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Civic agriculture and leadership: Builders and weavers in Iowa's regional food systems

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**Civic agriculture and leadership:
Builders and weavers in Iowa's regional food systems**

by

Laura Kleiman

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Majors: Sociology; Sustainable Agriculture

Program of Study Committee:
Lois Wright Morton, Major Professor
Craig Chase
Mark Rasmussen
Betty Wells

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
2013

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DEDICATION

To my family: Mom, Dad, Sara and Anna. Thank you for your love and support.

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ABSTRACT

Ecological instability is a problem in our modern time; however, there are an increasing number of social movements dedicated to addressing this problem, for example, the sustainable agriculture and the food security movements. This paper focuses on a specific aspect of social change related to food production: food system localization. The Regional Food Systems Working Group (RFSWG) was created by the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture of Iowa State University in 2003. The RFSWG can be understood as a *community of practice* and studied using the sociological theory of *civic agriculture*. The goal of the working group is to provide a forum for the coordinators of Iowa's regional food groups to share information and learn from each other within the social context of local food systems. Ten coordinators of the RFSWG were interviewed for this paper in order to learn how food group coordinators in Iowa develop lasting relationships with farmers and producers. After analysis, the data yielded rich, qualitative data regarding the research question; however, there were also emergent themes in the data that shed light on the leadership styles of coordinators. These themes include the warrior, builder, and weaver framework for understanding leadership style. This exploratory, inductive study is the first of its kind and provides a strong backbone for future research in food system localization efforts and leadership.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

In our modern age, ecological instability on a global scale is a common issue of concern. This concern can result in a shift of values regarding how resources should be managed and distributed. There are an increasing number of social movements that aim to make this type of awareness more accessible to the average person; such movements include the sustainable agriculture and food security movements. Within these two movements, many individuals, groups, and organizations are beginning to work to change the current system of food production in an attempt to alleviate some of the world's ecological, economic, and sociopolitical problems. This paper focuses on a specific aspect of social change related to food production: food system localization.

The terms *food systems* and *agrifood systems* involve “the complex set of actors, activities, and institutions that link food production to food consumption” (Committee on Twenty-First Century Systems Agriculture; National Research Council [CTFCSA;TRC] 2010, p. 18). These terms are not the same as a farming system in that “the primary focus is beyond the farm gate” (CTFCSA; TRC 2010, p. 18). In association with increased awareness and accessibility of food production issues, the word *sustainability* has become a common household term in America; in fact, the first lady of our country, Michelle Obama, even grows her own food at the White House in an effort to promote sustainable practices in the home! This type of endorsement along with a shift in values has allowed food system localization to become an increasingly

mainstream facet of American life. Sustainability can be described as the “ability to provide for core societal needs in a manner that can be readily continued into the indefinite future without unwanted negative effects” (CTFCSA; TRC 2010, p. 23). The Committee on Twenty-First Century Systems Agriculture (2010) provides an excellent, descriptive example of a sustainable farming system as:

one that provides food, feed, fiber, biofuel, and other commodities for society, as well as allows for reasonable economic returns to producers and laborers, cruelty-free practices for farm animals, and safe, healthy, and affordable food for consumers, while at the same time maintains or enhances the natural resource base upon which agriculture depends (USDA-NAL, 2007).
(p. 23)

The development and work of the sustainable agriculture and food security movements are based around the idea of sustainability and can be understood in the theoretical context of civic agriculture, this theory will be discussed in detail in the next section. These movements and associated food system localization efforts are growing and flourishing all over the country, including in the microcosm of Iowa. In order to understand the current agrifood system in America, it is helpful to have a historical understanding of agricultural development in the United States.

Since World War II, the agricultural systems in America have changed quite drastically. Before the end of the war, food systems were generally based on local economies and families grew much of their own food in their own back yards. However, after World War II, we have seen “increased mechanization, rising productivity, and growth in nonfarm employment opportunities combined to produce more than a 60 percent drop in the number of farming operations and a doubling in average farm size in the United States” (CTFCSA; TRC 2010, p. 45). These changes are characteristic of the

current, dominant agrifood system in the country. This dominant system, referred to as conventional agriculture, involves high inputs of chemicals, like pesticides and fertilizers, monocultural practices, and extreme mechanization on a very large scale (Beus and Dunlap 1990). In fact, between 1982 and 2002 “most types of crop farms have at least doubled in size, and the average size of livestock herds has increased by 2–20 times” (CTFCSA; TRC 2010, p. 45). Not only has farm size increased but so has productivity; since 1935 crop yields per acre have increased 2.1 percent per year! (CTFCSA; TRC 2010). Many people credit Rachel Carson’s publication *Silent Spring* in 1962 as the impetus for the development of other types of agricultural production, referred to as alternative agriculture. These alternative methods include but are not limited to “organic agriculture, sustainable agriculture, regenerative agriculture, ecoagriculture, permaculture, bio-dynamics, agroecology, natural farming, [and] low-input agriculture” (Beus and Dunlap 1990, p. 594). In general terms, alternative agriculturists advocate “smaller farm units and technology, reduced energy use, greater farm and regional self-sufficiency, minimally processed foodstuffs, conservation of finite resources and more direct sales to consumers” (Beus and Dunlap 1990, p. 594). Agricultural social movements, like the sustainable agriculture and food security movements, encourage the use of alternative methods in order to alleviate socio-ecological strains on our planet. In order for these movements to be successful, it is necessary for alternative policies and practices to become institutionalized in dominant agencies and organizations, like the United States Department of Agriculture (Allen 2004). The goal of this institutionalization is to hone the agricultural standards in our

country to become more concerned with environmental sustainability, social justice, and food security (Allen 2004). An active part of alternative agricultural social movements is food system localization, the focus of this thesis.

Two examples of food system localization efforts are the development of farmers' markets and community supported agriculture (CSA). Indeed, there were only two recorded CSA projects in the United States in 1986 but by 2009 there were approximately 2,877 throughout the country; furthermore, in 2007 the Census of Agriculture included a question about CSA's for the first time (CTFCSA; TRC 2010). Another example of food system localization is the farmers' market. Farmers' markets are becoming an increasingly popular way to buy and sell local, healthy produce. From 1980 to 2007 the number of farmers' markets in the United States increased from 1,200 to 4,385 (CTFCSA; TRC 2010). Farmers often credit the increasing demand for local foods to families' concerns regarding "food safety of distantly produced or imported foods, their need for a greater sense of 'community,' and their desire to talk to a person growing their food" (CTFCSA;TRC 2010, p. 279). However, it is important to keep in mind that these concerns represent a change in values of the American people.

As a research assistant at the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University, I have been working on an evaluation project in conjunction with the Regional Food Systems Working Group (RFSWG) to create a shared measurement system for collecting and aggregating economic data for the regional food groups. During this work I became interested in furthering my understanding of how the food group leaders in Iowa, and the RFSWG coordinators, develop relationships with the

farmers and producers in their food groups. This interest has led me to the research question of this paper: How do food group coordinators in Iowa develop lasting relationships with farmers and producers?

This paper explores relationship building and leadership within food system localization work in Iowa, specifically within the RFSWG. I argue that there are currently two types of leadership techniques being utilized by food group coordinators in Iowa: builder and weaver. These terms will be described in detail in the following literature review. These two types of leadership for food groups are now required because the state of Iowan food systems has progressed to the point where activism is less important and building infrastructure and weaving relationships are becoming vital tasks in food system localization work. I will discuss these types of leadership in the context of food system localization as part of the greater alternative agricultural social movements.

The literature review addresses food system localization within three categories: civic structure, communities of practice, and the structure and agency of Iowan food systems. These theoretical orientations are an important context for understanding my research question and my findings. The following section outlines my research methodology; it describes the research protocols of my study along with the data collection and analysis techniques that I used to conduct my research. I then discuss the findings of my research using three differentiations: common leadership and relationship building characteristics, leadership style, and relationship building and maintenance. The paper closes in a discussion of my findings and a conclusive analysis.

CHAPTER 2 Literature Review

Food System Localization

The Regional Food Systems Working Group (RFSWG) was created by the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture (LCSA) of Iowa State University in 2003. The goal of the working group is to provide a forum for the coordinators of Iowa's regional food groups to share information and learn from each other within the social context of local food systems. This type of collaborative work environment is referred to as a community of practice. Goals of food group coordination include creating relationships between consumers and producers, agricultural education, and bolstering local economies. The success of these goals is often described in quantitative, monetary terms; however, there are many other qualitative ways in which to evaluate the success of local food systems. As a research assistant at the Leopold Center I became interested in furthering my understanding of the qualitative characteristics of local food groups in Iowa. Specifically I am interested in learning how food group leaders develop relationships with the farmers and producers in their food groups. This interest has led me to the research question of this paper: How do food group coordinators in Iowa develop lasting relationships with farmers and producers?

Thomas Lyson (2004, 2005) writes in his theory of civic agriculture that there is a growing movement of localized food production and increasing collaboration among involved parties. The RFSWG is an example of an organization functioning within this theoretical framework. The strength of this study lies in the collection of qualitative data to better understand how relationship-building occurs within a civic agricultural network. This paper builds upon Lyson's (2004, 2005) theory and is an inductive and qualitative study that utilizes in-depth interviews to answer the research question.

