Around the globe, an array of alternative agrifood movements has emerged largely in response to the ecological and socio-economic threat caused by industrialized agricultural processes. From organic agriculture, to Slow Food, Locavore, and the Food Sovereignty movement, people around the world are reasserting their right to healthy and culturally appropriate food grown using ecologically sound practices. These movements are guided in part by different philosophical and practical approaches to agricultural production and food consumption. The purpose of this inquiry is to explore the relationship between alternative agrifood movements and industrialized agricultural, including their socio-cultural, economic, and ecological outcomes.

I focus this inquiry on a case study in the Ecuadorian Andes at an organic farm, La Finca, and a local NGO, Ser Tierra, both of which are involved in the alternative food movement. Specifically, I sought to gain an overview of community-supported agriculture (CSA) initiatives implemented at the local level.
by La Finca, and to determine whether or not these initiatives could be adapted to support the efforts of women farmer’s working with the NGO, and 2) to learn about local women farmers’ food sovereignty and micro-credit programs offered by Ser Tierra.

Although I recognize that there are other (and sometimes contradictory) interpretations, this body of research contends that industrialized agriculture is in a state of over-development, and that alternative agrifood movements (such as the La Finca organic farm and Ser Tierra farmer field schools) represent more than niche-marketing, but rather a real commitment to environmental sustainability and socio-economic justice. This argument is based on data that illustrate that 1) the ecological effects of industrialized agriculture are overwhelmingly destructive, with increased loss of biodiversity worldwide, whereas small-scale agricultural practices promote healthy soil and biodiversity, 2) the economic benefits of large-scale agriculture are increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few multinational corporations, while the livelihoods of many of the world’s small-scale farmers are simultaneously destroyed, and 3) the socio-cultural impact of industrialized agriculture is a loss of traditional foods and a trend towards global food hegemony controlled by multinational agrifood complexes, rather than by individual or local cultural preferences.
ALTERNATIVE AGRIFOOD MOVEMENTS
IN AN AGE OF INDUSTRIALIZED AGRICULTURE:
An Ecuadorian Case Study

by
Rebecka Rising Daye

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presented on March 7, 2011.

APPROVED:

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Chair of the Department of Anthropology

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Dean of the Graduate School

I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

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Rebecka Rising Daye, Author
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ALTERNATIVE AGRIFOOD MOVEMENTS
IN AN AGE OF INDUSTRIALIZED AGRICULTURE:
An Ecuadorian Case Study
Chapter 1: Introduction

Purpose of the Study

Food studies have always been a central component of anthropological inquiry. Archeologists study food remains and how one food system transitions to another. Biological anthropologists study the medicinal qualities of plants and the specifics of human diets. Linguistic anthropologists study how terms for foods are used in everyday language. And cultural anthropologists study all aspects of food systems including religious uses, taboos, gendered uses and the symbolic meanings of food to name but a few. To this day, the human relationship to food remains an important area of investigation for anthropologists.

Around the globe, an array of alternative agrifood movements has emerged largely in response to the ecological and socio-economic threat caused by industrialized agricultural processes. From organic agriculture, to local farmers’ markets, to the Food Sovereignty movement, people around the world are reasserting their right to healthy and culturally appropriate food grown using ecologically sound practices. These movements are guided in part by different philosophical and practical approaches to agricultural production and food consumption.

In *Food Wars* (2004), Lang and Heasman assert there are three main agricultural paradigms currently operating around the globe. The *Productionist Paradigm* is based on the ideology of “get big or get out”; it includes industrialized agriculture, monocropping, and the Green Revolution. It is the current global trend led by North-America. The *Life-Sciences Paradigm* is based
on the ideology that science can improve food production; it is grounded in biotech technologies and includes genetically-engineered and pest-resistant seeds. This paradigm is closely associated with the productionist mentality and is used by a majority of large-scale agriculturalists. The Integrated (or Ecological) Paradigm is based on the ideology of social-ecology and seeks to reincorporate traditional knowledge in farming practices; it includes organics and sustainable small-scale farming.

Embedded in the literature review section of this thesis is an exploration of specific aspects of these paradigms including industrialized agriculture, the Green Revolution, genetically-engineered seeds, and organic farming. The purpose of this inquiry is to explore the relationship between alternative agrifood movements and industrialized agricultural, including their socio-cultural, economic, and ecological outcomes. “The examination of agency and structure in contemporary agrifood systems is an important [anthropological] inquiry because it sheds light on how humans shape something as essential for life as food, and on how the existing food system shapes human action” (Wright and Middendorf 2008:14).

In order to examine the relationship between alternative agrifood movements and industrialized agricultural, I formulated the following research questions: 1) What are the primary factors influencing contemporary agricultural practices, both industrialized and alternative?, 2) What are the socio-cultural, economic and ecological effects of these practices? and 3) What are the overarching ideologies governing alternative agrifood movements? These
questions are explored in the literature review, through the use of data culled from various experiences of peoples around the world: primarily the United States, India, Mexico, and Ecuador. I extended this inquiry to a case study by asking 1) What is the role of alternative agrifood movements in Ecuador? and 2) How are small-scale organic women farmers in the Ecuadorian highlands engaged in these processes? Specifically, I contracted with an organic farm, La Finca, and a local NGO, Ser Tierra, in the Ecuadorian Andes on an applied research project that was twofold: 1) to gain an overview of community-supported agriculture (CSA) initiatives implemented at the local level by La Finca, and to determine whether or not these initiatives could be adapted to support the efforts of women farmers working with the NGO, and 2) to learn about local women farmers’ food sovereignty and micro-credit programs offered by Ser Tierra (see appendix 1).

The research is contextualized using a primarily Western lens, and thus focuses on the relationship of contemporary agricultural practices to capitalist and neoliberal ideologies rather than to socialism or communism, although the impact of socialist and communist ideologies has a long and complex history in Ecuador. The primary reason for this is the exploration of alternative food movements in relation to global industrialized agriculture.

Although I recognize that there are other (and sometimes contradictory) interpretations, this body of research contends that industrialized agriculture is in a state of over-development, and that alternative agrifood movements represent more than niche-marketing, but rather a real commitment to environmental
sustainability and socio-economic justice. This argument is based on data that illustrate that 1) the ecological effects of industrialized agriculture are overwhelmingly destructive, with increased loss of biodiversity worldwide, whereas small-scale agricultural practices promote healthy soil and biodiversity, 2) the economic benefits of large-scale agriculture are increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few multinational corporations, while the livelihoods of many of the world’s small-scale farmers are simultaneously destroyed, and 3) the socio-cultural impact of industrialized agriculture is a loss of traditional foods and a trend towards global food hegemony controlled by multinational agrifood complexes, rather than by individual or local cultural preferences.

Organization of Thesis

In chapter two I lay the foundation for the interpretation of research data. I begin with a theoretical overview of capitalism and neoliberalism, followed by a discussion on the debate between moral and rational economics. I then extend the discussion to explore the theoretical underpinnings of a sustainable economy, and conclude with an argument for the creation of a new economic paradigm based on socio-economic and ecological sustainability.

In chapter three I examine the rise of industrialized agriculture and analyze its expansion under neoliberal economic policies, including the socio-economic effects on people and the ecological effects on the natural environment. I then explore some responses to industrialized agricultural
practices with a focus on alternative agrifood movements, and illustrate how these movements represent forward-thinking socio-ecological sustainability initiatives. I conclude with a discussion on the social status of food.

Chapter four provides an overview of the Ecuadorian social, economic, and political landscape necessary for a discussion on food sovereignty activities in Ecuador. In this chapter I discuss the historical role of indigenous political activism and agrarian reform, as well as the role of ethnic and gender relations in indigenous social movements and national and international development programs.

Chapters five through seven focus on a research case study conducted in the Ecuadorian Andes. In chapter five I introduce my research methods, including participant-observation ethnography and data analysis. Chapter six is a presentation of research findings. I begin with an examination of the food sovereignty movement in Ecuador then present ethnographic research conducted in the Andean highlands on an organic farm and with women farmers working with a local NGO. In chapter seven I offer a discussion stemming from the research findings and provide limited recommendations.

In chapter eight I discuss the relationship of this case study to socio-economic and ecological sustainability as developed throughout this thesis. I conclude with a recommendation for additional research.
Chapter 2: Theoretical Approach

Chapter Overview

“There has emerged over the past five to six centuries a distinctive culture or way of life dominated by a belief in trade and commodity consumption as the source of well-being” (Robbins 2008:xiii). That system is defined as capitalism. Whether or not one is situated at the core or at the periphery, or engages in acts of resistance, there is no way to exist independent from the system for it has become a globalizing force. One characteristic of capitalism is the unequal distribution of wealth. Some reasons it persists is the value people have placed on certain traits of the capitalistic system: 1) the promise of individual growth and personal choice, 2) quality and comfort in lifestyle, 3) access to technological advancements, and 4) an elevation of social status, to name just a few (Robbins 2008).

In this chapter I provide a theoretical overview of capitalism and neoliberalism, followed by a discussion on moral and rational economics. I conclude with an argument for the creation of a new economic paradigm based on socio-economic and ecological sustainability.

Capitalism/Neoliberalism

The current global political economy can be characterized as a system of late capitalism, corporatism, and neoliberal economic policies. Neoliberalism is a theory of political economic practices that advocates for the liberation of
individual entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework of free markets and international free trade (Harvey 2005). The bottom line of neoliberal policies is the accumulation of profit. Multinational corporations dominate most global economic activities and yield enormous power in advancing the doctrine of free trade (Robbins 2008:133). Nonetheless, anthropologists, international activists, and even economists have found that international free trade agreements often come at a significant cost to those who reside in countries on the downside of power, and disproportionately benefit already wealthy nations (Shiva 2000; Wilk & Cligget 2007; Robbins 2008; Holt-Giménez & Patel 2009).

It has also been argued that the fundamental principles of capitalistic economies and “free trade” have been distorted and perverted by the neoliberal paradigm. “Capitalism has been defined as an economic system based on the private ownership of property and the private allocation of resources, through free markets” (Ikerd 2005:15). However a free market system implies that all partners are sovereign and have the choice to trade or not trade. In the current neoliberal economy, trading conditions have resulted from coercion or force, as weak countries have been forced to open up their borders to rich and powerful nations, even to their own detriment. Neoliberal economic policies can also be seen as a reflection of ongoing transformation from capitalism to corporatism as corporations exert pressure on governments to remove all constraints to corporate economic growth and profit-making activities. These activities result in resource exploitation at increasing speeds and threaten the sustainability of both the natural resource and its associated economic benefit (Shiva 2000; Ikerd
Some consequences of international free trade that are relevant to this discussion include the relaxation of social and environmental laws, unfettered resource extraction, and the export/import of subsidized monocrops (discussed further in chapter three).

Increased exploitation, hunger, poverty, inequality, environmental degradation, and global conflict have been some of the outcomes of the expansion of capitalism and western neoliberal economics (Shiva 2000; Ikerd 2005; Robbins 2008; Holt-Giménez & Patel 2009). Anthropologist and social theorist David Harvey (2005) argues that it is difficult to oppose all the specifics and particulars of neoliberalism without an appeal to universal principles and the reintegration of morality into human economic behavior. Instead of being obliged to live as appendages of the market, people must reject neoliberal economic practices and create an alternative economic system (Ikerd 2005).

While the effects of neoliberal economic policies are increasingly seen as negative by many social scientists, it is also important to understand that the trend towards globalization cannot easily be reversed or halted. The question remains whether or not these processes can be restrained to reduce or eliminate the destructive social and human costs of structural changes associated with neoliberal policies (Lefeber 2003). The argument here is not that capitalistic markets should be completely abolished, but rather that morality and social equity need to be incorporated into the global economic paradigm (Ikerd 2005).
Morality and Rationality in Economics

Social science is always a combination of objective and subjective views, of reality and ideology, and a mix of knowledge and power (Wilk & Cliggett 2007). The same is true of the relationship between morality, rationality, and the economy: it is multifaceted and highly dependent on which lens one is looking through. When thinking about morality and/or rationality in economics, several ways to examine and contextualize the economy emerge: 1) differences in capitalist and non-capitalist societies, 2) the formalist and substantive interpretations of economics, and 3) moral versus rational decision-making and choice (Wilk & Cliggett 2007). I explore some of these concepts here in an attempt to understand the relationships between morality, rationality, and economics and how they relate to culture.

The formalist and substantive debate on economics provides a foundation upon which to examine morality and rationality in economics. Substantive economics refers to the material acts of making a living, whereas formalist economics refers to the study of rational decision-making (Wilk & Cliggett 2007). The substantive model is relativistic; it assumes that economic systems are varied and based upon different principles in different societies. Substantivists argue that in a capitalistic society the economy is embedded in the marketplace, whereas in other cultures the economy may be embedded in social institutions other than the marketplace, such as kinship relations or systems of reciprocity. The substantive model contends that people in many cultures follow customs enforced by social groups or institutions that seek to facilitate and promote
community values; individuals are not always able to make a personal choice, nor do they act out of self-interest. In other words, it assumes a moral order enforced by social institutions. In addition, substantivism posits a type of evolutionism where societies engaged in systems of reciprocity are less advanced and developed than those engaged in market systems of exchange such as capitalism. And finally, in substantive economics the unit of analysis is society as a whole, not the individual. One critique of the substantivist model is there is not much room for culture; “Everything is social structure, groups, and institutions rather than systems of symbols, meaning, or customs” (Wilk & Cliggett 2007:9).

The formalist approach countered substantivism by moving away from institutions toward economic behavior and individual choice. The formalists believe that formal methods of economics can be applied to all societies because all people engage in rational behavior to maximize self-interest. They further assert that “maximizing” is not necessarily limited to money or markets, but can be extended to social qualities such as love or security (Wilk & Cliggett 2007).

The substantive/formalist debates have not been resolved one way or the other, but have led to a deeper philosophical discussion of human nature. The question of human nature is, of course, crucial for understanding the morality and/or rationality of specific human behaviors and activities. But it also begs the question: “Whose definition of morality and rationality is to be used in the examination of human nature”? 
Anthropologists Richard Wilk and Lisa Cliggett (2007) note three distinct models used to describe and understand human nature: 1) the self-interested model—which is concerned primarily with individual behavior, 2) the social model—which focuses on social groups and the uses of power, and 3) the moral model—which focuses on the way people think, believe, and relate to the world around them. The self-interested model forms the basis for microeconomics; the social model is associated with the political economy; and the moral model forms the basis for cultural economics. Although individual and cultural differences may incline a person to more frequent use of one model over another, in actuality people may choose to use a particular model at any given moment depending on the situation. Wilk and Cligget contend that culture can be described as the sum total of self-interested, social, and moral behavior.

In the self-interested model (developed by Adam Smith, Thomas Malthus, and David Ricardo), the morality of human behavior (what is fair) was replaced with rational choice, logic, education, and science. Adam Smith believed that rational decision-making, propelled by individual self-interest and working through the marketplace, would produce the greatest possible good for society. In this economic model, governments and social institutions do not intervene to regulate trade practices, prices, or markets; true competition and the invisible hand of a self-regulating marketplace will naturally serve to benefit society. Although it is widely used, this model is flawed for many reasons: 1) people do not always make rational choices, 2) morality should be a consideration in the decisions people make, and 3) governments do intervene and use their power to
enforce trade policies, often to the benefit of those already in positions of power (e.g. multinational corporations) and to the detriment of those on the downside of power (e.g. developing countries, and peasant or indigenous populations) (Wilk & Cligget 2007).

In formalist economics, the self-interested model is linked directly to the social model and the political economy through neoliberal policies. Like classical economics, neoliberalism contends that social good will be maximized by frequent market transactions; as such it attempts to bring all human action into the domain of the market. These market transactions are based upon the self-interested model and beliefs in informed rational decision-making processes and often lack moral integrity. In fact, it could be argued that morality has been removed entirely from the “rational” economic transaction, which has effectively been reduced to mere profit motive.

One problem with neoliberal policies is the assumption that everything can, in principle, be treated as a commodity (Harvey 2005). In this scenario, the market becomes the ethical guide for human action, but the market is based upon self-interest and profit motive, rather than moral principles. The outcome is real social problems, some of which include environmental degradation at rapid speeds, the conversion of individuals rooted in networks of social relations to individuals as mere factors of production and valued only for their labor skills and consumption practices, and accumulation by dispossession (i.e. taking land from peasants and indigenous peoples and placing it into the hands of the already wealthy) (Harvey 2005). Human labor and natural resources, upon which we all
depend for survival, become commodified and disposable. Land is stolen and its wealth appropriated by the elite under the guise of neoliberal free trade policies. Furthermore, formal economists contend that logic and rationality are universal traits, but values, or moral codes, are predominantly believed to be cultural products of particular places, and thus substantive rather than formalist. One impasse within the formalist model is that formalists separate rationality and morality and then fail to explain where value comes from; it is considered superfluous to the economic transaction. A second problem with the formalist model is that the definition of rationality is endorsed and preserved solely in terms of formalist economics. This incongruity is a serious ideological flaw in the formalist (i.e. capitalist/neoliberal) economic model.

