as a result of long-time governmental support of commodity agriculture, conventional farmers have internalized these corporately-influenced messages, creating an agricultural identity that is based on the indicators of conventional agriculture. He describes the following situation:

> There are a lot of people that don't wanna see [alternative agriculture] work because they are so entrenched in their old system. There are a lot of farmers that their very makeup and being is associated with making it, and to them making it means being able to go to that auction and buy that quarter of ground when it's for sale, or being able to walk up to the John Deere dealer and saying they wanna buy that $325,000 tractor. Their entire

> makeup, and most of their identity, is invested in what they think of as making it according to the extension agent or the co-op manager. So they resist it because what I'm talking about is a system that doesn't use that stuff, that doesn't need that stuff, and they don't want to hear that.

The narrative the grassfed movement is creating regarding the role of agribusiness in agriculture and government portrays an agricultural system that is rife with corporate interference. By framing their grievances in opposition to these outside influences, the grassfed movement is setting the stage to justify their rejection of government regulation and assistance, as well as their refusal to adhere to the oversight of regulators or the lessons of agricultural educators. Their grievances are a direct connection to their protest and change-making activities (Taylor and Whittier 1992) and work to give shape to a comprehensive "group consciousness;" the sense of connectivity among collective actors leading to the instillation of collectivity that fuels social movement action and adherence (Hunt and Benford 2004:445). As grassfed producers form a collective rejection of formal oversight from the government, they extend their critique of oversight to third-party certifiers, bringing into question the meaning of transparency in local food systems.

Narrative 3—Certification and Transparency: "So What Does That Mean?"

Grassfed producers are constructing a third narrative regarding certification schemes and their role in local and grassfed agriculture. Grassfed producers identify governmental and third-party certification schemes as responsible for intensifying inequalities within the broader food system. They also blame certifications for obstructing transparency within the food system by falsely-reassuring customers that producers are adhering to the certification standards. As a response, they eschew obtaining any government-supported certification, specifically USDA Certified Organic, as well as any non-governmental third-party backed certification, such as Animal Welfare Approved and Certified Naturally Grown. Instead, they advocate for the

redefinition of transparency through the cultivation of direct consumer and producer interactions in the hopes that such interactions will render obsolete the need to rely on outside certifiers.

Grassfed producers disagree with the price premium that many certified products command, in part to recoup the cost of obtaining official certification. One explains that the certifications work to increase the price of agricultural products, and thus food inequalities:

> Well I think the organic certification extenuates the bifurcation of our food system in a very negative way. Do you realize that every time you put a label in front of your food it's going to be at least 50 to 100% higher… to where you can get what they want but it's so expensive that nobody can afford it.

Another producer echoes these sentiments, stating that "Certified Organic way overshoots in a way that no one can afford. And then you end up with the food ghetto. It gets to the point where you have to produce food in a way that you either wouldn't want to eat or you couldn't afford to eat what you produce!" A third Certified Organic producer agrees, stating

> If we had to buy the beef and chickens we produce, being certified and all, we wouldn't buy them, because they are too expensive, we wouldn't be able to afford it. So what do you do about that? I'm not sure because there is so much labor involved in growing them, I wouldn't sell them for any less! So I really hate it that good food like that costs so much that everyday people don't really have access to a lot of it. I'm not sure what to do about the whole affordability issue, but I recognize it and I wish I didn't exist.

Grassfed producers are also concerned that consumers are relying solely on government or third-party backed certifications to ensure the authenticity of their food. This is in part because grassfed producers inherently distrust governmental agencies due to their perceived relationship with corporate agribusiness. As such, they are wary of regulatory and certification schemes that claim to verify the methods and characteristics of certain agricultural products. One producer explains that verifying agricultural practices and products is made more difficult by the proliferation of certifications and regulatory labels:

> The problem they're trying to solve [with certification and regulation] is their inability to verify the chain of ownership from the very beginning to where it gets to [the customers]. They can't do it. They walk into the grocery store and it says organic, so what does that

> mean? And how have we changed organic to fit the requirements of large corporate growers?

While grassfed producers do not think that all agricultural producers hide behind certifications to fool the public, they do feel there is a tendency by some to push the limits:

> I think anytime you write down a set of rules there is a number of people…that will find a way to operate within those rules but not in the spirit of those rules. So the fact that you've got corporations doing organic, large corporations doing organic, I don't think there is any way you could say that those products are legitimate.

Another producer outlines the issues of verification, highlighting that simply writing something on paper does not mean that a producer is following the specifications in the correct way:

> Well, those [certifications] are all fine and dandy, if you're willing to take somebody's word for it, 'cause all these systems, organic and otherwise, all came into effect because people couldn't trust farmers to be, you know, trustworthy, is what it comes down to! But the systems only work if we actually trust the farmers. Because all it is now is a matter of paper work! If I fill out all this paper work that says "oh yes, I don't do this, that, the other things, and this is what I do" you have to assume that I'm being truthful, but in reality I could be making it up! You know, I could be completely lying on all those forms yet I could still get my organic certification. And so, those sorts of labeling systems I think only work if you're willing to trust the person who you are inherently not trusting in the first place.

Accordingly, grassfed producers are foregoing certification on the grounds that, while they may follow the guidelines truthfully, there are others who might not and would devalue the entire system:

> I want to know what was in my food and I try to find out, whereas most people just want to find somebody and trust that person because we've told them what we do. But that leaves room for other people to say one thing and do another. Cause I could get certified organic and come out here on my spray rig and spray my pastures and nobody would know.

Another producer echoes this sentiment, saying "it's all dependent on people being honest about what they're doing. I haven't done any certifications basically because of that reason. I don't see that they're truly valuable. If you're not gonna believe me you're not gonna believe me."

As illustrated above, grassfed livestock producers are creating critical narratives regarding the perceived relationship among agribusiness and governmental and third-party regulatory and certification entities, and are using these narratives to garner support for and justify their grassfed movement. They are also using these narratives to support their cultural values regarding grassfed and local agriculture, and to make a case for increased transparency and producer-control in local agricultural systems. By instilling a sense of group efficacy and belonging through boundary formation and narrative framing, these cultural values begin to transcend individual actors and become group values, working to create a social movement culture that binds and inspires collective actors to further internalize group ideals and to work towards movement goals (Adams and Rocigno 2005: 761). This is demonstrated in how the grassfed movement is internalizing the cultural values of grassfed agriculture and how movement actors are prioritizing them over self-interest and profit seeking.

Internalization and Protest: "I'm Not Gonna Substitute the Quality for the Quantity"

Along with the creation of group boundaries and the formation of consistent narratives, collective actors begin to internalize group messages and exhibit the embedded cultural messages through cultural forms of protest (Taylor and Whittier 1992). In this process movement actors internalize the narrative messages and boundaries constructed in the previous two steps. By internalizing these narratives and affirming group boundaries, social movement actors begin to take the final step towards establishing a sense of group belonging and begin crafting effective change-making activities (West and Zimmerman 1987). Negotiation involves several different processes of protest that tend to revolve around politicizing aspects of everyday life and the cultural aspects of an actor's existence.

Within the grassfed movement, this politicization takes several forms. As farmers and ranchers, the everyday activity most easily politicized is the act of raising, processing, and marketing their livestock. As a result, grassfed producers begin to ascribe political characteristics

to their farming and eating habits, utilizing them as methods of cultural protest as well as production. Grassfed producers are internalizing these cultural issues to the point which they are more concerned with these aspects of their agricultural operations than they are with turning a profit from their operations. This process is specifically exemplified by producers' concern with preserving the quality and health of their products, employing humane practices to raise their livestock, and protecting the environment over realizing larger profits for their products through expanding or altering their operations. While profit remains a central concern for some grassfed producers, it has become a secondary concern for most, representing a "cultural turn" within the movement and the politicization of grassfed production (Johnston et. al. 1994).