In response to a growing concern regarding the environmental state of the world and associated impacts upon food production and food security, food systems are becoming more localized. Food system localization is a main tenet in the theory of civic

agriculture. Civic agriculture is best defined by the theorist who initially labeled and defined the movement, Thomas Lyson (2004, 2005). Lyson (2004) explains that civic agriculture “embodies a commitment to developing and strengthening an economically, environmentally, and socially sustainable system of agriculture and food production that relies on local resources and serves local markets and consumers” (p. 63). Many of the manifestations of civic agriculture are becoming more common place in American life. For example, community supported agriculture, farmer's markets, and an emphasis on naturally grown and local foods are all increasingly a part of social life in America (Chung, Kirkby, et al. 2005, Allen 2003/2004, Lyson 2004/2005, Bagdonis and Hinrichs 2009, DeLind 2002/2006, DeLind and Bingen 2008, Hinrichs 2003, Guptill 2002, Lyson and Guptill 2004, Macias 2008). Patricia Allen (2004), sociologist and food system localization expert, asserts that this localization is not only a social phenomenon but is necessary to solve some of the world’s problems caused by the dominant agricultural system of the modern age. There are now signs all over the world that people are trying to take hold of their food system and make changes; these changes are led by two movements: the sustainable agriculture movement and the community food security movement (Allen 2004). The work that occurs within both of these movements is an example of civic agriculture and how it functions to localize food systems.

Both Lyson (2005) and Allen (2004) describe two distinct types of agriculture in the United States; the first type is often described as *industrial* or *conventional* while the second type is referred to as *sustainable* or *alternative*. Industrial or conventional agriculture involves large-scale production requiring a high amount of external inputs,

intense use of technology, and constant management; this is currently the dominant system of agriculture in the Western world (Allen, 2004, Beus and Dunlap 1990, Lyson 2005). Sustainable or alternative agriculture is based around local food production and typically operates on a smaller scale than that of conventional agriculture (Lyson 2005). This alternative type of agriculture requires that local producers not only work together but work using a systemic orientation that comprehends the larger picture and goals of the alternative agrifood movements (Lyson 2005). Many sociological theorists believe that if the trend of these smaller scale, local farms continues, alternative agrifood systems will in fact become an “enduring feature of the agricultural landscape” (Lyson 2005, p. 92).

The main epistemological viewpoint to conventional agriculture includes the belief that humans can and should use science and technology to dominate nature and consequently advance their own knowledge. As a result, the environmental state of the world is becoming more fragile and dysfunctional, creating a void and a need for a different type of agriculture. New, sustainable agricultural epistemological viewpoints encompass a more inclusive worldview by recognizing the importance of agroecological and interdisciplinary approaches to natural resource management and agricultural production (Allen 2004). Allen (2004) refers to *discourse* as “how sustainable agriculture and community food security are framed and defined” (p. 81). A common discourse for understanding sustainable agriculture is the use of the three E’s: environment, economics, and equity (Allen 2004). Many sustainable agriculture and community food security organizations are moving toward the incorporation of social

justice into their missions, programming, and goals. However, some discourses from the dominant, conventional system of agriculture are maintained in alternative movements, for example, an emphasis on farmers as being the most important component of the agrifood system (Allen 2004).

Allen (2004) refers to a social movement as “persistent, patterned, and widely distributed collective challenges to the status quo” (2004, p. 5). Both the sustainable agriculture movement and the community food security movement can be categorized as social movements (Allen 2004). The goals of these movements are to transform the agrifood system into one that is environmentally sound, economically viable, and socially just. These alternative movements are a result of increased education and a shift in values regarding how resources should be managed and distributed. Allen (2004) recognizes that there are many problems with current agrifood systems and the outlook can seem bleak, but that people are not hopeless. Some of the systemic problems that contribute to the current state of the agrifood system are an increasing gap between the rich and the poor, the failure of the Electoral College, and staggering environmental problems (Allen 2004). The movements of sustainable agriculture and food security address the basic human issues of sustenance and sustainability. These alternative movements operate in two ways:

- 1- developing alternative practices within institutions
 - 2- changing the institutions themselves
- (Allen 2004)

Social movements, including the alternative agrifood movement, can only be successful if they are able to gain the right to negotiate and consult with existing institutions and

organizations in the dominant structure (Allen 2004). In fact, these rights can be the most important goal for some social movements (Allen 2004). For example, the sustainable agriculture and food security movements now have programming in hegemonic institutions like the United States Department of Agriculture; this is quite remarkable considering the conservative nature of these institutions.

One must keep in mind that food is political; it is the only sector of the United States economy that is nationally planned by the government (Allen 2004). Due to this politicization, Allen (2004) recommends a top down approach coupled with a bottom up approach of grassroots movements in order for the alternative agrifood movement to succeed. Examples of such a bottom up approach include the creation of farmer's markets, community supported agriculture, institutional purchasing of local foods, urban agriculture, food policy councils, etc (Allen 2004). DeLind (2002) also describes civic agriculture as a bottom up approach to creating change in the food system, an approach that, on a general level, also increases awareness of agricultural issues. This is an important piece to the civic agriculture puzzle: without increased awareness of the importance of agriculture and the forces that threaten its vitality, the movement would be unsuccessful. A prominent theme in alternative agrifood movements is the promulgation of local food systems (Allen 2004). These systems are considered to have environmental benefits, such as reducing energy use, social benefits such as creating new opportunities for solving problems of hunger and homelessness, and economic benefits such as improving opportunities for employment (Dahlberg 1994). Food system localization,

therefore, functions to “tie together the priorities of the sustainable agriculture and community food security movements” (Allen 2004, p. 66-67).

All players must come to the table in order to achieve the goals of alternative agrifood movements. Issues of sustenance and sustainability are centered around three main themes: “food, environment and livelihood and life chances” (Allen 2004, p. 22). The current agrifood system creates problems within these three main areas. For example, the conventional paradigm suggests that nature is something to be dominated (Allen 2004). On the other hand, alternative agrifood systems are more successful in meeting the needs of the people and the environment because, within these systems, humanity is viewed as part of nature (Allen 2004). Since all commodities, including food, “begin and end in nature” the dominant worldview associated with conventional agriculture is quite problematic (Allen 2004, p. 22). In addition to viewing nature in terms of cooperation, rather than domination, alternative agrifood systems tend to emphasize interdisciplinary, whole farm systems and even localized research, while conventional agriculture is more reductionist and tends to focus on one discipline at a time during problem-solving (Allen 2004).

Sustainable agriculture is increasingly recognized as an important ecological and social revolution that provides an alternative to harmful agricultural practices of the dominant system. However, there is lack of coordination between social and biophysical scientists in sustainable agriculture research (Allen 2004). This creates practices that do not include a consideration of social life in agricultural epistemologies. This is problematic because one cannot actually separate social life from human-made

institutions, such as economics, in this example, agribusiness. Civic agriculture and food system localization theories provide an academic orientation that can help bridge the gap between social and biophysical science in a way that can revolutionize, and even meld, the world's ecological, sociopolitical, and economic systems.

An important piece of food system localization is to ensure that the voices of all people are heard. The following quotation is representative of Allen's (2004) views of power in alternative agrifood movements:

People whose perspectives, ideas, and proposals get heard may be simply the most aggressive, loudest, and most confident, not necessarily those with the best ideas. This not only focuses attention on the viewpoints of these people, it simultaneously restricts the ability of others to present their perspectives (p. 162).

Localized food systems can help prevent such power imbalances in alternative agricultural movements. A fundamental difference between the two types of agriculture described above, and a key element within civic agriculture, is the recognition of the importance of place. The connection of inhabitants to a place is vital for the emergence of a common identity and the desire to create positive change. This common identity has allowed the work of civic agriculture to become a social movement that often takes shape in grass roots activism (DeLind 2002). Furthermore, a deep connection to place can help prevent the type of power imbalances described above by Allen (2004).

An important benefit of civic agriculture is its effects beyond the agricultural systems: the enhancement of civic life. DeLind (2002) posits that civically oriented, agricultural organizations and businesses “extend[s] an invitation for academics, activists, and practitioners alike to rethink conventional and universalizing categories... and to explore more closely and less partially the role agriculture can play in the lives,

bodies, and minds of real people” (p. 217). Civic agriculture is becoming not just a way to farm or sell produce but is becoming a worldview that is being shaped and molded as more accurate understandings of environmental concerns become common knowledge. Since civic agriculture operates within public and shared spheres of socio-environmental life, the concept of *public work* can be included in the discussion of civic agriculture. Public work includes the collective actions of diverse individuals and groups that cooperate to reach a common goal or to solve a shared problem (Chung et al. 2005). Despite the diverse quality of individuals and groups in food system localization efforts, all participants are bound together by the common desire to better the quality of life for the general public (Chung et al. 2005). This desire to do good and the recognition of the importance of place and local capital is what allows food system localization movements to grow. The emphasis on local natural, social, human, and financial capital roots the movement of civic agriculture, fostering hope for creating a sustainable way of life for all (Lyson 2004, Flora 2008).

In order to make changes in the world, to create a less globalized and more personalized agrifood system, alternative movements are attempting to develop “decentralized and community-based local food systems” (Allen 2004, p. 166). Social movements, in a sense, are all local, but the scale of food systems politics must be reduced to the local level in order to become a less exclusionary movement. However, like every level of life, there are issues of disproportionate distributions of power on the local scale, thus “more participatory democracy at local levels is absolutely necessary to the success of the sustainability and community food security movements” (Allen 2004,

p. 175). This success will only be possible if local politics can function “with not instead of national and international politics” (Allen 2004, p. 175). Alternative movements need to function on the institutional level, in addition to the local, by becoming involved in public policy and other forms of dominant agrifood power. Participation in formal levels of the dominant structure will allow alternative movements to “overcome the structures of power and privilege that create and maintain these policies” and to develop a more localized food system (Allen 2004, p. 187).