And finally, the moral model of human behavior asserts that people are guided by a particular set of principles and values like fairness and self-control that they learn as children in a particular cultural context (Wilk & Cliggett 2007). The moral model of human economic behavior was developed along diverging theoretical lines by sociologist Max Weber, and anthropologists Bronislaw Malinowski and Franz Boas. Weber thought that all human economic behavior derived from moral considerations, which included personal, ethical, and social implications (Wilk & Cliggett 2007). Malinowski was more interested in individual behavior and believed that motivations for economic actions were both social and symbolic: that people engaged in particular economic transactions out of a desire for prestige or in accordance with tradition. And Boas theorized that all human economic thought and action was a product of culture. He believed all humans
have the ability to be rational, but choose instead to follow a set of traditions dictated by their culture rather than exercise their individual rational choice on a regular basis (Wilk & Cliggett 2007). But rationality is also a trait embedded in cultural differences and has different meanings for different people.

Towards a Sustainable Economy: Social and Ecological Morality

The pursuit of wealth has dominated capitalist economic behavior with the promise of individual prosperity and comfort, and little recognition or concern for the societal well-being of others. There is, however, a growing movement dedicated to building a new economics of sustainability, built with a forward-thinking vision of societal well-being rather than the singular pursuit of wealth (Shiva 2000, Lumley 2002; Ikerd 2005, Robbins 2008; Holt-Giménez 2009). Sustainability refers to the act of meeting the needs of the people today while leaving equal or better opportunities for future generations. Sustainability is rooted in the relationship between humans and their natural environment, and as such, social and ecological relationships must become priorities of economic decision-making. Economist John Ikerd suggests “the most fundamental questions of sustainability cannot be resolved by data, facts, or logic but instead must be resolved through a process of social and moral consensus concerning what is true and right regarding issues of sustainability” (2005:2). The principles of a sustainable economy must be built upon the ethical cornerstones of "social
justice, economic security, ecological integrity, and intergenerational equity” (Ikerd 2005:75).

Ikerd contends that Smith and Malthus generally viewed economics in terms of happiness, that an individual’s pursuit of self-interest would serve to benefit the greater good of society. In other words, classical economics was a social science that understood economics in terms of its relationship to people and society. In contrast, neoclassical economics has sought to turn economics into a hard science rather than a social science, and thus remove it from the realm of morality or human values and into the (fictional) independent realm of rational decision-making. In effect, the abandonment of economics as a social science laid the foundation for a neoclassical economics that is concerned primarily with profit rather than people. According to Ikerd (2005), neoclassical economics was built upon market principles developed by classical economics, but it has perverted and distorted those principles in its quest for wealth and profit.

There are countless other economists, activists, anthropologists, and global citizens who recognize that in order “to create a just, sustainable, and compassionate post-corporate world we must face up to the need to create a new core culture, a new political center, and a new economic mainstream” (Robbins 2008:387). The ideas of sustainable development (in opposition to unfettered economic growth) have been around since the 1970s and gained increased popularity during the late 1980s (Lumley 2002). These ideas, however, have grown in tandem with the expansion of neoliberal economic policies leading
to a general consensus among advocates for sustainable economic development that in today’s neoliberal economy people must be protected from economic exploitation (Ikerd 2005).

Those who advocate for the reintegration of morality into economics support the idea that sustainable resource allocation and development will require a fundamental change in both individual and private decisions as well as collective or public decisions for the benefit of all with ongoing consideration of future generations (Ikerd 2005; Lefeber 2003; Robbins 2008). And as Adam Smith observed (Lefeber 2003:44), “unless society’s foundation is justice, the prevalence of injustice must utterly destroy it”.

In the following chapter I examine the links between neoliberal economic policies and industrialized agricultural practices. I then explore some responses to the industrialized agrifood-scape and show how food sovereignty initiatives exemplify forward-thinking plans for socio-economic and ecological sustainability.
Chapter 3: Literature Review

The Global Food System

There is no doubt that current global food consumption patterns are directly related to industrialized agricultural practices brought about by neoliberal trade policies. With practices ranging from crop subsidies, monocropping, and international trade agreements, one thing is obvious—food production activities across the globe have changed dramatically in recent years. Since the production and consumption of food is part and parcel of the same socio-economic system, understanding the paradigm that governs agricultural practices is paramount (Mintz 2009).

For more than 100,000 years humans lived as hunter-gathers; and yet as far back as 10,000 - 40,000 years ago, we began to reshape the natural environment by employing proto-agricultural techniques like seed-carrying and domesticating plants and animals, favoring certain traits over others. Although the domestication of plants and animals has greatly improved the quality of life for humans, it has also shaped our lives in negative ways. In fact, the dichotomous social and political organizations that arose from agriculture—wealth and abundance on the one hand, and poverty and disease on the other—still plague us to this day (Manning 2004).

In this chapter I examine the rise of industrialized agriculture and analyze its expansion under neoliberal economic policies, including the socio-economic effects on people and the ecological effects on the natural environment. I then examine some responses to the negative effects of industrialized agricultural
practices with a focus on alternative agrifood movements and illustrate how these movements represent forward-thinking socio-ecological sustainability initiatives. I conclude with a discussion on the social status of food.

The Growth of Industrialized Agriculture

Contemporary agriculture is for the most part highly industrialized and reflects a number of politicized activities such as governmental crop subsidies, corporate food lobbyists, and patented food crops. Each of these activities comes with its own set of historical particulars and associated outcomes but they point in the same direction: industrialized agriculture has indeed reshaped food production, distribution, and consumption practices (Mintz 2006). And while “we are continuously being told that industrial agriculture will feed the world…in reality it causes many of our health, economic, and environmental problems” (Mintz 2009:20).

Agricultural development based on the industrialization of farm inputs (pesticides and herbicides) began in the early nineteenth century, spread globally between the 1960s and 1990s and became commonly known as the Green Revolution. The Green Revolution was the epitome of industrialized agriculture and its proponents argued that it would save the world from hunger. Advocates for the agrifood industry asserted that large-scale operations would result in overall lower costs and thus provide wider access to affordable food. Although agricultural outputs did originally experience a higher yield, the Green Revolution
has also led to the loss of agricultural biodiversity worldwide (especially in the global South) and a global shift to an oil-based agricultural economy that has destroyed the livelihoods of millions of peasants worldwide (Shiva 2000; Grinspun 2003; Holt-Giménez & Patel 2009). Additionally, it has led to the monopolization of chemical inputs and genetically-modified seed production by Northern companies such as Monsanto and Cargill, which by extension control agricultural production.

Introduced in the US in the 1990s, a genetically-modified organism (GMO) is a seed that has been genetically altered via the insertion of a bacterium (such as E-Coli) and other plant or animal genes (Shiva 2000). There are several different varieties of transgenic seeds (GMOs), from those created to withstand the application of pesticides and herbicides like Monsanto’s Roundup (commonly known as Roundup ready) to terminator seeds that do not produce viable seedlings thus making it necessary to purchase new seeds every year. Transgenic seeds are patented by the companies that produce them, which are also the companies that produce the herbicides and pesticides used in agricultural production leading to a monopoly on the entire production from seed to cultivation (Shiva 2000). For example, both corn and soy are genetically-engineered and patented crops owned by large multinational corporations Cargill and Monsanto- the same corporations that receive immense sums of financial support from the U.S. government in the form of subsidies (Holt-Giménez & Patel 2009).
The Rise of Agrifood Conglomerates

As industrialized agriculture is increasingly concentrated into the hands of a few agrifood complexes, what is grown, and by extension what we eat, is controlled by government and corporate agrifood policies. In the 1970s, the U.S. government announced its effort to save the world from hunger by subsidizing farmers to plant crops fence row to fence row, rather than to keep lands fallow as had been practiced in the past. The plan was to produce enough to promote a growth in the agricultural export economy and supply more raw produce to developing countries. The hungry people of less-developed countries proved to be too poor to purchase the U.S. grown food crops and the ensuing overproduction of crops led to the widespread bankruptcy of U.S. family farms, followed by an accompanying shift to large-scale corporate agricultural complexes. Additionally, U.S. agricultural policies guaranteed a minimum price to farmers for their grain, the outcome of which was a grain surplus sustained by artificially cheap prices for over twenty years (Holt-Giménez and Patel 2009).

The Agricultural Export Economy

In the 1990s, as international trade regulations under the General Agreement of Trade and Tariffs (GATT) were reorganized under the World Trade Organization (WTO), crop subsidies were supposed to be phased out under the guise of “free trade” and an unimpeded export economy; however in 2002 as global grain prices crashed, the U.S. continued to pay billions of dollars in emergency funds to multinational food conglomerates like Cargill and Archer
Daniels Midland (Holt-Giménez and Patel 2009). These practices were written into the 2002 (and later the 2007) U.S. Farm Bill, one outcome of which is that the U.S. agricultural industry continues to produce vast quantities of grains at astonishingly cheap prices (Walsh 2009). Another outcome is corn and other grain exports continue to be priced well below the cost of production, which translates into cheap crops for importing countries.

While at first glance cheap imported crops may seem beneficial to consumers in poorer nations, the impacts of cheap crops from the U.S. negatively affects not only the local and national economy of importing countries, it also changes food consumption patterns and threatens the diversity of food crops (Shiva [2000], 2006; Holt-Giménez and Patel 2009). For example, in Mexico the North American Free-Trade Agreement (NAFTA) mandated the liberalization of U.S. corn imports which caused the collapse of the local corn economy and many farmers in Mexico lost their lands as a result (Grinspun 2003; Holt-Giménez and Patel 2009). Moreover, as more Mexican consumers purchase U.S. transgenic corn, Mexico’s corn varieties are increasingly threatened. In India, the import of cheap soybean oil caused the collapse of the local mustard-seed oil economy and threatens the diversity of oilseed crops throughout the country (Shiva 2000). India’s edible-oil economy, which traditionally is performed by rural women who compress mustard (or other) seeds by hand in front of the consumer, has been largely replaced by imported soybean oil. Additionally, the production of small-scale local edible-oils has been criminalized by the government in favor of commercially-processed imported soybean oil, which it
alleges to be safer for human consumption. In effect, “the flooding of domestic markets with artificially cheap imports is stealing local markets and livelihoods from local farmers and local food processors” (Shiva 2000:22).

Global Outcomes

*Food Insecurity (Hunger and Malnutrition)*

For many years the U.S. agricultural system has been the dominant paradigm that other countries continue to emulate, yet across the globe people are arguing that industrial agriculture practices are destroying biodiversity, threatening their livelihood, harming the environment, and altering traditional food consumption practices (Shiva [2000] 2006; Holt-Giménez and Patel 2009; Pollan 2006; Walsh 2009). Some outcomes of global industrialized agriculture and the Green Revolution have been increased food insecurity, hunger, malnutrition, migration and economic displacement. The increase in yields in some industrialized crops such as corn and soy are realized through the displacement of not only other crops but also people, especially women and children.

A wide body of research has shown that increased migration due to loss of land, and hunger and poverty caused by the industrialized agricultural export economy disproportionately affects women and children (Shiva 2000; Holt-Giménez & Patel 2009). Globally women have traditionally been responsible for more than 50% of small-scale agricultural production and activities, and in some countries this rises to over 80% (Holt-Giménez & Patel 2009). As the export economy replaces these activities, women lose their livelihoods, earn less money, and are therefore less able to produce or purchase food and other
necessary items. This situation is exacerbated as men migrate for wage jobs in urban areas. In Mexico, over 700,000 peasant farmers migrated to urban areas after the enactment of NAFTA (Grinspun 2003; Holt-Giménez & Patel 2009). The end result is increased hunger and malnutrition.

Food security has become a major issue in this context. Even though evidence shows that global hunger and malnutrition has risen exponentially in recent years (over 800 million worldwide and 55 million in Latin America) (Grinspun 2003:53), many countries continue to support global industrialized agriculture and the export/import economy (Shiva 2000; Holt-Giménez & Patel 2009). Trade-liberalization and agribusiness advocates assert that food insecurity is best addressed by “lowering world price levels and increasing export earnings” (Grinspun 2003:54). However, this approach favors large-scale agribusiness while ignoring the role of small-scale and subsistence farmers in local economic activity. It also ignores many of the externalities associated with large-scale agricultural practices, such as the loss of biodiversity.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Director-General Jacques Diouf called “the over one billion hungry people in the world our tragic achievement in these modern days” (FAO online 2010). The FAO agenda for action states that “developing countries [should] have a fair chance of competing in world commodity markets and that agricultural support policies do not unfairly distort international trade” (FAO online 2010). At a glance this statement seems to address some of the problems of neoliberal trade policies, such as crop subsidies. Although it is recognized that healthy rural development promoted
through investment in agriculture is necessary for sustainable food security (Grinspun 2003), the overall focus remains heavily on industrialized inputs, development, and economic growth.

“Poor countries need the development, economic and policy tools required to boost their agricultural production and productivity. Investment in agriculture must be increased because for the majority of poor countries a healthy agricultural sector is essential to overcome hunger and poverty and is a pre-requisite for overall economic growth” (FAO online 2010).

These contradictory positions undermine the efforts of small-scale agricultural producers while protecting the interests of international agribusiness. Rather than implementing a more equitable and sustainable solution to the problem, neoliberal economic policies advanced by a doctrine of trade liberalization continue to promote the same processes that arguably are root causes of rising global hunger rates.

Alternative Agrifood Movements

“Food has become the example of what is wrong with our environment and what is wrong with our economy” (Gross 2009:2). Discontent with the mainstream industrialized agricultural paradigm has given rise to a plethora of alternative agrifood movements, most of which focus on a return to more localized socio-economic and ecological-friendly processes of food cultivation and consumption. In the section below I describe and analyze the growing alternative food movement in relation to the expansion of industrialized agriculture and neoliberal economic policies.
Organics

Philip Conford (2001) asserts the organic movement, as it is commonly understood today, originated in Britain and America over 100 years ago with the endorsement of the medical scientist Dr. G.V. Poore as to the inherent benefit of organic manures in opposition to the fast growing and common practice of artificial fertilizers and pesticides. However, there is a general sense that organic farming is a “new” practice that has resulted from negative reaction to such agricultural practices as genetically-modified crops and environmental dangers associated with pesticides and herbicides. While this view has some validity in that it has shaped and spread the causes of the organic movement, it does not adequately address its origins.

As previously discussed, a major change in agricultural practices began in the nineteenth century with the spread of industrialization, the creation and use of artificial fertilizers, and urbanization. Several factors affected the transition including a science over nature mentality, state control over resources, and a fast-growing population. However, the divide between a natural and/or scientific approach to agriculture remains at the base of these discussions.

Concern about animal and human health, as well as conservatorship of the land has always been a primary focus within the organic movement. Although “natural” is emphasized in organic agriculture, it does not necessarily do away with science. In fact, the use of scientific knowledge coupled with natural processes (agroecology) is evidenced in such organic practices as crop diversity and intercropping: a system where beneficial crops that act as natural deterrents
to pests are planted in close proximity (Funes, et al. 2001). Additionally, planting crops according to season and region are also primary considerations in organic agriculture. Conford argues that “the role of agricultural science should be to explicate the reasons for the success of traditional methods and find ways of improving them” rather than exploit the earth to promote large tracts of monocrops (2001:19). In other words, science should seek to complement and enhance natural processes, rather than control and alter them.

The fundamental principles of organic agriculture are social and ecological sustainability. As such, an organic view of life extends beyond the ways in which food is grown to encompass the interconnectedness between the health of farms to individuals, families, communities, and society as a whole. As industrialized agriculture advances, the basic tenets of organic agriculture also continue to develop in response to these practices. Some contemporary ideology includes a wholesome and natural alternative to conventional foods and GMOs; the promotion of small-scale farm operations; and the prohibition of pesticides, artificial fertilizers and genetically-modified seeds in agricultural production (Conford 2001; Funes, et.al. 2001; Pollan 2006; Fromartz 2006). It is, however, important to note that not all small-scale agricultural operations are organic, although the majority of small-scale farmers make use of similar sustainable practices. And even though organic agriculture has seen a boom in recent years, organic ideology and practices have also been severely affected by industrialized agriculture.
Michael Pollan, a leading author on U.S. food systems, chronicles the explosion of organics in supermarket stores, misleading organic advertisement, and the industrialization of the organic industry. Pollan (2006) observes that organic advertising displays pastoral scenes that conjure up images of the good 'ol American farmer working hard in the field with free-range animals living a happy life in the pasture until the day of slaughter (in-line with the fundamental principles of organics). Although advertisement depicts such happy scenes, organics in the U.S. has shifted in the last 30 years from its ‘origins’ as a “communal movement in the countryside” to food co-ops, and most recently to resemble the industrialized big agro-business it was originally fighting against.

