

Preferring Rabbits To Revolution: A Comparative Analysis of Marxist and Local Food Movement Critiques of Capitalist Agriculture

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Abstract

The Local Food Movement (LFM) in the United States promotes dramatic changes in agriculture that favor environmentally and socially progressive farming. LFM participants emphasize the importance of the health of the land and the need for radical, strategic change in agricultural production. They advocate for small, diversified, organic, owner-operated or collectively owned farms that distribute food locally. These goals reference their complaints about the current agricultural system in the U.S., namely, its domination by corporate and large farms, environmentally damaging techniques, and harmful labor systems. These critiques echo the analysis done by one of the central critics of capitalist agriculture, Karl Marx. Marx decried the systematic mistreatment of workers and degradation of the soil that came from modern capitalists' mechanization and privatization of agriculture. Considering the resonance between these two platforms, this paper analyzes the LFM using Marx's criticisms of capitalist agriculture as a comparative framework for evaluating the effectiveness of LFM efforts. This paper focuses on the California LFM, an epicenter of the movement, as a case study and draws specifically on ethnographic insights from Bay Area LFM participants. The comparison of the LFM and Marxist approaches reveals constraints on the LFM's potential impact on U.S. agriculture and suggests that the movement is without a viable strategy for large-scale change.

“The immediate aim of the Communists is . . . [the] formation of the proletariat into a class; [the] overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy; [and the] conquest of political power by the proletariat.”

—Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, p. 484

“We’re gonna get the jack together and we’re gonna have a little house and a couple of acres an’ a cow and some pigs and—
‘An live off the fatta the lan,’ Lennie shouted, ‘An have rabbits!’”
—John Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men*, p. 14

I. Introduction

In Marx's theory of capitalism, agriculture plays a critical role. According

to Marx, agriculture “more and more becomes merely a branch of industry, and is entirely dominated by capital” (Tucker, 1978). When capitalism conquers agriculture, the key characteristic of Marx’s capitalism—exploitation of the working class—emerges. Marx envisions a radically different form of agriculture that would preserve the productivity of the soil and support a communist society. The local food movement (LFM) also warns of the negative effects of industrialized, capitalist agriculture in the United States and elsewhere. It promotes dramatic changes in agriculture that favor environmentally and socially progressive farming. The LFM is gaining increased attention in the United States; at the center of this movement is the California LFM.

In their critiques of capitalist agriculture, Marx and the LFM share a general emphasis on the importance of the health of the land and the need for radical, strategic change in agricultural production. Focusing on the California LFM, this paper analyzes the LFM critique of capitalist agriculture by comparing it to Marx’s perspective. This comparison facilitates analysis of the LFM’s motivations and means to create sustainable and systematic change. This approach reveals constraints on the LFM’s potential impact on U.S. agriculture and indicates that the movement has no viable strategy for large-scale change. Although Marx and the LFM are concerned with capitalist agriculture’s degradation of land and the need for radical change in agricultural production, their approaches prove immensely different. While Marx calls for revolution, the LFM resonates with the dreams of Steinbeck’s farm hands George and Lennie, who cultivate an idealist vision of small-scale farming that lets them savor the fruits of their labor.

II. Critiquing Capitalist Agriculture: Linking Soil and Systemic Change

In the United States, agriculture has long been a backbone for the country’s prosperity. According to the 2007 Census of Agriculture, 40.8 percent of U.S. land is farmland. Individuals or families operate about 80 percent of the farms, and corporations operate about four percent. Most cultivated land is in the center of the country, but pockets exist in coastal regions, such as California. The LFM is gaining traction in the United States. From 2002-07, the number of U.S. farms grew by four percent, in contrast with an equivalent decline in the previous five years. Key attributes of the LFM such as diversified production, fewer acres, lower sales, and younger operators characterize these new farms (USDA, 2007). Internationally, the United Nations reported that small-scale, eco-farming could double global food production in 10 years (UNCHR, 2011), which could be important given growing food security concerns (Brown, 2011).

California provides fertile ground for analyzing agriculture and the LFM in the United States. According to the 2007 Census of Agriculture, corporations have a two percent higher presence in California than the national average, and a 13-17 percent higher presence in the South Valley.

