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**A Local Food System Glossary:
A Rose by Any Other Name**

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A Local Foods System Glossary: A Rose by Any Other Name

The local food movement has defined much of the change in food trends for the early 21st century. While the term “local food” has become a common component of people’s lexicon and the vernacular, the meaning of the term is still somewhat ambiguous. In 2013, a group of agribusiness and other food systems specialists with land-grant universities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) attempted to identify the opportunities for the land-grant system to assist both producers and consumers attempting to navigate the murky waters of “local food” systems (see the series of articles in Choices). While the group of specialists, organized by the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA’s) Southern Risk Management Education Center (SRMEC), strove to clarify the issues related to producer involvement in local food systems, the contributors faced – as have several other researchers – the many challenges of defining “local food.”

This paper attempts to map the various aspects of “local food” and in doing so provide some common ground and a glossary of terminology related to local food systems. It is hoped that this effort will better assist consumers, producers, government entities, NGOs, and land-grant universities identify gaps in local food information and opportunities for educational programs related to local food systems.

The Importance of a Definition

In Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, Juliet dismisses the significance of a name by stating that “a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” However, as both Romeo and Juliet tragically learn in the play, names do carry meanings for others. Similarly, “a rose by any other name” does not hold for food marketing in the 21st century. Agribusiness literature is rife with studies showing that segments of consumers place premiums on various characteristics and

attributes of the foods they purchase, leading to the creation of numerous niche market opportunities. Some food categories develop a standardized definition over time, with the most notable example being the USDA's efforts to create the definitive national standard for certified organic products. However, other terms remain vague or overly broad in their definition because many characteristics play a role in the development of the definition. One common example is the term "value-added agriculture," which encompasses several different categories of food and agricultural products – each with its own set of qualifying characteristics, concepts, and unique practices (Lu and Dudensing 2015).

"Local food" – much like "value-added agriculture" – is an umbrella term for a broad array of niche food distribution strategies in the agribusiness context, each with a set of characteristics that hold value for a segment of consumers and producers. Unlike "certified organic," USDA has not arrived at a uniform set of standards for local foods but rather embraced a rather broad-based definition. It could be argued one common characteristic of all local food definitions is a short supply chain with few (or no) intermediaries and some sense of proximity between the producer and the end consumer. Still, for both consumers and producers there are other characteristics used to satisfy their own definitions of "local," and – as Romeo learned – names sometimes do carry an important meaning for others.

"Local," and who defines "local," has been a common theme in recent food/agribusiness articles and publications. It has been the subject of USDA publications (e.g., Martinez et. al 2010; Low et. al 2015), a question for discussion in agribusiness articles (e.g., Hand and Martinez 2010), a question for discussion in food journals (e.g., Lang, Stanton, and Qu 2014), and the impetus for numerous applied economics studies (e.g., Darby et. al 2008; Durham, King and Roheim 2009). Popular press articles and trade publications have also addressed the issue of

defining local food, with some attributing the modern redefinition of local foods to food manufacturers (e.g., Judkis 2009) and/or retailers (Burfield 2013) rather than solely the result of voiced consumer expectations.

Using “local food” as an over-arching term and drawing upon published and commonly applied terminology, we provide this rudimentary glossary of terms related to local food systems and associated classifications for the terms. Terms are loosely grouped into categories, realizing that categories can overlap. As with the “value-added agriculture” schematic developed by Lu and Dudensing (2015), we try to highlight areas where land-grant universities, government agencies, and natural alliances might play a role.

Value Chain Terms

Diamond et. al (2014) defined food value chains as business arrangements where “transparency, collaborative business planning and exchange of market intelligence and business knowhow among chain partners” result in “tangible benefits” to each system participant. Not all food value chains place the same values on the same characteristics or business practices. In the consumers’ eyes, local food products have real or perceived values that distinguish them from competing products available through any other marketing channel. The following terms relate to the distinguished values associated with local food.