Unlike Lyson (2005), Allen (2004) does not see alternative agricultural movements as oppositional to conventional agriculture, but as an actual alternative. However, she believes that both alternative and conventional strategies are necessary to create short and long term change in the agrifood system. There are two, concrete suggestions that Allen (2004) notes as being necessary for change: 1. “articulating a unified vision” (p. 210) and 2. “expanding participation” (p. 211). Such a vision would include asking and answering questions like “Whom do we want to sustain and secure?” (Allen 2004, p. 210). This question must be answered in such a way that is inclusive of all groups, ideologies, and environmental needs; furthermore, participation must be expanded to include all current and future members of society without creating a system of subordination, these are not small feats.

The Regional Food System Working Group and Communities of Practice

Locally and regionally based food systems are becoming a more common fixture of life in the United States and many countries around the world. A regional food system can be described as a system that:

- supports long-term connections between farmers and consumers while helping to meet the health, social, economic and environmental needs of communities within that region. Producers and markets are linked via efficient infrastructures that:
 - promote environmental health;
 - provide competitive advantages to producers, processors and retailers;
 - encourage identification with a region's culture, history and ecology; and
 - share risks and rewards equitably among all partners in the system.
- (Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture 2013)

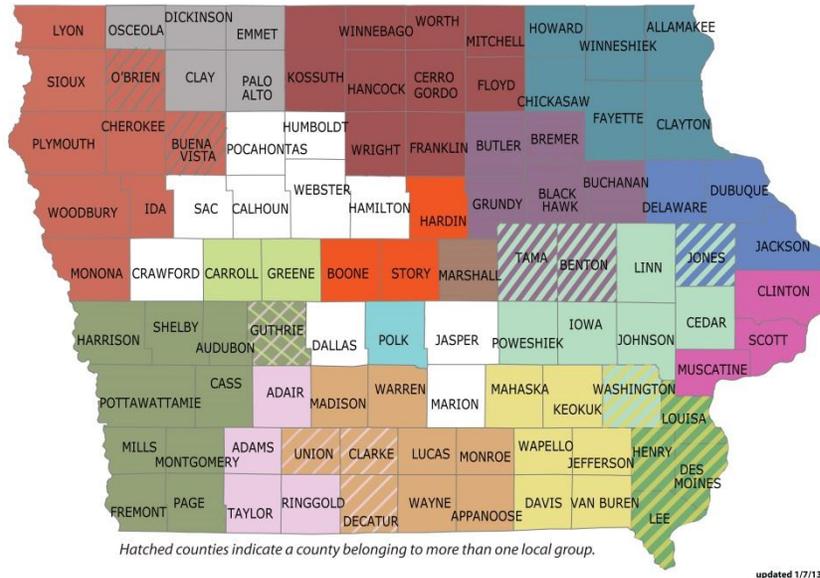
The RFSWG was born out of programming at the LCSA at Iowa State University (ISU). The LCSA's Marketing and Food Systems Initiative, in conjunction with ISU Extension and Practical Farmers of Iowa, developed an Iowa network of Value Chain Partnerships (VCP) in 2002 (Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture 2013). The program was funded primarily by the Leopold Center and Wallace Center at Winrock International. VCP programming was created to support "new supply networks for farmer-led food, fiber and energy enterprises that follow sustainable practices" (Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture 2013). The RFSWG is one of five working groups that was created from the VCP initiative. See Figure 1 for a pictorial representation of the VCP working groups.

Figure 1: Value Chain Partnership Working Groups



A pictorial list of all six Value Chain Partnership working groups as developed through the collaboration of the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture’s Marketing and Food Systems Initiative, Iowa State University Extension, and Practical Farmers of Iowa.

The RFSWG participants include all seventeen coordinators of various local food groups across Iowa; this is the core of the group. Additionally, there are many RFSWG participants that can be described as stakeholders, for example, farmers, producers, processors, local food advocates, business owners, and other players in local foods. The core group and the stakeholders meet to discuss common challenges and problems and to share successes and knowledge. The seventeen food groups that are represented in the RFSWG are geographically based around the state of Iowa (see Figure 2 for details).

Figure 2: Map of Iowa by Regional Food Groups

A map of Iowa by regional food groups that are involved in the Regional Food Systems Working Group.

All five VCP working groups can be understood as *communities of practice*. By the simplest of definitions, communities of practice are “groups of people in organizations who come together to share what they know, to learn from one another regarding some aspects of their work and to provide a social context for that work” (Wegner et al. 2002). All of the VCP groups “are organized as communities of practice that leverage funds and expertise to identify food and agriculture system challenges, foster learning and innovation and implement solutions” (Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture 2013). The importance of place is deeply embedded in the concept of a community of practice. The geographic area of concern must be common to all members of the community in order for participants to properly relate to each other. The Leopold

Center for Sustainable Agriculture (2013) describes the nuances of communities of practice:

Communities of practice present an odd irony. They have always been part of the informal structure of organizations. They are organic. They grow and thrive as their focus and dynamics engage community members. But to make them really valuable, inclusive and vibrant, they need to be nurtured, cared for and legitimated. They need a very human touch.

And so it is with the working groups in Value Chain Partnerships. Each of our working groups is very different, shaped by the working group leader and participants' skills and expertise, yet all of the groups function in a collaborative atmosphere where everyone is both learner and teacher.

Kania and Kramer (2011) spearheaded research on similar types of collaboration as described above by the Leopold Center (2013), and articulated the idea that collaboration among different players with similar interests and needs is a facet of collective action and impact. Allen (2004) explains that *collective action* “becomes a movement when participants refuse to accept the boundaries of established institutional rules and routinized roles,” the results are referred to as collective impact. *Collective impact* can be described as “the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem” (Kania and Kramer 2011, pg. 36-38).

Collective impact organizations and relationships are unique in that such initiatives “involve a centralized infrastructure, a dedicated staff, and a structured process that leads to a common agenda, shared measurement, continuous communication, and mutually reinforcing activities among all participants” (Kania and Kramer 2011, pg. 36-38). The RFSWG is an example of such an organization; participants of the working group collaborate to create mutually beneficial partnerships, share experiences, and support each other in their work. Kania and Kramer (2011) name

three characteristics that are common to collective impact initiatives: 1) domain, 2) community, and 3) practice. *Domain* is crucial in that a community of practice is much more than a group of people, these communities identify a specific “domain of interest”, for the RFSWG the domain is local food systems in Iowa (Wenger 2006). The *community* is the specific pursuit of the players’ interests within the identified domain. Community of practice members do not need to daily interact, instead they usually meet occasionally in depth meetings, like the quarterly meetings of the RFSWG (Wenger 2006). The members of a community of practice must share a common *practice*, they must be practitioners in their field (Wenger 2006). In the case of the RFSWG, the practitioners are the seventenn coordinators of Iowa-based local food systems.

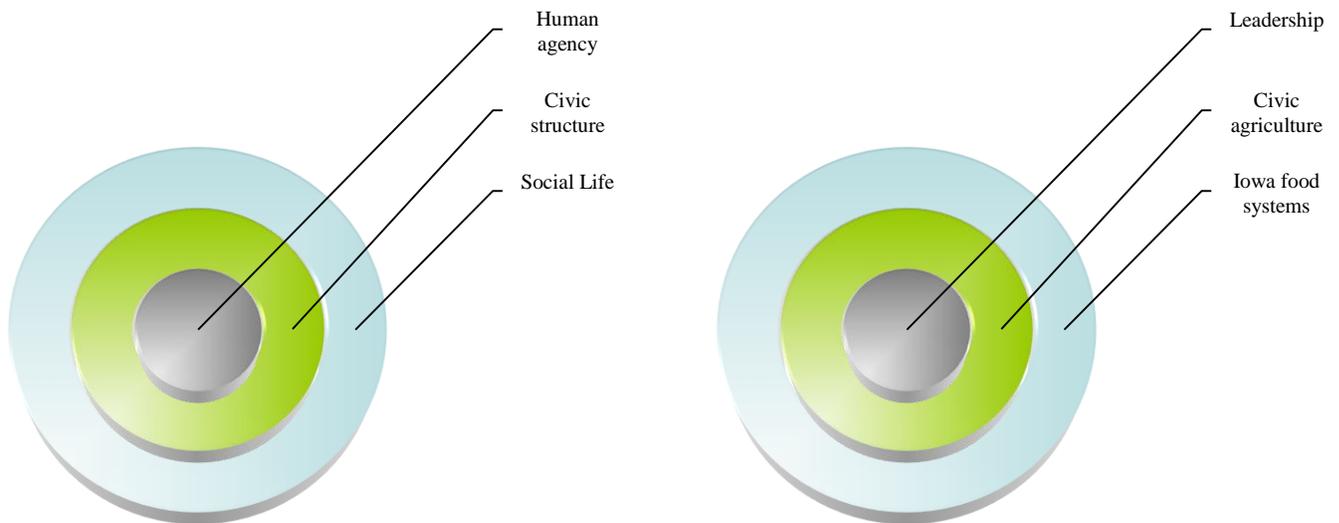
In the words of Kania and Kramer (2011), the Regional Food Systems Working Group has a “common agenda, shared measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support organizations” (Kania and Kramer 2011, pg. 39). The Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture has functioned as the “backbone organization” for the RFSWG, however, in 2011 all VCP working groups began the transition to self-convene under new leadership and independent funding (Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture 2013). The RFSWG has flourished under new leadership and independent funding and has continued to meet four times per year to “discuss and coordinate efforts to build more vibrant regional food systems” (Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture 2013). The RFSWG can be understood in the context of civic agriculture, for example the group is a “locally organized system of agriculture and food production characterized by networks of producers who are bound together by

place” (Lyson 2004, p. 63). As a community of practice, the RFSWG is an example of the cooperative efforts distinctive to the theory of civic agriculture.