Production of vegetables and fruits dominates California agriculture, and these crops require intensive and cost-efficient labor that machines cannot easily replace. Accordingly, California has one of the highest densities of migrant farm workers and some of the highest labor expenditures.

California also sports some of the most profitable farms in the country, which provides an incentive to continue current practices (USDA, 2007). Similarly, profit maximization often encourages environmentally harmful methods, such as pesticides and poor land management (Pimentel 2005).

With these dynamics, California represents archetypal capitalist agriculture. Marx criticizes such capitalist exploitation of workers and alienation of farm labor from the ownership of the means of production (Tucker, 1978). Marx also decries capitalist agriculture's practice of "robbing the soil" (Tucker, 1978)—the destruction of the physical inputs of production. Hence, Marx's call for revolutionary movements "against the existing social and political order of things" (Tucker, 1978) includes overturning capitalist agriculture.

California agriculture is particularly suited for comparing the LFM and Marxist critiques of capitalist agriculture. The LFM has a strong presence in California (*Local Harvest* 2011). The movement has not taken root in other places where industrialized farming exists, such as the interior corridor. In this corridor, family and individual operators dominate by using mechanization to grow mass staple crops such as corn, wheat, and soybeans. With California as a center of gravity, the LFM criticizes how food is produced, the environmental damage caused by current methods, the social consequences of production and consumption patterns, the globalization of food supply and demand, and the alienation of producers and consumers from food and farmland (Hendrickson 2002). LFM stakeholders want a "complete transformation of the food and agriculture system" (Hassanein, 2003). This call to action comes from the desire for an agro-food system that places environmental and social sustainability at the center of food production (Hassanein, 2003).

Thus, the LFM and Marxism share, at a general level, concerns about capitalist agriculture's threat to the health of the land, its creation of harmful processes of social and political alienation of workers and consumers, and the need for sustainable, systemic change in agriculture. Making this initial comparison more analytically rigorous requires deeper investigation of both critiques—an exercise that reveals more differences than similarities between the two approaches.

III. Marx and Capitalist Agriculture

3.1 The Importance of Agriculture in Marx's Theory of Capitalism

Marx establishes a theory of capitalism and applies it to individual economic sectors. Specific sectors, such as agriculture, serve to support his general theory. However, in his articles, the *Grundrisse*, *Das Capital*, and the *Manifesto*, Marx briefly discusses agriculture specifically. Marx's exploration of agriculture reveals his concern for the degradation of the

origin of all production—the earth—and for the exploitation of laborers caused by capitalism in agriculture.

According to Marx, all material production starts with the earth. The earth is “the source of all production and all being,” and agriculture is the “first form of production” (Tucker, 1978). In Marx’s historical dialectic, agriculture reflects prevailing class conflicts. For instance, land-owning feudal lords exploited serfs. With capitalism’s emergence, “agriculture more and more becomes a branch of industry, and is entirely dominated by capital” (Tucker, 1978). Capitalism facilitates technology’s advance into agriculture, which disrupts the labor force, makes agriculture dependent on industry and its methods, and ends with bourgeois capitalists controlling agriculture. These factors create a union between agriculture and industry, enabling “a revolution [to be] called forth by modern industry in agriculture” (Tucker, 1978). This union propels exploited workers towards the revolution that will end class conflicts and restore agricultural production that is “appropriate to the full development of the human race” (Tucker, 1978).

As a capitalist industry, agriculture exhibits certain features. Farmers increasingly use machinery because it alleviates some burdens of farming and allows farmers to cultivate more land (Tucker, 1978). However, greater use of machinery reduces the need for agricultural labor and facilitates the migration of laborers to industry. Marx comments that, in 1861 in England and Wales, the number of laborers manufacturing agricultural machines was 1,034, while operators of these machines numbered only 1,205 (Tucker, 1978). This displacement is capitalist agriculture’s triumph. Under capitalism, agriculture has a “more revolutionary effect than elsewhere” because it “annihilates the peasant” and “replaces him with the wage-laborer” (Tucker, 1978). Further, agricultural industrialization destroys the “intellectual life of the laborer” and reduces the labor force’s strength, disperses it, and breaks its “power of resistance” (Tucker, 1978). Capitalist agriculture destroys the social and economic power of agricultural society.