Relationship marketing: Relationship marketing refers to a focus on longer-term customer attention, satisfaction, and retention, rather than a short-term goal such as quantity of sales transactions. Although relationship marketing is not new to food marketing, and thus not specific to “local,” it is a commonly recognized as an underpinning tenet of local food systems. The USDA “Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food” campaign epitomizes this philosophy, emphasizing relational loyalty on both sides of the market transaction. Relationship marketing is

often mentioned as a key success factor for local food producers supplying area restaurants (e.g., Curtis et. al 2008; Ernst and Woods 2011). The grassroots/social media campaigns undertaken by local food suppliers and farmers markets are associated with relationship marketing.

Transparency: While “transparency” is not adequately defined by USDA, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), or local foods associations, the term generally implies an easily identified and available knowledge of all the details and components of the marketing chain. For local food consumers, the ability to easily see and understand the links in the short supply chain builds trust and serves as a sort of authenticity of the local food system. Transparency is also a critical component of food safety and traceability regulations and guidelines throughout the entire food industry.

Loyalty: For local foods, “loyalty” is virtually no different from the concept of “customer loyalty” as fervently pursued by members of other food value chains (Diamond et. al 2014). One difference, however, is the inclination of local food systems to pursue loyalty based on shared values across the entire short supply chain: producers, farmers markets, food hubs, food cooperatives, and participating retail outlets. Keeping consumers returning to the designated market channel is the vital component of local food loyalty.

Farm branded: The specific farm’s brand carries with it a bundle of real and/or perceived characteristics signifying value (i.e., financial, social, and environmental) to the consumer. “Farm branded” refers to efforts by the supplier to build customer loyalty for the farm’s products, regardless of the marketing channel used by the consumer to obtain the farm’s products and regardless of the consumers’ proximity to the farm. As one example of this behavior, Holcomb, Kenkel, and Brown (2012) found that 94.6% of the suppliers to the 5,000-member Oklahoma Food Cooperative viewed the cooperative as an important marketing channel for their

farm/business, yet they actively promoted their respective farm brands through farmers markets, specialty stores, and even conventional supermarkets.

Geo-Proximity Terms

Geo-proximity terms are most commonly associated with “local,” even though proximity is not a consistent term in the eyes of consumers. The concept of “food miles,” the distance from farm-to-fork, and the environmental footprint of food distribution, which includes other transportation efficiencies, have been largely debated. Still, a “food mile” is unique to each and every food item, but the main issue of interest to consumers is proximity in the food chain. Yet, even a measurable quantity like proximity has subjective meaning to local food systems. While proximity may not be an objectively derived and quantifiable term, consumers do develop their own perceptions of acceptable proximity associated with “local.” Durham, King, and Roheim (2009) surveyed consumers in the Pacific Northwest, Minnesota, and Rhode Island, finding that almost equal percentages of consumers in Oregon and Minnesota viewed “local” as sourced from “less than 60 miles away” and “less than 175 miles away.”

Even without a universally accepted proximity for “local,” geographically specific conditions have been placed on many local food branding programs. Some might be defined as “political local,” meaning local is limited to a defined political/government entity or border, such as those defined by state departments of agriculture. Others are affiliated with natural boundaries or population centers. Martinez et al (2010) reported the total distance a product can be transported and still be considered a “locally or regionally produced agricultural food product” is less than 400 miles from its origin, or within the State in which it is produced according to the 2008 Farm Bill. Regardless, these geo-proximate terms are tied to boundaries that can be identified on a map.

State branding: The Farmer-to-Consumer Direct Marketing Act of 1976 and subsequent block grant funding in the 1980s helped many states start or revamp state branding programs (Nganje, Hughner, and Lee 2011). The goal of implementing these programs was and is to increase demand for products produced within a specified state, essentially a state-defined version of generic advertising commonly used for certain agricultural commodities (e.g., pork, beef, milk, etc.), but where the state brand is the constant and the branded products vary. Theoretically, these programs increase in-state demand for products and generate a spill-over effect in other states, promoting state branded products beyond their borders. State branding programs tend to be applied to both fresh foods and further processed foods manufactured in the state, even if the further processed foods are comprised of ingredients not produced in the state.