Quality and Health: "That's Our Main Focus"

When asked about profits, grassfed producers openly admit that they operate within a niche market that allows them to charge a premium for their product. One producer says "I can say probably as much as anything, [grassfed is] just a different niche that gives you a little more money." Another producer relates that the profit motive was the reason he began grassfed in the first place, explaining that "I could see that the grassfed farming was more profitable than the conventional, so we started converting all our conventional cattle to grassfed." With several other grassfed producers echoing these sentiments, it is undeniable that profit is a motivating factor for grassfed producers, and that this self-interest fuels some of the movement's actions.

However, as grassfed producers become more educated about the ideals and concerns of the grassfed movement and increasingly internalize the movement's narratives, they begin to prioritize the cultural aspects of the grassfed movement and place profit-seeking as a secondary motive. One grassfed producer describes this process and admits that while profit was the initial motivation, other concerns soon took priority over his grassfed enterprise:

> We saw grassfed as just another way to…make more money on the profit. So it was all motivated by trying to make more profit. But then I got into learning about food and how

> bad our food is…and what we should or shouldn't be eating. And now that is really my main motivation for doing this, to grow good food for my kids and my customers.

Pursuing a quality product over a profitable product is one way grassfed producers are internalizing the cultural concerns of the broader grassfed movement. Quality and profit are typically addressed in relation to scale: a larger scale operation is considered to have a greater potential for profit, but at the cost of reduced quality of the end product. When asked about scaling up, some grassfed producers were interested in growing their operations, but were concerned about the impacts it could have on their products. One producer explains "why do it unconventionally? Because you're not happy with the quality that's being produced conventionally. So why would I change what I do to be bigger and more like the conventional stuff? That's what I'm trying to change in the first place!" So when faced with the decision to scale-up their operations, grassfed producers are open to the idea inasmuch as it does not impact the quality of their products. As one producer explains: "My main thing is I'm not gonna risk quality for quantity. I can tell you where all my animals come from, I know what kind of program I've got. I can't say the same for everybody else. So I'm not gonna substitute the quantity for the quality. That's as far as, you know, I take a lot of pride in that."

Grassfed producers are also concerned with protecting the health of their consumers through providing a "high nutrition, nutrient dense product." By emphasizing the nutritional quality of their products, grassfed producers are politicizing the acts of raising and eating in accordance with the ideals of the grassfed livestock movement. For some producers, health is the primary reason they became involved in grassfed. One producer explains that "[grassfed producers] are mainly interested in the health aspect of raising our own livestock, and raising livestock more naturally." This health concern is informed by the narratives within the grassfed movement concerning the state of conventional agriculture. Others agree, stating that they got involved "mainly because of the health concerns that so many people were having. I really never thought of it as being like profitable, to be honest with you." They also discuss how they have

come to realize that they are impacting their customers' lives in positive ways through their products:

> And I've been told through our customers, you know, that we're doing more than we realize. We're making people healthy, healthier. And you know yeah, I do believe in our product 100%, but I guess I never looked it as extreme as we're changing people's lives in that aspect…I never went that extreme I guess, but now that's our main focus.

The result of the internalization process in regards to quality is a sense of pride and purpose imbued into their methods and operations, with producers stating "we're proud of what we do and we offer people what I truly believe is a healthy alternative to what you can go to the grocery store and buy." Another producer explains how this positive impact on his customers through his agricultural operation has inspired his complete transition to grassfed: "I enjoy grassfed and the challenge of [grassfed], and I enjoy people's comments to me, how appreciative they are for what I'm doing by trying to supply a good wholesome food for people, and because of that I just believe this is how I'm supposed to farm now." By internalizing the messages of the grassfed movement, producers are letting their cultural values steer their decision making, resulting in the shaping of their businesses into a form that fits with the movement's broader ideals.

Humane Practices: "I Make Sure To Treat Them Right"

Along with quality, nutrition, and health concerns, grassfed producers are working to implement humane practices in their operations, and once again placing these ideals above profit-seeking. When asked why he refuses to use growth hormones or implants to increase the weight of his cattle and thus his profit, one producer responds "well yes, our cattle are grassfed, you know we feed 'em a lot of grass, so they do take quite a bit longer and we only get them up to 1250, sometimes 1300 pounds. But we want them to be *healthy* cattle. Nobody wants to eat an unhealthy animal. So I just won't do it." Another producer admits that while he operates in a

niche market that has the potential for higher profits, it becomes more complicated when the question of humane practices is raised:

> Yeah, it's kind of a niche market, but once you start getting involved with these cattle you actually see a personality in them. Each animal has a personality unlike commercial cattle, where they're just kind of existing. Don't get me wrong, this is my business, you know. You have to be a businessman, even with the cattle. But you can still, like I said, love the animal, you know? So I make sure to treat 'em right. Cause we are raising them to eat, but we also want them to have a happy, healthy life while they're here.

Another grassfed producer addresses the contradiction inherent in placing humane practices above profit in a business that is based on killing animals for consumption, and that while it appears to be hypocritical, there is a larger cultural issue motivating his actions:

> Now don't get me wrong, [slaughtering the livestock] is not something that I enjoy doing. But there's a difference with the way we do things. You can do something because it needs to be done and it's part of the process and its food. And it's good food. And you can take some pride in that. And I'd much rather it be done this way than in a giant processing plant, because it's more respectful, and I'm giving them thanks. That's important.

Employing humane practices on their livestock operations involves issues of confinement as well, with grassfed producers explaining that allowing their animals space to graze is a way for them to calm their concerns over the animal's welfare. One producer says that confinement is "just not happy to them, that's not being a critter. We want them to be a critter!" Instead, they allow them ample access to pastures, declaring that "there is no question our cows are happier than anybody's confined cows. 'Cause these cows get four acres a piece, and I can feel good about that." Once again, although they are enticed and continue to pursue higher profits, grassfed producers are prioritizing the cultural values communicated by the broader narratives within the grassfed movement. They do this by allowing cultural issues concerning the welfare of their animals and their commitment to humane practices to shape their operations and take priority over processes of rational self-interest, specifically profit-making.

Environmental Integrity: "We Need To Do Right By the Land"

Finally, environmental issues also inform the decisions of grassfed producers, and oftentimes are prioritized over increasing the profit of a grassfed operation. A well-established grassfed producer explains that there is a deeply-entrenched environmental ethic in the grassfed movement, and that "the true grassfed people aren't in it for the money. They're in it because they believe that we need to do better by the land." A newly-minted grassfed producer discusses her grassfed operation in terms of a broader land ethic, explaining that profit in the short term was not as important as conservation in the long term:

> [Grassfed] is a long term project. We may never make much money off of it, but if we treat it well and…take care of the land, it will be there for our children and grandchildren and five generations from now, just like some of the land we have to farm in Weatherford belonged to [my husband's] grand and great grandparents. And it's still good land because everybody took good care of it. So you have to see it as a legacy. Some projects you take on because you think they'll pay for this year's vacation, and some projects you take on and you think they'll pay for my retirement, and some projects you take on and you think this will give my grandchildren something to be proud of…but only if you treat the land well.