Finally, Marx argues that capitalism’s dominance of agriculture is essential to creating “class antagonisms” and the “desire for social changes” necessary for a final revolution (Tucker, 1978). In industry, class antagonism does not immediately create desire for social change (Tucker, 1978). Without the capitalization of agriculture, proletariat-bourgeois conflicts cannot proceed to the point of revolution. Indeed, Marx “insists on an agrarian revolution as the prime condition for national emancipation” in Poland” (Tucker, 1978). Agriculture is central to establishing communism in society.

Marx’s views of U. S. agriculture illustrate agriculture’s importance to capitalism. In the United States, Marx sees “a gigantic agricultural production whose competition is shaking the very foundations of [Europe]” (Tucker, 1978). America quickly embraces capitalist agriculture, with dual consequences (Tucker, 1978). He foresees “the

small and middle landownership of the farmers, the basis of the whole political constitution...succumbing to the competition of giant farm” (Tucker, 1978). American agricultural growth will lead to rapid industrialization that will topple Europe’s economic dominance and disrupt social coherence (Tucker, 1978).

3.2 *Marx, Capitalist Agriculture, and the Environment*

A striking feature of Marx’s views on agriculture is his concern for the degradation of material resources. Marx’s general discussions of capitalism center on its tendency to “suck... living labor;” he is usually not concerned with the exploitation of raw materials (Tucker, 1978). With agriculture, however, Marx takes a different approach. For Marx, all “progress in capitalist agriculture” is “progress in the art, not only of robbing the laborer, but of robbing the soil” and ruining “the lasting sources of that fertility” (Tucker, 1978). Further, urbanization—the migration of labor from farm to factory—“disturbs the circulation of matter between man and the soil” (Tucker, 1978). Thus, Marx is concerned not just with the exploitation of producers but with the health of the raw material of production - a new thought derived from his inspection of agriculture.

Marx summarizes agriculture’s importance to his analysis of capitalism by concluding that “capitalist production ...develops technology,” combines “various processes into a social whole,” and saps “the original sources of all wealth—the soil and the laborer” (Tucker, 1978). Capitalism dramatically changes agricultural society. More importantly, linking exploitation of labor and the soil demonstrates the importance of capitalism’s transformation of agriculture to Marx’s entire theory. After analyzing agriculture, Marx advances a new conception of production and labor with two nuclei: earth and people.

3.3 *Marx’s Solution: Collectivist Agriculture*

Mechanization, migration, exploitation, and soil degradation in capitalist agriculture lead to class conflict and to the conditions Marx believes are necessary for the revolution of the proletariat. After the revolution, Marx argued for collectivist agriculture as the path to ending exploitation of soil and labor. Marx’s theory “may be summed up in the single sentence: abolition of private property” (Tucker, 1978). In keeping with this idea, Marx advocates “abolition of property in land” and the “establishment of industrial armies, especially for agriculture” (Tucker, 1978). Collectivism in agriculture supports a new conception of property that avoids the inequities derived from capitalism’s embrace of private property and wage labor. With collectivism, Marx foresees “cultivation of waste-lands, and the improvement of the soil generally according to a common plan” (Tucker, 1978). Through collectivism and common planning, Marx hopes to increase agricultural productivity, social equity, and stewardship of interactions between man and soil.

IV. The Local Food Movement and Capitalist Agriculture

Although the name “local food movement” conveys the image of a unified effort, LFM participants in California and their motivations are varied. LFM ideology seeks to counter the commercialization of food, but the LFM involves a patchwork of participants, reasons, and strategies. Stakeholders range from organizations, such as the Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association, which seeks to provide starter plots and education for low-resource farmers (ALBA), to farms joining the movement for economic benefit (Heights, 2011; Close, 2011). To address this variation, I interviewed¹:

- Two students involved in the LFM at Stanford University—Rita Moore, who was involved in managing residential food production, and Hannah Close, an aspiring farmer;
- James Claiborne, director of a food justice organization operating in a low-income, predominantly Hispanic neighborhood in the Bay Area;
- Maura Heights, California farmer-turned-academic;
- Victoria Richards, co-founder of an educational farm near the Bay;
- Lily James, manager at an urban farm in the Bay Area; and
- Rick Martin, long-time employee at a historic, cooperative grocery store in the Bay Area.