In addition to misleading advertisement, Pollan describes the negative effects of large-scale organic farming such as monocropping, soil depletion due to over-tilling, and conventional processing plants. Notably, the popularity of the underlying tenets of organics (good, raw, unprocessed, and healthy food) promoted the rise of the small-scale organic farmer to big producer, and the eventual industrialization of the organic movement. In 2006, Wal-Mart, the world’s largest low-cost retailer, made a commitment to increase its range and sales of organic foods, leading policymakers and consumers alike to reexamine the economic and social significance of organics (Gilpin 2007). The explosion of organics represents both a niche-market to be exploited and a growing public awareness of the health benefits of organically grown food. Still, organic advocates argue “to the extent that the organic movement was conceived as a
critique of industrial values, surely there comes a point when the process of industrialization will cost organics its soul” (Pollan 2006:13).

In response to the explosion of industrialized organics (as well as industrialized agriculture in general), small-scale organic farmers have sought to reemphasize local food systems through the development of local farmers’ markets and community-supported agriculture (CSA) programs. These venues seek to bring local consumers into direct contact with local growers with the goal of developing personal relationships between the two parties. The combination of local farmers’ markets and CSAs has made it possible for many small-scale family farms to continue growing food (Stephenson 2008).

Local Farmers’ Markets

Local farmers’ markets have become the epitome of efforts to reshape the dominant agrifood system by focusing on local food production and direct producer-to-consumer sales. Due to the rise of industrialized agriculture and the loss of competitive market options, small farmers have increasingly found it difficult to participate in conventional wholesale markets (Stephenson 2008). Notably, it can be argued that agricultural production by small-scale farmers for local and regional markets benefits the farmer, the consumer, the community, and the environment. In his examination of farmers’ markets in Oregon, Garry Stephenson (2008) notes that as food production becomes reintegrated into the community, farmers begin to compete on product quality rather than low cost, farming enterprises remain small (and arguably more environmentally friendly),
and producers begin to develop direct marketing relationships with their customers.

Stephenson’s research data shows that local farmers’ markets in Oregon have grown exponentially in the past 15 years, with 48% of the operating farmers’ markets being established between 1996 and 2001 and continuing to grow into the present-day (2008:76). These trends are mirrored in similar studies of farmers’ markets throughout the U.S. Stephenson also notes that while “a continued and increasing interest in the United States in high-quality food” is a factor in the rapid expansion of farmers’ markets in recent years, “community-building” is another very important factor propelling their current growth (2008:77).

Farmers’ markets are successful when individuals and communities support localization efforts. “The promotion of local food systems is premised on the belief that in order to create a more sustainable agriculture, those who eat (not just those who produce) will need to develop a philosophy and act on a set of values that are congruent with a sustainable agricultural future” (Goland 2002:14). Another reason why farmers’ markets succeed is variety and consumer choice when purchasing items, something that is more uncertain in other direct farmer-to-consumer programs such as community-supported agriculture.

Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA)

Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) is another manifestation of the natural food movement that has exploded in the United States over the past 20
years. The nature and ideology of CSAs are twofold: 1) a marketing alternative for small farmers, and 2) a moral responsibility to produce food in an environmentally sustainable manner (Cone 1995; Durrenberger 2002). Although organic agriculture is a foundational cornerstone of CSA, not all produce currently sold through CSA is organic. Generally speaking CSA seeks to forge ongoing direct relationships between small-scale producers and consumers. CSA members agree to pay upfront for a specified amount of produce delivered weekly during harvest season. The advance payment helps the farmer to offset the cost of production while limiting the economic risks associated with farming.

Social, political, and environmental concerns are primary considerations for both producers and consumers of CSA (Cone & Kakaliouras 1995; Goland 2002; Durrenberger 2002). In a recent comparative study of seven CSAs operating in Pennsylvania, E. Paul Durrenberger (2002) notes that the primary reasons farmers gave for implementing a CSA program were “to sustain a way of life”; “ecological values”; “make a living” and “social values”. The chief reasons members gave for participation in the CSA program were to receive fresher and healthier food and to support their local farmer. These data are supported by other comparable studies (see Goland 2002; McIlvaine-Newsad, et al. 2004).

In a similar study conducted in Minneapolis in 1995, Cone & Kakaliouras discovered that most farmers built their CSA membership by selling to friends and associates with additional members joining through word-of-mouth and various advertising techniques. Additionally, the majority of farmers and CSA members were well-educated, many of them holding college degrees. These
traits seem to be common in CSA participation and are discussed further in the section on the social status of the food movement at the end of this chapter, as well as in the chapter on research findings.

Although CSAs have grown exponentially in the U.S. in the past 20 years, there can be turn-over rates from 30-50 percent due to unrealistic expectations on both sides (Durrenberger 2002; Goland 2002). Some of the most common critiques associated with CSAs are variety and quantity. For many members, receiving a large amount of vegetables each week, some of which are unfamiliar or disliked, can be daunting. Eating in season and storing and preparing new foods also means changes in personal food consumption patterns that some members are unwilling to make (Cone & Kakaliouras 1995; Goland 2002; Durrenberger 2002). As I will discuss further in chapter six, my research in Ecuador shows a comparative similarity to the CSA studies mentioned here.

_The Slow Food and Local Food Movements_

The Slow Food Movement and Eat Local are two other contemporary alternative food movements that seek to reintegrate healthy food traditions into people’s daily lives while promoting social and ecological sustainability. There is a shared belief that local and/or regional food is not only tied to seasons, but also to local economic resources and environmental stability. The globalization of the food supply has drastically altered this system by making foods from regions around the world available year-round through the use of industrialized processes of refrigeration, freezing, canning, and packaging (Manning 2004;
Mintz 2006). Carlo Petrini (2006) asserts that the “[food] industry and the production ethos have robbed people of the knowledge of food and reduced it to pure merchandise - a good to be consumed like any other”. A slow food approach champions the rediscovery of pleasure via slow living actions (such as sharing meals together or working together in the vegetable garden) as a means of restoring agency to individuals overwhelmed by the fast pace of the contemporary neoliberal environment. It is a movement that “works to preserve biodiversity, sustainable agriculture, traditional foods and production methods, while advocating fair wages for producers” (Steager 2009:242).

The Slow Food Movement has spread globally as people are again beginning to realize the value in social processes associated with food, as well as environmental and economic benefits to local farmers and communities. What’s missing when purchasing and eating fast, easy to prepare, pre-packaged food is kinship ties, community bonds, and the rich texture of daily social interactions with other people. Slow food and local food movements recognize the value of traditionally grown foods and food preparation techniques, with respect for cultural differences and preferences (Mintz 2006).

**Food Sovereignty**

"Food sovereignty = “the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations. It defends the interests and inclusion of the next generation” (P2P Foundation 2010).
Food sovereignty (a term coined by the international peasant movement La Via Campesina) seeks to counteract the food industry’s ethos and reassert the human right to culturally appropriate and healthy food. It incorporates the principles of local, slow food, organics, CSA, small farm operations, and ecological sustainability into its fold. It has grown in response to industrialized agriculture and neoliberal economic policies that have deprived people of their economic livelihood, threatened environmental stability, and increased hunger and malnutrition worldwide.

Food sovereignty promotes the sustainable use and management of natural resources through small-scale farming practices that utilize ecological techniques such as biodiversity, intercropping, and organic cultivation. It promotes culturally appropriate foods that are produced and sold in local markets according to local customs and needs. And finally, food sovereignty advocates for morality in economics by supporting sustainable socio-ecological economies and fair trade (rather than free-trade) policies. In the food sovereignty model, social and ecological relationships are the priorities of economic decision-making.

The Meaning and Social Status of Food

Much anthropological research has explored the relationship between food and culture, and the data make clear that cultural and socio-economic associations with particular foods are very strong for most people. Food is more
than just what we eat for sustenance. Foods, particular diets, are used as ideological symbols: their meanings derived from the various roles they play in economic and everyday life (Weistmantel 1988). These roles exist on many levels. Thus a discussion of alternative food movements inevitably must include an examination of foods socio-cultural status.

This section looks at the roles that food plays in our daily lives. I begin with a brief examination of the anthropological literature on the socio-economic status of traditional versus modern food in a cultural context in the highlands of Ecuador and rural Western India. I then extend my discussion to alternative food movements with a focus on the socio-economic significance of the broader movement. Given the ongoing simultaneous processes of agricultural globalization and food localization movements, an examination of the “local symbolic meanings ascribed to different food and agricultural practices [can] provide insight into the ways that global processes of agriculture commercialization are played out on the local level, affecting notions of identity and the moral economies surrounding specific types of food” (Finnis 2008:464).

It should be noted that there are a multitude of ways to examine food consumption patterns ranging from historical land-use patterns, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and generational difference, to offer just a few examples. This section does not delve deep into these arenas, but rather gives a broad overview of some cultural associations with particular foods, and how those have changed with the spread of global industrialized agriculture.
Symbolic Meaning of Food

In her 1980s study of foods, cooking, and the rituals of everyday life to explore the underlying structures of an indigenous Andean community in Zumbagua, Ecuador, Mary Weistmantel (1988) elucidates the connection between specific foods and ideas of race, class, and social standing. Expensive food stands for wealth; cheap food for poverty; and homemade is compared to store bought; rice is contrasted with potatoes. These contrasts fall along ethnic lines where indigenous is associated with homegrown, potatoes, poverty and lower status, while mestizo (mixed Indian and Spanish descent) is associated with store bought, rice, and wealth.

In Weistmantel’s study, white rice was the focal point of changing food consumption patterns. Although white rice was considered less substantial than traditional foods such as quinoa, it was still “the most desirable, and this quality is connected with two facts about it: white people eat it, and it is bought at the market” (Weistmantel 1988:149). The prestige associated with the ability to purchase, rather than grow, one’s food is one impact of global industrialized agriculture that has increased with the expansion of neoliberal economic policies.

In a recent revisiting of Weistmantel’s work, a group of food studies students led by anthropologists Joan Gross and David McMurray (2007) conducted a restudy of the Andean marketplace used in Weistmantel’s study. They discovered that rapid social change has occurred in both the marketplace and in local consumption patterns. For example, where fruits and vegetables used to be scarce, they are now abundant; meat and eggs are easily obtainable;
and there is now a wide assortment of processed foods such as noodles, soft drinks, crackers, and toiletry items. And of course white rice, the status symbol food of the 1980s, was prevalent in the marketplace along with other grains such as lentils and barley. The research team concluded that:

“the penetration of capitalist relations of production at the expense of subsistence relations would seem to be at the root of such market changes as the greater abundance of red meat and chicken; of the huge variety of fresh fruits, vegetables and eggs today compared with Weismantel’s time; and to the appearance of an impressive variety of nonfood items unknown in the past” (Gross and McMurray 2007).

In a similar study conducted in Southern India in 2003, Elizabeth Finnis (2009) found that the monoculture cash crop sweet cassava is increasingly replacing traditional subsistence crops of millet. Part of the decline in millet production and the rise of sweet cassava production can be attributed to “economic aspirations and the desire for a cash income” (Finnis 2009:468). The flow of cash from sweet cassava production has afforded local villagers the opportunity to improve their community by installing electricity, building new homes, and providing higher levels of education for their children. It has also led to dietary changes, affected the socio-economic status of small farmers, and eroded regional agricultural food security (Finnis 2009).

Millet, once the stable dietary grain grown and used for personal consumption, has been replaced with rice, which is purchased from local stores or accessed via governmental public ration shops. This process is directly linked to India’s Green Revolution which focused on increased yields for rice and wheat
at the expense of other, more traditional crops. Prior to the dietary trend of rice consumption, the local diet consisted of minor varieties of millet supplemented by locally grown vegetables and legumes.

Symbolic and practical meanings associated with rice and millet also affect household consumption patterns. Millet is generally associated with extensive labor, regardless of socio-economic status, as it requires a significant amount of time for processing and preparation at each meal. Rice, on the other hand, is preprocessed and easy to prepare. Younger women tend towards rice consumption for its ease of preparation, while middle-aged to older women still prefer the variety and flavor of millet consumption.

Millets and rice consumption are also culturally linked with individual physical health. Although rice consumption has commonly replaced millet, many people in Finnis’s study complained that eating rice has led to a bland diet and a loss in overall physical health. Although these assertions were not quantified in terms of health histories, many local people felt healthier when they were eating millet, stating that “millets are important to me because they give me strength” (Finnis 2009:471). Interestingly, millets are also valued for what they do not have: contamination from pesticide and chemical fertilizers that are used in rice cultivation (Finnis 2008). Although millets are generally considered to be healthier dietary options, their relative socio-economic status is considered lower than rice, which is often associated with upward social mobility. In both studies discussed above, peasant farmers are associated with poverty and food production processes, and a higher income often leads to a similarity of
preferences for particular foods associated with modernity and wealth (Mintz 2006).

*The Social Status of the Slow & Locavore Food Movements*

One often hears that organic food has become a staple of the upwardly mobile, while Slow Food and localization movements have been criticized for not fully understanding the realities of global food consumers. Critics and proponents alike recognize that organic agriculture and local food movements in wealthy countries are commonly associated with the well-educated middle-to-high socio-economic classes and often fail to become readily accessible to those most in need, such as the lower socio-economic classes who are more commonly suffering from food insecurity and malnutrition (Cone & Kakaliouras 1995; Durrenberger 2002; Mintz 2006; Steager 2009). In the U.S., organics and local food purchased at farmers’ markets or co-ops can cost significantly more than conventional food grown locally or imported from other countries. Proponents of ‘organics’ and ‘eat local’ argue that the purchasing costs reflect a more accurate relationship to production cost, whereas industrialized agriculture is associated with artificially low prices fueled by crop-subsidies and environmental costs that are externalized.

Additionally, Slow Food and Locavore advocates assert that support of local food production cycles diminish the power of multinational corporations to control our food systems and restores socio-economic agency to individuals worldwide making it easier for them to feed themselves (Steager 2009).
words, food sovereignty movements react against the global industrial food system by rallying against the harmful effects of commodity food production (Gross 2009) in favor of slow food processes that boost local economic livelihoods while promoting ecological sustainability. Proponents argue that small-scale sustainable agricultural production is the best way to feed the world’s hungry people, while critics argue that paying attention to how food is grown and where it comes from are unattainable luxuries for people still focused on securing basic necessities (Steager 2009). Although industrial agribusiness supporters assert that market expansion for agricultural products will feed the world’s growing population, the majority of the world’s food is still produced locally for local and national consumption. “Even in the most food insecure countries, domestic production accounts for about 90 percent of food consumption” (Grinspun 2003:50).

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the global food system fueled by neoliberal economic policies, specifically examining the socio-economic effects on small-scale producers and the ecological effects on the environment. It has also explored a multitude of alternative food movements, such as Slow Food, Organics, CSA, and Food Sovereignty that challenge the global industrialized agrifood complex. The next chapter provides an overview of the Ecuadorian social, economic, and political landscape necessary for a discussion on food sovereignty activities in Ecuador that are the main focus of chapter six.
Chapter 4: Ecuador

Contemporary Geography

Ecuador is located on the northwestern edge of South America (see Map). The country sits directly on the Equator and is positioned in the northern, southern, and western hemispheres. It is bordered to the north by Colombia, to the south/southeast by Peru and to the west by the Pacific Ocean. Ecuador’s geographic features include central to northern Andean highlands, western coastal plains, eastern jungles, and the Galapagos Islands. The nation's extreme geographic and climatic variations have led to the evolution of thousands of species of fauna and flora making Ecuador one the most biologically diverse nations on the planet (Ecuador Embassy 2010). Contemporary environmental concerns include soil erosion, deforestation, water pollution, and pollution from petroleum wastes in the Amazon regions (Goodwin Jr. 2003; CIA 2010).

Figure 4.1 Map of Ecuador

Population statistics

Ecuador’s current population is approximately 14,000,000, with 66% living in urban areas (see Table 4.1). Ecuador’s ethnic makeup is 65% mestizo (mixed Indigenous and Spanish descent); 25% Indian; 10% Spanish, black and other. The major spoken languages are Spanish, Quechua or Kichwa, and other Amerindian languages (Goodwin Jr. 2003; CIA 2010). Ecuador is home to several indigenous groups but the Quechua compose the largest majority. The Quechua are one of the largest groups of indigenous people in the world and number approximately 2.5 million and live principally in Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia (Jamison 2008).