Quality and healthy products, happy and healthy animals, and environmentally-sound practices are all cultural issues resonating with grassfed producers. Cultural issues have been placed above immediate self-interest as motivation for pursuing such types of agricultural operations. Internalization of grassfed movement narratives has helped producers politicize cultural and everyday acts and values. As a result, the grassfed movement has turned its sites towards protecting and publicizing the cultural issues they associate with livestock agriculture rather than pursuing profit in an effort to realize a greater agricultural good. One producer in west Tulsa discussed how he was taking steps to improve access to his products to lower-income families by establishing a not-for-profit cooperative, stating that

> It was about a year and a half ago when I asked 'How can we make this business benefit other people?' Cause the more I can do to help people eat better the better; I think that's my responsibility. It ain't really about the bottom line, it's about helping people. So that's what I'm really here for, I'm here to help these people, so I'm working to help these people buy these things they need.

Another producer acknowledges a higher calling within his business, explaining:

> For the health of everybody, they need to look at what I'm doing. My first motivation when I first went into grassfed was money, after three years or so I could see that it was more profitable and money was my motivation. But now it wouldn't be; I just believe I'm doing it right now, even if there was less money in it.

A third producer agrees, acknowledging a sense of purpose in what he does, saying "well, I do it because I think it's the right thing to do, and I'm not—trust me, I'm not making *any* money off this deal, I'm probably breaking even at this point. If I were to do it on a larger scale, I probably could make some amount of money from it, but I couldn't do it the same way, so I won't expand anymore." So as grassfed producers internalize the narratives of the grassfed movement, they begin to shift their operations to reflect the cultural values these narratives contain. An established grassfed producer sums the cultural concerns inherent in grassfed livestock production as follows:

> So are we meeting a need? Yes. And that need goes beyond [customers'] nutritional need to their spiritual need to first do no harm. No harm to the environment, no harm to their bodies, and no unnecessary harm to the animal along the way. And isn't that kind of what we all wanna do? To leave a small footprint? And I think as people get older they think more about that and if this is what they want their legacy to have been. I know it's what I want my legacy to be.

Downplaying self-interest and profit-seeking in order to prioritize cultural issues associated with livestock agriculture is a primary protest tactic of grassfed livestock producers. It is also an important step towards developing a cohesive collective identity. By placing cultural and identity issues above rational self-interest, grassfed actors are converging as a cohesive social movement with a common set of goals and values (Polletta and Jasper 2001:285). As an extension of this process, it is through the formation of the grassfed collective identity that grassfed producers connect their politicized agricultural values through the everyday interactions they have with their livestock and customers, and thus engage in broader change-making activities (Taylor and Whittier 1992). From here, collective actors are able to employ these solidarity-building processes to form a cohesive collective identity. This collective identity

development is a central aspect of collective action, and is a necessary component to foster in order to implement effective change-making activities (Friedman and McAdam 1992).

CHAPTER V

COLLECTIVE IDENTITY AND CHANGE-MAKING: "WE ARE GRASSFARMERS"

Through boundary formation, narrative creation, and internalization of the movement's cultural values, grassfed producers have laid most of the groundwork for the construction of a collective identity. In order for a collective identity to take form, collective actors must take measures to build a sense of solidarity and positive affect towards one another (Jasper 1998). This process is complicated and difficult for several reasons. First, contemporary movements tend to be diffuse and lack centralized leadership and infrastructure (Johnston et. al. 1994). Without main offices or chapters to hold meetings and organize movement activities, it becomes more problematic to connect collective actors with one another. Second, culturally-focused movements in contemporary society tend to draw members from diverse and disparate backgrounds (Einwohner, Reger, and Myers 2008). While members may have grassfed methods in common, they may lack any other commonalities, and even exhibit oppositional cultural backgrounds and beliefs. Rectifying these differences, or at least encouraging members to look past their dissimilarities and focus on their commonalities, is a huge hurdle to overcome before collective identity can be cultivated (Polletta and Jasper 2001). Third, collective identity itself is a continual process, constantly shifting and changing as movement actors renegotiate structural barriers and group narratives and boundaries (Cohen 1985). As the political, economic, and cultural aspects of the agricultural landscape grow and evolve, the grassfed identity must as

well. The grassfed movement is currently engaging in these processes of collective identity formation, and is beginning to build positive affect among members, create a unique set of terminology to identify group methods and actors, and overcome physical barriers to organization by utilizing submerged networks to connect members, share information, and engage in daily protest against the dominant agricultural system.

Positive Affect: "We Can Respect Each Other As People"

The grassfed movement in Oklahoma is comprised of a diverse group of movement actors with many different backgrounds and beliefs. As such, they are similar to the various other culturally-focused groups that social movement actors have examined in the past. In order for collective identity to take hold and unite the group, grassfed actors must encourage a sense of "positive affect" among fellow movement participants (Jasper 1998). According to several grassfed producers, this sense of positive affect is being nurtured. One producer explains it this way:

> There is just this wide variety of people [in the grassfed movement]. A lot of them are people whose lifestyles and political views and so on are very dissimilar from mine, and that I probably wouldn't have come across in any other normal context living out here in western Oklahoma, and so that's been kind of fun too, is to get to know people who are very different and understand that even though I might not agree with everything they do or say or believe and they don't agree with everything that I do that there's this common interest in food and we can respect each other as people.

Another producer was a bit surprised when he discovered that one of his long-time friends and fellow conventional livestock producer was also considering pursuing grassfed because:

> Neither one of us would have suspected that either one of us would get into the sustainable agriculture stuff since for most conventional farmers, its only hippies that do this stuff, or super ultra-liberal people that they don't wanna associate with. So neither one of us would have suspected that the other one would have gotten into it, but the people we have met doing it are pretty all over the place. We were surprised!

A third grassfed producer described the friendships budding among her and the grassfed producers she met through a farmer's market in Oklahoma City, saying "I really feel like we are

becoming friends with these people, not just competition at the market or familiar faces at the [Oklahoma Food] Co-Op. I'm really looking forward to getting to know all these people more, cause it seems like we have so much in common."

Finally, a long-time grassfed producer explains how individuals within the movement have coalesced over the years she has been grassfarming, and how the group self-regulates boundaries and membership:

> The ones that are really in it for the same reasons, we get along real well. With every group you're gonna have some weirdoes, but normally there's reasons. Either they're not living what they preach and we've figured them out, or they're just in it for the money somehow. They don't normally fit into us. Cause this is a lifestyle, you know? We're not backwards whatsoever. But it is a lifestyle.

Another grassfed producer agreed that the group manages boundaries using collective identity, stating: "If you've got somebody that doesn't do it right, trust me, they aren't gonna be in business, cause word's gonna get around: 'don't buy anything from that dude, etc. etc.,' and that person will cease to exist. And so, it has a natural way of weeding itself out, those who belong and those who are just looking to make a buck." This type of regulation on the basis of the collective values of the grassfed movement enforces the implicit definitions of membership and further builds group solidarity (Melucci 1995; Johnston et. al. 1994). Overall, building positive affect strengthens the bonds within the group, and further solidifies member's feelings of belonging and commitment to grassfed principles and actors across diverse backgrounds (Jasper 1998).

The Naming of Things: "Grassfarmers"

In contemporary social movements, collective identity can be imbued into many different cultural artifacts (Polletta and Jasper 2001: 285). For the grassfed movement in Oklahoma, these cultural artifacts include the narratives group members promote, the agricultural rituals they take part in on their farms and ranches, and the boundaries they draw between themselves and

oppositional actors. For other social movements, names are a key cultural artifact used to express the group's collective identity. In the grassfed movement, the names producers choose to describe their profession and livelihoods are expressions of the collective identity they are forming with grassfed collective actors.