Structure and Agency

Civic structure within social life requires human agency. In the instance of the Regional Food Systems Working Group, the civic structure is civic agriculture and the human agency is the leadership of the different food groups. See Figure 3 for a graphic representation of these relationships.

Figure 3: Structure and Agency in Iowa’s Regional Food Groups



Social life in a general sense is represented as the largest circle in each chart. Civic structure and human agency are embedded in the circle of civic life. The chart on the left is a macro representation of social life, civic structure, and human agency while the chart on the right represents the same three concepts but on the micro level of food systems in Iowa.

The leadership, or agency, of local food groups in Iowa can be explained using a theoretical structure developed by Stevenson et al. (2007). Within this framework there are three types of leadership that can be found in alternative agrifood movements: warrior, builder, and weaver (Stevenson et al. (2007). Stevenson et al. (2007) describes the three different types of leadership as follows:

Warrior work consciously contests many of the corporate trajectories and operatives, but not exclusively, in the political sector. This is the work of resistance. Builder work seeks to create alternative food initiatives and models and operates primarily (and often less contentiously) in the economic sector. This is the work of reconstruction. Weaver work focuses on developing strategic and conceptual linkages within and between warrior and builder activities. It operates in the political and economic sectors but is particularly important in mobilizing civil society. This is the work of connection.
(p. 34)

All three types of leadership can be understood through the context of a social movement.

A social movement can be loosely defined as “consciously formed associations with the goal of bringing about change in social, economic, or political sectors through collective action and the mobilization of large numbers of people” (Stevenson et al. 2007, p. 35).

The agendas and work of alternative agrifood advocates have not always been considered the work of a social movement; however we have seen this begin to change over the past ten years or so. During that time, many academics and lay persons have started to recognize the work of alternative agrifood professionals and advocates as that of a social movement (Stevenson et al., 2007). Recognizing the value of viewing the alternative agrifood system as a social movement allows “informal networks of individuals, groups, and organizations that share a common belief about the nature of a

problem [to] work to bring attention to the problem and then propose and advocate solutions” (Stevenson et al. 2007, p. 35).

Another recent development in the common understanding of the alternative agrifood movement is the context in which it is understood and analyzed. In the past this analysis was done using the framework and lexicon of the conventional agrifood system with an emphasis on agribusiness (Stevenson et al. 2007). Of late this is changing, particularly in the realm of food system localization; there is now a greater emphasis on “building alternative agrifood paradigms and initiatives” (Stevenson et al. 2007, p. 33). These new analyses are shifting from a supportive stance toward agribusiness to a more critical one “based on deep concerns about ecological degradation, economic and political imbalances, and social and ethical issues” (Stevenson et al. 2007, p. 33).

The strength of social movements, including that of the alternative agrifood movement lies in its ability to successfully apply “three interactive elements: framing processes, mobilizing structures, and political opportunities” (Stevenson et al. 2007, p. 35). The *framing processes*, or discourses, include a common understanding of specific concepts that allow those involved in a movement to recognize societal issues, develop solutions, and incite advocates to action. The strength of a frame can be measured by its ability to precipitate action (Stevenson et al. 2007). *Mobilizing structures* pertains to “the particular forms that social movement organizations take and the tactics that they engage in order to communicate a message and to press for political change (McCarthy and Wolfson 1992)” (Stevenson et al. 2007, p. 37). These tactics vary depending on the resources available to the movement’s adherents and the particular problems or issues in

play. The more diverse these resources are the more potential the movement has in terms of resiliency and opportunities for success (Stevenson et al. 2007). *Political opportunities* refer to opportunities for change within the political realm of life. The goal of taking advantage of these opportunities is the “institutionalization of long-term structural change (McAdam 1996)” (Stevenson et al. 2007, p. 38).

The three types of leadership outlined above (warrior, builder, and weaver), can be executed using one or more of three different *goal orientations*:

- 1) Inclusion (getting marginalized players into the agrifood system).
 - 2) Reformation (changing the rules of the agrifood system).
 - 3) Transformation (changing the agrifood system)
- (Stevenson et al. 2007, p. 39-40)

The goal of all three orientations is to create some kind of social change. These methods for goal attainment are possible using any of the three types of leadership; the three types of leadership can be thought of as *strategic orientations* for achieving goals (Stevenson et al. 2007). It must be noted that the leadership types and goal orientations are not mutually exclusive. A leader can use varying combinations of the strategic and goal orientations to conduct his or her work within social movements. In the case of the Regional Food Systems Working Group, I believe that there are currently two types of leadership being used by the Group’s coordinators: builder and weaver. See Table A for a description of builder and weaver characteristics, adapted from Stevenson et al. (2007, p. 42-43).

Table A: Characteristics of Builders and Weavers

Outlines the characteristics of both builder and weaver leaders in alternative agrifood movements. These characteristics are based upon the activities, strategic orientations, goals, and targets of coordinators. Additionally, the difference between the ways in which leaders link their work to civil society is outlined in the table. Adapted from table in Stevenson et al 2007, p. 42-43.

Characteristics of Builders and Weavers		
	Builders/Less established coordinators	Weaver/More established coordinators
Activity	Creating new agrifood initiatives and models	Developing strategic and conceptual linkages
Strategic Orientation	<i>Reconstruction</i> ; entrepreneurial economic activities building new collaborative structures	<i>Connection</i> ; linking stakeholders; coalition building; communicating messages to civil society
Goals	Reconstruct economic sector to include such goals as sustainability, equity, healthfulness, regionality; working within established political structures to create alternative public policies	Build a food system change movement, engage members of civil society; create and strengthen coalitions within and beyond food system change communities
Main Target	Economic, political	Civil society; political
Link with Civil Society	Encourages civil society to protect alternative economic spaces through consumption choices of public policies	Serves linkage function for advocates and engaged actors within the public sphere; potential to provide vehicles for participation by less engaged members of civil society

It is important to keep in mind that leadership needs change throughout the course of a social movement's lifetime; the kind of leadership that activates a movement is not the

same kind of leadership that institutionalizes the beliefs and practices of a social movement. That being said, there is not a consistent progression of leadership that occurs within a social movement. For example, the beginning stages of a social movement usually require the work of warrior leaders, however, there may be a need throughout a movement in which the work of a warrior is again necessary. Furthermore, these types of leadership are not mutually exclusive and one individual can utilize multiple styles in order to successfully lead a social movement or group. In the case of the Regional Food Systems Working Group, I have found that the builder and weaver types of leadership reflect how the coordinators develop relationships with farmers and producers in their food group and have provided a framework for answering my research question: How do food group coordinators in Iowa develop lasting relationships with farmers and producers?

CHAPTER 3

Research Methodology

Qualitative research is both a science and an art form. It requires tact, grace, and the effective use of the scientific method. Within qualitative research one can use an inductive or deductive technique of inquiry. This study utilizes an inductive technique through the use of in-depth interviews to answer the research question at hand. Neuman (2011) describes the methods and value of inductive inquiry:

To theorize in an inductive direction, we begin with observing the empirical world and then reflecting on what is taking place and thinking in increasingly more abstract ways. We move toward theoretical concepts and propositions. We can begin with a general topic and a few vague ideas that we later refine and elaborate into more precise concepts when operating inductively. We build from empirical observations toward more abstract thinking.
(p. 70)

In the case of this paper, the in-depth interviews function as observations of the world while the analysis and discussion, which follows, function as the abstract thought process that can inform the sociological theories discussed in the section above.

Qualitative science, including in-depth interviews, does not usually yield generalizable or empirical results. This does not, however, subtract any value from the findings.

Rather, the intent of qualitative research is to administer “detailed examinations of specific cases that arise in the natural flow of social life” (Neuman 2011, p. 165). This type of examination is vital to the process of creating, developing, and strengthening sociological theory that can, if desired, be tested empirically in subsequent quantitative research projects.

Qualitative science is extremely time intensive and requires a lot of human interaction and therefore necessitates that the researcher possess adequate social skills.

The researcher must maintain his or her role as a researcher throughout the entire process and that role must be understood and consistently recognized by the human research subjects. This requires that the researcher walk a fine line between “researcher” and “friend” in the eyes of the subjects. Neuman (2011) explains that “personal openness and integrity by the individual researcher are central to a qualitative study. By contrast, in a quantitative study, we stress neutrality and objectivity” (p. 168). The researcher must also acquire an “intimate understanding of a setting” however, this “does not mean that we can arbitrarily interject personal opinion, be sloppy about data collection, or use evidence selectively to support our prejudices” (Neuman 2011, p. 168). In order to facilitate an effective research process, I developed an expert understanding of food systems in Iowa and the details regarding the structure and functions of the RFSWG group as a whole and of its member food groups. I attended the RFSWG quarterly meetings and became an honorary member of the RFSWG steering committee, the governing body of the group. These experiences have allowed me to become intimately involved with the RFSWG and obtain a greater understanding of how the community functions.

The process of in-depth interviewing is time consuming and requires tactful human interaction. An important component to conducting in-depth interviews is to create a safe and comfortable place, whether physical or virtual, in which the communication travels between interviewer and interviewee and back again successfully and productively; this “interexchange” or communication must result in the “cocreation of verbal viewpoints in the interest of scientific knowing” (Miller and Crabtree 2004, p.