Table 4.1 Ecuador Population Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population:</th>
<th>14,790,608 (July 2010 est.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban population:</td>
<td>66% of total population (2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate of urbanization:</td>
<td>2.1% annual rate of change (2005-10 est.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic groups:</td>
<td>mestizo (mixed Amerindian and white) 65%, Amerindian 25%, Spanish and others 7%, black 3% (2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Languages:</td>
<td>Spanish (official), Amerindian languages (especially Quechua)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty Rate:</td>
<td>35.1% (2008)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Historical Overview

Ecuador formed part of the northern Incan civilization for a brief period until its conquest by the Spanish in 1533 (CIA 2010). Thirty years after conquest, Quito became the capital of Ecuador and the seat of Spanish colonial government in 1563 (CIA 2010). Ecuador gained independence from Spain in 1822, although the Spanish colonial legacy still affects the political, economic, and social landscape to this day.

The Spanish brought many changes to the Ecuadorian landscape including new food and animal crops, as well as the introduction of a new economic system focused around the *encomienda*. A simplified explanation of the *encomienda* is a system of tributory labor established by the Spanish and enforced upon the local native inhabitants. The Spanish crown granted Spanish elite (conquistadors and noblemen) the right to govern native peasantry in exchange for a portion of crops grown by the local native peasant farmers, which was paid as tribute to the Spanish crown. The *encomienda* was eventually replaced by a system of *haciendas*. *Haciendas* were large land estates granted by the Spanish crown to Spanish elite who ruled over the native inhabits and used them as a labor force on their large plantations, which grew cocoa and bananas for export, among other things. *Haciendas* remained a feature of the Ecuadorian landscape well after Ecuador had gained independence from Spain, often under the control of British (and later) American-backed corporations such as the United Fruit Company (Striffler 2002).
Much anthropological literature has explored the *encomienda* and *hacienda* systems as well as their effect on indigenous culture. Rather than discuss these systems in depth, I have provided a brief overview to lay the foundation for a discussion on Ecuador's export economy, agrarian reform and indigenous social movements.

*Agriculture and Exports*

Ecuador's political economic landscape has been fashioned largely by three export-driven economic booms: cocoa from 1880-1920; bananas from the 1930s to the present; and oil from the 1960s to the present (Striffler 2002). These booms affected national economic policies and illustrate the role of indigenous people in shaping the modern economy. For example, the shift in agricultural production away from crops grown for local consumption towards crops grown for export was propelled forward by the government that sought to increase revenues from export agriculture. The first two booms centered on the production of cocoa and banana, both of which were grown on the coast of Ecuador and grown for export. Many indigenous peoples in the highlands migrated to the coast to work on the large plantations, while those that remained in the highlands provided food for the coastal plantations (Karnes 2007). Although this system eventually led to indigenous uprisings and agrarian reform, agricultural production for export continues to be a main feature of Ecuador's modern economy.
Contemporary industrialized agricultural production includes bananas, coffee, cocoa, rice, potatoes, manioc (tapioca), plantains, sugarcane; cattle, sheep, pigs, beef, pork, dairy products; balsa wood; fish, shrimp (see Table 4.2). Petroleum is currently Ecuador’s number one export, accounting for more than half of Ecuador’s export earnings, while agriculture contributes 6.8 percent of Ecuador’s national GDP (CIA 2010). The country’s primary export partners are the U.S., Peru, Chile, and Columbia.

Table 4.2 Ecuador’s Agriculture and Exports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land use:</th>
<th>arable land:</th>
<th>5.71%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>permanent crops:</td>
<td>4.81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>other:</td>
<td>89.48% (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP:</td>
<td>agriculture:</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor:</td>
<td>agriculture:</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Export Products:</td>
<td>petroleum, bananas, cut flowers, shrimp, cacao, coffee, hemp, wood, fish</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Export Partners:</td>
<td>US 33.5%, Peru 6.8%, Chile 6.5%, Columbia 4.9% (2009 est.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Indigenous Political Activism

Agrarian Reform

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, cocoa and banana were produced on haciendas using a workforce of mainly highland indigenous people. However, beginning in the 1930s and intensifying in the 1950s, indigenous political activism organized around peasant struggles for land brought
many changes to the Ecuadorian landscape. The most important of these were the end of the *haciendas* and the beginning of agrarian reform in the 1960s (Striffler 2002). A major cause of early rural mobilization was peasant resistance to the expansion of commercial *haciendas* (Korovkin 2003). However, another facet of agrarian reform was state-sponsored as the government sought to modernize the agricultural sector. To accomplish this task the Ecuadorian government divided the *hacienda* lands, selling the fertile lowlands to capitalist farmers and redistributing the less-productive highlands to indigenous farmers (Striffler 2002).

Many problems plagued agrarian reform efforts including widespread corruption, the unequal distribution between communal and individual plots, and the lack of machinery and resources necessary for new land owners to plant and cultivate the lands. Between 1975-1985, peasant organizations and cooperative struggles shifted from land acquisition to efforts to obtain resources in order to cultivate crops and build communities. Agrarian reform policies had parceled out small plots of land, but peasant-farmer needs changed and their struggle shifted to a focus on becoming viable landowners and agricultural producers. Several conditions including marginal land size, limited credit, poor infrastructure, exploitative capitalist markets, and an unstable political economy all served to limit the benefits of agrarian reform for indigenous peasants that had acquired land (Striffler 2002; Korovkin 2003).

Part of this scenario, which has ongoing political and economic implications, is the limited plot size and inability to compete directly with large-
scale monocrop agricultural production. Without the machinery and resources to work the land many peasants were forced to sell their land and a new landlord class developed (Striffler 2002). While a few peasant farmers became successful commercial farmers (mostly with the help of government assistance programs), the majority were transformed into a cheap labor force working as contract laborers for the growing capitalistic agricultural sector, thereby creating a new socioeconomic differentiation among the peasantry. In short, “the semi-feudal haciendas were replaced by medium-sized capitalist farms producing food and agro-industrial crops for the domestic market” (Korovkin 2003:129). These trends were exacerbated as economic liberalization promoted the growth of nontraditional crops, such as vegetables and cut flowers, for export.

Cultural Rights

Although years of state-led economic intervention served to limit peasants’ capacity for autonomous political action (Korovkin 2003), indigenous organizing and political maneuvering did not end with the discharge of agrarian reform policies. Over the years there have been continuous and multiple indigenous uprisings that have led to some significant changes in indigenous-state relations. For example, during the 1990 elections over five hundred indigenous people were elected to municipal courts and almost one hundred were elected as mayors (Albó 2004). Similarly the 1998 Ecuadorian constitution incorporated several important proposals for indigenous peoples: “Article I of the constitution recognizes the “pluricultural and multiethnic” character of Ecuador, while an
entire section is dedicated to the "collective rights" of indigenous peoples who define themselves as a nation" (Albó 2004:26). Still, as Albó so eloquently states:

“Recognizing the multicultural character of a nation is an important step in the right direction, but unless they are backed up by social and economic policies that improve the conditions of indigenous peoples, such measures can constitute little more than empty rhetorical gestures” (2004:27).

Since gaining independence in 1822, Ecuador has had twenty constitutions, the most recent being approved by voters in 2008 (CIA 2010). The significance of the 2008 constitution is important to this thesis as it establishes food sovereignty and water as basic human rights. These concepts are explored further in the next chapter.

*Dollarization*

In 2004, Ecuador laid claim to 25 years of civilian governance, although the period has been marked by continuous political instability. Ongoing political factions often divide and/or overthrow state government. In fact, indigenous and civilian protests in Quito have contributed to the overthrow of Ecuador’s last three democratically elected presidents. In 1999/2000, Ecuador experienced a severe economic crisis followed by a collapse in the banking system and a default on its external loans. In 2000, the Ecuadorian Congress approved a number of structural reforms, one of which was the adoption of the U.S. dollar as the legal tender (North 2003: CIA 2010).
Dollarization was met with widespread resistance and in 2001 Ecuador once again experienced a large-scale indigenous political uprising, this time in opposition to the dollarization of the Ecuadorian economy. The significance of this event is that the uprising reached beyond the fight for indigenous land and cultural rights to include a challenge to the neoliberal economic reforms that were created by dollarization, as well as the threat to Ecuador’s economic sovereignty (Uzendoski 2005). One of the main problems was that new legislation favored neoliberal policies at the expense of local small-scale farmers. For example, the Ecuadorian government promoted the interests of large exporters by securing trade agreements favorable to them, while peasant organizations did not receive state assistance or protection (North 2003).

*Ethnic and National Identity*

As discussed earlier, indigenous social movements in Ecuador have organized around struggles for land, inclusion in state government, socioeconomic and cultural agendas. This section examines the significance of ethnic and national identity in shaping indigenous social movements.

One definition of a social movement is a collective effort “by socially and politically subordinate people to challenge the conditions and assumptions of their lives” (Brysk 2000:33). Local cooperatives and national organizations are often created within the margins of broad social movements to promote a particular identity and solidarity. In Latin America the Indian resurgence has been intimately linked with the growth of identity-based social movements, the
expansion of international and domestic NGO activism, and processes of political democratization and neoliberalism (Korovkin 2006).

Max Weber argued that ethnicity does not give rise to identity until it is recognized subjectively and is employed as “the basis of joint (mostly) political action” (Eller 1999:59). Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan also contend that ethnicity is formed and mobilized by social groups for specific purposes, usually in pursuit of economic opportunities and social justice (Eller 1999). In the case of Ecuador and across Latin America, racial/ethnic categories have long been in use by both colonialist forces and indigenous communities as a means of subjugation and a position of resistance respectively. For instance, as a result of changing political agendas, terms to describe indigenous communities have morphed over time to include broader terms such as indio and campesino, and most recently indigena, while simultaneously recognizing different ethnic/cultural heritages such as Quichua, Shuar, and Waorani.

Over the past several decades, indigenous peoples of Ecuador have been quite successful in collective political organizing and have established Ecuador as a pluriethnic and multicultural society (Albó 2004). Embedded in these social constructions of personal and collective identities are systems of normalization, as well as law. Power has often been thought of in terms of institutions, with small governing bodies exercising control over the citizenry via its power and law. On the other hand, power structures can also be examined as they are enacted through relationships (Foucault 1980). Foucault argued that power works through relationships, and that processes of normalization have replaced older juridical
processes of repression and law. He emphasized that resistance is inherent in power structures and that the two operate simultaneously. One result of the power/resistance interplay is the fracturing of individual and group identity where autonomy again becomes an area of contention.

These ideas of power and resistance are useful when considering that “the construction of meaning and identity within a political community underlies systems of both domination and resistance” (Brysk 2000:30). On one hand, ethnic resurgence in Ecuador has evolved as the outcome of indigenous resistance to white-mestizo dominance and neoliberal government policies. On the other hand, indigenous social movements have been strengthened as the result of connection to international resources and NGOs. This creates a paradox as globalization has both provided an opportunity for indigenous political organizations to develop but has also had catastrophic effects on traditional indigenous culture and livelihoods (Colloredo 2002). This topic is addressed below by specifically examining some gendered aspects of the indigenous social movement, as well as gendered development programs and their implications.

Gendered Development Programs

Beginning in the 1980s, indigenous women’s social movements also began to develop in Ecuador. The goal of the women’s organizations was to “engender the broader political, cultural, and economic landscape of the Andes” (Albó 2004:58). Various social forces have affected the trajectory of these movements: the interplay of state, NGO, and international policies including
decentralization and privatization; and market-oriented funding packages aimed at women’s micro-entrepreneurship. Some data suggests that the overall effect of gendered social movements has been the exacerbation of gender and class inequalities as women have been expected to volunteer, rather than be paid, for their involvement in social programs. Furthermore, previously overlooked racial and ethnic differences among women have created a need for women to address and challenge racism within their own movements as well as sexism within the larger indigenous movements (Albó 2004). As such, women’s organizations address several issues simultaneously: collectively they respond to racism, sexism, and ethnocentrism both within and outside their respective organizations while dealing with the negative effects of economic insecurity.

Two general themes emerge from this process: 1) the crisis of identity and the shifting relationships women negotiate with various community organizations and governmental agencies, and 2) the shift in power that occurs as a result of their internal restructuring (Albó 2004). Women’s NGOs and state agencies, while making headway and promoting gender issues within the state, also become institutions that delineate the role of women in development projects, effectively maintaining interpretive and institutional power in the development arena.

Furthermore, ‘gender and development projects’ are commonly funded and promoted by the World Bank, foreign development agencies, and even local women’s NGOs. Subsequently, it becomes evident that the agenda of funding agencies shapes the course of women’s agencies, and thus their wider social
outcomes. In other words, “like other hegemonic state practices, gender and
development policy serves to normalize a certain set of ideas about women’s
roles…while rendering others invisible or less important” (Albó 2004:66).

Paradoxically, while the expansion of international communication has
fostered an increased awareness on the importance of preserving cultural
traditions and lent power to indigenous social movements, it has also produced
many negative side effects. One notable critique argues when “services are
culturally homogenized for everyone across the globe, the impact on native
cultures [can] be the gradual loss of identity” (Albó 2004:37). For example,
development agencies tend to focus on women’s economic role and often
overlook the complexity of ethnic or cultural identities in relation to societal
change.

Blanca Muratorio’s ethnographic study among Napo Quichua women
elders in the 1990s revealed that the role of social and cultural reproduction has
become increasingly complex as younger Quichua women are exposed to forces
of globalization, mass media, and neoliberal state policy. The elderly women
argue several points:

“[i] the most important factor in shaping the politics of ethnic
difference has been the now-autonomous voice of the indigenous
political organizations…[ii] these organizations have been almost
exclusively led by men…[iii] indigenous intellectuals have
constructed a discourse of generic Indian-ness with claims to a
common history” (Muratorio 1998:410).
Thus the homogenous nature of ethnic-identity social movements threatens to silence gender differences and complexities of group identity, as well as their quest for autonomy.

Similar research on gender and development microcredit programs in Bangladesh in the late 1990s revealed what Larmia Karim calls “the economy of shame” (2006). Karim argues that the Grameen Bank’s microcredit program is implemented according to Western ideals of women’s economic participation and does not take into account the Islamic culture of Bangladesh. Because state economic sovereignty is low, local and international NGOs are able to target poor people with Women-in-Development (WID) projects that are intended to improve quality of life, but also redefine and alter the socio-economic landscape. Karim asserts “the focus of Women-in-Development policies was not only to bring “third world” women into the mainstream economy as producers, but also to modernize third world societies by restructuring “woman” into a rational, market-oriented, secular, and modern subject” (2006:3). Karim’s research, however, found that in Bangladesh’s gendered microcredit projects, women are the carriers of the loan, not the end users. The male heads-of-households, including husbands, brothers, uncles, and son, controlled the monies received although financial and moral responsibility for loan repayment was achieved through collective manipulation of Bangladeshi women’s honor and shame.
Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the historical role of indigenous political activism and agrarian reform in shaping the economic landscape of modern Ecuador. I have also talked about how ethnic and gender relations in indigenous social movements are shaped and influenced by various factors such as the quest for autonomy, as well as national and international development programs. The purpose of this discussion has been to lay the groundwork for understanding the complexity of food sovereignty in the Ecuadorian context.

In the next chapter I introduce my research methods; and in chapter six I look specifically at the food sovereignty movement in Ecuador and present ethnographic research conducted in the Andean highlands with the NGO Ser Tierra (Earth Being) and its associate La Finca (The Farm).
Chapter 5: Research Methods

Methodology

One of the primary methodological toolkits used by cultural anthropologists engaged in field research is ethnography. Ethnographic data is particularly qualitative and relies heavily on detailed fieldnotes of daily activities and observations. The cornerstone of ethnographic fieldwork is participant observation - a strategic research method that involves complete immersion in the culture being studied, the intended outcome of which is to elicit the emic, or native, point of view (Bernard 2006). Ethnography may also include the use of informal or semi-structured interviews with key informants, as well as access to secondary or archival data. Furthermore, it allows for preliminary data analysis while still in the field. Other components of ethnography, such as gaining access and building rapport with key stakeholders and members of the community, understanding and adapting to the intricacies of gender roles and social hierarchies, and learning or speaking the language, are necessities of good field research. When practiced correctly, ethnography "turns fieldworkers into instruments of data collection and data analysis" (Bernard 2006:344).

Ethnography, and participant-observation in particular, can appear somewhat subjective as it relies on a well-trained anthropologist to accurately observe and interpret cultural data; however, many anthropologists agree that objective knowledge is "culled from the thicket of subjective experience" (Bernard 2002:371). Therefore, an important component of good field research is the ability to regularly remove one’s self from the field in order to reflect objectively
on the day's activities. Ethnographic fieldwork obliges the anthropologist to intellectualize about daily events and to record detailed fieldnotes, to look for patterns and inconsistencies, and to translate descriptive data into deeper cultural understanding (Wolcott 1995).