This collective identity is encapsulated in the "grassfarmer." When asked what they would call themselves, several grassfed producers identified themselves as grassfarmers rather than ranchers or farmers. As one producer elaborates: "when it comes down to it, [grassfed is] a different mindset. You're really a *grassfarmer*, not a rancher or a farmer. And when you start looking at it from the standpoint of your grass versus your animal, it kind of changes what you do." They consider a grassfarmer to be a unique agricultural identifier that captures their worldview. This is not simply an attempt to redefine their agricultural practices with new terminology. The creation of the grassfarmer label is a reflection and concentration of their cultural values concerning livestock agriculture. It also represents a re-definition of livestock agriculture by rejecting the traditional identifiers in favor of a new name that represents the cultural concerns of grassfed producers. By rejecting the false dichotomy of farmer and rancher, grassfarmers situate themselves on agricultural common ground: focusing on raising healthy animals, but through the protection and cultivation of healthy soils and plants.

At the root of everything for grassfarmers is their grass. Grass is seen as the central focus of grassfed operations because it is the source of everything else. Through cultivating healthy pastures, grass can be the key to environmental integrity. Grass is also seen as the central source of nutrition for grassfed livestock, and thus the key to animal welfare and health. Grassfarmers also see a direct connection between food and personal health, and thus grass is seen as the protector of the health of consumers of grassfed products. Grass is also seen as subversive and political. By utilizing grass as the only input in their agricultural systems, grassfarmers are subverting the conventional wisdom of agriculture that prescribes various manufactured inputs. One producer describes his tasks as more focused on the pasture plants than animals:

> We basically are grassfarmers. We rotate legumes and cover crops that build the soil, cowpeas in the summer, winter peas in the winter. We have some barley we raise; we raise some oats, some alfalfa. For the most part that's what we plant and raise on our pastures and our cows run in that. So we focus on what we're growin' more than we focus on the cattle themselves…and people could learn a lot from us, and learn that you don't need all those inputs and chemicals and things to raise good food or tall grass or healthy animals. Sunshine and rain are all that makes it go, along with a little bit of cow shit!

By embodying the term grassfarmer, grassfed producers are forming a collective identity that encapsulates their cultural concerns and their oppositional feelings towards conventional agriculture while preserving their dedication to grass-based livestock systems. They are also developing a collective identity that is oppositional and potentially radical. By rejecting conventional agricultural methods and values, grassfarmers are creating "cultures of solidarity" which serve to challenge the dominant agricultural powers within society (Fantasia 1988; Roscigno and Danaher 2001: 24). This type of "counterhegemonic organizing" has the potential to inspire broader change within society as well as the localized food systems in which grassfed producers in Oklahoma operate (Horton 2010: 65). These types of protest are not primarily concerned with material rewards or goals, but again are motivated by cultural and ideological desires for acknowledgment and change (Gamson 1992, 1995; Melucci 1985; Taylor and Whittier 1992).

Identifying as grassfarmers thus works on two levels: the first is the intentional use of names and terminology to reflect the cultural values of the grassfed movement, and the second is the potential to inspire broader agricultural reform through the subversion of dominant agricultural paradigms. While the act of naming and renaming individuals and actions is political and subversive, it is only the first step towards achieving tangible changes in the agricultural and political system. Although grassfed actors are not organizing in overtly political ways, they are engaging in protest through more informal, culturally-focused methods. Building upon the subversive grassfarmer identity and methods, grassfed producers are working to create "cultural

laboratories" in which "free spaces" and other cultural protest activities are taking place (Melucci 1989:18). It is here, connected with other grassfarmers via submerged networks, where grassfed producers "self-consciously practice in the present the future changes they seek" (Melucci 1989:18).

Submerged Networks: Informal Mobilization and Collective Grassfed Action

Through the processes of delineating boundaries and internalizing movement narratives, grassfed producers are establishing a firm cultural base from which they center their collective identity as members of the grassfed movement, or grassfarmers. Grassfed producers are also identifying conventional agricultural processes as threats to their cultural values, and thus as a call to action. Accordingly, they are seeking to change the conventional structural forces they identify as oppositional. However, grassfed producers are not utilizing formal avenues to implement the changes they seek. Instead, they are accessing informal networks of submerged actors to organize and implement protest and change-making activities (Melucci 1989). These activities reflect their grassfed cultural values and are a form cultural critique (Marcus and Fisher 1999). They are also earnest attempts to reshape local food systems in the image they desire. While the protest and change-making activities may sometimes manifest through individuals, they require the mobilization of many other actors via informal submerged networks in order to occur, and as such are a form of collective action. Through a redefinition of transparency, the utilization of direct marketing initiatives, and the creation of alternative processing operations, grassfed producers are changing local agriculture with the aim to change conventional agriculture and contemporary society's relationship with food and livestock.

Redefining Transparency in Everyday Transactions

At the heart of grassfed producers change-making tactics is the issue of transparency. Grassfed producers object to the increasingly-involved hand of government in agricultural issues.

They also object to the perceived obfuscation of agricultural processes through regulatory agencies, both public and private. This is encapsulated in their rejection of third-party and governmentally-supported certification schemes and governmentally-regulated processing and distribution techniques. The solution for grassfed producers is a simple one: create a local food system that relies on direct interactions between producers and consumers, thus eliminating the need for certifications in the first place. One producer outlines his idea of this new food system:

> And so, I think it's better if we have a local food system to where I don't have to be certified anything! You come out and check it out [the farm], you can walk through the barns, you can look through my shelves and see if you see any chemicals there or whatever, and do it that way, and feel more comfortable with what it is or I am not doing. And so I think that's how it should be, we should get a more trustworthy system rather than depending on me accurately filling out paper work, 'cause that's really what most of these certifications revolve around.

Another producer agrees, explaining that visits to farms should be encouraged, stating "if you really wanna know what's going on [at my farm], come out and look! I'm fine with that! I'd rather customers come out than nosey government regulators." So grassfed producers appear to be encouraging consumers to demand transparency from their agricultural producers in order to cut out the interference of government and third-party regulators.

Ensuring transparency goes beyond simply avoiding certification and regulatory interference and fees, but involves the larger issue of establishing trust and building a relationship between consumer and producer. One producer explains that he would not trust any farmer unless he had the opportunity to verify his practices himself: "Everyone I talk to, you know, we invite them to come out here and *see* what we do. Unless I had a relationship with the producer I have no confidence that you're getting what they say." Another producer echoes the need to build trust between consumers and producers, stating that "The only way to do this and to be able to do it right is to find somebody you do trust and visit the farm once in a while! You have to be transparent if you are inviting people out, so knowing that you're invited tells people that this is a transparent deal and that he does what he says." He goes on to explain that it meets the

customer's need to have his or her moral and ethical concerns addressed: "I also think that if you give people a way to satisfy their desire to be humane and to eat good beef, they'll wanna come out and see the farm and the cows frolicking. And so you give them a way to do that, then they will not only want to pay a premium for the fact that they can do that, but they will want to develop a relationship with you because of it." According to a long-time producer, this is because people are yearning for a connection to agriculture now more than ever due in part to their separation from agricultural processes over time:

> Customers like to visit with the farmer, they like to know the farmer, and that's something that's—I mean they become part of our extended family. We've got customers from the market that come to the farm, people just wanna know where their food comes from, and how it's raised and how the cattle are treated and what you put on your soils. They're a generation or two away from the farm anymore, you might say. Their parents or grandparents or great-grandparents maybe were farmers, a lot of them, so any ties they can get back to the farm they just love it! I think that happens and we just don't really realize how starved these people are just to get their hands dirty you might say. We enjoy having people here and we enjoy tellin' our story.