Regional branding: Regional branding, unlike state branding, can be smaller or larger in scope than an individual state. A state as large as Texas or California can have multiple in-state regions to differentiate agricultural production (e.g., Rio Grande Valley citrus and Napa Valley vineyards), while the Northeastern United States may have branding regions encompassing multiple states. Unlike state branding, where political orchestration and governmental funding are involved, regional branding may naturally arise from a recognizable kinship or demographic/economic association of states/counties. A region may be tied to metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) that either individually overlap state boundaries or naturally create a region by their collective proximity to one another, without consideration of state boundaries. King, Hand, and Gomez (2014) identified the “Washington, D.C. local area” as encompassing the District of Columbia and 56 counties across five states (Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia). Durham, King, and Roheim (2009) found consumers in Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN, and Portland, OR/Vancouver, WA, were more likely to consider

“Minnesota plus Wisconsin” and “Oregon plus Washington” (respectively) as acceptable to meet their own definitions of “local” fruits and vegetables due to their proximity to state borders and neighboring MSAs. Additionally, the Food Routes Network, LLC (FRN) initiated a national Buy Fresh, Buy Local educational campaign where regional Buy Fresh, Buy Local chapters within the FRN network may encompass up to 8 to 10 counties.

Food shed: Hedden (1929) provided the first recognized definition of a “foodshed” as analogous to a watershed, i.e., the “dikes and dams guiding the flow of food from producer to consumer,” pointing out the vulnerability of the whole “shed” to any mishap at one point in the flow. More recent definitions of food shed have related the term to a geographic region encompassing food production to reasonably match the region’s food consumption. Michigan State University (2013) defines a food shed as a “geographical area between where food is produced and where the food is consumed.” Peters et. al (2008) likened the term to a geographically defined area that can promote sufficient and sustainable food production to meet the needs of the area, without necessarily meeting all seasonal demands (e.g., strawberries in winter) or all food demands (e.g., bananas in non-tropic US). Still, others have expanded the definition of food shed to also incorporate measures of societal well-being (e.g., a “moral economy”), environmental well-being, community resilience, and self-reliance/self-sufficiency (e.g., Kloppenburg, Hendrickson, and Stevenson 1996).

Food hub: According to USDA (Barham et. al 2012), a regional food hub is “a business or organization that actively manages the aggregation, distribution, and marketing of source-identified food products primarily from local and regional producers to strengthen their ability to satisfy wholesale, retail, and institutional demand.” Though not included in the USDA definition, many food hubs also include social mission objectives in their business models (e.g.,

producer educational services, community food access). The scope of food hubs are generally defined geographically, hence the inclusion of the term in this section. The USDA oversees funding programs related to the development of food hubs, plus several state agencies and NGOs such as Winrock International's Wallace Center have established programs through their National Good Food Network to assist in the planning and creation of local food hubs.

Community/Social Terms

“Local food” is often envisioned with connotations of community well-being, whether well-being relates to economics, health, or some measure(s) of social justice. Such types of well-being are often difficult to accurately measure due to the challenges of identifying opportunity costs for producers and the impacts of local food spending on overall consumer expenditures (e.g., Hughes et. al 2008). Toler et. al (2009) found that at least a portion of price premiums paid by farmers market shoppers were related to “fairness” and “community” perceptions as opposed to solely on product characteristics such as freshness, food safety, or “food miles.” Farmers markets, CSAs, and food hubs are commonly associated with local food, but other proponents advocate for a more “civic agriculture” that considers the well-being a specific place.

Civic agriculture: “Civic agriculture” is a term originally coined by rural sociologist Dr. Thomas Lyson, who later devoted a book to the concept (Lyson 2004). The term represents the trend towards locally based agriculture and food production as a contrast to the increasingly globalized nature of food production, but Lyson's definition is more place-based and closely ties local food to a community's social and economic development. The term is generally applied to face-to-face interactions between farmers and consumers and includes most forms of community-based food systems, including farmers markets, community supported agriculture (CSA), and farm-to-school efforts. USDA, state departments of agriculture and health, and

numerous NGOs have adopted the most general and socially-based concepts of civic agriculture, even as agricultural economics literature hotly debates the economic theory and measurable economic development of local food systems.