When I asked LFM participants why they joined the movement, the invariable response was, “the motivations are all over the map” (Heights, 2011). Interviewees were puzzled by questions about community: “our community is disparate” (Close, 2011). This response revealed an important LFM characteristic: the movement is highly individualized, rather than communal. As discussed below, this LFM characteristic has repercussions for its ability to transform U.S. agriculture.

4.1 *The LFM and the Importance of Soil*

LFM participants expressed a desire to be “good stewards of the land” (Heights, 2011) and “do this human-centric agriculture naturally in a way that sustains the soil over many years” (Richards, 2011). Thus, the LFM echoes one of Marx’s central criticisms of capitalist agriculture—its abuse of the material source of food production (Tucker, 1978). However, LFM participants used different language from Marx in discussing the need to sustain the land. For example, LFM farming moves away from “the masculine domination of nature, and sustainable farming is more like nurturing the earth” (Close, 2011). LFM participants personify farming in quasi-spiritual ways. They seek to “connect with the earth” and rejuvenate

¹ All names have been changed to protect the interviewees from economic or reputational damage. Names of organizations and identifying location details have been omitted.

“an innate understanding of natural cycles” (Heights, 2011). Their concern for the soil moves beyond Marx’s materialistic analysis and collectivist aspirations. LFM proponents view farming in non-material, spiritual, or individual terms. Some scholars even define this aspect as key to the movement’s success (Delind, 2006). From Marx’s viewpoint, this outlook suggests bourgeois individuals (none of the LFM participants interviewed are wage laborers) seeking self-actualization through semi-spiritual interactions with land. These individuals sell the high-priced products of their interactions with the spiritual soil to other bourgeois individuals, who salve their consciences by buying local. To paraphrase Marx, environmentalism is the opiate of the LFM. In Marxist terms, the LFM is a bourgeois institution that leaves agriculture embedded in the system of capitalist exploitation, leaving the majority of cultivated land to continued degradation.

4.2 The LFM and the Persistence of Class in Agriculture

The LFM’s individualism means that the movement does not address Marx’s concern about capitalist agriculture’s exploitation of labor. Maura Heights, the farmer-turned academic, reports, “people like being self-sufficient, working for themselves, working outside with their hands” (2011). Heights farmed by herself for 5 years, starting chores when she got home from work and often working through the night by the light of a headlamp. Heights farmed this way because “it was fun.” Heights’ responses indicate an LFM tendency to cater to individual preferences. Similarly, Victoria Richards, the co-founder of the educational farm near the Bay, concludes that, like herself, many people turn to the LFM as a way to discover “how to be of use in the world, how to link yourself to nature, community, and history, ...[of] why we’ve ended up how we are as a human race” (2011). Essentially, LFM farmers farm because they love “putting their hands in the dirt” (Heights, 2011). They find personal pleasure, contemplation, and self-reflection in farming.

This vision of agricultural labor is at odds with Marx’s stance on capitalism’s exploitation of laborers and their alienation from the means of production. The LFM movement resembles a patchwork of people seeking self-actualization while committed to “nourishing people” (Close, 2011). The California LFM “is mostly white kids with money” (Heights, 2011) wanting to do something unusual with a “mission [that] ...is pure” (Close, 2011). LFM participants are usually not involved in agriculture before joining, and they often travel to California to join the movement after college (Heights, 2011). The laborers in mainstream California agricultural play little to no role in the LFM. Richards explains that, of the 11 local farms surrounding hers, Latinos own only two farms, and both were educated at top agriculture programs – thus, the Latinos involved are not representative of the actual agriculture labor force. (2011). Richards, with her farm, hopes to “begin a dialogue for the students and community to be involved in a different kind of agriculture” (2011). However, this

LFM-fostered dialogue does not appear to include agricultural laborers, such as migrant farm workers, who make California agriculture profitable.