Within such a system, grassfed producers are redefining the consumer and producer relationship. Instead of relying on outside agencies to verify a producer's practices and products, grassfed producers are shifting the responsibility of verification onto the consumer. They believe that producers should be in charge of their production techniques and that consumers should take it upon themselves to educate themselves about how their food is raised and what they are and are not comfortable accepting in terms of agricultural products and production. One producer exclaims:

> You as a consumer should be smart enough to ask questions! If you're not it's your own damn fault! And now in the grocery store I can kind of see that, why they want different certifications, because you've got all this to choose from and there's nobody there to talk to, you know, there could be some different legalities on that. But as far as me selling you some of my beef and you're not happy with it or whatever, you know, that's between you and me! And we should be able to have that kind of relationship with our customers, if it's a one on one. And if it's a third party, to where I'm selling it in a grocery store, I can see that needs to make sure that it has the labeling and the packaging and certifications for different things. But as far as you coming out here to my farm or me taking it to you, that's between you and me!

Through this redefinition of transparency and the responsibilities of producers and consumers, grassfed producers are envisioning a very different type of local food system.

Utilizing Direct Marketing: "I Kind of Gather My Own Following"

Related to issues of transparency is grassfed producers' motivation to direct market their products. In order to avoid governmental and third-party oversight and potentially-costly certifications, many grassfed producers are expanding their direct marketing abilities. They are going about this process by utilizing existing alternative agricultural infrastructure to initially reach customers. However, grassfed producers are encouraging customers to abandon local food institutions and to buy directly from the producers via on-farm sales in an effort to skirt regulatory obligations. One producer explains the amount of paperwork required to allow him to sell at the Tulsa's farmers market is "just too much hassle." Looking to avoid this type of oversight, he uses the access to customers the market provides him in order to secure his own client base, and then convinces clients to buy directly from his farm:

> And then we went to the farmers market, but our objective was not necessarily to sell at farmers market, cause of the regulations, they were such a pain…So we decided to just go to get customers. And so we did one year over in Tulsa at Cherry Street which is a huge farmers market, and then we've done a couple years in Stillwater, but now we don't really have to do farmer's market because people buy quarters and halves [of beef], or they'll even call and come out, which is exactly what we wanted.

Other producers describe using similar tactics with the Oklahoma Food Cooperative:

> Now the Co-Op has been wonderful and integral in introducing customers to me and my products, and it pushed me into the next step to grow big enough and to where I don't need that exposure anymore. Now I kind of gather my own following and just sell directly to these customers without the middle man…Cause you know [the Co-Op was] taking 10 or 15% off the top for their delivery thing, and was making me process everything USDA and stuff. But now I'm to where people are willing to come out to my place or just go to the processor and pick up whatever it is they ordered, that's the easiest thing.

So while grassfed producers identify as part of the broader alternative agriculture movement, they are using the alternative structures to their advantage in order to guide customers towards their on-farm direct marketing schemes and away from formal institutions.

Direct marketing is also popular with grassfed producers because it allows them to verify all of the products they sell, which is especially important when the products are being marketed as healthy or value-added. One producer explains the extra effort in several ways:

> So it takes a while to build up to direct marketing. It's a lot easier to just load 'em up and take them to the local livestock auction and sell' em but you know, when you sell anything there, no one knows all the trouble and objectives that you had when you raised those livestock cause they go into a ring and then somebody buys them. They're not carrying a sign as they come into the ring saying "I'm grassfed, I wasn't injected with anything that would hurt you" or whatever. You know? That's the only thing about direct marketing, it takes more time and it takes a little more money but the payoff is greater. Cause if you take it from birth to slaughter and then you go the extra step to sell it to somebody then you can assure them of the whole chain of ownership, cause it's just you! And they don't mind paying you because they know where it comes from and they know how it was taken care of and they know how it was raised, you know the breeding and the whole works, so that's why I'm doing it, right now.

While direct marketing affords grassfed producers a higher profit by eliminating middle men from the distribution process, once again profit is not the only motivator. One producer explains that such forms of direct marketing resonate with his personal political values, saying "for me it's a political thing—the more political roadblocks that we can take out of that connection between the farmer and the consumer the better. If I had to have one area that I could focus on to change it's that. Because I think once we open up truly free trade amongst individuals, I think stuff will work itself out."

Grassfed producers are supportive of direct marketing in part because of the customer relations it fosters. By removing middle men from the distribution process, farmers and ranchers are more likely to be directly involved with the customer and the purchasing process (Marsden et.al. 2000; Winter 2003). For many grassfed producers, it is not only direct customer-to-producer interactions they are pursuing, but a non-regulated space from which to sell their

products as well. For them, even participating in alternative food institutions like farmers markets is still giving in to the conventional agricultural system, since products sold at farmers markets must be regulated and processed in certified facilities. In the search for a free space, grassed producers are retreating beyond the farm gate to completely on-farm sales schemes. By taking advantage of this legal loophole, they are beginning to completely withdraw from agricultural processing and distribution systems, and instead rely on online and word of mouth marketing to publicize their operations and products and on-farm slaughter facilities to process their products.

Alternative Processing: "Free Spaces" and Counterhegemonic Statements

Another way grassfed producers subvert the dominant regulatory system involves processing their animals outside of the conventional slaughterhouse. For some this started as a cultural protest and a way to voice their discontent with the current agricultural system, while with others alternative processing arrangements came about as a necessity as local slaughter facilities slowly went under due to increasing consolidation within the livestock industry. For others still, it was a political statement rejecting the increasing restrictions on livestock processing for small scale producers. No matter the cause, grassfed producers utilizing alternative processing models are united in their distrust of conventional agricultural interests and their dedication to preserve their cultural concerns regarding the welfare of their animals, the health of their customers, and the transparency of the agricultural process. Individuals involved with these processing activities are engaging and sharing information with one another and their customers via submerged networks, and imbuing their activities and products with a cultural protest and meaning aligned with their broader grassfed ideals.

The first type of alternative livestock processing utilized by grassfed producers involves the certified slaughter of poultry in an on-farm facility. State law allows for individual farmers to process poultry on their farm as long as they process fewer than 1000 birds a year (Oklahoma

Department of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry 2004b). These facilities must be certified and inspected by state agricultural officials. This requires an inspector to visit the facility yearly, and the producer to pay the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture for a certification permit. Some grassfed producers choose this avenue because they acknowledge the importance of safety and certification, but still object to the practices of more conventional slaughter facilities and federal regulations. One producer explains "some of the federal regulations that are in place are ridiculous, and we can bypass some of that stuff, and I don't mind there being some sort of level of inspection and some sort of level of accountability, but it needs to be fair, across the board." However, some still view the regulatory process as unnecessary:

> We do our own chickens, we've had the [Oklahoma] Department of Ag out here on that for on-site slaughter, been inspected which was really kind of a joke. I got my little permit to do it, had to pay them for it. The way it works, people need to preorder and [the State inspectors] want them to buy the live animal. And then when we process it we put their name on it and it's their chicken, and the only other thing is you have to have a sticker on it that says it's *not* processed in a USDA plant. There's a lot of splitting hairs involved.