Community Supported Agriculture: Community supported agriculture (CSA) is the most directly applicable form of local food system, with local consumers and a local farmer reaching an agreement, generally on a subscription basis, on the production and division of food items produced on part/all of the farm. Consumers (the “community”) pledge financial and/or labor support to a farm business so that the farming operation becomes, either legally or idealistically, the community's farm. The consumers and the producer share the risks and benefits of the farm operation. In the traditional model, consumers receive weekly shares of the farm’s output for their pledged financial support to the operation. Typically, CSA members, or "share-holders" of the farm operation, reach an agreement(s) with the landowner, e.g. for the acres of production, the crops and quantities to be provided per share, prior to pledging financial and/or labor support. In return, they receive shares or a regular subscription of the farm's output (i.e., vegetables, fruits, eggs, dairy, meats, etc.) throughout the growing season and the satisfaction of directly participating in the production of their food. Risks to members include poor harvests due to weather-related events, insect damage, or other unpredictable events. Rewards to the participating landowner include a predefined source of operating capital early in the growing season, a guaranteed outlet for their crops, and possibly better net prices for the crops. The traditional model is being adapted in many places, with variations on this model developing across the U.S.

Community gardens: According to Lawson (2005), the term community garden dates back to World War I and, “tends to be associated with one particular manifestation—the neighborhood

garden in which individuals have their own plots yet share in the garden's overall management.”

As with CSAs, participating community members agree upon the crops to be grown on the land, share in the costs and labor of producing the crops, and agree upon a division of the crops.

However, the ways in which community gardens are operated and organized, and even the ownership of the land, can vary greatly. In some cases, individual gardeners grow for their own consumption in their allotted space, in other cases crops are divided in shares among participating members, while in other cases a portion of the garden’s output may be designated for charitable contribution to members of the community deemed most needy. School gardens, in which students provide the labor to produce crops, are also a type of community garden.

In more recent work, Lawson leans away from a concretely defining the term due to greater understanding of the diversity of activities, governance, and functionality of these spaces. Lawson says, “...understanding the common experiences across these contexts might be more beneficial than coming up with an exact definition of a community garden (Lawson and Drake 2012).” State and federal programs may provide grant funding for qualified community gardens, and NGOs such as the American Community Garden Association support the development of community gardens on a national level.

Regional food system: Clancy and Ruhf (2010) define a regional food system as one in which “as much food as possible to meet the population’s food needs is produced, processed, distributed, and purchased at multiple levels and scales within the region.” Rather than emphasize the geographic dimensions of a region, the authors tie regional food systems to social equity, explaining that an idealized regional model would also result in “maximum resilience, minimum importation, and significant economic and social return to all stakeholders in the region.”

Farm-to-School: The distribution of excess farm production to schools can be traced back to federal programs of the 1930s and more recent food security programs associated with the U.S. Department of Defense, but the version of farm-to-school (F2S) most commonly embraced in the 21st century can be traced back to pilot programs in the 1990s with a combined incentive of increasing student consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables and creating market outlets for local farmers (Vallianatos, Gottlieb, and Hasse 2004). As reported by Kish (2008), the USDA Initiative for Future Agricultural Food Systems (IFAFS) of 2000 supported the development of a national F2S program, resulting in numerous F2S workshops nationwide and eventually a proposed Farm-to-Cafeteria Act in 2003. Even though the 2003 act was not passed, many aspects of F2S were continued at the state level and the National Farm to School Network was established. “Local” is a relative term in F2S programs, with programs limiting acceptable items to school-district-vicinity produce or as broad as to include produce and non-produce items grown and processed in the same state. Regardless, the primary emphasis of F2S remains to be the health of a community’s children, the desire to increase their consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables, and the inclusion of educational activities related to agriculture, food, health, and nutrition.

Social equity: This may be the most complex and value-driven term associated with local food, primarily due to the subjective nature of “equitable,” “fair,” or “just” and the tendency to apply the term to societal morality and structural injustices, rather than location-specific definitions. One of the best definitions of social equity as it relates to local food comes from Fehr and Schmidt (1999), who – rather than defining “equity” – focused their analysis on definitions of “inequity.” The authors proposed that people are averse to two forms of inequity: advantageous inequity (“I have more money than you”) and disadvantageous inequity (“you have more money

than me”). Using these definitions, “social equity” is more or less achieved when members of a community have collectively minimized their aversion to inequity. Achieving such a Pareto-optimal solution is rarely – if ever – recognized in studies of food and agricultural economics.

