



Marketing the ‘Slippery’ Local with the Contrived ‘Rural’: Case Studies of Alternative Vegetable Retail in the Urban Fringe of Nagoya, Japan

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Abstract. In recent years, a wealth of research has been conducted on alternative food economies and the construction of quality in markets in North America and Europe. Nonetheless, research undertaken from these perspectives on food networks in the Japanese context remains relatively unexplored. As the definition of quality is rooted in the social, political and economic contexts of particular places, understanding its construction requires empirical studies on actual alternative food economies in Japan. In efforts to partially address this gap, this article focuses on how re-embedded and possibly appropriated alternative food economies (re-)valorize and then combine ‘locality’ with ‘rurality’ in farm product retail outlets in the Nagoya urban fringe. The authors conducted a series of interviews with retailers who source ‘locally’ produced vegetables from outside the Central Union of Agricultural Co-operatives to assess their goals, supply strategies and marketing images. The semantics of ‘local’ was found to be highly malleable based on retail imperatives, but its visualization through the photographic depiction of farmers was found to be a salient element in the construction and marketing of ‘quality’ to consumers.

Introduction

This article explores the construction of quality in alternative vegetable retailing in the urban fringe of Nagoya in Japan. To this end, the article first draws from the literature on alternative food economies and social embeddedness in the Western

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context to construct a theoretical framework. With this established, the article then shifts to delineate recent post-productivist trends in Japanese fringe agriculture, with particular emphasis on the specific social, political and economic conditions affecting Nagoya. Finally, as case-studies, the goals, supply distance ranges and point of purchase images of five dissimilar retail outlets on the fringe are extrapolated to illustrate a more uniformly employed, but complex, often contrived, re-embedding of communities into alternative Japanese food economies as a distinctive marketing strategy. More generally, this article also explores retailer-forged relationships between producers and consumers based in strategically manipulated constructions of quality and trust within the context of alternative Japanese vegetable retailing. The findings of this study in turn elicit questions about the success of previous policy advocacy for this post-productive shift and ultimately the trajectory of fringe agriculture in Japan.

Alternative Food Economies and Social Embeddedness in the Western Literature

Recent explorations by researchers in North America and Western Europe have greatly contributed to our understanding of the development, maintenance and promotion of alternative food economies and the construction of quality in the marketplace. Many of these studies have centered on social and economic transitions away from productivist systems to those arguably post-productivist (Benediktsson, 2001; Evans et al., 2002; Mardsen et al., 2003; Watts et al., 2005). While precise definitions remain the subject of debate, post-productivist systems are often symbolized by changes in policy to stimulate endogenous development, and forged by social and/or political motivations to promote organic or ecological farming, counter-urbanization, the consumption of the countryside and the diversification of farm activities (Ilbery and Kneafsey, 1999; Benediktsson, 2001; La Trobe, 2001; Dowler and Caraher, 2003; Wilson and Riggs, 2003; Watts et al., 2005).

These alternative food economies serve in direct contrast to the industrial agriculture of productivism as they are typically designed to reconnect consumers, producers and food in new economic spaces, (re-)forging and then promoting ties to a particular place and in so doing reuniting community and encouraging economic viability (De Lind, 2002; Parker, 2005; Watts et al., 2005). Conventional and typically globalized distribution networks and chains are spurned in favor of community or place-based production and consumption rooted in interconnected yet semantically ambiguous buzzwords such as 'trust' and 'locality' (Watts et al., 2005; Venn et al., 2006).

Likewise, many of these alternative food economies exemplify the rise in quality of food production and distribution, linked not only to environmental concerns but also to consumer health and responsible citizenship. Studies to this end have included the expansion of organic and ecologically friendly production (Ilbery and Kneafsey, 1999; Morgan and Murdoch, 2000) and the branding of commodities (Ilbery and Kneafsey, 1999, 2000; Murdoch and Miele, 1999; Holloway and Kneafsey, 2000).

Moreover, the construction of quality also includes social-cultural components and is subject to adaptation and renegotiation over space and time (Winter, 2003b).

More recently, many academics have begun to conceptualize alternative food economies and the oft-associated shift towards quality production through the perspective of embeddedness (Hinrichs, 2000; Murdoch et al., 2000; Winter 2003a, 2003b; Hinrichs et al., 2004). Embeddedness is concentrated on the social relations existent in the direct and ongoing interactions between participants in economic transactions (Granovetter, 1985; Murdoch et al., 2000; Hinrichs et al., 2004; Kirwan, 2004). As food production and distribution is re-embedded in an alternative food economy, a more direct exchange between actors generates trust. Moreover, as many alternative food economies are often founded or driven by an erosion of public confidence in larger scale farming and modern food distribution chains both in terms of food safety and environmental damage (Morris and Young, 2000; Murdoch et al., 2000; Kneafsey et al., 2004; Moore, 2006), the importance of establishing some variants of trust between producers and consumers takes on added importance in the marketplace.