However, state certification is not as strict as Federal USDA regulations, so producers are still not able to sell these products through established retail institutions, such as the supermarket or local food stores, or across state lines. While they may list their products for sale through a third party website, such as the Oklahoma Food Cooperative, the third party is legally barred from distributing the product. Instead, producers must physically transfer the product to the customer—no middleman or distributor may facilitate the transfer of the livestock products without Federal inspection, presenting producers utilizing this type of operation with a different set of obstacles despite their certification: by leaving the farmer responsible for physically delivering the product to the consumer, it severely limits a producer's market access.

Although producers prefer to do things themselves and are glad the state allows them to legally process poultry on their farms, they admit that it is still limiting their expansion and exposure in local food markets: "I know there is a 1,000 chicken exemption where you can

slaughter your own and that some people do that, but since you can't sell through the OK Food Co-Op, it limits us because they deliver all over the state, and I would be subject to just one place in the state. So on the one hand it seems like a workaround, and then on the other hand it's a roadblock." Another producer explains that while the exemption is helpful, the resale restrictions make it difficult to access customers, and results in a lot of careful wording to prevent any illegal action:

> The [Oklahoma Food] Co-Op will not deliver because it's not USDA processed. But I can list [products] and sell them through the Co-Op, and the Co-Op will collect the money, and then I just meet the buyer in the parking lot adjacent to the Co-Op pickup. It feels like a drug deal, except I load my trench coat up with chickens! But that's how it works.

So as grassfed producers attempt to find a middle ground between complete government regulation and their individual desires, they depict an agricultural regulatory environment that is ill-designed to work with smaller-scale producers and a group of grassfed producers that are reluctant to participate in such a process. This drives some producers to opt-out completely of any formalized distribution schemes on political convictions:

> You know the farms that we know of that seem to be pretty sustainable or seem to be making it are ones where they're off the grid, they're not doing the whole regulatory dance, they just they have people come to the farm, all direct marketing. And they live close enough to a population center that it's drivable for their customers. So there's that aspect of just sort of the libertarian, leave me alone, you don't have any business on my property and if my neighbors and friends want to come buy my milk and buy my cheese and my beef, good! So all that [regulation] drives people away from wanting to deal with any government, until you just want to have your little compound and have people come and buy your stuff and have everyone else just leave you alone.

Others utilize a second form of movement protest and change-making which involves processing animals at local slaughter facilities and direct marketing large portions of the animals directly to consumers. Many local and small-scale processing facilities lack the USDA certification that enables producers to resell their products through formal marketing institutions, such as groceries and farmers markets. Instead, producers have engaged with customers on a

contract-like basis, where customers call in bulk orders of animals, such as half or whole sides of beef, and arrange for the producer to deliver the live animal to a specific processor. The customer then picks up the processed products directly from the processor according to their custom specifications. This enables local producers to avoid shipping their animals to certified facilities and dealing with the resale or delivery of the rendered products, and places the burden of certification on the processors.

The third alternative processing method grassfed producers use involves processing and marketing their products through uncertified and unregulated on-farm slaughter. The narratives the grassfed movement perpetuates regarding the difficulty of processing their animals seem to have influenced many grassfed producers to take matters into their own hands, literally. Instead of continuing to participate in a system that they are morally and ethically opposed to, and one that they depict as openly-hostile to their interests, grassfed producers have begun to establish informal on-farm processing systems. These systems are clandestine operations put together by groups of grassfed producers and activists. On-farm processing is also unique to every operation since most producers design their own facilities to their own needs, and even build their own processing equipment. This system takes advantage of a legal loophole that allows farmers to sell anything they would like directly to consumers, regardless of regulation or certification, as long as the transaction occurs on the producer's property and involves a direct sale, referred to colloquially as the "on-farm exemption."

During the course of the interview process I was witness to a processing "party," as the producers call them. While the party I attended was for processing poultry, producers discussed at length their systems for on-farm processing of goats, hogs, and even cattle. The parties are organized through several key actors within the grassfed movement, and are examples of submerged networks in action. Some, but not all, of the organizing actors are particularly visible in the movement, and most do not command a strong presence at retail sites like natural food stores or farmers markets. However, these producers have amassed the knowledge and

wherewithal to devise their own processing systems, and actively coordinate with other like-minded producers to plan group processing sessions. Their do-it-yourself and anti-regulatory attitude results in a processing method involving homemade machines and cooperative work-sharing. While processing is unregulated and uncertified, producers hold food safety paramount and take great strides to ensure the products they render are not contaminated in any way. Once the livestock products are broken down into the desired cuts, they are then delivered or picked up by customers who place pre-orders. All transactions are handled in cash, and all parties involved understand the legalities, or lack thereof, involved with such transactions. When one customer was asked about the safety of eating such unregulated products, she responded with indignation: "I'm not doing anything bizarre that I need to hide. The same cannot be said for anything you're buyin' down at Wal-Mart, you will not get access to how that animal is treated or raised or anything else. As far as I'm concerned, this is the safest and healthiest thing I could be doin'!"

These alternative processing circles are prime examples of submerged networks in action. First, grassfed producers are networking with each other to identify who is interested in such activities. Second, grassfed producers are not receiving any formal education regarding how to process various types of livestock, so they are gaining the knowledge themselves and sharing it with other producers through the established grassfed network. Third, customers must engage with alternative processor/producers via these submerged networks by asking around at farmers markets or through other involved parties. Since distribution is not publicized, all the transactions involved, from the organizing of processing schedules with participating producers to the taking and placing of customer orders, to the final on-farm distribution of the finished products, take place within the submerged networks of the grassfed movement.

By engaging with alternative processing operations and direct marketing schemes, grassfed producers are attempting to shape local food systems in Oklahoma by emphasizing the need for less government regulation and increased transparency in the agricultural system. While subverting the conventional agricultural status quo is a motivation for pursuing direct marketing,

grassfed producers are also concerned with issues regarding transparency between producers and consumers. This is motivated in part by producers' concerns with various certification schemes such as organic certification, as well as by a desire to increase the food literacy of customers. It is also influenced by their overall desire to see a deregulated local agricultural system that fits more closely with their libertarian ideals. Grassfed producers politicize issues surrounding transparency by emphasizing the importance of direct customer-producer interactions and transactions regarding the purchase of food products and agricultural methods used by producers. Finally, by utilizing informal networks of knowledge and product exchange, grassfed producers are creating connections between like-minded producers and consumers, and engaging in subversive processing techniques that challenge the agricultural status quo while producing a product that is in-line with their cultural values. While these activities may not take place in formal venues, they are working to shape and change the local food system, and are working to spread a grassfarmer culture in Oklahoma.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

Grassfed Livestock and Impacts on Local Food Systems in Oklahoma

Utilizing social movement theories to analyze the activities of the grassfed movement in Oklahoma offers several key contributions to the literature. A discussion of the grassfed movement's identity work allows us to view the actions of the grassfed movement that occur outside of the formal political sphere, and allows us to understand movement action as something more than rational choice and self-interest, but as personal and cultural values in action. Since grassfed producers operate within a niche market and do tend to charge a premium for their products, it is important to be able to see past the initial sticker shock and view the underlying cultural processes that are motivating grassfarmers. A discussion of the grassfed movement's use of submerged networks also provides a demonstration of collective identity in action, and an example of collective actors engaging in the creation and definition of new spaces in an attempt to restructure oppositional institutions in accordance with their cultural definitions and agricultural values (Cohen 1985). This study offers a unique example of such processes that no other scholars have presented, and lends further legitimacy to using cultural approaches to understand social movement activity.