Conclusions and Implications

This paper by no means attempts to address all issues or identify all terms associated with local food systems. However, we do attempt to address the varying nature of the terms, the quantitative-versus-qualitative concepts affiliated with discussions about local food systems, and the roles played by various stakeholders and governmental entities in the definition and application of these terms. As Figure 1 shows, even the terms discussed in this paper are difficult to assign to just one category of terminology. Time, politics, and consumer tastes, values, perceptions, and preferences have and will continue to play a role in the meanings of these terms.

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LOCAL FOOD TERMINOLOGY

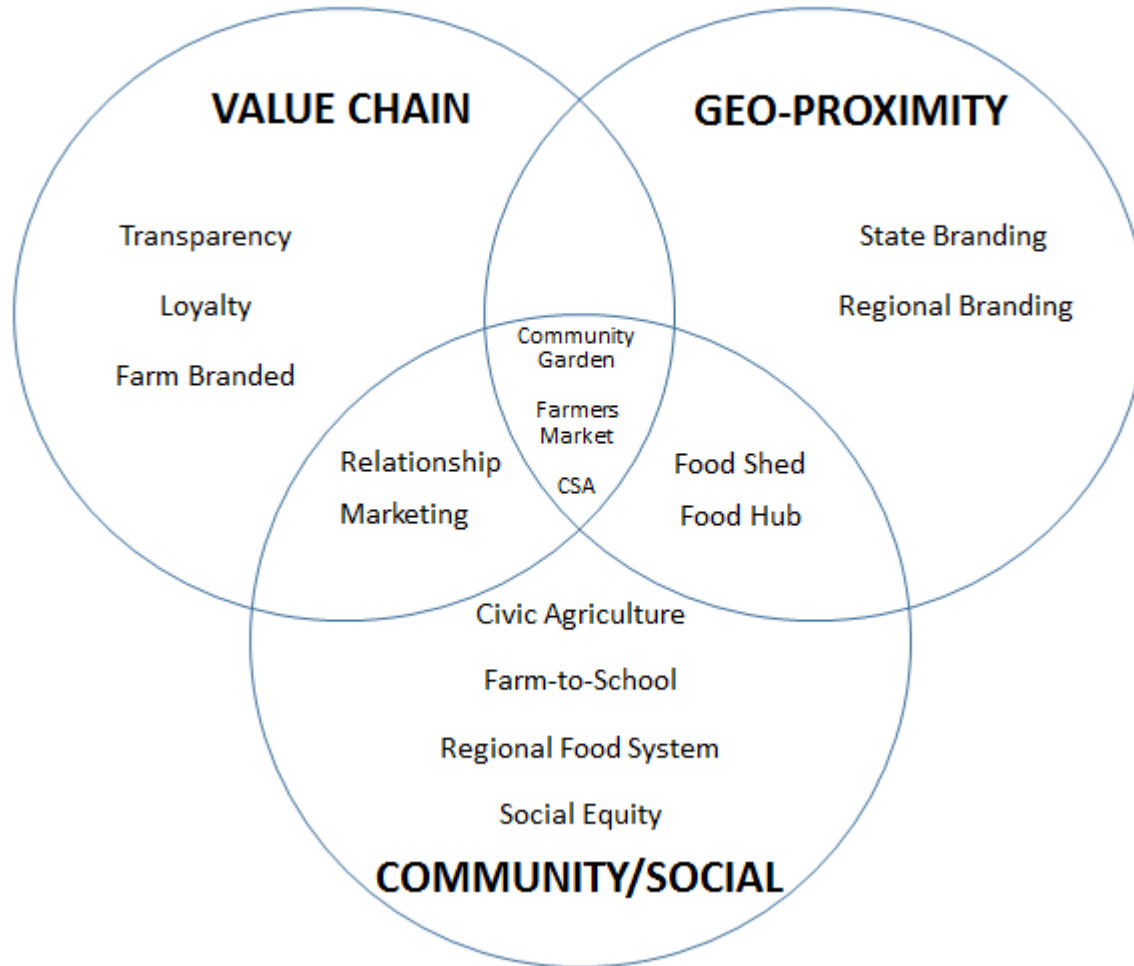


Figure 1: Commonly Used Local Food Terms and Classifications.