Indeed, research on alternative food economies in the West often links the spatial scale of production and distribution to forms of trust and, ultimately, to conceptualized constructions of quality production. In effect, conceptualizations of embeddedness then support 'locality' as a decisive element in the creation of some forms of trust, which for consumers is in turn often re-linked to conceptualizations of healthiness and/or quality (Murdoch et al., 2000; Archer et al., 2003; Youngs, 2003; Hinrichs et al., 2004; Watts et al., 2005). Therefore, the concept of 'locality' assumes added importance in explaining the re-embedding of food systems, particularly as markets occur within specific regional and community contexts and are shaped by the socio-cultural mores of particular places.

According to Morris and Buller (2003), the expression of this 'locality' can be manifested in two general patterns. The first of these centers on closed systems, where food is 'produced, processed and retailed within a geographically circumscribed area and defined in various ways as local (2003, p. 559). The second is through locality for value added export, where products are distinguished through labeling, certification, etc., as originating from a distinct geographical location and/or within distinct production standards (Ilbery and Kneafsey, 1999, 2000; Murdoch et al., 2000; Morris and Buller, 2003). Within these contexts, 'locality' provides a spatial and social alternative to conventional agricultural commodity distribution networks, possibly improving the flow of information between producers and consumers and improving food traceability in the process (La Trobe, 2001; Morris and Buller, 2003; Renting et al., 2003; Watts et al., 2005).

The quintessential example of this trend to revalorize the local is the growth in farmers' markets, typically explored in the literature not only as a place of social learning and entrepreneurial business development, but more importantly here as an archetypical means of re-embedding community into food production, with geographical and/or direct closeness and social interaction between producers and consumers linked to trust and the construction of quality (Hinrichs, 2000; Holloway and Kneafsey, 2000; La Trobe, 2001; Brown, 2002; Archer et al., 2003; Hinrichs et al.,

2004). Beneficially, farmers' markets provide spaces for community interaction, preservation of rural character, employment opportunities, possible tourist attractions, and sources of income for the predominantly part-time farmers who typically retail at the markets (Brown, 2002; Hinrichs et al., 2004).

Nonetheless, research undertaken from the perspective of embeddedness and the construction of quality in food networks remains relatively unexplored in the Japanese context (Iga, 2006). While two recent exceptions include a study on quality construction in miso (soybean paste) in supply networks of locality-based industries (Iga, 2007) and the fabrication of local embeddedness in the branding of beef (Takayanagi, 2007), considerable gaps in the literature exist. As the definition and conceptualization of quality is rooted in the social, political and economic contexts of particular places, understanding its construction within the Japanese context requires empirical studies on alternative food economies centered on quality *in Japan*. In efforts to partially address this gap, the narrative of this article now shifts to focus first on the characteristics of Japanese agriculture in fringe regions more generally before shifting to explore specific national, regional and local policy changes affecting the spaces of agriculture and agricultural retail in the Nagoya fringe. With this established, a series of vegetable retail outlets are explored as contrasting case-studies to determine how re-embedded and often appropriated alternative food economies construct 'quality' in the region. This study asks if 'quality' in Japanese farmers' markets entails distinct definitions of trust and, if so, how it is constructed and negotiated. Overall, this study contributes to our understanding of the dynamics of retailer-producer-consumer linkages and their relation and significance to the creation of 'locality' in Japanese agricultural retail spaces.

Agriculture and the Japanese Urban Fringe

The long and downward spiral of importance of agriculture to the Japanese economy is well documented in the popular press and academic literatures. Contemporary Japanese farmers produce less than 40% of the country's total caloric intake (Ito, 2004). Smaller scale family operations, run by predominantly part-time farmers on disconnected fields, have difficulty competing with lower cost imports (Godo, 2001; Nagaki, 2002). Likewise, as farmers age, the lack of interest and availability of successors has resulted in farm abandonment and depopulated rural spaces (e.g. Kumagai, 1996; Morimoto, 1996; Nakajima, 1996; Japanese Statistics Bureau, 2000; Morimoto, 2001; Nagaki, 2002; Kitahara, 2004).

Agricultural production in the Japanese urban fringe perhaps embodies many of the most undesirable characteristics of this decline, in particular as it represents both a more advanced stage in the transition between land uses as well as spaces that are highly contested between various stakeholders for political and economic control (Sawa and Takahashi, 1996; Takahashi and Sawa, 1996; Yamamoto, 1996; Kikuchi and Cui, 2001; Kikuchi et al., 2002). According to Hebbert (1994), legislation such as the 1968 New Urban Planning Act exemplifies Japanese planning policy as one of seeking to control rather than contain urban expansion. That is, little impetus is placed

on dividing rural and urban spaces, resulting in the emergence of fuzzy spaces (i.e. sprawl). Linked to disordered development and legislation encouraging non-agricultural land use, this has left a highly fragmented conversion of fringe land, leading to patchwork landscapes of industrial, commercial, residential and agricultural use (Mori, 1998; Wiltshire and Azum, 2000; Isoda et al., 2001; Saizen et al., 2006). Typically, periods of high economic growth have been found to reduce agricultural land within urban fringe areas, particularly as land owners converted land to other uses, left it fallow to concentrate on income generation elsewhere, and/or simply retained the land in speculation of the potential for future lucrative rezoning (McDonald, 1997; Isoda et al., 2001; Kikuchi et al., 2002; Saizen et al., 2006). Overall then, urban fringe areas typically have higher percentages of part-time farmers than more rural spaces (Kikuchi et al., 2002).