185). The following describes the multidimensionality of the interviewer/interviewee relationship:

In the actual interview the attitudes expressed by the interviewer should reinforce the interviewer's role. The interviewer should display desired enthusiasm; be nonjudgemental; show interest in the information as it unfolds; be empathetic; and avoid forgetting previous answers, condescension, and rigidity (Gordon, 1975) (Miller and Crabtree 2004, p. 196).

While conducting all of my interviews I made sure to keep in mind this advice from Miller and Crabtree (2004) to help my interviewees feel comfortable in order to yield the most accurate data.

The remaining portions of this methodology section will delve into the specific details of the process I used in order to address my research question.

Research Protocols

I chose to use the qualitative research tool of in-depth interviews to address my research question. I determined this tool would be the most effective to gather the data I was interested in because "interviewing is a known communication routine of the respondent" and was "a culturally appropriate communication form for the topic of interest (Briggs, 1986)" (Miller and Crabtree 2004, p. 188). Before any contact or research began, I filed the proper paperwork with the Iowa State University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This included the following forms and supplemental documents:

1. Application for Approval of Research Involving Humans
2. Initial contact letter to interviewees
3. Confidentiality and informed consent document for interviewees
4. List of questions to be used in interviews
5. Request for waiver of documentation of consent (described in more detail below)

I received approval from the IRB for my research on July 19, 2012, IRB identification number 12-349. Shortly after this date I initiated contact with the RFSWG coordinators.

There were sixteen food group coordinators involved in the RFSWG when I did my interviewing in the summer of 2012; since that time there has been a seventeenth group added. The study population was quite small (sixteen), so no sampling technique was needed and the full population was contacted for interview requests. As a research assistant at the Leopold Center I assisted with an evaluation project for the RFSWG regarding economic data collection. This project helped me to develop connections with several coordinators of the RFSWG so I was able to gain easy access to the study population by utilizing these relationships to initiate contact. The interview questions were written to produce meaningful data concerning how coordinators work to produce relationships with farmers and producers in their local food system. The list of questions used in my interviews can be found in Appendix A.

All sixteen coordinators were contacted via email; the first letter of contact began with a brief introduction stating who I am, what I wished to learn, and why the RFSWG coordinators were my study population of interest. See Appendix B for a copy of this letter. This email also described how my study could potentially benefit the coordinators personally, the Leopold Center, and Iowa food systems. I closed the email with a short description of the confidentiality I would provide for my respondents and a request for them to respond to the email if they were interested in participating in the study. Nine coordinators responded to this first contact email and interviews were set up; I began

conducting interviews over the phone in August 2012. Two weeks after the initial contact letter was sent, I emailed a follow up letter to the coordinators who had not responded, reminding them of my request to interview them; one coordinator responded to this second request and the remaining six did not respond. I maintained a professional, yet safe and friendly, interview environment during all ten interviews and sent a follow-up email to each interviewee thanking him or her for his or her time and assistance and to inquire if there were any questions regarding participation in my study. After the ten interviews were complete, a clear information saturation point was reached so I did not pursue interviews with the remaining six coordinators.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

I maintained explicit confidentiality for my interviewees. As noted above, I filed a waiver to the ISU Institutional Review Board to request exemption from signed confidentiality agreements; this waiver was approved as part of my research project so I did not require that the coordinators sign the agreement, however, I did make sure each coordinator understood the document prior to each interview. Before interviewing, I emailed a copy of the confidentiality and informed consent agreement to each coordinator. The written confidentiality and informed consent agreement was reviewed with each participant before the interview began. This agreement included a description of the confidentiality I would provide, a basic outline of my research, and the manner in which the interview content would be used. Additionally, at the start of each interview I

asked and received permission to audio record the session and made sure that the interviewee understood the following:

1. (S)He did not have to answer any question (s)he did not want to
2. The interview could be stopped at any time
3. The interview would remain confidential and anonymous

Prior to each interview I conducted an open discussion with the interviewee regarding the anonymity I would provide for him or her. The names of the coordinator were not to be used in my research reports and no connection would be made between the unnamed coordinator to the identity of his or her specific food group. I ensured this anonymity by using a number system, for example, Food Group #1 corresponds to Food Coordinator #1. Furthermore, I ensured that each participant would remain anonymous and that revealing information would not be used concerning their identity. In my IRB application, I described these confidentiality and anonymity methods above in detail and provided the board with a copy of the confidentiality and informed consent agreements.

Data Collection

In-depth interviews are organic processes that require excellent communication skills and empathetic listening; the interview can be described as a “partnership on a conversational research journey” (Miller and Crabtree 2004, p. 185). I applied this mentality to conduct professional and effective interviews.

All interviews were done over the phone and, with the consent of each interviewee, I used a digital audio recorder to record each interview while I simultaneously took notes in case of a recording error. My interviews were semi-structured in that I used a preset

list of interview questions but also asked other questions during interviews; these additional questions were used to clarify and expand the responses of my interviewees. The excerpt below gracefully describes the process of qualitative research and directly relates to that of in-depth interviews:

Flexibility in qualitative research encourages us to continuously focus throughout a study. An emergent research questions may become clear only during the research process. We can focus and refine the research questions after we gather some data and begin a preliminary analysis. In many qualitative studies, the most important issues and most interesting questions become clear only after we become immersed in the data. We need to remain open to unanticipated ideas, data, and issues.
(Neuman 2011, p. 170-1)

During each interview I kept in mind these lessons and techniques in order to conduct scientific and effective interviews. After each interview was complete, I saved the digital recordings on my personal computer along with the notes I took by hand. These files were labeled according to the coordinator number I assigned to each respondent and a key was kept in a separate document listing each coordinator and their corresponding number.

The Marketing and Food Systems Initiative at the Leopold Center often works with the RFSWG and my research can provide a future resource to the Center and its partners, so I approached the leader of this initiative, Dr. Craig Chase, to see if there was any available funding to pay for the transcriptions of my interview recordings. Dr. Chase agreed to fund the transcription process and I enlisted the services Ms. Dori Douglass of WORDS Unlimited, a transcription service often used by the Sociology Department at ISU. I emailed each digital recording to Ms. Douglass who then transcribed each interview and emailed the electronic transcriptions to me which were then saved on my

personal computer. After all interviews and associated transcriptions were complete, I began the data analysis process.

Data Analysis

One method of qualitative data analysis is referred to as *open, axial and selective coding*; this technique is particularly effective for analyzing in-depth interviews so I chose this method for my study. Neuman (2011) describes, in general terms, how one analyzes data qualitatively:

Those who conduct qualitative studies analyze by organizing data into categories based on themes, concepts, or similar features. While doing this they may also develop new concepts, formulate conceptual definitions, and examine the relationships among concepts.
(p. 511).

This type of thematic analysis is the method I used to code my data. As a qualitative researcher it is important to remember that one's research question should function as a guide but that the process of analysis can, and often does, yield more questions.

Qualitative coding "frees you from entanglement in the details of the raw data and encourages you to think about them at a higher level, moving toward theory and generalizations" (Neuman 2011, p. 511). The first step of this coding process is referred to as *open coding*. This type of coding involves a first, brief read of the data in which the researcher identifies broad categories in order to condense the data into more manageable material (Neuman 2011). During this first read, I wrote down preliminary concepts, ideas, and questions on paper copies of interview transcripts. During this phase I kept in mind that these initial categories, or codes, could be changed later in the analysis process as new themes emerged (Neuman 2011). The themes at this point of the

analysis process were relatively basic and were directly related to my research questions, they rested at “a low level of abstraction” (Neuman 2011, p. 512). The second read through of the data, the *axial coding* phase, is characterized by an elaboration of the themes that emerged during open coding. During this phase I was not concerned with making connections between codes, my main goal was to “review and examine initial codes” in order to move “toward organizing ideas or themes and identify the axis of key concepts in analysis” (Neuman 2011, p. 512-13). The last phase of coding I conducted was *selective coding*, during which I reviewed all data and coding, then I analyzed selectively to illuminate instances that illustrated codes that had emerged in previous phases of analysis (Neuman 2011).

Throughout the coding process I utilized an iterative technique to inductively develop and code conceptual, emergent themes. During this inductive process of analysis, it became very clear that leadership was one of the differentiating factors between types of coordinators and their associated relationship-building techniques. In response to this emergent theme, I developed criteria for placing the coordinators in two categories that were theoretically driven from the warrior, builder, weaver framework discussed in the Theory section above. Based on leadership style and other qualitative characteristics, I coded the coordinators into the following categories: more established coordinators and less established. The term “established” refers to coordinators who lead as weavers while the term “less established” refers to coordinators who lead as builders. The weaver and builder leadership styles are described in greater detail in the theory section of this paper. These two categories are valueless in that one is not better than the

other; coordinator leadership is not always based on choice but sometimes is dependent on situation, context, and need. The RFSWG food groups are beyond a stage in their development, as part of the alternative agrifood movement, where warrior leadership and activism are required. Some of the groups, less established, have progressed to a point where builder leadership is needed, while others, more established, now require weaver leadership. Builders are less established coordinators who lead less established food groups while weavers are more established coordinators who lead more established food groups. During my qualitative data analysis it became clear that the less established coordinators were acting as builders while the more established coordinators were acting as weavers. Table B describes the characteristics of builders/less established and weavers/more established coordinators and groups.

Table B: Qualitative Characteristics of More and Less Established Coordinators and Groups

Outlines the characteristics of more and less established coordinators and groups based on group longevity and coordinator experience, membership and programming, and coordinator roles.