In Marxist terms, the LFM fails to address labor exploitation and alienation, issues central to Marx's critique of capitalist agriculture. Rather than current workers reacting against class antagonisms, new stakeholders enter agriculture through the LFM and introduce a desire for social change (Tucker, 1978). LFM participants ignore class antagonisms and may exacerbate them by exerting their capital and social power to establish visions that do not include emancipating exploited farm workers. Indeed, the development of LFM farming in California mirrors Marx's description of the introduction of capitalist industry to agriculture: more powerful members of society establish a "better" system of agriculture without concern for its effects on wage labor. The LFM's power to create lasting strongholds within agricultural communities will be limited unless it induces stakeholder ownership of the movement.

4.3 The LFM's Alienation Concern: The Alienation of the Consumer from the Product

Marx criticized the alienation of the worker from the fruits of his labor; the LFM movement is concerned with the alienation of the consumer from his product. LFM participants are not usually former farmers, but they were formerly consumers. Rita Moore, the student involved with managing Stanford on-campus food production, indicates that, with student gardens, "production is less important, it's more about teaching people" (personal communication, April 22, 2011). Similarly, the food justice organization operating in a low-income, primarily Hispanic neighborhood works to "help people grow their own food" (Claiborne, 2011), providing raised beds, making available farmers' market certifications, or letting them use Food Stamps to buy fresh produce at a special farmers' market. These efforts aim to educate the consumer about food production in order to reduce the alienation of the consumer from his or her food. The scale of these LFM efforts is, at present, small, meaning that LFM attempts to bring consumers closer to food production cannot counter on a serious scale the traditional separation of consumer from food production.

Instead of Marx's concern with the alienation of the laborer from the means of production, the LFM seems more occupied with the alienation of the bourgeois farmer from his own identity. Close describes the centering effects of farming: "you just have your mind and there is strength in this—you just have your mind. You don't need anything else. You just do your task and revel in what you are doing" (2011). Close reclaims her mind, embattled by modern society, through farming. This attitude recalls motivations of pioneer farmers, who tried to escape the feeling that "a fellow doesn't have room to breathe here anymore" (Ingalls-Wilder 1953). Heights adds that most LFM farmers farm because they like "feeling good about what they do" (2011). LFM farming

provides self-actualization for educated owners of capital. Close asserts that LFM farming is a “subtle rebellion against modern culture;” subtle, yes, and a rebellion against bourgeois culture, but not against capitalist socio-economics (2011). My interviews with LFM participants generated no statements of concern about California’s farm workers.

Overall, the LFM inverts the issue of alienation from a Marxist perspective. Marx decries the “alienation of the worker” (Tucker, 1978) from his labor. The LFM fails to engage the laborers, but it engages consumers who can afford LFM food to overcome knowledge and distance gaps between consumers and food. Under the LFM approach, labor is a mechanism for the farm owner to obtain other ends, such as self-actualization. The failure to address agricultural labor ensures that, for most workers and consumers, the gap between food production and consumption remains. Although Marx called for workers to bring about a revolution, the LFM calls for a revolution of bourgeois consumers to “vote with their spoon” (Heights, 2011). Such an action, based on the principles of capital, is readily welcomed by the existing system.

4.4 The LFM and Agricultural Technology

The LFM also does not reflect Marx’s collectivist response to the technological features of agriculture; rather, it employs technology to maintain its individualistic nature. For Marx, technology spread by capitalist industry induced dramatic changes in agriculture. As a response, Marx calls for the “establishment of industrial armies, especially for agriculture” (Tucker 1978) as a way to combat the exploitative effects of capitalism’s embrace of agricultural technologies. In contrast to Marx’s collectivist harnessing of farm technology, LFM farmers work alone, in pairs, or in small, cooperative groups with typically limited uses of technology. LFM farmers are not technology averse; indeed, the few technologies they use are laborsaving technologies that allow them to work individually rather than turning to “armies” of labor. For instance, the educational farm built an irrigation system and acquired an egg washer to make cleaning eggs easier (Richards, 2011). However, LFM farmers typically have limited access to capital to purchase machinery, and the demands of diversified agriculture mean that they cannot systematically employ technologies. Thus, technology does not play a transformative role in the LFM’s critique of agriculture.