Alternative Food Economies in Japan

Since World War II, agriculture in Japan has been shaped by the considerable economic and political power of producer and consumer co-operatives. The majority of farmers join their local producer co-operative, linking them to the larger umbrella network of the Central Union of Agricultural Co-operatives (i.e. JA). JA supplies farmers with a complex range of services including an outlet to distribute their agricultural production (Sakamaki, 1996a; Godo, 2001; Parker, 2005). JA is typically an imperative distribution outlet for farmers producing quantities too small for larger distribution contracts, percentages of which have increased in correlation to the growth in off-farm incomes (Godo, 2001). JA then compiles commodities from various sources for redistribution along a longer distribution chain to more distant retail outlets. This process naturally occurs at a price to the farmer, who if interested and able to bypass the margins charged by JA can reduce costs and increase profits. From the mid-1990s onwards, however, government policies of economic liberalization have increased competition with JA's banking and insurance operations, greatly eroding its financial base. As a result, JA has reformed structurally to reduce its number of employees and consolidate many of its smaller offices. From an agricultural perspective, this has in turn reduced its political influence and overall effectiveness (Godo, 2001).

The Japanese consumer co-operative movement can be linked directly to models of the Rochdale Co-operative of late-nineteenth century England. According to Moen (2000), these early movements were based on idealistic principles including equitable distribution of economic surplus, open membership and democratic control. By the 1960s, Japanese consumer co-operatives often interwove growing concerns of food safety with critiques of the excesses of capitalism, attempts to transform agricultural production practices and/or promote relations between farmers (Sakamoto, 1996; Moen, 1997, 2000; Parker, 2005; Miyachi, 2007).

According to Moen (2000), co-ordinated movements between various interest groups allowed Japan to develop one of the more politically active and developed consumer movements in the world. As such, consumer co-operatives played a promi-

ment role in the creation of alternative Japanese food economies. Moen's own study then focuses on the idealistic Japan Consumers' Cooperative Union (i.e. Seikyoku) movement, which in 1990 operated over 2,400 retail outlets supplying locally produced products based on its own rigorous environmental production and health standards (Moen, 2000). This included both direct and mail-order retail of biodegradable cleaning supplies and ecologically grown foods. As a grass-roots movement, Seikyoku was designed not only to increase the scope of direct marketing between producers and consumers, but also ultimately to encourage environmental protection and the prevention of farm abandonment (Moen, 1997, 2000).

Overall, Moen's study is one of many illustrating tendencies of post-productivism in various areas of Japan. Some have linked conceptualizations of the multifunctionality of rural spaces with community-based agriculture and development (Takahashi, 2001; Ohe, 2006), while others have explored regions with farmers specializing in niche markets (e.g. organic production, low input sustainable agriculture, grow-to-order vegetables), and/or alternative distribution outlets (e.g. Internet store fronts, direct sales to restaurants, CSAs) in various regions in the country (Mizushima, 1996; Sakamaki, 1996b; Sakamoto, 1996; Moen, 1997, 2000; Tabayashi and Waldichuk, 2004; Kohmoto, 2005; Parker, 2005; Iga, 2006; Miyachi, 2007). Conceptualizations of an arguable post-productivist countryside have also included the branding of pork products to reinforce connections between the production and retail sectors (Tanno, 2007), concerted efforts to produce local food for local consumption (Koganezawa, 2007) and idyllic connotations of (re-)constructed 'rurality' utilized to add value to land and products as well as an atheistic amenity in more urban environments (Kikuchi et al., 2002; Takahashi and Nakagawa, 2002; Takahashi, 2004).

Policy Redirection and Agricultural Change in the Nagoya Fringe

Nagoya City lies in the center of the Tokai region between Tokyo and Osaka on the island of Honshu (see Figure 1).

With a population of over eight million residents, it comprises the third largest conurbation in Japan. Increasingly concentrated industrial development, centered on the growth of automobile and machinery production following the Second World War, has resulted in the tremendous expansion of the city into its surrounding areas. Thus, the Nagoya fringe, which extends primarily on the largely low-lying Owari Region, has faced ever-increasing pressures of urbanization and sprawl-related land-use changes.

Nonetheless, as a result of government efforts to improve infrastructural capacities for farming and shipping, and its advantageous geographic position between Tokyo and Osaka, Nagoya's urban growth has allowed for the development of active farming in the region. Small-scale, family- and commercial-oriented operations produce an array of vegetables, fruit, flowers, poultry and eggs throughout the region. In 2007, Aichi Prefecture agricultural production sales ranked fifth in Japan, totaling approximately 315 billion yen (\$2.7 billion).¹ Aichi Prefecture's share of agricultural production to Japanese output totals was, for example, 18% for cabbage, 7% for toma-