Qualitative Characteristics of More and Less Established Coordinators and Groups		
	Less established coordinators and groups	More established coordinators and groups
Group longevity and coordinator experience	Less established groups have generally been in existence for shorter periods of time, usually less than 5 years. Less established coordinators often have experience in social activism and movements.	More established groups have generally been in existence longer, usually more than 5 years. More established groups were led by coordinators that have more general experience in food system localization activities.
Membership and programming	Less established groups tend to have fewer members and programming is often based on education and member recruitment.	More established groups have been in existence longer, include more members, and have more diverse programming.
Coordinator roles	Coordinators of less established groups generally described their roles in terms of activism and as educators.	Coordinators of more established groups generally described their roles as servant leaders.

After I completed the open, axial, and selective coding process of all ten interviews I reread all interviews and selected quotations that illustrated the thematic areas of my analysis. These quotations were placed in a Microsoft Excel document listed, by interview. Following this step I made bulleted lists of aggregated, analytical generalizations that would serve as the outline for my analysis section of my project that will be found later in this paper.

Maintaining Validity

Neuman (2011) describes the concept of validity in qualitative analysis:

Validity means truthfulness. In qualitative studies, we are more interested in achieving authenticity than realizing a single version of 'Truth.' Authenticity means offering a fair, honest, and balanced account of social life from the viewpoint of the people who live it every day. We are less concerned with matching an abstract construct to empirical data than with giving a candid portrayal of social life that is true to the lived experiences of the people we study.
(Neuman 2011, p. 214)

In order to ensure that my coding was valid I enlisted the help of my major professor, Dr. Lois Wright Morton, who read and coded one of my interviews using open, axial, and selective techniques. I met with Dr. Morton and we reviewed both of our coding notes in order to reconcile the data for consistent themes. We found many of the same conceptual themes and connections during this meeting and expanded upon some of my original ideas. I used the codes that emerged from this conversation to analyze my remaining data.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

During the stages of open, axial, and selective coding, the data revealed three areas in which I could categorize my findings:

1. Common leadership and relationship building characteristics among all ten coordinators,
2. Leadership styles (builder and weaver),
3. Relationship building techniques that varied according to leadership style.

Table A in the Literature Review described the leadership characteristics of more and less established coordinators (weavers and builders). This Findings section will cover the results of my coding and analysis of the data in the context of the theoretical orientations discussed previously: food system localization, civic agriculture, and the warrior, builder, weaver framework.

During the process of coding and data analysis it became clear that there were two, distinct categories of food groups: more established and less established. The more established groups have been in existence longer, have more members, and more diverse programming than that of less established groups. I also found that the more established groups were led by coordinators that were more established in food system localization activities. These coordinators had been working in food systems longer and often had a more extensive academic or professional background in agriculture. On the other hand, less established coordinators often had more experience in social activism and movements. The coordinators of more established groups reported different roles and different goals than the coordinators of less established groups. However, Coordinator 3

was an exception to some of the evaluative rules I developed to determine more and less established coordinators. Coordinator 3 has been working in food systems for eight years but his food group has only been existence for three years so some of his responses were consistent with more established coordinators while others were consistent with less established coordinators. See Table C for a list of more established and less established designations by coordinator and food groups.

Table C: More and Less Established Coordinators and Groups

More and Less Established Coordinators and Groups		
	Less established	More established
Coordinators	2, 9, 10	1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
Groups	2, 3, 9, 10	1, 4, 5, 6, 7

Lists the more and less established coordinators and groups by number (numbers are used for anonymity).

Of the ten coordinators, I determined that seven were more established and three were less established. These determinations were made in a qualitative fashion; see Table B for a summary of these characteristics. However, there were some common characteristics and responses that were present in all ten interviews. For example, every coordinator reported that he or she had some kind of background in agriculture, whether they ran their own farm or had come from a farming family or community. The following section describes these common leadership and relationship building characteristics.

Common Leadership and Relationship Building Characteristics

All coordinators reported some kind of experience in the realm of agriculture; this experience varied in type and duration but was reported consistently. Some coordinators grew up on a farm, currently run a farming operation, lived in an agriculturally based town, etc. Many of the coordinators mentioned that understanding the “culture of agriculture” in Iowa was an asset to their work, “Myself, growing up on a farm and being on a farm all the time, I sort of talk... I mean, you can talk equipment or talk livestock or something... it’s like the same language sort of to where you sound more sincere when you talk” (Coordinator 1, personal communication, August 17, 2012). This sentiment was shared by both more and less established coordinators and allows them to “talk shop” and build trust in their relationships. Focusing on shared experiences also allows coordinators to build deeper relationships with the farmers and producers they work with, for example, Coordinator 6 said, “Every farmer complains about the weather. So if you feel like you’re getting on rocky space with this farmer, and he’s like, ‘No – we’re gonna do it like this’ and I’m like, ‘Really? That’s not the best way.’ – you just talk about the weather for a while” (Personal communication, August, 29, 2012). Another commonly reported way to build legitimacy within a relationship is to allow the farmer to teach, “One of the things that farmers love is to teach you. They want to tell you why their way is right and what way is the right way. And so if you just take the learner stance with them, they’re just thrilled; they’ll talk to you all day” (Coordinator 6, personal communication, August, 29, 2012).

All ten coordinators seemed to agree that the best ways to begin a relationship with farmers and producers included one or more of the following:

- *Visits to farms and/or face to face meetings*

Not only do coordinators feel that farm visits are an effective way to begin a relationship, but that these visits allow the coordinators to understand and market their products, “the first step in building that relationship with farmers is always just a visit to their farm, which goes out of general interest I think one has to have for understanding their operation... and how they’re running their business and why” (Coordinator 3, personal communication August 24, 2012). A similar sentiment was reported by Coordinator 10 who like to,

come to your farm and learn about your farm and see what you do and just really get to know that person and their products. And then you can tell them, ‘Make sure you include this and that in your information for the website, whatever information you have that you want to go out.’ So then you know enough about them, you can help them do an effective promotion for whatever they’re producing
(Personal communication, August 24, 2012)

- *Expressing genuine interest and honesty*

Coordinators often discussed the use of basic, positive relationship skills to develop relationships with farmers, for example, “if you have a genuine interest, it’s going to come across” (Coordinator 3, personal communication August 24, 2012). This interest may take time to relate to a farmer but once a farmer understands the coordinator is genuine, a successful relationship can follow. One coordinator directly mentioned the use of basic social skills to develop relationships

You know, I think it's very similar to lessons we all probably learned when we walked in school in kindergarten. It's just really having a genuine interest in people and getting to know what they do and why. And I think if that's there and just really see people on a very basic, human interest level, the rest will follow.

(Coordinator 4, personal communication, August 22, 2012)

Coordinator 1 also uses his natural, genuine interest “to find the most sincere way to kind of make them comfortable to talk about their business and their successes and their needs. And it may take honestly a couple times for both parties to feel that they're comfortable and actually have a relationship that's started (Personal communication, August 17, 2012). In general, all of the coordinators seemed to truly love the work that they do in food systems and if that love and genuineness can be relayed to farmers and producers it seems more likely that a successful and lasting relationships can be developed.

- *Getting to know the farmers personally*

Both more and less established coordinators mentioned that they like to get to know the farmers and producers they work with as friends, and even spend time with their families and on their farms. Coordinator 4 expressed his interest in the farmer as a family unit:

I don't know that this is anything special to our group, but on a side note I really, truly am invested in each family – they're not just operations. And I know many of the farmers' families and children and their pets, and I've been to their farms, and many of them have welcomed me into their kitchen for a cup of coffee. And I think that truly building friendships with people is absolutely key. And sometimes I think that gets missed because it is work and it is a job and it's not something that's fake; you know, it's not this slow relationship. But that's very much at the heart of what we do. These people that I work with, they're my friends, and I think they would consider me their friend, and I think that's been essential.

(Personal communication, August 22, 2012)

The benefits of this type of personal relationship are obvious; knowing the farmers and producers personally allow coordinators to better provide services and support that are specific to the individual and operation. However, this can also create some difficulties for the coordinator, the “flip side” of these personal relationships is that “yes, it’s very fulfilling, yes – unless you have to deliver bad news to one of your friends and it’s just work” (Coordinator 4, personal communication, August 22, 2012). However, this drawback is probably common in most if not all occupations that involve developing relationships with clients, stakeholders, or colleagues.

○ *Understanding the products and operations*

Coordinators understand the value of becoming knowledgeable about the products and operations of the farmers that they work with. This knowledge has many benefits; the most commonly mentioned benefits were being able to market the farmers’ products and to improve the local, rural economy of their region, “the other part of it then is marketing their product. And the way that I go about marketing their product is education. I just say our rural economy should be bolstered. We can make ourselves recession proof if we get people to grow our food for us so that we don't have to buy it from California” (Coordinator 6, personal communication, August, 29, 2012). Understanding products and operations is quite a multifaceted asset to the work of coordinators, Coordinator 7 describes a new relationship with a farmer and how he worked to develop it:

And I recognized that I didn’t know very much about her, so we just did some email exchange. I asked her a few questions like I have just explained to you,

and she sent me back a bunch about what she's doing with her operation and where she's going with that. And... I can remember those details the next time I see her... pick up some and sort of narrow in and say, okay, I remember her, and I remember she was interested in working on these kinds of things. (Coordinator 7, personal communication, August 17, 2012).

Many coordinators were consciously aware that remembering identifying characteristics of the farmers and producers that they work with, whether these characteristics are related to the farmer's operation, personal life, or products, worked to their advantage during relationships building and maintenance.