4.5 The LFM and the Persistence of Private Property and Market Forces in Agriculture

Far from abolishing private property, the LFM embraces it in agriculture. LFM farmers typically seek to own land and operate their own farms. Richards bought land with her husband and an investor. They have bought out the investor and now own the land entirely, leasing the land to their non-profit entity. Close and Moore, however, observe that finding land is one of the highest barriers to entry to LFM farming, but no land access

movements to benefit LFM agriculture seem to be in place. ALBA Organics represents one of the only shared-plot farming institutions. Although ALBA provides education and temporary access to land for low-resource, often immigrant farmers, this strategy does not permanently procure farmland for these farmers (ALBA, 2011). Overall, the LFM does not challenge private property in California agriculture.

The ideologies of the LFM are also at the mercy of the market. The LFM can advocate for changes, but the movement's success depends upon its consumers. At the cooperative grocery store in the Bay Area, Rick Martin states that, "it's hard to survive in these social and economic conditions, even if you are the best worker cooperative, if you don't have what people want" (2011). The demands of consumer markets, not LFM ideologies, drive the grocery's behavior. Martin recognizes that the grocery's existence depends on its proximity to the Bay Area, one of the richest regions in the world. In addition, Martin expresses impatience with LFM members not tuned into the rigors of the market system: "they have to be serious—you have to get what you ordered and have it delivered on time, it's not just 'oh hey, groovy farmer, give me your cheese'" (2011). His frustrations increase when local growers prioritize orders to large chains, making it harder for his grocery to supply its consumers. Dependence on the market frustrates LFM activists, yet they do not fundamentally challenge it.

The persistence of private property and dependence on market forces present a picture of a movement willing to participate in existing capitalist systems. Alternatives to the current system are not pursued; groups are simply trying to make capitalism work better for themselves, as property owners, and for their customers. Given the failures of collectivist agriculture as envisioned by Marx (Ellison, 1961), the LFM's embrace of the ideal of the self-sufficient American farmer is perhaps not surprising. Still, barriers to increasing the LFM's scale of production, such as land access, can only be overcome by challenging existing structures.

4.6 The LFM and the Community Question: Community Supported Agriculture

Marx argues that capitalism breaks apart and scatters agricultural communities, disrupting their power and intellectual and social coherence. Marx's vision of communist agriculture involves collectives. As noted above, the LFM has not produced a distinct "community." At best, the LFM community is "disparate" (Close, 2011), largely because of ideological and motivational variations in LFM participants. Rather, the LFM cultivates an intellectual way of farming where participants enjoy the challenge of "masterminding in farming" (Close, 2011). Communities with a history of farming, such as the area surrounding the educational farm, have LFM leagues, but these efforts result in little productive local community growth (Richards, 2011). Instead, the farms best engender a community for customers, typically white and wealthy, who come for

retreats, harvest days, or markets. Farms conduct outreach with underprivileged schools by bringing students to the farms and sending them home with groceries, but these efforts provide no sustainable access to the LFM farms and their products. True to their consumer-dependent approach, LFM farms create community between the bourgeois consumer and the sources of LFM food (Guthman, 2003), but do not successfully foster community for laborers, farmers, or poor consumers (Macias, 2008).

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) provides a case study of LFM agricultural community and economics. With a CSA, members pay a fee to have farm products delivered weekly. Most LFM farmers choose the CSA route because “it’s the most financially reasonable option. It guarantees a source of income and a customer every week” (James, 2011). In doing so, the CSA provides some security from the risk that comes from being “locked into a highly diverse crop” and “applying sustainable agriculture techniques” (James, 2011). These characteristics mean reaching economies of scale, such as bulk growing, are not possible. Food scholar Jayme Buckley argues that CSAs create social bonds and “expand the repertoire of contention by creating an alternative to conventional means” (Buckley, 2009). She describes the CSA as a “social contract of cooperation between farmer, farm workers, and shareholders” that creates “bonds [that] resonate through the community outside of the farm itself” (Buckley, 2009). Buckley’s view echoes Marx’s desired social response to capitalist agriculture.