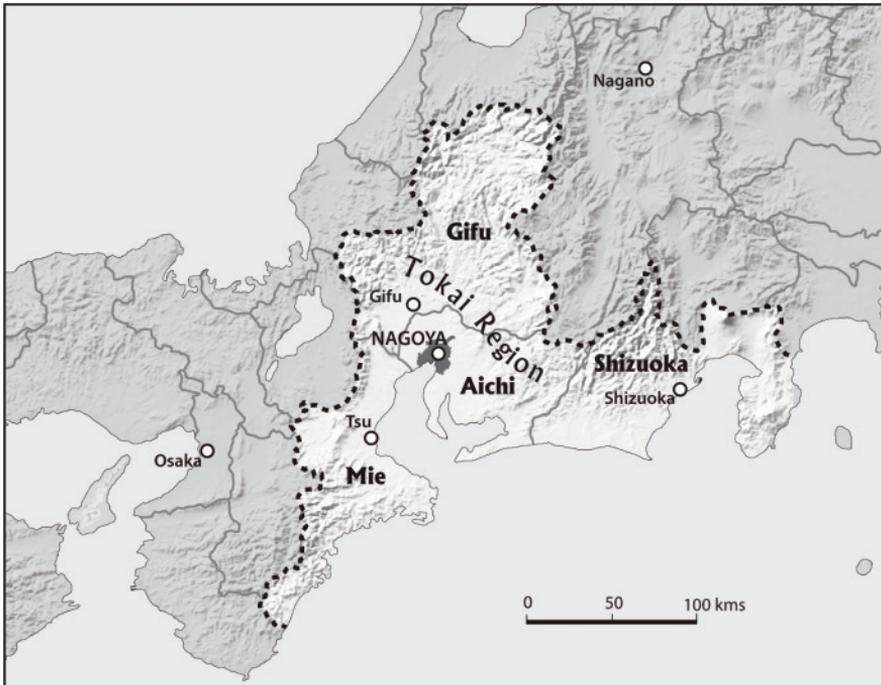


Figure 1: Nagoya City and the Tokai Region

toes, 6% for both strawberry and melon, and 5% for eggs (MAFF, 2007). Thus, Nagoya and its fringe regions are culturally situated closer to an agriculturally productive countryside when compared to the Tokyo and Osaka metropolitan areas. However, especially in the fringe areas of Nagoya, agriculture's progressive social and economic decline in overall importance mirrors the plight of other major conurbations. For example, according to Aichi Prefectural Government statistics, the number of farm households decreased from approximately 51 000 in 1980 to 34 000 in 2000; and the proportion of farm households halved from 13% to 6% during the same period. Likewise, the area of cultivated land fell from approximately 26 000 to 18 000 hectares, with 630 hectares of land being abandoned in 1980, and 960 hectares in 2000 (Aichi Prefectural Government, 2005).

At the national level, urban fringes similar to those around Nagoya City have become a more primary focus of contemporary Japanese domestic agricultural policy over the last two decades.² These policies have shifted increasingly towards the creation of a countryside more post-productivist in nature. In 1999, for example, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) completely revised the 1961 Agriculture Basic Act. While this previous legislation stressed the industrialization and modernization of agriculture and the quantitative expansion of domestic food production, the replacement Food, Agriculture and Rural Areas Basic Act posits farm land in a more multifunctional light. In effect, conceptualizations of farm land are now politically constructed not simply as spaces for the production of food, but rather also as a key element in environmental conservation, as a water resource and

as habitat for wild life. Likewise, such legislation also revalorizes the aesthetic qualities associated with pristine landscapes and links them to projects promoting education, history and culture.

More recently, legislation such as the 2002 Promotion of Nature Restoration Act and the 2004 Landscape Act has also reassessed arable land, pasture and forest in environmental and aesthetic terms. These new values and uses now attributed to the agricultural countryside are also expressed in the 2004 Food Education Basic Act. Emphasizing the importance of 'locality' in farm products, this act promotes farming practices that allow urbanites not only access to fresh, healthy and seemingly safe food, but also to learn about the unique natural environments and local culture in their nearby countryside.

In MAFF's agricultural area typology, the Nagoya fringe is classified as a 'close-to-urban area'. As such, more recent regional agricultural policies have been predominantly conservation based or consumer oriented and are best exemplified by the Regional Plan of the Basic Program on Food and a green Aichi Prefecture. Concentrating on the Owari Region, this plan mirrors trends in national legislation seeking to prevent farm-land abandonment and additional urban sprawl, supporting eco-friendly and locality-specific farming practices, expanding local and regional markets for farm products and promoting visits to farms by urbanites.

Similarly, recent local policies have solicited support for such voluntary activities as 'local production for local consumption' campaigns, community-based food processing and food education projects. Each of these programs represent attempts to re-localize agricultural production in the face of an increasingly globalized food system. Thus, these shifts in national, regional and local policies have begun to reposition farmers' markets as pivotal facilities for rural-urban interchange and interaction. Markets are increasingly becoming vital spaces where farmers can sell both their small quantities of produce and home-processed specialties unsuitable for shipping to larger and/or more distant outlets, and to non-farmers living in and around Nagoya who can acquire a more profound understanding of the regions' farming and local specialties.

Japanese farmers' markets are typically founded and/or operated by JA, various levels of government, farmers groups and NGOs. According to MAFF statistics (2008), overall sales at farmers' markets are led by farmers groups and companies, JA-operated enterprises and by the quasi-government/semi-public sector (i.e. the third sector, or in Japanese 第3セクター, *daisan sekuta*). However, research on Japanese farmers' markets tends to focus more on JA's nationwide engagement with retailing (e.g. Ito, 2009).