- *Creating connections within the food system, especially to new markets*

Many coordinators considered their “core audience as the farmers...the people who are producing the local food for the foodshed” but that other stakeholders within the food system are also important (Coordinator 5, personal communication, August 21, 2012). The value chain within the food system was often mentioned as a way to not only develop more relationships with farmers, producers, and processors but to develop their local food systems for their communities. Coordinator 5 said that he does “outreach to individual consumers and eaters moving up through that chain to families, extended families, organizations, institutions, businesses, county supervisors, all sorts of folks within that food system; ... anybody that's working to engage in the food system” (Coordinator 5, personal communication, August 21, 2012). Including as many individuals, organizations, associations, businesses, etc. in the coordinators' work, allows for greater successes in the quest for nurturing food system localization efforts.

These findings were common to both more and less established coordinators; however, there were many areas of relationship development that differed between the two basic types of coordinators, builders and weavers. Before one can delve into the

ways in which the two types of leaders differ regarding relationship building, one must first understand their different leadership styles.

Leadership style

Of the ten coordinators, I determined that seven were more established and three were less established. Of the seven established coordinators six are paid in their position as food group coordinator while one works as a volunteer. Of the three less established coordinators all work in volunteer positions without monetary compensation. Refer to both Tables A and B for a summary of differences in food groups and leadership styles among coordinators. The less established coordinators tended to work with food groups that were newer with fewer members while the more established coordinators tended to work with food groups that have been around longer with larger memberships. As mentioned earlier, Coordinator 3 was a bit of an exception in that the coordinator was more established but his group was less established.

I found evidence in the ten interviews that suggests more established coordinators view their work as more “farmer centric” and, like more established Coordinator 8, directly refer to their work as “servant leadership”. The coordinators of less established groups reported fewer farmers/producers in their food group and described their main goals as educating the community and building group membership. For example, more established Coordinator 5 said that he is “willing to drop everything if a farmer needs something. And maintaining that farmer-centric behavior is what has served me the best over the years of doing this, is that recognizing that I may worry about distribution of food, but if I don't have land and people to farm that land, then I really don't have

anything to worry about distributing” (Personal communication, August 21, 2012). Less established Coordinator 10 discussed the importance of educating and building his community, he said “part of our goal is to provide education in the community on the importance of local food for the health of both individuals, community members and the economy” (Personal communication, August 24, 2012).

Volunteer coordinators, all of which were less established except for one (Coordinator 7), repeatedly expressed that their work would be easier if he or she (or a support staff member) were paid for their work. Less established coordinators, like Coordinator 9, expressed that they were “informal” leaders, these coordinators often stated that there was work they would like to be doing but are unable to because there isn’t enough money and time as a volunteer coordinator. Coordinator 3 said that he would probably not continue in his position if he had to continue as a volunteer and Coordinator 2 explained that “if we had more money, we could do a lot more stuff” (Personal communication August 24, 2012).

The work of less established coordinators is also different, in general, from that of more established coordinators. Less established coordinators described themselves as “zealots”, “tree huggers”, or “activists”, work that can be considered to be builder work. This type of work focuses on building the infrastructure and organization of their local food shed. Less established Coordinator 9 explains his work as “close-to-the-ground and outreach... efforts in building community around food and in building community, period” (Personal communication, August 31, 2012). Although Coordinator 3 has been working in local foods for some time, his food group is only three years old so a lot of

his work is in the realm of education and outreach, “Well, right now our goals are to expand our geographic outreach and base it on the information that was collected on the Ken Meter study and the community conversations” (Personal communication August 24, 2012).

Less established coordinators also describe their work in terms of activism, sometimes even as being contrary to the common feelings and beliefs of their area. Coordinator 9 said the following regarding his activist work:

I’m not the most popular person in the big ag side, or what we often call conventional ag in Iowa. I’m not the most popular person. I come off kind of as a tree-hugger if you know what I mean. I come off as some far liberal because I’m totally against hog confinements. And so when I say I want my pork to be from Neiman Ranch or from a friend who’s grown it, they all roll their eyes at me. Or when I ask at Fareway for a locally grown something, they kind of go... If somebody doesn’t ask it or bring the idea up..., and that’s part of my role.
(Personal communication, August 31, 2012).

Another less established coordinator discusses his work in activism, referring to himself as a “zealot”, he said, “Everywhere I go, I talk about local food, and I mean everywhere. When I go back to college for a reunion, I talk about it back in New York. When I go to Chicago to visit my best friend and they have a party at their house, I talk to everybody at the party about local food (Coordinator 10, personal communication, August 24, 2012). Local foods are not just the field in which these coordinators work, it is their passion, what drives them. This same passion is also seen in the more established coordinators, it just manifests itself in different ways.

More established coordinators tended to describe their duties as “weaver” work. One of the more established coordinators even used the warrior, builder, weaver framework to describe work done in food systems and described her work as weaver

work. The work of more established coordinators was often described as “connecting” work to create relationships between many members of the local food value chain,

Coordinator 7 said,

And there are styles of working that are more like weaving. They’re weaving all sorts of relationships together, not because they’re the endpoint but because weaving those relationships starts to open up these opportunities that builders then sort of build on. And I think I tend to operate much more like a weaver, sort of laying the groundwork and then moving us towards some building.

(Personal communication, August 17, 2012)

These more established coordinators seemed to focus more on the value chain of partnerships and connections that create a local food system, weaving together different threads of a community to make a whole system:

... that’s what the whole idea about, for a community-based agriculture is, you need everybody along that value chain and along that food chain, from the producer to the eater to the distributor and so forth. So I think you’ve got a responsibility. You’re sort of like the spider in the center of that web, trying to keep all those connections going so that people understand the piece of the pie that they’re involved with and that they understand that their piece is connected to this bigger picture...

(Coordinator 7, personal communication, August 17, 2012).

More established coordinators even believed that the farmers and producers that they work with view them as a “networker” who is “supposed to be versed in what’s going on throughout the food system” and “supposed to be helping them get connected”

(Coordinator 6, personal communication, August, 29, 2012).

More established coordinators also spoke of preserving communities and families and the Iowa landscape in general. They were clearly invested in the success of their work to better their hometowns and help their neighbors. One coordinator, particularly passionate about the preservation of rural community, said,

And certainly as a parent – I have younger children – and certainly as a parent I can... the future of Iowa and some of our livelihood. You’re right – agriculture is so just permeated in all of what we do here in Iowa. It’s very hard to escape. And so, yeah, I

like to feel like I'm contributing something, kind of paying it forward in a way, yeah, kind of trying to make something healthy and okay for us in the future.
(Coordinator 4, personal communication, August 22, 2012)

Farmer collaboration was a topic of concern to all coordinators; however, the more and less established coordinators approached farmer collaboration in different ways. More established coordinators noted trying to keep a hands-off approach to farmer collaboration while less established coordinators seemed to directly insert themselves into all situations, more direct action and less facilitation. More established Coordinator 4 was particularly adamant about these concepts, referring to himself as an “invisible captain... [to] steer the ship if possible” and work to support collaboration and to facilitate, rather than to do all of the leg work personally (Personal communication, August 22, 2012).

Relationship building and maintenance

An aspect of relationship building that varied between coordinators were the ways in which new farmers and producers were recruited into their food group. These varied methods were not consistently different between more and less established coordinators, rather it seems that these methods were determined by personal preference and time or resources constraints.

Some coordinators said that they waited until a producer or farmer came to them with a need or a question while others were proactive in recruiting new farmers and producers to their group. More established Coordinator 8 reported that he used both techniques, “we have some that we have reached out to that we get contact information and then I either email them or try to get a hold of them some other way and see what

they've got going on and how we can work together. And there's a few of the growers that are real active in what we do, and then they make those contacts also" (Personal communication, August 14, 2012). Recruitment can also be a team effort with the foodshed, for example more established Coordinator 4 said,

I'm constantly hearing from other people about these new contacts we can make. And then also I go out of my way to visit farmers' markets. Or one thing that's really worked well is asking food buyers who they're buying from. I've learned of several farmers in our area from food buyers, so that's helpful. But I've found the first step in building that relationship with farmers is always just a visit to their farm, which goes out of general interest I think one has to have for understanding their operation... and how they're running their business
(Personal communication, August 22, 2012)

More established coordinator 5 usually waits until a farmer or producer comes to him with a need or a question and then tries to help that farmer address his or her issues, "We have found that in our communities our farmers are generally pretty independent people, and they kind of feel like if they haven't needed you yet, they probably don't need you. And so it's easier for us to provide something to them that they will enjoy or need as a way to start that relationship" (Coordinator 5, personal communication, August 21, 2012).

A way in which more and less established coordinator work varied was in terms of the type of relationships they currently have with farmers and producers. More established coordinators reported that there was difficulty in fostering a culture of collaboration because farmers are competitive and don't want to share trade secrets. More established Coordinator 5 said that "the culture of agriculture is not always one of collaboration and sharing where people have had to fight to make a niche for themselves and fight to have their customer base. But what we want to show is that by sharing

there's actually better resources for everyone (Coordinator 5, personal communication, August 21, 2012). On the other hand, less established coordinators said this was not a problem, for example, one coordinator said it was not a problem because there was not enough supply in their area to meet the demand. Coordinator 3 was an interesting example because he is a more established coordinator of a less established group. He has not had any problems with producer collaboration because "there isn't enough supply to meet the demand right now, I don't think there's any issue with that, because even if there were..., there's not enough to buy" (Coordinator 3, personal communication August 24, 2012).