Instead, for the LFM, the CSA is mainly an economic contract and does not create a sustained community response to prevailing agriculture practices. James speaks of the pressures of fulfilling their CSA orders: “We spend a lot of energy and focus on providing their share, because they’ve made a down payment. We have to make the delivery every week” (2011). The CSA drives the economics of her farm. Indeed, Richards chose an egg-only CSA, not a vegetable CSA, because of the stress (2011). When Heights joined a CSA, “my CSA checks went right into funding what I needed. All the money went back out to the farm” (2011). LFM farmers often opt for CSAs out of economic necessity rather than choice, while consumers participate because they have the economic freedom to do so. James reports customers drive significant distances to pick up eggs at \$7 per dozen. LFM farmers overwhelmingly participate in CSAs because of economics, and the social bonds CSAs create seem again to be between the bourgeois consumer and his product, rather between the laborer and his product.

Second, Buckley presents the CSA as a sweeping response to corporate food culture. Buckley argues that “CSA participants are focused on creating systemic change for the food system . . . instead of waiting for a response from corporate entities, those participating in CSA have already implemented an alternative: a community-based mode of production” (Buckley, 2009). CSAs are a local alternative to corporate food

domination, but the CSA structure limits its ability to be a strategic response to dominant modes of food production. Richards comments, “we sell our eggs for seven dollars a dozen, which is pretty expensive for most people. Most of our customers tend to be from the Bay Area” (2011). The prices of LFM food prohibit true “community” supported agriculture—no one in the area where Richards’ farm is located can support the farm. Heights notes that CSA programs “try to address the fact that only the middle and upper class can afford it. CSA members often pay extra money as a subsidy to let low income people have access to the food” (2011). Sometimes, grants pay for leftover CSA food to go to food banks (Heights, 2011). These comments indicate that class barriers to a collective community response still remain. Richards speaks of her farm’s effort to get “our produce into the families of the kids we’re working with—we send them home with a bag of groceries and a recipe” (2011). Although perhaps the only financially feasible option for the educational farm, this solution does not provide any sustainable way for locals to access LFM produce. Farms are seeking economic outlets more profitable and less taxing than CSAs. For the educational farm, this route includes hard won contracts to supply Station 1, a restaurant serving “sophisticated, unpretentious, carefully sourced” food (Station 1, 2011). As this type of external market expansion occurs, LFM resources and interest will be diverted away from market engagement of local community members. The economic bonds of the CSA may diminish to the weak level of its social bonds. Overall, the LFM does not address the communal fracturing produced by capitalist agriculture. By failing to address community issues within their own production and distribution systems, the LFM propagates the displacement inherent in capitalist agriculture.

4.7 The LFM and the Problem of Scale

The LFM has little revolutionary power or vision. It makes no calls for “working men of all countries” (Tucker, 1978), or of any cohesive social group, to unite. LFM farmers report barriers to expansion, such as lack of capital, access to land, and access to consumers, such as Richards struggle to reach out beyond her CSA. Yet, the LFM mounts no coherent effort to overcome these barriers. The LFM also faces increasing competition from companies. Opportunities for LFM expansion, such as those created by demand from larger retail entities, often mean that LFM producers eventually cut ties with the customers that supported their emergence. Martin reports that a Whole Foods store is being built near the cooperative grocery, creating competition (2011). He describes the propensity of LFM growers to snap up bids from giant companies, such as Whole Foods, which can mean Martin’s orders for the grocery are neglected or unfilled in favor of corporate contracts.

Another enduring structural barrier is price: LFM food is expensive. LFM farms, not surprisingly, often spring up near rich areas. For instance, consider the many LFM farms in the Bay Area, or Close’s

farm, located on the “Gold Coast” of Connecticut, where the majority of the customers are “yoga mommies” or people looking for “braised kale and lamb for my dinner party” (Close, 2011). The price problem prohibits LFM farmers from addressing inequitable access to LFM food because they are bound by their bottom lines.

In places where techniques similar to those of the LFM are institutionalized and supported by governments, locally based agricultural production shows potential for growth. A recent UN report on sustainable farming notes that governments in East Africa fund local programs that teach and implement techniques, such as using insect repellent crops and stabilizing migrant worker populations into stationary, local experts (de Schutter, 2010). The report recognizes that “agroecological practices are best adopted when they are not imposed top-down but shared from farmer to farmer” (de Schutter, 2010), and the report encourages farmers to achieve scale by taking increased roles in every step of food production, from growth to distribution and marketing. In the United States, no such coordinated efforts are taking place, and knowledge distribution among LFM practitioners is largely limited to academic programs.