The increase in both the quantity of and total sales attributed to farmers' markets over the last 20 years has not simply been retailer driven, but has also been heavily influenced/supported by consumer interest and activism. According to a MAFF survey (2007), ideas of freshness, safety, and proximity to the source of production were also more vital to consumers than price. In this context, many private and co-operative supermarkets now operate small farmers' market-like spaces as local food islands (i.e. 産直コーナー, *sanchouku koo-naa*). Nonetheless, the majority of previous

research has not only overlooked these retail trends but also failed to explore notions of quality, locality, and symbolic and/or actual producer–consumer relationships in the diverse array of farmers' markets and related distribution outlets.

An Overview of the Six Markets

This article is based on data collected by the authors in a series of semi-structured, face-to-face, qualitative interviews with retailers employed at outlets in the Nagoya fringe during the summer of 2007 (See Figure 2).

As this study sought to explore the construction of quality in alternative vegetable retailing, outlets targeted for interviews were selected across a variety of retail scales and with hypothesized dissimilar *modus operandi*. In all cases, the respondent(s) of those outlets were chosen based on their familiarity with both the operations and consumers of the associated outlet. Interviews were conducted with five different types of farmers' market retailers: a farmer co-operative, a local government, a third-sector operator, a private supermarket and a co-operative supermarket. The interviews assessed the goals of the retail outlets in providing a local producer–con-

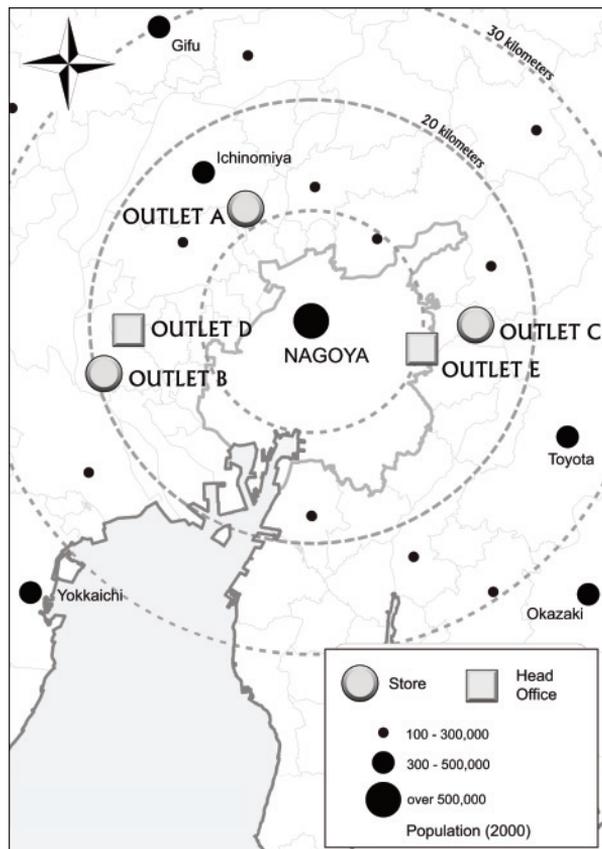


Figure 2: Interview placement on the Nagoya Fringe.

sumer linkage, the distances from which the merchants sourced local products, and the images at the point of sale that represented the local producer–consumer link. The findings on these three points are discussed after an initial introduction of the six outlets about their location, foundation, management, employment, costs, sales and size (summarized in Table 1).

Overview of Outlet A

Outlet A is currently owned and operated by a small farmers co-operative specializing in the production of eggs. The outlet is located in an area of rapidly urbanizing industrial/suburban sprawl on a local road. The co-operative opened a restaurant in 2002, at which time a small market was organized to sell fresh eggs directly to consumers. At this small market, 20 ‘local’ agricultural families (i.e. この辺の地域の農家/地元, *kono hen no chiiki no nouka/jimoto*) provide vegetables daily from 9AM to 5PM. The market charges the farmers a 15% commission on products sold. The market employs more than 10 part-time employees. In addition to eggs and vegetables, regionally produced tofu and processed products from other regions of Japan are offered. The customers are predominantly housewives over 65 years of age from the immediate surrounding area.

Overview of Outlet B

Outlet B is owned and operated by a village government. Located on a prefectural road, the outlet is part of a larger complex that includes a bakery and restaurant. Opened in 2004, the entire complex was accepted into the federal government’s Street’s Station (道の駅, *michi no eki*) programme the following year. The outlet sells local (i.e. 地元, *jimoto*) produce supplied from 34 farm families. Additional products available at the outlet include fruits, rice and processed products grown in other regions in Japan, although no products of any origin are sourced from JA. Roughly 900 customers arrive daily from the local, prefectural and Tokai regional areas by car,

Table 1: General Distinctions between the Surveyed Outlets.