My study provides an ethnographic case study of food sovereignty initiatives as enacted by two specific groups located on the llaló volcano in the Ecuadorian highlands. My methodological toolkit included the following methods: 1) a literature review, 2) participant-observation and informal interviews, 3) semi-structured interviews, and 4) ongoing data analysis. These methods are frequently utilized in applied anthropological research to strengthen data accuracy and validity (Bernard 2002).

Site Selection

The site selection was guided by my goal of using applied anthropology to conduct research focused specifically on alternative food movements, the hosts’ acceptance of participant-observation as the primary mode of research, and a desire to conduct fieldwork in Latin America. A perfect opportunity arose in the Ecuadorian Andes at the La Finca organic farm. La Finca is involved in several local food sovereignty and ecological sustainability initiatives and had recently initiated a community-supported agriculture (CSA) program on the farm. Additionally, La Finca is engaged in an ongoing relationship with a local non-governmental organization, Ser Tierra, which works with local indigenous women farmers.
La Finca, Ser Tierra, and I agreed upon an applied research project wherein I would work with both entities. The objective of the project was twofold: 1) to gain an overview on how La Finca CSA initiatives were being implemented at the local level, and to determine whether or not these initiatives could be adapted to support the efforts of women farmers working with Ser Tierra, and 2) to learn about local women farmers’ food sovereignty and micro-credit programs offered by Ser Tierra (see appendix 1). All participants including other La Finca volunteers and paid workers, CSA members, Ser Tierra employees, volunteers, and clients were informed of my research.

Methods

Participant observation and informal interviews

As an anthropologist engaged in field research, my primary source of data collection was ethnography. From January through March 2010 I lived and worked on the La Finca. During that time I participated on several occasions in farm-related activities such as tilling the soil, planting, applying manure, and weeding. Although I worked on the farm in these capacities, the majority of my time was spent in the delivery of the La Finca CSA food basket, which I discuss further in chapter six. Throughout this process I had the opportunity to experience and record the CSA preparation and delivery system, meet and talk with the majority of CSA members, personally interview three CSA members, Maria, Anna, and Vianca, and to discuss the challenges and successes of the CSA with the producers, and to interview La Finca owner, Myriam, twice.
Throughout the three months that I lived on La Finca, I also worked with Ser Tierra. There were many periods of overlap as Ser Tierra and La Finca coordinate and support each other’s activities. For instance, the delivery of the La Finca CSA was held at the Ser Tierra offices on Wednesday mornings and was followed by a weekly Ser Tierra planning meeting in the early afternoon. I regularly participated in both these activities. Although I participated in a number of Ser Tierra activities, data for this thesis focuses on two main activities: Canastas Comunitarias and Farmer Field Schools (FFS).

Full participant-observation with the community of women farmers’ was limited due to two primary factors: 1) geography of the Ilaló mountain, and 2) language barriers. First, while I lived in one community on the Ilaló mountain, the women farmers working with Ser Tierra lived in various communities around the mountain. These communities were difficult to access via public transportation and I had no private vehicle. Secondly, the majority of women spoke Spanish (some also spoke Kichwa) and my Spanish-speaking abilities are at an intermediate level and I did not have any Kichwa language skills. Additionally, we were often in a group setting and the conversation flowed in several directions at one time, which made communication even more difficult. It also takes time to build rapport and trust, and time spent in the communities with the women was limited.
Fieldnotes

I had my own private lodgings while living on La Finca, thus I was able to regularly remove myself from complete cultural immersion in order to contemplate the day’s activities. I was also able to take notes frequently throughout the day on what I had seen, heard, and experienced. These notes served to spark my memory when writing detailed fieldnotes each night. When my research was well underway, I began to evaluate and analyze my data frequently. I looked for thematic schemes, inconsistencies or contradictions, and areas where I needed additional data. Writing fieldnotes is always an ongoing process that is rarely, if ever, completely finished. However, working with fieldnotes at an early stage can help to clarify where additional data is needed and guide further research.

Semi-structured Interviews

The original research proposal included the use of semi-structured interviews with women farmers’ working with Ser Tierra (see appendix 2). I was, however, unable to complete the interviews with women in the communities due to a general lack of one-on-one time with any one member of the community and the complexity of the questions.

I did, however, interview Ser Tierra director Maria, and long-time volunteer Yoli. The interview with Maria focused on the goals of Ser Tierra and its ongoing activities with the micro-credit groups. The interview with Yoli used the questionnaire developed for women farmers and focused on her assessment of
*Ser Tierra* activities in the communities. It was during this interview that the complexity of the questions and the difficulties they would present to *Ser Tierra* members came to my attention. In a subsequent conversation with Maria, I was informed that *Ser Tierra* had also attempted to complete an evaluation of their programs. Due to the varied and minimal literacy of the women farmers, sentence structure had to be simple and an alternate form available. *Ser Tierra's* answer was to create several station boxes, each one of which focused on a different topic but had the same question used for evaluation. A series of faces from sad to neutral to happy, and a quantitative component for evaluating their interest in, or success of, a particular objective was placed at the top. Women were given small tokens that they placed in the bottom of the box according to their level of satisfaction (see figure 5.1)

*Figure 5.1 Photo of Ser Tierra Program Evaluation box*
Data Analysis

Data analysis of fieldnotes and interviews began in the field and continued after returning to the states. Informal and semi-structured interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes to an hour and a half and were recorded by me in the field using both a digital voice recorder and hand-written notes. Transcription of interviews was also done by me and completed in the field. All names are pseudonyms unless permission was received by the participant to use his or her real name; although I make no distinction between the two in this thesis. All translations from Spanish to English are my own. Fieldnotes and interview transcripts were evaluated and coded into thematic categories. Thematic categories originating from field research observations were first described in their own terms in order to nuance cultural particulars. The analysis was then extended to include relevant literature; additional literature was also reviewed to clarify and elaborate specific data. Thematic categories and general analysis was also shared with the hosts for verification of accuracy.
Chapter 6: Research Findings

Overview

In Ecuador, as throughout the world, modern agriculture has emerged as industrialized input-intensive production (i.e. pesticides, herbicides) coupled with multinational agrifood complexes and increased market exclusion for smallholders. As discussed in a previous chapter, agrarian reform initiated by indigenous peasant-farmers was supplanted by agricultural modernization fueled by state intervention (Striffler 2002; Korovkin 2003). Many of the policies implemented by the state were built on ideals of externally based knowledge (i.e. international development programs) that favored large-scale industrialized practices and global agrifood companies. Ecuadorians have, however, responded to the challenges of these policies through the development of alternative food movements such as the Canastas Comunitarias (community food baskets) and Colectivo de Agroecología (Agroecology collective), as well as approving the 2008 Ecuadorian Constitution which declares food sovereignty and water as basic human rights. This chapter provides an overview of contemporary food sovereignty activities in Ecuador as well as a presentation of my research findings at a community-based NGO and organic farm in the Ecuadorian Andes.

Canastas Comunitarias

I first learned about Canastas Comunitarias (herein referred to as Canastas) while conducting a literature review of global agrifood policies and alternative food movements. The data presented below is derived from two articles that focus on the development of the Canastas and how they have
changed over time. The articles are based on participant-observation research conducted by Emma Kirwan and Stephen Sherwood from 2007 to 2009 (Kirwan and Sherwood 2009).

*Canastas Comunitarias* originated in 1987 in Riobamba, Ecuador as a direct response to the harmful effects of modern markets: especially the lack of affordable and healthy food. *Canastas*, which literally means "baskets", was initiated by urban consumers who formed a neighborhood association with the objective of pulling funds together to make bulk purchases at local open-air markets, thereby acquiring a wider selection of healthy food while reducing cost (Kirwan 2008). The *Canastas* focused on purchasing fresh vegetables, fruits, and legumes, as opposed to pre-processed foods. All members assumed responsibility for the management of the organization and rotated specific duties such as organizing, purchasing, market analyses, distribution, and accounting.

In the early stages of the *Canastas* movement members began to analyze their consumption habits which spawned a process dubbed "deepening". Deepening refers to the evaluation of family and community food consumption practices with a focus on improving awareness about healthy food systems. Although Ecuador is one of the most biodiverse countries in the world, the local diet is based on rice, corn, wheat, and potato supplemented by additional processed foods; thus the reintroduction of a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables is key to improving the health of local inhabitants. An "[additional] priority of this movement is to increase consumer awareness about the origin of
food in order to create a mutually beneficial farm-to-city [farm-to-consumer] market system” (Kirwan 2008:24).

Since its inception in 1987, the Canastas have grown substantially and can be found in almost all parts of Ecuador, both urban and rural. The original group was founded by 25 members, but contemporary Canastas can range anywhere between 15 to 100 families and are composed of various socio-economic classes, professions, and genders. Additionally, since the year 2000 the Canastas movement has been appropriated by local community-based NGOs and the national government, both of which have sought to advance the movement but have also brought about structural changes. Kirwan and Sherwood (2009) note three principal changes in the Canastas – 1) paid professionals have replaced volunteers, 2) the deepening process has been severely affected, and 3) groups increasingly rely on external funding rather than personal resources. (For a comparative structural overview of the Canastas see Tables 6.1, 6.2, and 6.3).

It has been argued that in the process of scaling up, the Canastas have lost much of their original ideology which centered on a critique of modern food systems (Kirwan & Sherwood 2009). Although the number of participants increased, the rapid growth and organizational restructuring has put the movement in jeopardy of reproducing the modern food system it sought to transform. This phenomenon is similar to that of organics in the U.S. as discussed in chapter four. Nonetheless, the Canastas have become a vital component of the food sovereignty movement in Ecuador.
### Table 6.1 Founding principles of the Canasta movement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principles</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Solidarity                  | - Cooperation over competition  
|                             | - Not a lucrative, for-profit endeavor  
|                             | - Finances and accounting are transparent and self-managed  
|                             | - Mutual understanding of urban-rural lifestyles  
|                             | - People are invested in the Canasta work and show respect  |
| ‘Healthy’ food              | - Food comes from family farmers who protect the soil, water, and plant biodiversity, and avoid using agro-chemicals or GMO seeds.  
|                             | - Varied, nutritious diet  
|                             | - Products are purchased in good condition (not bruised or rotten)  |
| Responsible consumption     | - Direct purchasing from smallholders to eliminate intermediaries and stimulate local economies  
|                             | - Fair prices and payment for commodities and services  |
| Shared responsibility       | - The Canasta is autonomous and independent; members control and maintain their own process  
|                             | - Members are self-selected and contribute to common interests  
|                             | - All members are expected to contribute equally and participate in decision-making  |

(Kirwan and Sherwood, 2009)

### Table 6.2 Different classes of Canastas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Class 1</th>
<th>Class 2</th>
<th>Class 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Primera Constituyente, Riobamba</td>
<td>“Taleguita Solidaria”, Machala</td>
<td>Municipio de Quito, Quito</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Locally formed group of laypeople: 25 families from the Church Group (p.2 says 7 families)”Solidaridad”</td>
<td>Community-based NGO: Movimiento de Mujeres de el Oro (MMO)</td>
<td>Government agencies: Sustainable Human Development Agencies from 3 Administrative Zones (25 groups)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership</td>
<td>Cross-generational, cross-gender, all members rotate in volunteer work</td>
<td>Cross-generational, majority women. NGO staff and a</td>
<td>Shift of power from municipal employees to town council and local</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
base group of members assume majority of work residents. Majority middle-age women

Immediate priority
To lower food costs
To lower food costs; direct purchasing; agroecology
To lower food costs; grow in number

Original purpose
Family and community solidarity
Food security and community solidarity
Provision of citizen-based public service for the poor

External financing?
No
No/yes – initially self-financed, but eventually supported by Intermón-Oxfam
Yes – generally financed by municipality and international GOs

(Kirwan and Sherwood, 2009)

Table 6.3 Comparison between community-led and government led Canastas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Community-led development</th>
<th>Government-led development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary source of change</td>
<td>Endogenous – induced through localized contingency and on-going practice of living</td>
<td>Exogenous- induced through specialized, usually external, source of information and support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logic behind decisions</td>
<td>Nurturing social relationships and action around more affordable food</td>
<td>Implementation of best government practices: transparency, participation, accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preoccupation</td>
<td>Common understanding – What people do and why; work with people to advance common agenda</td>
<td>Adoption – What people don’t do; work to get people to do something differently</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Kirwan and Sherwood, 2009)

**Colectivo de Agroecología**

*Colectivo de Agroecología* was founded collectively by various actors involved in the Ecuadorian alternative food movement (e.g. peasant farmer
organizations, indigenous movements, and NGOs) who sought to influence the 2008 Constitutional Assembly’s Agriculture Commission regarding modern food systems. They presented research to expose the human health consequences of pesticides, the relationship between industrialized agriculture and global warming, the rising cost of fertilizers, the loss of genetic and biodiversity, and the loss of culturally appropriate and nutritious foods. The goal of *Colectivo de Agroecología* was to promote “a fundamental shift in national agricultural policy from food security to food sovereignty” (Kirwan & Sherwood 2009). Their efforts resulted in a 15-page proposal drafted by the Agriculture Commission for the promotion of healthy food systems based in part on social and ecological patterns of production and consumption.

*Colectivo de Agroecología* continues to promote food sovereignty and recently established *la feria agroecologica* (organic farmers’ market) in three areas throughout Ecuador. Some of their main objectives are to provide a platform for the promotion of organics and sustainable agricultural practices while building ongoing relationships between smallholder farmers and urban residents, as evidence in their mission statement “Come Sano, Seguro y Soberano” (Eat healthy, safe, sovereign [food]) (Feria Agroecologica 2009).

Food Sovereignty in Ecuador’s Constitution

It has been suggested when dealing with environmental issues the 2008 Ecuadorian Constitution is one the most advanced in the world (Zibechi 2009).
Based in part on the reorganization of society around the Andean concept of *Sumak Kawsay* or *el Buen Vivir*, (which translates to “the good life” and encompasses spiritual, social, economic, and environmental harmony) (Kirwan and Sherwood 2009), the 2008 Ecuadorian Constitution recognizes food sovereignty and access to water as basic human rights. The constitution even goes as far as recognizing the “Rights of Nature” as stipulated in Article 71:

“Nature or Pacha Mama, where life is created and carried out, has the right to integral respect concerning its existence, maintenance, and the regeneration of its life cycles, structure, functions, and developmental processes” (Zibechi 2009).

As the foundational cornerstone of a country’s law, the significance of the 2008 Constitution is profound.

In Ecuador the rise of food sovereignty was born in part from indigenous peasant farmers’ organizing against the impacts of globalization and neoliberal policies on agriculture, as well as the discrimination against traditional farming practices (Flor 2009). Through ongoing collective action, Ecuadorian social movements (indigenous organizations, peasant farmer associations, etc.) have impacted the political economic landscape and brought about significant change in the struggle for social and economic rights. I would argue that these processes represent a broader trend toward the reintegration of morality in economics as discussed earlier in chapter three.

“Un hito en este proceso es la elaboración de la Constitución del 2008, que sintetiza una visión de nueva sociedad, muestra los puntos clave para la construcción de una sociedad y economía diferente a la neoliberal y oligárquica, y coloca ahí a la Soberanía Alimentaria como aspecto medular para construir las nuevas
estrategias para el ámbito rural, rescatando lo campesino y agrario” (Flor 2009:8).

A milestone in this process is the drafting of the Constitution of 2008, which synthesizes a new vision of society, shows the key to building a society different from the neoliberal economy and oligarchy, and places Food Sovereignty at the core of building new strategies for rural areas, thereby rescuing the farmer and agriculture [from the harmful effects of industrialized agriculture].

Although a full evaluation of food sovereignty as articulated in the 2008 Ecuadorian Constitution is beyond the scope of this thesis, I would like present a couple of articles that are of particular significance to this thesis.

**Artículo 13** (La declaración derechos de la soberanía alimentaria)
“Las personas y colectividades tienen derecho al acceso seguro y permanente a alimentos sanos, suficientes y nutritivos; preferentemente producidos a nivel local y en correspondencia con sus diversas identidades y tradiciones culturales. El Estado ecuatoriano promoverá la soberanía alimentaria” (Flor 2009:10)

(Declaring food sovereignty rights)
"Individuals and communities have the right to safe and permanent access to healthy food, adequate and nutritious food, preferably locally produced and in accordance with their different cultural identities and traditions. The Ecuadorian State shall promote food sovereignty”.

**Artículo 276** (Los objetivos de la soberanía alimentaria)
“Mejorar la calidad y esperanza de vida, y aumentar las capacidades y potencialidades de la población: Construir un sistema económico justo, democrático, productivo, solidario y sostenible, basado en la distribución igualitaria de los beneficios del desarrollo; Fomentar la participación y el control social, con reconocimiento de las diversas identidades y promoción de su representación equitativa”. (Flor 2009:11).