Institutionalization of the movement, such as the government-supported programs in East Africa, fund programs in this area, may contradict the fundamental principle of a participant-driven movement, but it may prove a viable way for LFM expansion. The LFM seems caught between individual ideological preferences and more viable economic choices. East Africa has not experienced, however, the level of agricultural industrialization that the United States has. Thus, the LFM may work more effectively in regions with less industrialized agriculture.

Although the UN Report predicts that agro-ecology could boost global food production by 10 percent, the LFM will continue to have a purely local impact in the U.S. (“Eco-Farming”). The LFM will operate through CSAs and local vendors, but will face internal scale difficulties and increasing competition from corporate vendors. The LFM movement also faces geographical challenges. The LFM utilizes highly diversified production, a phenomenon best suited to certain climates, such as California’s. The LFM has saturated suitable land and will face difficulty penetrating remaining agricultural strongholds. In terms of ideology, the individualistic nature of its participants makes united action difficult. Additionally, steep barriers to entry to the LFM farming mean that participants often focus on education rather than scaling up production, consequently leaving the LFM as a niche element in the U.S. agricultural system.

4.8 Beyond Marxism: The Future of the LFM

This paper used Marxism to analyze the LFM and its critique of capitalist agriculture. This approach is not the only way to evaluate the promise and problems of the movement, but it provided an interesting way to view the LFM. Particularly, the analysis demonstrates that the LFM does not reflect

Marxist agriculture's visions of collectivized, large-scale farming and does not remedy the alienation of workers in capitalist agriculture. An LFM advocate might respond to these claims by arguing that the LFM has a different vision of scale: a linked, growing community of self-employed, small-scale farmers working to expand and diversify agricultural offerings. This different approach to scale means that large numbers of agricultural workers aren't necessary, so the LFM successfully integrates, rather than alienates, those working within the system. In addition, the progressive nature of the LFM's ideology would prevent abuses of workers as scale gradually emerges. Thus, unlike Marx's vision, collective ownership may not be necessary to safeguard workers.

In terms LFM's ability to achieve scale, LFM advocates might argue that it is too soon to assess the movement on this criterion. The movement is still adapting and changing with new innovation, principles, and models emerging. The LFM needs more time to experiment before being dismissed as a potential source of widespread change. However, the current indications of scaling in the LFM community demonstrate that a shift away from ideology and towards more standard economic principles might accompany increases in LFM scale. Consider the recently launched Silicon Valley "Local Food Lab," an incubator started by Columbia and Stanford graduates who were formerly employed by Facebook and the U.S. military (Local Food Lab). The lab offers "workshops and exposure to industry mentors so you'll learn everything you need to know to plan, pitch, launch, and manage your new good food or farming startup" (Local Food Lab). Strategies like these offer the potential of increasing participation in the LFM in ways that will be economically sustainable - such as implementing the business principles of profit-driven, entrepreneurial startups. LFM participants who seek to "connect with the earth" and do something with a "mission [that] ...is pure" should be aware of the potential convergence of entrepreneurial capitalism with their professed LFM ideologies (Heights, 2011; Close, 2011). Whether the LFM can achieve economic scale without losing its soul remains, of course, to be seen.

V. Conclusion

Marx proclaims agriculture as central to the process that leads to the overthrow of bourgeois supremacy and seizure of political power by the proletariat (Tucker, 1978). Although, like Marx, the LFM expresses concerns about degradation of the earth and the need for systemic changes in capitalist agriculture, it does not represent a radical ideology or movement. Compared to Marx's critique and call for revolution, the LFM seeks escape in owning a plot of land and a rabbit hutch. The LFM is a capitalist, individualist, and limited response to critiques of agriculture and lacks an ideological center of gravity and large-scale vision of reform. It fails to address the problems capitalist agriculture creates for the environment and for agricultural labor, central concerns for Marx. The

growth of the LFM in California and the United States leaves the structure and dynamics of capitalist agriculture largely unchanged, and, in some respects, deeply reinforced.

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