| | Founded in | Management | Employees Full/Part | Inclusion of JA Products | Cost to Farmer | No. of Farm Families Supplying | Consumers Origin |
|----------|------------|-----------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|---|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Outlet A | 1998 | Farmers’ co-operative | 0/10 | No | 15% | 20 | Local, occasional Aichi Prefecture |
| Outlet B | 2004 | Village government | 0/11 | No | 15% | 34 | Local, Aichi Prefecture, Tokai Region |
| Outlet C | 2007 | Public company | 3/20 | Yes | In-town Farmers 15% Others 16% | 100 | Local, Aichi Prefecture, Tokai Region |
| Outlet D | 2002 | Supermarket | Large operation | None in ‘local’ food island | Self-delivery 16% Company trucks 22% | 30 | Tokai Region |
| Outlet E | 1970 | Supermarket | Large operation | >75% | Not stated | Not stated | Tokai Region |

many stopping en route to or from more rural areas. The entire complex also receives an average of two tour buses daily, with noted increases on festival days (e.g. Buddha's birthday) and national holidays. The outlet employs approximately 11 part-time workers in addition to office staff. Farmers are charged a flat rate of 15% to sell their products at the outlet.

Overview of Outlet C

Outlet C was opened in April 2007 by initiative from a town hall, although it is currently operated by a third-sector public company. The outlet is part of a larger complex that includes hot springs, a restaurant serving health food and a garden for disabled residents. The outlet is located in a rapidly suburbanizing region, and has managed to source from 20% of a total 400 local farm family households. Over 50% of products on offer at the outlet originate from local sources (i.e. 地元, jimoto), with 30% coming from Aichi Prefecture and 20% from more distant locations. Farmers living in the town are charged a 15% commission while those further away are charged 16%. Customers are mostly from the surrounding middle-class suburban area, although some business is linked to regional hot-spring visitors. According to the town's own survey, over 60% of market customers wish to maintain an agricultural/rural landscape, while over 70% seek active community connections between old and new town residents. The market portion of the complex employs three full-time and 20 part-time workers who operate the business daily from 9AM to 6AM.

Overview of Outlet D

Outlet D was started in 2002 by a regional supermarket chain with a number of distribution points throughout the Tokai region. The outlet is a 5.4m by 90cm local food island (i.e. 産直コーナー, sanchouku koo-naa) within the larger traditionally sourced produce section of the supermarket. This corner advertises and banners being supplied by local (地元, jimoto) producers, with noted seasonal variation stocks mostly tomatoes, lotus root and cabbage. Thirty farm families supply to the corner, which comprises 10% of the entire vegetable sales of the supermarket. Farmers who deliver directly to retail outlets are charged a 19% commission, while those who use the company trucking system to deliver products to the outlet are charged 22%. No outside source of funding was utilized for the start-up or operation of the outlet.

Overview of Outlet E:

Outlet E is the entire regional supermarket chain and mail-order business of the Aichi branch of a larger consumer co-operative founded in 1970 as a grass-roots coalition to exclusively promote local and sustainably produced agriculture (i.e. 地産地消, chisan-chishou). Nonetheless, the market now sources over 75% of its current vegetables through distant JA and international channels. Despite these changes, non-JA

produce from Aichi Prefecture still accounts for approximately \$320 000 per month in sales. As will be shown, Outlet E serves as an interesting counterpoint to the other four outlets in that it represents a highly appropriated version of a once alternative retail vegetable trade.

Motivations for Establishment

The motivations for the establishment of the five outlets explored in the Nagoya urban fringe represent a range of economic, social and environmental interests from a variety of actors. At the very least, however, all of these outlets share a characteristic goal of an alternative food economy as they attempt to source some supply of 'local' vegetables from smaller farmers outside of larger scale distribution channels (e.g. JA). Many of the outlets also incorporate highly idealistic civic-minded impetuses and environmentally progressive objectives in their mandates and operations. The remainder of this section explores the goals of each outlet in turn.

The operation of Outlet A can be classified as being primarily motivated by maximization of profit, particularly as the direct retailing of eggs yields the highest return for the company. Likewise, prior to the opening of the market, customers would regularly request eggs from the factory offices, and the market was designed to reduce these 'burdensome' interruptions. The prime market-floor space is predominantly allocated to the company's fresh egg displays, with only miniscule retail space allocated to the less financially lucrative vegetables. As such, community development or local agricultural or environmental conservation is only a secondary or accidental externality.

Both economic and social reasons contributed to the founding of Outlet B. First, federal legislation to discourage the overproduction of rice (i.e. 減反政策、*gentan seisaku*) has resulted in the increased local cultivation of lotus root. As such, the chamber of commerce proposed the idea for a market to help the local, overwhelmingly small-scale and part-time farmers survive by providing necessary retail outlets. The entire complex is designed around a lotus root theme, with both the on-premises bakery and restaurant incorporating the crop as primary ingredients (i.e. as baking flour and in set lunches). In addition, a wide range of other vegetables is offered.

As mentioned previously, Outlet C is situated in a region undergoing rapid suburbanization. The market was conceived as a means of creating linkages between the new, predominantly younger suburbanite residents and the more established members of the older farming community. Simultaneously, the town government attempted to create a space offering a direct outlet for local farmers producing small quantities, while supplying residents with fresh local food and beneficially maintaining agriculture and green spaces in the town. As such, Outlet C is best classified as being motivated by economic, social and environmental impetuses.