The manner in which grassfed producers mobilize is another unique contribution to the agrifood literature as well as the social movement literature. Grassfed producers are attempting to change various aspects of the contemporary agricultural system through informal protest and

change-making. This is in part because they have not had luck with direct political tactics in the past, and in part because they inherently distrust the formal political system due to the perceived relationship between agribusiness and governmental regulators. Through their use of submerged networks, grassfed producers not only attempt to reject the oversight of formal political entities, but to reject the regulated spaces that dominant agricultural forces use to regulate and control the act of production and consumption. The submerged networks they are utilizing are creating new relationships between producers and consumers as well as new unregulated spaces for the production and marketing of agricultural products. Direct marketing and alternative processing stations can thus be viewed as examples of "free spaces," or areas of movement activity and protest that are separated from the oppositional powers against which the movement is mobilizing (Polletta and Jasper 2001: 288). By shifting the processes involved with grassfed agriculture to spaces beyond the control of agribusiness and governmental regulators, grassfed producers are reshaping local food systems in Oklahoma, and are making the seemingly-simple act of raising and purchasing livestock products a culturally and politically significant act, and an act that is imbued with the values of the broader grassfed movement.

These free spaces are not simply areas where producers can process and sell their products free from government interference, but they are areas where producers are socializing, building friendships, and exchanging information, skills, and knowledge. Through this process, the collective grassfed identity shared by producers is strengthened, and thus so is the grassfed movement. It is also through these spaces that movement tactics, such as on-farm processing and methods of pasture-management, are spread among other producers. This type of agricultural knowledge exchange has been shown to be important in another circle of local grassfed dairy producers in Wisconsin (Hassanein and Kloppenburg 1995). This study extends the work of Hassanein and Kloppenburg by observing these processes in grassfed beef cattle, poultry, and hog producers in Oklahoma.

Closer to home, the emergence of the grassfed livestock movement in Oklahoma has important implications for the region. First, Oklahoma is one of the nation's leaders in the production of commercial livestock, ranking fifth in the nation in cattle production, eighth in hog production, and thirteenth in poultry production (United States Department of Agriculture 2011). Considering that conventional livestock operations are one of the state's largest industries, the fact that an alternative movement espousing critical views of the industry is interesting. It would be beneficial for future researchers in Oklahoma, as well as other states with large conventional agricultural interests, to analyze the grassfed livestock movement as a countermovement. Countermovement theories could help explain how the grassfed movement is seeking to implement change and is utilizing material resources towards this end. It would also help identify the barriers that the grassfed movement may be coming up against, and how alternative agricultural producers are interacting with and mobilizing against conventional agricultural interests. Finally, it would provide the other side of the story by highlighting the processes that conventional producers are using to produce livestock and justify their operations. Framing conventional producers in terms of a cohesive social movement, rather than a static oppositional force, would lend new facets of understanding to the conventional-alternative dichotomy. As an extension, analysis of the broader AAF movement as a potential countermovement would help researchers understand the complicated relationships that exist between agricultural reformers and the existing agricultural status quo.

A central aspect of the grassfed movement's identity work involves the promotion of critical narratives concerning the value and effectiveness of certification schemes, specifically organic certification. This is in contrast to the findings of other agrifood researchers who claim that certification schemes are a viable method of ensuring the authenticity of agricultural products through the verification of producer practices via third parties (Renting and Marsden 2003). Contrastingly, grassfed producers in Oklahoma are skeptical of the ability of governmental and third-party certifications to ensure that producers are adhering to the strict principles of

production that certification requires. They see a certification system, organic or otherwise, as a method that obscures transparency by allowing paperwork and regulators to vouch for the authenticity and legitimacy of agricultural products. Instead, they are advocating for a further shortening of food supply chains by cutting out these certifications and instead relying on face-to-face transactions and open farm-gate policies to allow for verification of a producer's agricultural practices (Marsden et.al. 2003).

This goal has several implications, both positive and negative, on local food systems in Oklahoma. It can be argued that through these methods of shortening food supply chains, grassfed producers are also economically embedding their operations in their local communities, which could have a positive impact on local economies (Winter 2003; Murdoch et.al. 2000). The types of hyper-local transactions they are advocating require no payments to outside certifiers or distributors, and instead funnel all the money involved directly into the local economies. These activities reflect those observed by other local food researchers in which local food producers are purposefully working to recreate local systems of economic exchange in order to rebuild local economies. Several grassfed producers addressed how they hoped their agricultural ventures would lead to the opening or reopening of local storefronts and processors, and encourage others to "buy local" and "buy Oklahoma." As an extension, by increasing the economic embeddedness of their operations, grassfed producers are also instilling their products with cultural as well as economic value and meaning (Murdoch et.al. 2000). This is exemplified in their marketing of grassfed livestock products that are animal welfare-friendly and environmentally-conscious, and by their prioritizing of cultural issues regarding agriculture over self-interest and profit. The meanings they are attaching to their products are working to retool local definitions of what farmers and ranchers are and do, what their values are, how they should contribute to the local food system and economy, and by extension how consumers should engage in these activities.

Despite the potential benefits grassfed producers attribute to more localized and direct agricultural processes, their activities raise several concerns. First, grassfed producers' pursuit of

increasingly-shortened food supply chains calls into question issues of accessibility and fairness. By reducing access to their products through limiting their distribution area and methods, producers are reinforcing many of the physical barriers that inhibit food security within Oklahoma. Requiring customers to come to their farms, which are often in remote and hard-to-reach areas of the state, grassfed producers are limiting access to their products to those that can afford the time and resources to make the trip. It also takes away patrons from other local food institutions such as farmers markets, which also contribute to local economies. Additionally, this type of exclusionary marketing works to undermine other alternative agrifood institutions, such as the Oklahoma Food Cooperative, that strive to increase access to local foods and have worked to create local food supply chains that reach into even the most rural areas of the state. By purposefully siphoning off customers from these types of institutions, as several grassed producers admit to doing, grassfed producers are effectively working against the food security goals of other AAF actors. So while they are creating narratives that support their decision to seek direct interactions with consumers and honor their cultural values regarding how they raise, process, and distribute their livestock, it comes at the price of access by consumers and broader food security in the Oklahoma region.

Second, by encouraging the purchase of uncertified products via on-farm sales or other direct-purchase methods, producers are placing all the risk of the transaction onto the consumer. While they view this as an attempt to draw the consumer into the agricultural process by making them more aware of the food system, it also eliminates formalized systems of accountability and quality assurance. Grassfed producers state that they take every precaution to ensure customer safety and satisfaction, but they are not making these claims in relation to any formal codified set of rules and regulations. If consumers were to get ill from an on-farm purchase from these producers, they would have no avenue for restitution. This scenario is ironic in relation to the grassfed movement's vitriolic criticism of the practices of many conventional processing and feedlot facilities, in which they denounce producers for cutting corners and compromising the

health and safety of the consumer despite assurances by conventional producers of the safety and quality of their products and methods. However, when grassfed producers want to cut the corners of regulation and formal certification from their operations, they expect others to just simply trust them.

This hypocritical stance is a prime example of the "local trap." Because their grassfed products are local, producers assume that they are safer, healthier, and better than the conventional options (Born and Purcell 2006). In reality, their products are no safer, and from a public health standpoint may even be more dangerous than the conventional products they demonize through their narratives. In reality, there is no reason that an unscrupulous producer could not be a local grassfed producer. This brings up larger issues that need to be addressed by AAF actors regarding the role of agricultural transparency and regulation, and the steps that both customers and producers should take to ensure safety while still honoring the cultural values that motivate them.