There were also many ways in common in which both more established and less established coordinators built relationships. Many coordinators said that problematic relationships were created by strong personalities and people who lacked social skills. They also said that their relationships were built in the same way any successful relationships are built, using good people skills. Almost every coordinator described some kind of collaboration with other civic organizations and either directly or indirectly referred to the value chain of partnerships and organizations that allowed them to do their work successfully. Most coordinators either directly or indirectly mentioned that they recognize that different people engage and communicate on different levels and in different ways and that they tried to accept this and accommodate for these differences. Many coordinators described their successful relationships as ones that are mutually beneficial. Not only did they feel a responsibility to their farmers but felt at least some degree that their farmers had a responsibility to help them in their work as well. Many

coordinators were involved in local foods on a personal level, whether it was through production or other civic organizations, before they became RFSWG coordinators. All coordinators described behavior that could be considered personal and professional leverage to create networks within the food system: you scratch my back I'll scratch yours. Most coordinators reported that maintaining relationships is more informal, often via email, and there were many different levels of relationship maintenance. The more established and paid coordinators seemed to have more time for this kind of work.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion and Conclusion

As described in the theory section of this paper, civic structure requires human agency and, in the case of the RFSWG, civic structure is analogous to civic agriculture and human agency is analogous to food group leadership. See Figure 3 for a graphic representation. Within the civically-oriented group, the RFSWG, I found two different types of leadership being utilized by food group coordinators: builder and weaver. As explained earlier, I believe that the activism stage of social movements that requires warrior work is no longer applicable to the RFSWG, rather building and weaving work is now needed. However, this does not mean that warrior work will never again be required or used by those in leadership positions in Iowan food systems. Perhaps extreme weather events or climate change will require that food production systems change in Iowa and around the world; this could dramatically effect what is needed in terms of leadership in local food systems in Iowa. New legislation regarding agriculture or food production could also affect the type of leadership needed in food system localization efforts in Iowa.

The reader will recall that builder work is focused on infrastructure while weaver work is focused on relationship building. Iowa food systems can be considered mature in that food system localization movements have already begun extensive activity, in essence, the warrior, or activism stage has been completed (at least for the time being) and it is now time for builders and weavers to lead food groups in Iowa. This is a time sensitive process that may proceed in a similar fashion in other states and regions;

however, the time frame would vary depending on things like state or regional politics, available natural capital, pre-existing infrastructure, etc. As other states and regions develop mature local food systems I would posit that their development will occur similarly to what we have seen in Iowa.

To determine whether builder or weaver work is needed, one must assess the “established” quality of the food group. Newer food groups require builder leaders and more established food groups require weaver leaders. Furthermore, less established food groups tend to have less established coordinators that lead using builder techniques while more established food groups tend to have more established coordinators that lead using weaver techniques (refer back to Tables A and B for characteristics of weavers, builders, and more and less established coordinators). Less established leaders initiate, advocate, and build food groups while more established coordinators sustain and weave relationships within food groups. Despite the difference in leadership style of builder/less established coordinators and weaver/more established coordinators (of the ten coordinators I interviewed), there were many similarities between the two coordinator categorizations in terms of leadership qualities, for example, visiting farms, getting to know farmers personally, and, using shared experiences to develop relationships. However, there were many dissimilarities in leadership style that then function to dictate differences in relationship building techniques, the initial question of my study. Most notably, more established coordinators view their role as servant leaders, weavers, and relationship builders while less established coordinators view their roles as agricultural educators, outreach coordinators, and builders of infrastructure. As

mentioned above, these differences foster some differing techniques for relationship building. For example, more established coordinators try to make connections between farmers, foster collaboration, and market products to create successful relationships with farmers and producers in their region. On the other hand, less established coordinators focus more on meeting farmers to build food group membership and to develop useful programming for farmers and producers.

My initial research question was as follows: how do food group coordinators in Iowa develop lasting relationships with farmers and producers? My data also yielded substantial results regarding different types of leadership among food group coordinators. However, as described in the methodology section, one of the goals of inductive, qualitative research is to allow new questions and answers to emerge. So I may not have been able to answer my initial research question as thoroughly as I would have liked; however, I am extremely satisfied with the emergent themes and data that I discovered regarding leadership in food groups and I think they provide lessons that can be taken back to the Leopold Center, the RFSWG, and other food groups around the country. See Appendix C for a list of helpful hints that can be used by food group coordinators to develop successful and lasting relationships with farmers and producers.

My study can also function as the first of many on the topic of relationship building in food systems. Other studies could delve into other relationships in the value chain of local foods besides the farmer/producer–food group coordinator relationship. For example, another interesting study could be to develop an understanding of how farmers and producers can develop relationships with food group coordinators in such a

way to increase profits and visibility in the marketplace. One could also research relationship building between farmers and producers and purchasers or consumers in a food group. The cooperation of these two groups is what allows a local economy to flourish and it would be beneficial to learn more about fostering successful relationships between the two. Furthermore, one could delve into the quantitative side of research in order to understand if successful relationships in food groups create positive economic outcomes. The possibilities for future research are practically endless.

The main limitation of this study is that it is very place-specific. The same types of leadership and associated relationship building techniques may not be present in the local food systems of other states or countries. Despite this limitation, it does not mean that there are no transferrable lessons to other geographic areas, rather, there is just merely no guarantee that the lessons are applicable outside of Iowan food systems.

The current state of the world's agroecological and economic systems are precarious at best. One can see evidence, however, that change is happening through alternative agrifood movements like the sustainable agriculture and food security movements. A manifestation of these movements is food system localization which is a main tenet of the theoretical orientation of civic agriculture. Food system localization is becoming more mainstream as words like *sustainability*, *organic*, and *local* are becoming more and more commonly used in American households, schools, and marketplaces. This paper explored relationship building and leadership characteristics in local food systems in Iowa. As the Iowan food system landscape changes and evolves, the builder leaders may have to step aside, or adapt their leadership skills, to allow

weaver leaders to continue to create more inclusive local food systems in Iowa. As the state of the world becomes more fragile, studies like this one, and many more, will become not only increasingly relevant, but necessary to heal our wounded planet.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROMPTS

1. How and when did you become involved in the RFSWG?
2. Describe your position and responsibilities within the RFSWG? Is this a paid or volunteer position?
3. Can you describe the members of your food group? Are they mostly farmer/producer, institutional, or some other type?
4. How many members are in your food group?
5. What are your goals as a coordinator? What kind of information or services do you try to provide for your members?
6. Can you describe the relationships you personally have with the members of your group? With the farmers/producers specifically?
7. How do you usually begin a relationship with a new farmer or producer?
8. How do you maintain relationships with farmers/producers?
9. Can you describe any problematic aspects to your relationships with the farmers/producers in your food group?
10. If another food group coordinator asked your advice in creating a successful relationship with a farmer/producer what would you tell them?
11. Please describe how you developed a relationship with a farmer in your food group that has been particularly productive or successful.
12. Please describe a relationship that you have with a farmer in your food group that has proved to be more challenging than others?

APPENDIX B

INITIAL CONTACT LETTER TO INTERVIEWEES

Dear _____ ,

Greetings! My name is Laura Kleiman and I am a research assistant at the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture and have worked with the Regional Food Systems Working Group as part of my assistantship. You may remember me from my evaluation work with Corry Bregendahl involving shared data collection for economic information.

I am contacting you today to request an interview with you for my Master's thesis research project. During my work at the Leopold Center I have developed an interest in furthering my understanding of how the RFSWG coordinators establish relationships with the farmers and producers that they work with. The specific aim of this study is to understand how these relationships develop and are maintained and perhaps may even generate suggestions for how food group coordinators can create and advance such relationships.

This study will produce direct benefits to you and those you work with as a RFSWG coordinator. The study involves gathering data regarding relationship-building with farmers and producers. Understanding how these relationships are developed successfully will enable food systems coordinators, practitioners, and researchers to more adequately understand the realities of farming. This understanding will allow these individuals to be better equipped to leverage resources for farmers and make their support work more relevant. Furthermore, the data collected and the analysis may help coordinators to engage farmers in the process of connecting the act of farming with the greater public good. This new information may also empower farmers to get involved in farming beyond production or purely market based activities.

Your name and food group name will be kept confidential and will only be recorded in my interview notes. Any data I share or publish will use a numbered system to differentiate individuals and food groups. For example, Jane Smith of Iowa Food Group would be referred to as Coordinator #1 of Food Group #1. At the time of our interview we can discuss in greater detail issues of confidentiality and consent.

The interview should take between 30 and 45 minutes of your time. My schedule this summer is extremely flexible and I would like to complete your interview before September 1st 2012 if possible. Please let me know if and when you would be available for an interview. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Laura Kleiman

APPENDIX B

HELPFUL HINTS FOR DEVELOPING LASTING RELATIONSHIPS WITH
FARMERS AND PRODUCERS IN YOUR LOCAL OR REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEM

- Take the time to visit a farm; most farmers enjoy giving tours of their operation and discussing their work. This will also give you the chance to get to know the farmer and his product personally so you can better assess and address his or her needs.
- Remember that not everyone likes to communicate the same way; be sure to communicate via phone, email, or in person depending on what makes the individual farmer more comfortable.
- Use shared experience, for example, the weather, or agricultural experience, as a way to start conversation and build rapport.
- Help farmers and producers develop relationships with the local food system value chain, not only will it help the farmer personally and bolster local economy but it will also increase the likelihood of the farmer helping you out in the future.
- Get to know a farmer personally, ask about family or hobbies, but stay away from heavier topics like religion or politics.
- Think about the general rules of relationship building that one learns as a child: be polite but assertive, be complementary but genuine, and be confident but not aggressive.