Outlet D was established exclusively to source fresh yet inexpensive vegetables at little risk to the supermarket. The contract is fixed with a percentage of return to the farmer on product sold. If the merchandise is not sold, the supermarket incurs no financial loss. Likewise, shorter supply chains decrease company delivery costs,

allowing for lower prices and higher profit margins. Respondents identified these economic considerations as the primary impetus rather than any social or environmental motivations.

Initially the result of a larger consumer movement in the early 1970s seeking healthy and environment-friendly agricultural commodities, Outlet E originally sold locally produced agricultural products only. Although idealistic at its foundation, increases in scale both in terms of retail space and distribution quantity have resulted in the sourcing of products nationally and internationally. Likewise, expressed changes in consumer demand have resulted in the inclusion of processed foods, name-brand products and non-organic products. As such, while the outlet was founded on social and environmental grounds, it has been appropriated slowly into more dominating economic realities brought on by increases in the scale of its operations and a changing consumer base.

Questions of Supplying 'Locality'³

The second objective of the interviews was to assess the distances from which the merchants actually source their products. The interviews revealed a number of retail-side difficulties in the sourcing of vegetables. In particular, Outlets B, C, D and E expressed considerable concern with maintaining an adequate and diverse supply of vegetables grown in the 'local' area. Despite the variance in quantities demanded by these markets, the management of each outlet showed unique responses to resolving this very real concern.

Despite its recent establishment, Outlet C already faces struggles between its foundation ideals and the realities of the marketplace and paltry local production. As the market is financed primarily by the town government, there is no political will to source vegetables from farmers residing outside of its constituency. Nonetheless, as a high morning demand limits the availability of vegetables on offer for the afternoon, they have begun begrudgingly to source from JA to maintain stocked shelves and their reputation.

Likewise, the larger quantities of vegetables demanded by Outlet D has also caused considerable problems with the maintenance of adequate supplies throughout the day. Management regularly requests that farmers re-harvest in the afternoon and/or have vegetables trucked from elsewhere in the Tokai Region. As expressed by Outlet D respondents, definitions of 'locality' at the local food island also include a seasonal component. While the actual size of the outlet remains the same, the geographic sourcing area broadly widens in non-peak local production periods.

Respondents from Outlet E also expressed difficulty in coping with shortages inherent in 'local' production. Indeed, as the company has increased the scale of its operations, reducing the risk and financial losses from supply collapses has forced extensive sourcing of product from other regions both within and outside of Japan.

Connected to the product supply-demand requirements linked to scale, conceptualizations of 'locality' at each outlet acquire distinct semantic renderings. These meanings are 'slippery' in that they vary both within and between retail outlets

according to demand requirements, seasonality and crop. Table 2 lists each outlet versus their expressed spatial versions of 'locality' in relation to retail demand. As the sourcing requirements increase, so too does the area defined as 'local'.

Visualizing 'Locality' and Linking to the Contrived Rural

The third goal of the interviews was to assess the ways in which the feeling of localness was established through imagery at each market. Each of the five outlets attempted to portray some form of 'locality' to consumers. The primary method consisted of prominently displaying color photographs of the farmer and/or farmer's family next to their own vegetables. For example, above a plastic bin of cabbage would be a large laminated photograph of an elderly farmer standing proudly in a field of harvestable cabbage (often with the name of the farmer displayed prominently). A variation on this theme was the assignment of each farmer with a regular identification number. Finally, the larger and obviously more financially driven outlets regularly use signage advertising the displayed products as, for example, 'local from the suburbs' (地元近郊野菜, jimotokinkouyasai), despite the fact that vegetables are sourced from a much wider geographic area.

However, it is the prominence of the farmers' photographs, names, addresses and/or numbers that serves as one of the stronger means of product differentiation. Respondents often mentioned that from their own discussions with shoppers that consumers recognize the names, faces and/or numbers of farmers, often asking for and making purchasing decisions based on allegiance to a particular producer; thereby linking producer and consumer in a conceptual relationship beyond mere traceability. Outlet E respondents, for example, mentioned that producers are able to communicate with consumers through the photographs. Additionally, Outlet D respondents mentioned that consumers identify with the producers through the photographs, bringing about a feeling of security. Likewise, respondents also mentioned that consumers gave considerable preference to vegetables produced 'locally' (地元, jimoto). The image and numbering systems therefore not only link directly the vegetables to actual people in specific places, but also function advantageously as a form of reassurance and informal and personalized branding for producers. Furthermore, as the farms' addresses may be included (i.e. highlighted) in the labeling or signage, producers are linked not simply to *any* place, but embedded in a particular, identifi-

Table 2: Conceptualized Spatial Versions of 'Locality'.

| | Outlet A | Outlet B | Outlet C | Outlet D | Outlet E |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------|---|--------------|---|
| Retail Demand | Small | Small-Medium | Medium | Large | Large |
| Primary Source of Vegetables | Immediate Area/Aichi Prefecture | Village | Town but ever more from entire prefecture | Tokai Region | Tokai Region, Japan, some international |
| Definition of 'Local' | Immediate Area/Aichi Prefecture | Village | Ideal: Town Reality: Aichi Prefecture | Tokai Region | National |

Source: Fieldwork, 2007.

able and 'local' place. The means of visualizing 'locality' by outlet is listed in Table 3. It is also important to notice respondents' direct replies to questions asking what values consumers associate with the photographs.