The local trap extends into the analysis of grassfed producers' claims to protect the environment and the welfare of their animals as well. Grassfed producers have built a narrative that portrays grassfed agriculture as environmentally friendly because it does not require chemical inputs and is based on local transactions. However, the impact of livestock on the environment is one that climate scientists and sustainability experts are increasingly concerned about (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations 2006; Lappe and Terry 2006). While it may be better for the environment to raise animals on grass rather than in a feedlot, especially when taking into consideration the grain requirements of feedlot-raised livestock (Gurian-Sherman 2008), it appears that raising livestock in any fashion may have a negative impact on the global climate. However, the local trap hides this macro-level critique, and the constant comparison of alternative and conventional systems makes it easy to lose the bigger picture of agricultural and environmental sustainability.

In terms of animal welfare, grassfed producers claim that their operations better ensure the health and safety of their animals than conventional systems. However, the irony of these statements is obvious when producers begin to describe the methods they use to slaughter and process their livestock for human consumption. While animal welfare may be better-preserved in these smaller-scale operations because individual producers with fewer animals can afford to monitor them more closely, the discussion quickly changes when the ethical and moral issues concerned with raising animals for human consumption are considered (Marcus 2005). Once again, the cultural values and claims of the grassfed livestock movement can sometimes become shrouded by moral relativism and defensive localism.

Finally, some grassfed producers espouse discriminatory narratives concerning the contemporary agricultural system. When asked about efficiency and scaling up, grassfed producers are resolutely opposed to increasing the size of their operations for fear of compromising their cultural values regarding animal welfare, health and quality, and environmental integrity. At the same time, they are critical of the efficiency paradigms that conventional agriculture has utilized to expand livestock operations. Some producers claim that producing food in a way that is not morally or culturally appropriate is not worth it, with one grassfed producer even going so far as to say "so what if we can feed the world with conventional agriculture? The issue should be *what* we are feeding them!" This demonstrates the extent to which the narratives of the grassfed movement have become ingrained in their personal ideologies, as well as how committed they are to ethical and value-driven agricultural processes. It also demonstrates how cultural values can eclipse other issues, such as food access and security, which must be taken into consideration when considering larger issues of food security. While it is questionable to claim that if people cannot afford nor have access to value-laden food that they should go hungry, it is laudable to wish that all people could have access to clean, healthy, and ethically-produced food. On the other hand, producers admit that their products are much more expensive than their conventional equivalents, and that even though they feel good

about producing a product that is in line with their cultural values, they must sell them for a price that some say even they cannot afford. So while the products are aligned with the cultural values of the movement, they are not within the reach of many individual consumers, and raise larger questions of food democracy and discrimination.

It is obvious that grassfed producers are allowing their cultural values to influence and dictate their agricultural practices. This is the outcome of collective identity development, and in many ways it is helping producers reach their goals of engaging in ethical and value-driven livestock production in a local context. However, these values are also leading some producers into the local trap, where grassfed values become synonymous with local production and the assumption that they are inherently better than conventional options. Nevertheless, it appears that grassfed producers in Oklahoma are concerned with the state of agriculture and are getting involved with changing the problems they take issue with, even if this involvement is through informal networks rather than political pressure via more established avenues.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS

This study examines the ongoing identity processes within the grassfed livestock movement in Oklahoma and the subsequent impacts these producers are having on local food systems. It highlights the three step process through which grassfed producers are forging a collective identity as grassfarmers. By forming group boundaries, grassfed producers are identifying movement members and oppositional forces on the basis of their agricultural production methods. In this stage grassfed producers draw group boundaries between those that use confinement methods to raise their animals and feed ruminant animals grain rations, and those that grass-finish their animals in free-range grazing programs. Next, through the creation of movement narratives, grassfed producers are framing their grievances with the current agricultural system. They specifically identify how conventional agriculture has changed over time, the role of agribusiness in regulation and education, and how certification schemes are contributing to a corrupt and destructive agricultural system. These narratives are justifying the actions of grassfed producers and motivating their protest and change-making activities. Finally, grassfed producers are internalizing group narratives and discourses regarding the cultural implications of their agricultural production. This is exemplified by grassfed producers placing the cultural imperatives of animal welfare, environmental protection, and the nutritional quality of their grassfed livestock products above the opportunity to maximize profit from their operations.

Through these three steps, grassfed producers are forging a collective identity as grassfarmers. Despite their diverse backgrounds, producers are working to build a positive affect towards one another, and are identifying as members of the grassfed movement. Through this, they are allowing their cultural values to directly influence their agricultural choices and strategies, resulting in their use of submerged networks and other informal protest activities to seek change. By engaging in alternative marketing and processing techniques, grassfed producers are subverting the dominant agricultural paradigm they identified in their narratives. They are also creating free spaces for knowledge exchange through on-farm processing networks. Within these networks, grassfarmers are engaging with customers and producers in ways that they identify as transparent, fair, and removed from the influence of government and agribusiness interests. Through this informal protest activity, grassfed producers are attempting to shape a local food system that is directly aligned with their cultural agricultural values.

The changes enacted by grassfed producers in local food systems in Oklahoma appear to be having both positive and negative impacts. Through emphasizing the need for local agricultural transactions, grassfed producers are working to embed their operations economically, to the benefit of local economies. They are also attempting to shorten the food supply chains of local agriculture by encouraging the use of direct marketing and on-farm sales schemes to strengthen the customer-producer relationship. However, these hyper-local transactions may also be weakening existing alternative agrifood institutions by siphoning off customers from other local food institutions and reinforcing physical and economic barriers to local food distribution. By avoiding formal regulatory and certification processes, grassfed producers may also be unfairly placing the burden of safety and responsibility onto the customer, bringing up issues of public health. Finally, grassfed producers may be falling into the local trap by assuming their products are safer, healthier, and more environmentally friendly than the conventional options.

The actions of grassfed livestock producers in Oklahoma deserve further attention from social movement scholars and agrifood researchers alike. A closer examination of how the

cultural values of grassfed producers are shaping the local food system would lend insight into the dynamics and power of collective identity in social movements. How producers redefine transparency and customer responsibility are of great importance to food and agricultural policy makers, and the implications of these movement goals should be seriously scrutinized. Additionally, analyzing the grassfed movement as a potential countermovement would lend insight into how grassfed producers, and the broader AAF movement, are mobilizing against conventional agricultural forces, and how conventional producers are organizing as well. Finally, this study was limited by its regional focus and non-representative sample size. Future studies examining grassfed agricultural processes at the national and international level would lend clarity to some of the issues raised in this study. It would also provide an important piece of analysis regarding the increasingly popular and powerful AAF movement, and would lend focus and direction to future studies of these movement actors.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date:	Thursday, August 23, 2012
IRB Application No:	AS1288
Proposal Title:	From CAFOs to Civic Agricultures: Alternative Livestock Models and Issues of Localism, Sustainability, and Rural Development in Oklahoma
Reviewed and Processed as:	Expedited

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 8/22/2013

Principal Investigator(s):

Andrew Taridon
425 N. Jardon
Stillwater, OK 74075

Tamara Mix
460 Murray Hall
Stillwater, OK 74078

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

X The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI, advisor, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Beth McTernan in 219 Cordell North (phone: 405-744-5700, beth.mcternan@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Shelia K. Kennison

Shelia Kennison, Chair
Institutional Review Board

VITA

Andrew Wade Raridon

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: AGAINST THE GRAIN: COLLECTIVE IDENTITY AND THE GRASSFED LIVESTOCK MOVEMENT IN OKLAHOMA

Major Field: Sociology

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Master of Science in Sociology at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2013.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology & Sociology at Knox College, Galesburg, Illinois in 2009.