(The objectives of food sovereignty)
"To improve the quality and life expectancy, and enhance the capabilities and potential of the population; To build a fair economic system that is democratic, productive, supportive and sustainable, based on the equitable distribution of benefits of development; To
encourage participation and social control, with recognition of different identities and promotion of equitable representation”.

The implementation of the 2008 Ecuadorian Constitutional laws on food sovereignty and the rights of nature have yet to be explored and analyzed fully as the legislative enactment of these articles are still in process and heavily debated (for further reading see Colectivo Agragrio’s “Soberanía alimentaria: Porque creemos en el debate: propuestas de legislación” 2009). However, the implication of these Constitutional articles is movement towards socio-economic sustainability.

Ecological Sustainability and Food Sovereignty in Ecuador: A Case Study

In the next section I present ethnographic research conducted with La Finca and Ser Tierra in the Andean highlands of Ecuador from January through March 2010. I provide a general overview followed by a discussion of specific aspects of the research with a focus on La Finca organic farming practices and the CSA program, and Ser Tierra Canastas Comunitarias and farmer-field schools.

Ser Tierra, Overview of a non-governmental organization

Ser Tierra is a small community-based non-governmental and non-profit organization that is represented by its Board Director Maria. The offices of Ser Tierra are located approximately 20 miles northeast of Quito, in the Cumbaya area. The Ser Tierra project zone is located on deforested slopes and areas affected by ground erosion in the Ilaló volcano region of Ecuador, which is
situated in the Andean highlands approximately 30 miles southeast of Quito (see Map, figure 6.1). Throughout the area there is a legacy of deforestation and agricultural practices that have resulted in a lack of potable water, a decreasing and less varied local diet, and overall poorer health for inhabitants of the area. The inhabitants of the region are mostly indigenous Kichwa, are of low socio-economic status, and lack the necessary resources to access other forms of commercialized foods. The team of *Ser Tierra* supports groups of Ecuadorian women who are native inhabitants of the *Ilaló* volcano to manage micro-credit funds for their different projects. Some specific projects include water harvesting, organic farming and reforestation efforts with the goal of promoting nutritional health and food sovereignty in the area.
Figure 6.1 Map of Quito and surrounding areas

http://maps.google.com/maps?hl=en&tab=wl
Ser Tierra’s community-development project is titled “Reverdeciendo el llaló”: Manejo comunitario de recursos naturales para promover la seguridad alimentaria en llaló” (Re-greening the Ilaló: Community management of natural resources to promote food security in Ilaló”). When entering the offices the Ser Tierra, one of the first things that catches the eye is a hand-written diagram on blue paper clipped to a large dry erase board at the back of the room (see Figure 6.2). Ser Tierra uses this step chart to facilitate its overall objectives of ecological sustainability and food sovereignty (see Figure 6.3). Maria, the director of Ser Tierra, explained to me during a later interview that the foundation, Canastas Comunitarias, is vital in the effort to allay immediate food insecurity and hunger. The remaining four steps which focus on 1) agua (water); 2) suelos (soils); 3) animales (animals); and 4) huertos (home vegetable gardens) can only be engaged after a family has adequate food.

Figure 6.2 Photo Offices of Ser Tierra with step chart diagram
All of *Ser Tierra* projects center on water. Water is scarce on the *Ilaló* Mountain and the need is great. Many people do not have regular access to water for domestic use, let alone water for irrigation or growing food. Thus step one of *Ser Tierra* microcredit projects focuses on the obtainment of water. These include purchasing plastic water tanks, and constructing rooftop rainwater catchments, open-air rainwater harvest systems, and cisterns for domestic use and irrigation. Steps two, three, and four also involve various microcredit financing projects such as purchasing fence materials to construct and protect home vegetable gardens. In addition, all steps are supported through volunteer-led Farmer Field Schools (FFS). Farmer Field Schools are interactive and intended to teach a plethora of information about water-harvesting, soil conservation, animal care, organic gardening and food preparation.

Many of the projects now guided by *Ser Tierra* were originally initiated and developed on *La Finca*. For example, water harvesting research and

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**Figure 6.3 Diagram Ser Tierra’s Step Chart**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td>procuring potable water and rainwater harvesting</td>
<td><em>Agua</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td>learning about soil health</td>
<td><em>Suelos</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3</td>
<td>learning proper pasturing techniques</td>
<td><em>Animales</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 4</td>
<td>learning about organic home gardening</td>
<td><em>Huertos</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
reforestation efforts began in 2001 when La Finca was purchased by its current owners, Myriam and Stephen. Myriam and Stephen implemented a number of community-development and ecological sustainability initiatives on the farm, the first of which was a tree nursery with the objective of replanting the Ilaló mountain slopes with native trees. As the various projects on La Finca grew in scope and magnitude, Ser Tierra was established to continue the community-development aspects of the various projects (personal communication 2010). Currently, La Finca supports the activities of the NGO Ser Tierra by doing research and receiving groups of farmers for training and demonstrations.

La Finca, Farm Overview

La Finca is a family-owned and operated organic farm located on the Ilaló volcano in La Merced, Ecuador. Myriam and Stephen are the owners of La Finca. Myriam is Mestizo-Ecuadorian and Stephen is Caucasian-American. Both Stephen and Myriam hold advanced university degrees and have worked for years in community and agricultural development. The couple is married and has a one-year old daughter. Myriam’s mother, who is Kichwa, also currently lives and works on the farm.

La Finca is located on five hectares of land with a small creek that runs beside the farm. The farm was purchased in 2001 at a relatively low price due to the lack of both potable and irrigation water. Myriam and Stephen saw the purchase of this farm as an opportunity for community-building. As Myriam articulated to me during an interview “The thing is that our neighbors have the
same problem. They don’t have irrigation water, they don’t have drinking water, and if we found some solutions we knew we could also work with the community, which was attractive for us” (personal communication 2010).

As noted previously, since purchasing the property in 2001, Myriam and Stephen have implemented (and continue to be engaged in) myriad activities on the farm and in the surrounding community. All of these activities focus on ecological sustainability and stem from the ideological viewpoint that the health of people, animals, and the land are inter-connected. As Myriam stated “So it was maybe spiritual or emotional, but we dreamed this mountain more green and that’s how it started” (personal communication 2010). Although Myriam and Stephen have continued to be actively involved in community development projects, Myriam notes that it has been challenging.

“It turned out that most of the interested people were people that came to live from outside the mountain, not the native people. Because the people that have been living here for a long, long time, like centuries, they saw the change with hacienda systems and they developed an extensive agricultural system and the native trees didn’t have any economic value. And also they didn’t understand which other values the trees could give to the mountain. So they said we were crazy, and Steve was crazy because he is from the US and not from here and comes with these strange ideas”. (Myriam, personal communication, 2010).

The tensions arising from both Stephen’s “outsiderness” and the disparities between innovations on La Finca, and what could actually be implemented by members of the local community, was a theme that Myriam mentioned several times. It was also a contributing factor to the creation of Ser Tierra, which took
over the community-development aspects of the projects while *La Finca* continued to host farmers for training and demonstrations.

One example of these tensions is noted below in the excerpt from my fieldnotes stemming from a conversation I had with Myriam.

People who live on the mountain used to have plenty of water and used the many creeks for all their domestic needs. One or two decades ago the water started to dry up due to deforestation. Now most creeks are dry or contaminated. After the creeks started to dry up people were forced to buy water tanks and purchase water from private homes in the city below. Taxi drivers saw this as an opportunity and started charging $5 to deliver water for their 200 liter tanks. Eventually neighborhoods started to organize. Those that organized have [experienced different] conditions, but again it depends on the particulars of that community. Here in the hills of La Merced the neighborhood organization got the Rotarians to help put in tubes to carry water to local houses. The municipality paid for the cistern to hold the water. Now each house that is a part of that organization is allowed a specific amount of water per week. We do not use the cistern system for two reasons: 1) the Rotarians who helped with the tubes are friends of Stephen and 2) we are using the open-air rainwater catch system and have own tank and irrigation system.

Within the first week of my arrival, Myriam provided me with a short outline of the history of the farm, from trying to get community members to plant native trees, to working with the municipality to install a cistern, exploring rainwater harvesting techniques, and learning that people were using the water tanks for drinking and domestic use (and not watering trees); to initiating a school garden program and learning that the kids did not have enough to eat, to a health study that showed how local people were deficient in certain vitamins, to the implementation of the canastas, and finally the pilot CSA program at *La Finca*.
Although I was unable to explore each of these categories in depth, it is important to illustrate both the multitude of community-development initiatives implemented on the farm, and the adaptability of overarching agendas to correspond with a deeper and emerging understanding of community needs: a topic I explore later in this thesis.

Research Findings: La Finca

Sustainable Farming Practices

La Finca is currently operated by Myriam with help from her mother, one regular paid laborer, and two volunteers from the United States. Myriam’s mother, who is 82, works every day in the gardens and grows mostly for household consumption. She raises cuyes (guinea pigs) and owns one pregnant vaca (cow), both of which are used for manure and not for meat. She has spent the majority of her life growing food organically and farms by intuition and a lifetime of practice. The paid laborer is a local man who works on the farm eight hours a day five days a week. He is paid ten dollars a day for his labor, plus time-off and a yearly bonus, which is considered a high wage by Ecuadorian standards (personal communication 2010). His family home neighbors the La Finca and he was raised in the community where he still resides. Although he has worked in agriculture his entire life, he is new to organic ideology and methodology. The volunteers are a couple from the central plains of the United States. The woman has worked previously in organic agriculture and has a breadth of knowledge that encompasses both produce and livestock. Her partner
has some experience in agriculture, albeit far less than she. The volunteers are currently in charge of day-to-day farm operations such as planting and harvesting, and implementation of the CSA. They work long hours in exchange for room and board and are included in family activities when not working.

The farm now has a rainwater-harvesting system that includes two open-air water tanks, but it also still relies on water drawn from the nearby creek. A drip-tape irrigation system has been installed for the majority of crop beds, although watering by hand is also necessary on parts of the farm. In keeping with its tradition of greening the mountain, La Finca has planted a number of native plants on the farm (both trees and crops). Several of these crops are included in the CSA basket, as well as eaten in the home. Approximately 40% of what is consumed in the house is grown on the farm. Some produce and grains not grown on the farm are purchased from a local vendor and some staples are purchased from the grocery store conglomerate SuperMaxi.

The farm is operated in accordance with organic ideology and methodology which includes the use of human labor in tillage, planting and harvesting; organic composting; the application of green manure as a natural fertilizer; and intercropping (Conford 2001; Holt-Giménez 2006; Pollan 2006). Intercropping and diversification are the standard and crops are chosen according to how they grow in the area. Different varieties are constantly being tested, thus there is a lot of experimentation, trial and error in the production cycle. Complementary crops are planted in close proximity to act as natural protection against pest infestation; no pesticides of any type are applied. One
aspect of organic farming that has been a major challenge for *La Finca* is the obtainment of organic seeds. According to Myriam, organic seeds in Ecuador are difficult to procure; most seeds are coated in pesticides before being purchased. *La Finca* produces some of its own seeds but it purchases many others. However, purchasing hybrid and/or organic seeds from the United States is extremely expensive.

*La Finca Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) food basket*

The owners of *La Finca* did not initially have plans to develop a CSA program; it happened slowly as a result of several factors. When the farm began producing more than the owners could eat, Myriam began to think about selling the extra. At first she sold to neighbors and through *intermediarias* (women traders), but did not receive a good price for their produce. In 2008 Myriam participated for several months in the *feria agroecología* outside Quito. Stephen and Myriam are members of the *colectivo agroecología* and Myriam was excited by many aspects of the *feria*, such as promoting organic agriculture and healthy eating, and developing relationships between producers and consumers; however the farm was not producing enough to offset the cost of participation, which included transportation to the city in addition to the *feria* booth charge. Next, Myriam attempted to sell locally at a small farmers’ market in a neighboring town but was unsuccessful in promoting organics or selling all her produce. Many local customers were unfamiliar with organics (and largely uninterested in learning about organics), were unwilling to pay the extra two or three cents on
the dollar for organic produce, and wanted to purchase a greater variety from one vendor. But *La Finca* still had extra produce and that’s when Myriam had the idea to sell CSA-style to her friends. Having previously taught about alternative markets and alternative development options, she had a basic understanding of how a CSA program functioned.

In September of 2009 Myriam sent out an email to ten of her friends in a nearby town and offered a *canasta* (basket) of organically grown produce for five dollars. When five friends responded that they were interested, the CSA program was developed. In order to accommodate the needs of different families, both a weekly and bi-weekly option were implemented. Since its inception in September 2009, the CSA program has grown to regularly sell to 15-18 families. At 18 families, Myriam believes the *La Finca* CSA is at its current production limit.

During our interview, Myriam told me “My [CSA] canastas are organized to deliver food to friends and growth has occurred by word of mouth, not as a result of advertising or planning” (personal communication 2010). *La Finca* CSA share’s cost five dollars and the produce typically fills a small plastic grocery bag or small basket (see figure 6.4).
[CSA] canastas are prepared on Tuesday and delivered on Wednesday. Today four of us worked on the canastas. Kristi and Fernando mainly did the harvesting while Ben and I cleaned and weighed the vegetables. Towards the end of the afternoon, Fernando was also washing produce. All in all we shared in the duties, only I did not participate in the harvesting.

[CSA] canastas are sold for $5 and include an amazing amount and variety of produce. This week’s canastas included several types of lettuce, kale, carrots, radishes, beets, carrots, herbs, potatoes and more. It changes every week according to the harvest. Many items here are planted and harvested monthly on a rotating basis. I was surprised at the amount of water we used to clean all the produce being as water in the Illaló region has to be purchased and stored in tanks. Water is one of the main issues affecting food security in the area. Myriam tells me that the Eucalyptus trees are partially to blame because they soak up so much of the ground water.

We loaded up the car with canasta items that were prepared the day before. The canasta baskets contain the quantity needed for that week plus a little extra. All items have been washed and weighed. The hortilizas vegetables change each week. There is
always a list. This week’s items were remolacha, hierbas, papas, limones, uvillas, rabanos blancos, lechuga o brocoli (because there was not enough of either for all the baskets), zambo, mashua, y acelga. The baskets are not prepared for each person, but are rather loaded… in crates that are taken to Ser Tierra to be picked up by canasta participants.

This week Myriam, Fernando, and I went. Kristi did not go because she had been sick. Ben did not go either. I drove while Myriam cared for Nina and Fernando and Myriam talked practically the whole way there about the cell phone antennae that Moviestar wants to put in on top of the mountain in La Merced. There is quite a big controversy over the issue. Moviestar has offered to fix the road, which is needed and has won over the minds of some community members. There are, however, many others who fear cancer and don’t want the antennae.

On the way to Ser Tierra we stopped at EkoRural. In fact, the building was occupied by World Neighbors before EkoRural. Anyway, there are 4 canasta recipients at EkoRural. I met two of them: Wilma and Aliana.

We arrived at Ser Tierra at about 10am. The first order of business was to unload the car, then to set up a large canopy. The canopy was actually rather difficult, but it was nice to have and it gave the canasta [CSA delivery] an elegant look. We then hung two signs, one advertised hortilizas for sale; the other was an older poster for la ferria organica.

The morning dragged by very slowly. Myriam went inside the Ser Tierra offices with Nina while Fernando and I sat outside and waiting for canasta customers. In the long interim between customers, we tried to talk in Spanish. It was good practice for me but often quite difficult. I also got the sense that the conversation went in a direction it shouldn’t have. At one point talking about family he asked about my mom and dad, still living? I said yes but didn’t much care about my dad. He hit my mom and abandoned us kids. Fernando said his dad beat his mom but that it was normal back then. We both agreed that things are changing. Fernando said if a man hits a woman now she just might get up and leave.

When customers came to pick up their baskets it wasn’t always the person who ordered the canasta [CSA share]. One time it was the maid, another time it was the husband, other times I wasn’t sure. The pick-up happened very fast. The customer would arrive, get out
of the car with a bag in hand and walk up to the small table we had set up. Fernando would then put each item in their bag telling them what it was. Nobody knew what the mashua was but Myriam has provided recipes for items that are unfamiliar. A couple of times Myriam introduced me to the canasta [CSA] client. Most often she was inside although she had to be called outside several times to determine if the client had prepaid or not or to give change. The system really is a bit clunky and needs work.

A few stray customers also came up to buy a very small quantity of items. One set of customers bought a whole $1 worth.

Myriam also sells miel de abeja honey for $5. This week she sold 6 jars, 4 to clients at EkoRural, one to Maria, and one to a man who came to Maria’s parent’s restaurant for lunch. I have seen him there before and assume he is a regular.