While the geographic realities and semantic constructions of 'local' are variable, the images employed by retailers are distinctly and uniformly rural in character. Despite the dominance of industrial and suburban landscapes on the Nagoya fringe, photographs of rustic farmers and plentiful agricultural fields are easily associated with rurality by fringe consumers. Further exaggerated by the possibility of meeting farmers during morning set-up and the nostalgic nature of market designs, 'rurality' becomes a commodified, albeit contrived, aesthetic construct. Indeed, it is this often synthetic combination of the slippery local and contrived rural that retailers believe evokes perceptions of safety, trust and ultimately quality to consumers. In effect, this forged relationship between the local and the rural forms a formable mechanism to conceptually re-embed producers and consumers in the Nagoya fringe.

Conclusions

Each of the five outlets in the Nagoya fringe has shown divergent motivations for its foundations and variance in the scale of its operations. Nonetheless, each outlet is linked in its desire to source vegetables from non-JA distribution channels. Overall, all retailers expressed the opinion that the link between trust and safety was connected to notions of 'locality', despite the slippery nature behind its semantic construction. Indeed, 'locality' was found to be highly malleable based on retail scale, yet a vital element in the construction and marketing of 'quality' to consumers. As such, retailers of all scales regularly displayed the names, photographs and possibly addresses of producers to establish them as *real* people, and embed them and their vegetables to particular, albeit it often only constructed, 'rural' places.

Larger scale outlets with more distant semantic renderings of 'locality' signify the creation and development of its more appropriated form. Their utilization of re-embedded production into the 'local' and linked to the 'rural' signifies a commodification of key components of particular alternative agricultural economies primarily for commercial gain. As such, they provide further evidence confirming the importance of and economic success associated with establishing some form of 'locality' in the differentiation of products in the Japanese marketplace. Appropriated, falsified or otherwise miscommunicated by retailers, this marketing strategy

Table 3: The Meaning and Visualization of 'Locality'.

| | Outlet A | Outlet B | Outlet C | Outlet D | Outlet E |
|--|--------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|----------|
| Product Label/Booth Design | Company | Farmer | Farmer | Company | Company |
| Current Use of Farmer photographs | Previous Use | Yes/Farmers Choice | Yes/Farmers Choice | Yes | Yes |
| Use of Farmer Numbering | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | No |
| What values do consumers associate with the photographs? | Quality | Safety | Freshness, Safety | Freshness, Trust, Safety | Trust |

Source: Fieldwork, 2007.

also illustrates the use/abuse of trust as a strategic variable in alternative retail marketing. Likewise, it exploits directly consumer confidence in the supposed 'local' actors involved in vegetable production. In effect, this slippery 'local' represents a highly manipulated relationship between retailers and consumers, something far removed from the ideals of previous generations of Japanese consumer co-operatives and NGO-operated retail markets. Questions about how 'alternative' these newer variations of Japanese farmers' markets are must also be forthcoming. Furthermore, the larger scale adoption of these 'local' and 'rural' narratives partially undermines policy incentives promoting local agriculture and community development. The extent to which these distribution channels are actually re-embedding local production into community on any level other than conceptual is doubtful.

Interestingly, government legislation and/or private certification (e.g. Japanese Agricultural Standard organic certification) or alternative methods of production (e.g. low pesticide production) were rarely mentioned by smaller scale respondents as vital to the construction of quality in their marketplaces. In contrast, the larger retail markets regularly employed these forms of formalized trust to distinguish products from those originating in more mixed JA vegetable sources. This reiterates the difficulty of establishing perceptions of quality in larger scale distribution, and partially explains the appropriation of 'local' and 'rural'.

Finally, this study also found that despite variance in demand, all respondents expressed extreme difficulty in regularly sourcing an adequate supply of vegetables from the Nagoya fringe and/or Tokai regions. First, this practical finding provides strong evidence that consumers regularly seek outlets supplying vegetables with these embedded, local relations with producers. As many retailers were found to fabricate such relations links again to the economic success attributed to their construction. On the other hand, this lack of supply brings into question not only the effectiveness of previous land-use legislations, but also the future of agriculture in these regions. Despite the consumer desire to by-pass traditional retail outlets, 'local' farmers are unable to accommodate the increases in demand. Whether this gradual spatial expansion of 'locality' is further evidence of the continued crisis in Japanese agriculture, or rather, perhaps quixotically, represents the creation of crucial opportunities for farmers within the fringe region remains a question to be answered.

Notes

1. All currency has been converted from yen to dollars based on 2007 average exchange rates (\$1 = 117.048 yen).
2. In contrast, for a detailed look at past legislation affecting agricultural land use in Japan, see McDonald, 1997; Ito, 2001; Isoda et al., 2001; Takahashi, 2001.
3. Various Japanese language terms have been translated as being the semantic equivalent to the English term 'local' (e.g. この辺の地域の農家, kono hen no chiiki no nouka, 地元, jimoto and ローカル, roukaru).

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