I should have mentioned this before, but each day that I have been working in any capacity at Ser Tierra Maria has provided lunch at her parent’s restaurant. Today was the same: everyone who works for Maria is provided lunch. This was my third time and each time the menu was different. Also, we get to eat meat. [However], before we went to eat the entire crew of volunteers helped to dismantle the tarp and outside set-up [for the CSA delivery]. Maria also purchased practically all the extra items (except for all the zambo) for the restaurant. During lunch we mostly talked about Salsa dancing on Friday night.

There are, of course, numerous avenues of interest to be explored in relationship to the development of the CSA program. I have chosen to focus my attention here on specific characteristics of the La Finca CSA as experienced by the producers and clients of the CSA, and how they relate to ecological sustainability and food sovereignty initiatives as discussed in chapters three and four. It is important to note that although the CSA model is growing in the U.S., it is relatively new to the Ecuadorian foodscape.
CSA Membership

One way that the La Finca CSA differs from the standard CSA model is that the members pay weekly rather than in advance. Because the members do not pay in advance, Myriam sends out weekly emails with a list of produce for the week. She must then commit the extra time and labor needed to send and check emails, calculate the number of clients to receive a CSA basket for the upcoming week, and update the weekly client list to include whether or not the client has paid in advance or not. This system entails a lot of extra work for Myriam and for the laborers producing/delivering the CSA share’s, thus limiting some of the economic benefit that would otherwise be recognized. Additionally, this system neutralizes one of the main functions of a CSA program, which is to alleviate some of the inherent risk associated with farming through the advanced payment received from CSA members who share the risk.

During the time I lived on the farm, Myriam tried to implement a contractual agreement, but many members remained reluctant to pay in advance, or were only willing to agree to a one-to-three month commitment. Although La Finca’s contact list includes over 30 names, its regular client base is closer to 15-18; and those willing to enter into a contractual agreement were less than 30 percent.

One way that the La Finca CSA resembles the data on CSA program’s in the U.S. concerns the members’ socio-economic status. Myriam notes that most regular members of the La Finca CSA are already committed to an alternative lifestyle. They are familiar with organics and are economically middle-class, thus
better able to afford the slight increase in cost. The majority of principal members have administrative or high-level jobs, and belong to various social support groups. Furthermore, when they receive uncommon items in their CSA share, such as a dry bag of corn, they know how to prepare it and sometimes even ask for more. They are also more apt to experiment with new varieties that are included in the CSA basket. The 15 or so CSA members that I met, talked with, and interviewed reflected the socio-economic status that Myriam noted. Two CSA members I personally interviewed, Maria and Vianca, held administrative positions and one, Anna, was a professor at a local university. Several members would occasionally send their maids, or personal drivers, which is itself a sign of at least modest wealth.

Most members with whom I spoke cited the desire to eat organic produce as the main reason they purchased the CSA share; and Anna even linked the production of organic crops to the rainwater harvest system used on La Finca. She said “Rainwater harvest is the most important thing. I like the idea of food grown with rainwater; I don’t like buying crops that have been grown with dirty water” (personal communication 2010).

*Crop diversity versus scale*

Myriam believes that diversity is more important than scale when it comes to farm planning. Throughout the production cycle the small farmer may need to utilize myriad strategies to confront everything from unexpected weather patterns and climate change, to price utility and market fluctuations. Flexibility and
adaptability are thus necessary characteristics of the small-scale farmer and crop diversity helps stabilize the risks inherent in agricultural production. Intercropping, an important aspect of organic farming, is viewed as vital to the health of the land and also leads to greater variety in production.

Food variety is also a key factor in human health and is a central consideration in consumer purchases. Kristi, the volunteer who ran the farm CSA program at this point, thinks the baskets should begin with a regular base of produce then add variety depending on crops harvested that week. The regular base of produce should include potatoes, carrots, lettuce, and some other regular items that are used in everyday meal preparation. During an interview one CSA member, Maria, told me that she considered the variety to be one of the main benefits of receiving the La Finca CSA share. However, variety is not guaranteed, nor is it consistent. Another member, Vianca, told me that while she appreciated the variety, the past several CSA baskets had included *acelga* (*Brassica oleracea*, kale) that neither she nor her children enjoyed eating. As discussed in the section on CSAs in chapter three, variety is both a key consideration and an area of contention for many CSA members, due in part to the obligation of having to eat what is provided in the CSA basket and not personally choosing those items.

*Eating What Grows*

While diversity is an important consideration in farm planning and consumer purchases, consumers also seek to purchase regular staples that are
used in the preparation of most meals. In the Andes these items may include tomatoes, carrots, onions, and potatoes: items that are either not produced on the farm or not produced in sufficient quantity to always be included in the CSA basket. In Ecuador it is possible to grow vegetables year-round due to its location on the equator and its two annual seasons: hot and wet. However, crops that were planted may become damaged and/or die before harvest due to weather or other unforeseen events, and certain crops such as choclo (corn) rely on rainfall during the rainy season for ripening. Thus eating what grows becomes a primary function for both the producers and the members of the CSA. As Maria articulated “You have to… eat things that nature gives us and different things and what is in season. In the supermarket you always have tomatoes, always onions, always the things you are accustomed to. So you have to change your way of consuming” (personal communication 2010). For the most part the produce sold in the CSA could not be sold in large grocery stores due to size, small imperfections, and bug bites. However, these characteristics are often found on organically produced food, and were also present on produce purchased from small local tiendas (stores).

Native plants/recipes

In addition to modifying one’s eating habits in order to eat what nature provides, La Finca CSA members also receive produce that they are unfamiliar with and don’t know how to prepare or to eat. La Finca promotes the reintroduction of native crops for their beneficial qualities to human health and
the health of the land. Myriam told me “We want to promote native varieties of food because those varieties can be easily produced organically. They are adapted to this region and also have lots of properties that are good for health and good for nutrition” (personal communication 2010).

Although once staples of local consumption, some native plants such as mashua (*trapaeloum tuberosum* - similar in appearance to a carrot but much softer), zambo (a fleshy sweet produce similar in appearance to a watermelon), and jícama (*pachyrhizus erosus* - a crisp sweet root similar to a turnip) have all but disappeared from the local diet. In order to promote the reintroduction of these foods, *La Finca* regularly distributes recipes with the CSA basket. Still, according to Myriam, some consumers are unwilling to try new items and after receiving one or two baskets they stop purchasing baskets from *La Finca*.

These statistics do not appear to be significantly different than data collected from similar studies conducted in the U.S. As previously discussed, CSA membership turnover rates can range between 30-50 percent, in part due to unrealistic expectations on both sides. The interesting fact here is that one main area of contention is the reintroduction of native plants in the CSA program, foods that many people no longer consume. Many CSA members that I spoke with stated they did not know how to prepare the item correctly, and thus did not enjoy eating it. However, several members also shared that once the food was prepared using the recipe, they liked it and even asked for new recipes. This was especially true for the *mashua*, which is commonly made into sweet bread.
Subsidizing the farm

The owners of the farm are currently subsidizing the farm with their professional positions off the farm. The cost of housing the volunteers, as well as the cost of the daily laborer is more than what is earned through the CSA program. As Myriam stated during our interview “We know we are paying part of the cost and that’s nice because we were subsidizing the farm in order to have the style of life of a farm. I know it is important for farmers to have their own food and that’s why they keep farming, not because they are earning much money. It’s a very huge challenge to incorporate… to this system of CSA. Money earned from the CSA is reinvested in the farm so it doesn’t necessarily come [in]… as a payment. So either we have to raise the prices so that we can cover costs, or we subsidize for a while until we know exactly how it works” (personal communication 2010).

CSA Conclusions

On the night before I left Ecuador, the producers of the La Finca CSA all sat down together for a lengthy discussion regarding the future of the CSA. Several changes were to be implemented in the upcoming months as a result of that meeting. The most important aspect for this discussion is the decision to discontinue the CSA as it currently operates. The new plan involves gaining access and permission to sell in the local town of La Merced, rather than commuting 30 miles away to deliver the CSA basket. The producers unanimously
agreed that one goal of the CSA was to expand the horizon of organics, which means to educate and promote organics at a more local level.

Research Findings: *Ser Tierra*  
*Canastas Comunitarias*

The *Ser Tierra Canastas Comunitarias* are small groups of 5-15 families who purchase food together in bulk from the outdoor markets in order to save money. As one woman said “*Canastas Comunitarias es más economico*” (community food baskets are more economical) implying that the primary purpose of the canasta was to save money in family food purchases. This statement was confirmed and reflected in my conversations with Myriam and Maria, both of whom noted that *Canastas Comunitarias* provide food security for local families and are considered an important first step in increasing their nutritional health. According to the UN World Food Programme, the national malnutrition rate for Ecuador is around 26 percent (WFP online 2011). However, poverty and malnutrition disproportionately affect indigenous populations, women, and young children and can climb as high as 92 percent in rural indigenous areas, such as the Ecuadorian Andes (WFP online 2011).

Thus, given my interest in food sovereignty, it was decided that I would accompany the different groups during *Canastas Comunitarias* activities. My role was to observe the process and record the purchases, as well as how the group functioned overall. Several factors facilitated the need for an assessment of the *Canastas Comunitarias*: 1) external funding agency reports, 2) internal conflict
within the groups stemming from lack of trust, and 3) the need for a methodological process that all groups could follow.

The fulfillment of my assigned role with the Canastas Comunitarias project proved to be very difficult. First and foremost, the Canastas Comunitarias groups are highly independent and, once developed, function externally from Ser Tierra. Gaining access to the community’s independent from the scheduled activities of Ser Tierra was challenging. On several occasions when I was scheduled to accompany a particular group I was either misinformed as to the date/time, I was not contacted as planned, or I was unavailable to attend. In the end I participated in three Canastas Comunitarias with two different groups. The first two were relatively early in my field research and my role had not yet been clearly defined. Thus, although a plan of action was later discussed (as noted above), the evaluation was never fully implemented. Nonetheless, during my participation with the Canastas Comunitarias I was able to observe and record group purchasing activities. In the following section I provide ethnographic data on two CC groups, Guate and Elcanti, and the open-air market where both groups shopped, El Machachi.

**Guate**

The Guate group, with whom I participated twice, has been in existence for over two years and functions in an orderly and business-like manner. The cost for one canasta is $20 per family and the produce typically fills a large gunnysack (see figure 6.5). The group purchases a canasta every 15 days,
however, not every family is able to participate in each *canasta*. For example, the first time I accompanied this group there were 13 families participating. The second time I went with this group there were only 9 families participating. Group members rotate responsibilities, such as travelling to the open-air market, purchasing, and redistributing the produce. In this respect, the *Guate canasta* operated similar to other *Canastas Comunitarias* throughout Ecuador.

The *Guate* group shopped at *El Machachi* open-air market. The main items purchased included potatoes (several varieties), carrots, lettuce, tomatoes, onions (several varieties), lemons, plantains and bananas. Additionally this group also purchased *viveres* (food staples) such as rice, flour and sugar. On both occasions the person responsible for purchasing items recorded the item purchased, the quantity purchased, and the price. At the redistribution site each item was counted and sorted equally, then placed in piles awaiting recipients. Individuals usually arrived while the redistribution was still under way. Business information was shared with the entire group before participants received their food items and went home.
El Cantaria

I participated on one occasion with the Cantaria group. The Cantaria group also shopped at El Machachi and purchased a similar array of fruits and vegetables but did not purchase viveres. This group did not appear to have the same cohesion and organization that the Guate group exhibited. On this occasion the person responsible for purchasing items recorded the items purchased and the amount spent for each item but did not record the quantity purchased, which is important information for redistribution and keeping track of financial records. I did not attend the redistribution with this group so I am unable to comment on how its business was conducted or how many families participated.

Shortly thereafter the Cantaria group split into two groups when several members decided to terminate their relationship with Ser Tierra in order to further
Develop a working relationship with the local municipality. Although not fully addressed in this thesis, the developing relationship between community-based NGOs and local municipalities is an interesting avenue of research and should be explored further.

*El Machachi*

On all three occasions the group shopped at *El Machachi*, an open-air market approximately one hour from *La Merced* (see figure 6.6). The produce at *El Machachi* is for the most part domestically-grown but not organically produced, and is brought to market by middle trader-women. The focus here is on purchasing in bulk to reduce cost and improve local food security. In an area where poverty rates are extremely high, access to affordable food becomes a critical matter.

Although both groups purchased the majority of items from familiar vendors, with each trip prices were bartered and negotiated. Thus I was unable to ascertain the extent to which *canasta* members had ongoing business relations with individual vendors, which was an important consideration in the establishment of *Canastas Comunitarias* throughout Ecuador as well as the broader food sovereignty movement in general.
Farmer Field Schools (FFS)

The FFS use an interactive hands-on approach, and incorporates personal knowledge in the process, thus each farmer field school included instruction as well as physical work. The focus of the FFS I attended was on growing organic food in home garden plots. None of the gardens that I worked in with the FFS had irrigation systems. The gardens were relatively small and cared for by the local community of women, not just the individual at whose house the garden was located. The main purpose of the vegetable gardens was subsistence, but it was believed that the women could, and would, share amongst each other when needed. There is an additional underlying goal that in the future these women can produce enough in their gardens to sell collectively or with the organic CSA baskets piloted by La Finca.

Most of the women, and in fact a large percentage of households in the region, have subsistence plots on their land. These plots are planted with what is
known as the “three sisters”: corn, squash, and beans. These complementary plants are planted together, rather than in separate rows. These crops are not irrigated but rely on rainwater.

One of the most interesting observations I made during the FFS was that each of the homes I went into had a new stove, while only a few had refrigerators. The price of the stove, which had six gas burners on top, was approximately $700.00. While the women knew how to operate the top burners, only a few seemed to understand how to operate the oven. Most of the women did not have baking pans and were unfamiliar with how to prepare baked foods.

When I asked the women about the origin of the stoves, I was informed that each family bought their own stove and that they were not sponsored by the government or any other non-governmental organization. It is possible, however, that I was either misunderstood, or that I misinterpreted their answer. It seems unlikely that all the women in the area would be able to afford such expensive stoves.

**Sta. Teresa**

It was initially decided that I would accompany Tina (an Ecuadorian university graduate student volunteering with Ser Tierra for one year to complete her thesis requirements) to meet and work with her newly formed group, Sta. Teresa, which had been in operation since November 2009. I accompanied Tina one time to Sta. Teresa for one FFS. At that time Tina gave a presentation on abono (manure) for organic gardening and we worked together in one of the
home vegetable gardens. The lesson seemed rather complex and the women listened, rather than engaged, with the material being presented. Following the lecture the group went outside to work collectively in the small subsistence plot pulling weeds. The next time I was scheduled to attend, the FFS was cancelled and shortly thereafter Tina gave her notice to Ser Tierra, having completed her year-long study.

Bayard (a well-educated Ecuadorian male from the Galapagos Islands), was hired before Tina left. Bayard specializes in nutritional health and one of his responsibilities was to take over the Sta. Teresa group started by Tina. Although Bayard was hired as a Ser Tierra employee, he had previously worked with Ser Tierra and La Finca in a volunteer capacity. I also accompanied Bayard on one occasion, which was a cooking class (see figure 6.7). The cooking lesson centered on the preparation of pan de mashua (mashua bread). As previously mentioned, mashua is a native plant that looks similar to a carrot but is much softer. The cooking lesson was one component of several that supported the goal of reintroducing native crops into the local diet. However, there was no systematic order to the class; whoever was interested and available at the time completed the next task. Full participation was often limited because the women took care of small children at the same time as participating in the group activities.

At the time of my research this newly formed group was already floundering. Bayard left the project after having only worked with Ser Tierra for three months, mainly as a result of the women requesting to work with somebody
else, preferably a woman. Thus the group was left without its own *Ser Tierra* volunteer and FFS coordinator.

*Figure 6.7 Photo Cooking Class*  
(note: there is a new stove in the house but no refrigerator; also water for this house is purchased and stored outside in a large plastic water tank)

![Photo Cooking Class](image)

*Elcanti*

I attended the most FFSs with Yoli in the community of *Elcanti*. Yoli is a *Ser Tierra* volunteer who lives in the local community and has had an ongoing relationship with *Ser Tierra* and *La Finca* since the early days of the tree nursery. Her specialty is ornamental plants and organic gardening. I participated in five FFSs in the community of *Elcanti* over the course of six weeks. Two FFSs were conducted in one woman’s vegetable garden (see figure 6.8); one was conducted at the school garden; and two were cooking classes that I facilitated. Approximately five to six women were present at each FFS, although the same
five women were not consistently in attendance. Several of the women also had small children with them.

*Figure 6.8 Photo Elancti home vegetable garden*  
(note: behind the small vegetable garden is a large plot of the three sisters: corn, squash, and beans)

At each of the agricultural FFSs, Yoli brought seeds, seedlings, and transplants to be planted in the garden. Yoli talked casually with the women about the type of vegetable to be planted, how to apply manure, how to work with compost, the need for water, and other gardening related activities. Everyone in
the group participated by working in the garden. I learned that some plants, such as zucchini and lettuce, are not commonly used by the women. The women said that they don’t know how to prepare those foods and that their children do not like them. This led to discussion on several ways to prepare zucchini, which included soups, stir-fry, and bread. The women were intrigued with the idea of zucchini bread and I offered to teach them how to make it.

I had worked with the Elcanti group on three occasions before I led the cooking class. I was beginning to build rapport with the women because I had spent the most time with them and was able to engage in light conversation while working in the garden. On the day I led the cooking class, Yoli was ill and unable to attend. The class went well, the women really liked the zucchini bread, and they invited me back to teach them how to make chocolate cake and apple pie. Although not discussed openly, I would venture to say that part of their desire to prepare these particular foods had to do with the “status” of preparing and consuming western foods.

The following week, my last week in the community, I led the second cooking class. Although I agreed to teach the women how to bake chocolate cake and apple pie, I was both aware of and concerned about the economic and health implications of the chosen items. Although cake is not uncommon in the area, my observations confirmed that it is usually purchased from local bakeries and consumed only on special occasions. Additionally, both items required the use of refined sugar (as well as other items that would need to be purchased) and the intention of the FFS is to provide support for healthy diets.
rest my concerns when she told me that sugar is also necessary in human diets, and that it was healthy for the women to enjoy what they are doing (personal communication 2010). Thus, as the women requested, during the second cooking class we baked a chocolate cake and an apple pie.
Discussion

Applied research project report

As previously mentioned, one of the main objectives of the applied research project was to determine if La Finca’s pilot CSA project could be adapted to support local women farmers working with the NGO Ser Tierra. In order to accomplish this task I engaged in qualitative research with members of both groups throughout 11 weeks of field research. My conclusion is that the pilot CSA is not yet functioning solidly, and thus is not easily adaptable. The CSA was also in the process of undergoing significant changes at the end of my research. And most importantly, the women farmers working with Ser Tierra are not yet organized to such an extent that they would be able to participate in a multi-farmer CSA project.

Generally speaking, a CSA seeks to forge ongoing direct relationships between small-scale producers and consumers. This implies a level of commitment on the part of the producer, but also on the part of the consumer. Thus, community involvement and farmer support are key components of a well-functioning CSA (Durrenberger 2002; Goland 2002; and McIlvaine et al 2004). In the case of the La Finca CSA, the level of commitment is high on the side of the producer, but inconsistent on the side of the consumer. Some of the reasons for this imbalance include such things as the cost of organic produce, food variety and quantity, and the need for CSA members to adapt to a different way of eating. Additionally, La Finca had experienced some challenges selling in the
local community and had been commuting to sell to friends in a different community. Thus one of the most important components of CSA was lacking since its inception: local community support.

The relationship of women farmers (working with Ser Tierra) to this project is also exceedingly complex. The overall assessment of the Ser Tierra Farmer Field Schools I attended is that the women farmers participating in these schools were still learning how to grow their own food, or at least were still learning organic gardening methods. The extent to which they utilized traditional ecological knowledge beyond planting and growing the three sisters (corn, beans, & squash) was unknown to me. Their plots were small and produced relatively little. These women face severe economic hardship and a high level of food insecurity. One of Ser Tierra’s development objectives is for the women to first grow enough food to supplement their own family’s dietary needs, then share and trade the extra within their respective group or community, and eventually join together to sell the extra produce in the local community (personal communication 2010). Data analysis of field research suggests local women farmers are still in the first stage of this process.

Another issue that should be addressed is the prospect of “scaling-up” the CSA to support a multi-farmer CSA project. The process of scaling-up involves a whole other set of complexities that I believe neither La Finca, nor women farmers working with Ser Tierra, are ready to embrace. First, Myriam has already stated that at 15-18 families, the CSA was at its current capacity. Furthermore, the client base for the La Finca CSA had a high level of fluctuation, with many
new members receiving only one or two baskets before deciding not to purchase any more CSA shares from La Finca. Without a regular, committed client base the primary tenant of CSA is missing - community support. Localization efforts such as CSAs are successful to the extent that individuals and communities support these activities (Goland 2002). Thus, before scaling-up or adapting the CSA model to support a multi-farmer project could be seriously considered, it would be vital that the CSA have first developed a solid foundation. This would need to be accomplished through increased local community support for organic farming and the establishment of a solid client base.

Ser Tierra and the role of development in food sovereignty

The role of development agencies in shaping food sovereignty initiatives in Ilaló, Ecuador is another complicated and important area of examination. Development agencies often play a significant role in shaping global and local agendas. These agendas are realized through such schema as gendered micro-credit projects and neoliberal economic policies favoring trade liberalization (Muratorio 1998; Korovkin 2003 [2006]; Lefeber 2003; Albó 2004; and Karim 2006). In this section I would like to look specifically at the role of Ser Tierra and La Finca in shaping food sovereignty in Ilaló, Ecuador.

Both Ser Tierra and La Finca have professional relationships with other local, international, governmental, and non-governmental organizations. A full examination of those relationships goes beyond the scope of this thesis;
however, I think it is important to note that the activities of *Ser Tierra* and *La Finca* are in part shaped by these external agencies. *Canastas Comunitarias* is a good example of this influence. As mentioned earlier in a previous chapter, one of the reasons I was to accompany specific groups of *Canastas Comunitarias* was the need for a detailed assessment of group activities to fulfill funding agency requirements. Another example of these relationships would be the gendered micro-credit projects; after all, *Ser Tierra* is working to promote the role of mostly indigenous women farmers. And finally, the nascent role of the Ecuadorian government in promoting food sovereignty is likely to have a significant impact on local NGO operations.

Although my research touched upon all of these topics, I did not acquire sufficient data to discuss any of them in depth. What the data analysis did illuminate was the adaptive nature of development projects led by *Ser Tierra* and *La Finca*, as well as their respective roles in shaping food sovereignty in the area.

The primary goal of *Ser Tierra* and *La Finca* activities has been the reforestation of the Ilaló volcano (personal communication 2010). The first community-development project initiated on *La Finca* was a tree nursery, the objective of which was to grow and plant native trees. Concurrently, the lack of potable water led to research in rainwater-harvesting. Ongoing engagement with the local community resulting from these development projects shed light on the need to address basic family needs, such as food insecurity and nutritional deficiency. These insights into local community needs helped shape the direction
of future community-development projects, such as the micro-credit projects currently overseen by *Ser Tierra*.

Throughout these processes, *Ser Tierra* and *La Finca* have adapted their community-development projects to meet the needs of the community while maintaining the integrity of reforestation efforts and promoting ecological sustainability. This type of flexibility in community-development projects is difficult to achieve as external funding agencies often have a particular set of criteria that are not easily adaptable to local needs and customs (for example see Karim 2006). In this respect, one of the greatest achievements of local community-development projects pursued by *Ser Tierra* and *La Finca* has been the bridging of a top-down ideology with a grounded approach. This is evidenced through the use of micro-credit projects to improve access to potable water and establish home vegetable gardens. These activities are intended to increase nutritional health and food sovereignty, while simultaneously teaching about soil health, organic farming methods, and proper animal care.

Another interesting way that *Ser Tierra* and *La Finca* influence local food sovereignty is the reintroduction of native plants. These practices are themselves influenced by engagement with groups such as *Colectivo de Agroecología* that are working to shift the focus of national agricultural policy from food security to food sovereignty (Kirwan and Sherwood 2009; and *Colectivo Agrario* 2009). The reintroduction of native plants highlights several core ideologies and functions of the food sovereignty movement: 1) it reasserts a claim to culturally appropriate foods, 2) it supports local food production cycles, and 3) it re-establishes local
biodiversity and promotes ecological sustainability. Still, how local consumers embrace the reintegration of traditional foods is another fascinating topic of particular relevance to this thesis.

Although cultural ties to particular foods remain very strong for most people, food is also used as socio-economic markers and it is saturated with symbolic meaning (Weistmantel 1988; and Finnis 2009). Additionally, global processes of agricultural commercialization have altered the Ecuadorian agrifood landscape to such an extent that social change has occurred in both the marketplace and in local consumption patterns (Gross and McMurray 2007). Data analysis of my own research confirms these trends, particularly in relationship to traditional and native foods such as mashua, which have all but disappeared from the local diet and were not readily available in the Machachi marketplace. Thus, while La Finca and Ser Tierra work towards the reintegration of these foods into the local agrifood system, they find it necessary to provide recipes and give cooking lessons.

Recommendations

My recommendations for the pilot CSA are directly in-line with the decisions already made by the La Finca producers: to redirect their efforts in the local town of La Merced. Although I understand the economic imperative to move beyond basic subsistence, local support for small-scale organic produce has yet to be established. Even La Finca reports the need to subsidize the farm with
outside employment income in order to continue operations. The women farmers working with *Ser Tierra* do not have access to these additional funds. Thus, my recommendations would be that the women farmers continue with their respective micro-credit projects and FFS until such time as their immediate subsistence needs have been met. By continuing to work with *La Finca* and *Ser Tierra* on food sovereignty initiatives, local women farmers can be active agents of change in their local and surrounding communities.

In an area where economic poverty is high and middletrader women control the sale of produce, support for locally grown organic food could encourage economic activity within the local community. Additionally, in an area with severe deforestation and soil degradation, small-scale organic farming methods could help regenerate the soil (Funes et al 2002; and Holt-Giménez 2006). Still, the dearth of potable water in the area remains a serious concern.
Chapter 8: Conclusion

Socio-economic and ecological sustainability

This thesis has developed an argument that socio-economic and ecological sustainability are closely linked to the reintroduction of morality into economics (Lumley 2002; Lefeber 2003; and Ikerd 2005). I have shown that alternative agrifood movements, such as Slow Food, Locavore, and Food Sovereignty, are deeply involved in these processes (Mintz 2006; Gross 2009; and Steager 2009) and are rooted in the principles of socio-economic and ecological sustainability advocated by organic farming, farmers’ markets, and CSA (Cone & Kakaliouras 1995; Conford 2001; Cone 1995; Funes et al. 2001; Durrenberger 2002; and Goland 2002). I have also argued that industrialized agriculture and neoliberal economic policies are the antithesis of such efforts (Shiva 2000; Grinspun 2003; Harvey 2005; Holt-Giménez & Patel 2009; Mintz 2009; and Walsh 2009).

Although they are closely linked, a minute but significant distinction can be made between sustainability (a contemporary buzzword), and advocating for the reintroduction of morality into economics. In the first scenario, the rising popularity of niche-marketing can distance socio-economic and ecologically-sustainable activities from their foundational principles. For example, organics now has both small-scale producers and industrialized producers (Pollan 2006; and Gilpin 2007). While some components of ecological sustainability remain intact in large-scale production, such as the prohibition of pesticides and transgenic seeds,
other aspects have been lost, such as local support for small-scale farmers. From this example, an important aspect of morality in economics emerges: the support of local socio-economic livelihoods.

It has been argued elsewhere that multinational corporations “invest in… their ability to privatize gains and socialize losses” (Campbell 2010). In other words, profit is the ultimate motive and the effect on peoples’ lives is secondary to the economic transaction. The concept of socio-economic sustainability argues against this system. Rather than allow multinational agrifood conglomerates to control the food supply chain, the ambitions and needs of local food producers and consumers are moved to the center of food systems (Mintz 2006; Steager 2009; and P2P 2010). Ecological sustainability then becomes a cornerstone of this economic model because true sustainability is rooted in the relationship between humans and their natural environment (Ikerd 2005). The activities of La Finca and Ser Tierra, which include community-development programs (e.g. tree nursery, local nutrition and health studies, canastas comunitarias, Farmer Field Schools), organic farming, and CSA, clearly represent a deep commitment to these principles.

Recommendation for further research

This particular body of research has resulted from a pilot study, which by its very nature is limited in both time and scope. What I have presented is a case study of organic agriculture and a pilot CSA on La Finca, as well as aspects of
the NGO *Ser Tierra* in relationship to the growing body of alternative agrifood movements. It is, however, important to note that these activities do not happen in a vacuum; they are intricately connected in a web of activities that promote socio-economic and ecological sustainability. Some of those particulars are discussed in this thesis, such as the cultural relationship to food; while others still need to be explored, such as the impact of relationships between governmental and local non-governmental organizations.

Additionally, the extent to which I have answered my own research questions is similarly limited. I set out to learn about the role of alternative agrifood movements in Ecuador, and how small-scale organic women farmers in the highlands are engaged in these processes. As an anthropologist engaged in applied research I was also flexible enough in my research agenda to allow for a natural flow and shift, to accommodate the desire and needs of the host community, and how they defined my role while I was there. As it turned out, I spent the majority of my time working with the *La Finca* CSA, and occasionally working with *Ser Tierra* women farmers. This allowed me to gain a broader understanding of the functions of the CSA then I might otherwise have gleaned, which proved useful for completing the applied portion of my research project.

The short amount of time spent in the field, my intermediate Spanish-speaking ability, and the distance of communities are some factors that restricted a deeper engagement with women farmers working with the NGO *Ser Tierra*. Thus, there remains an array of additional research that would broaden the data presented in this thesis in relationship to the research questions I posed. For
example, a study of the economic histories of the participants involved with Ser Tierra, as well as deeper examination of the micro-credit projects, would serve to further elucidate the socio-economic landscape of this particular group of women farmers in the Ilaló region of Ecuador. A local food consumption study would also shed light upon the relationship between changing food consumption patterns and the reintroduction of native crops into the agrifood-cape, as well as the local diet. The role of middle-trader women in the local socio-economic agrifood-cape is also of interest and needs to be explored further. Answering these important questions in a local context would nuance the particulars of how people in Ilaló, Ecuador renegotiate the socio-economic landscape brought about by ongoing changes in agriculture and food consumption patterns.
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APPENDICES
Appendix 1: Letter of Consent for Research

Quito, October 29th, 2009

Oregon State University
Internal Review Board

This letter is to inform you about our mutual consent about the terms of reference for Rebecka Daye’s internship with the Non-Governmental Organization “Red Ambiental” in Ecuador.

The individuals taking part on this internship are as follows:

- Joan Gross is a teacher at Oregon State University (OSU) and has made the contacts between her student Rebecka Daye and the respective organizations and individuals in Ecuador. Joan Gross will act as the principal investigator supervising Rebecka Daye’s research during her internship.
- Rebecka Daye is a student at Oregon State University (OSU) who voluntarily has contacted the “Red Ambiental” in order to do an internship in Quito, Ecuador.
- “Red Ambiental” legally represented by its Board Director Cinthya Peñaherrera is a local non-governmental and non-profit organization. The team of Red Ambiental works on water harvesting, organic farming and reforestation. It supports groups of Ecuadorian native inhabitants of the Ilaló volcano who manage micro-credit funds for their different projects.
- Finca Urkuwayku is a local organic farm managed by its owners Stephen Sherwood and Myriam Paredes. It supports the activities of the NGO Red Ambiental by doing research and receiving groups of farmers for training and demonstrations. Finca Urkuwayku has also started a pilot CSA with 10 families in the Cumbayá neighboring valley.

The internship will take place in the outskirts of volcano Ilaló situated at 45 minutes from Quito (Ecuador capital City). This is the area of influence of the project “Reverdeciendo el Ilaló” (Greening the Ilaló volcano) coordinated and implemented by the NGO Red Ambiental. The due dates for the Internship will be between the 1st of January and the 18th of March of 2010.

The name of the research carried out during this internship will be "Organic Farming and Greening the Ilalo Volcano in Ecuador"

The objectives of the research are:

1. To engage in qualitative research (through participant observation and semi-structured interviews) with women farmer’s from the micro-credit
project in Ilaló in order to understand their expectations, constraints and opportunities to participate in Community Supported Agriculture initiatives.

2. To engage in a short-time qualitative research with the providers and the clients of a pilot CSA in order to shed light on how this initiative can be scaled up to support organic farmers from Ilaló.

For these objectives to be accomplished the student Rebecka Daye agrees on the following:

- To participate in on-going activities of the [redacted], which are planned every week with the team of the project.
- To participate in the field work in Finca [redacted] in order to understand local organic farming.
- To participate in the functioning activities of the pilot CSA.

The NGO [redacted] represented by its board director [redacted] agrees on the following:

- To provide the necessary introduction to the groups of micro-credit with whom it works in order for the student Rebecka Daye to get familiarized with the area and the people who participate in the project.
- To include the student Rebecka Daye as part of the team of the project “Reverdeciendo el Ilaló”.

Finca [redacted] represented by its owner Myriam [redacted] agrees on the following:

To host the student Rebecka Daye for the time of the internship, providing supervision and explanations of fieldwork and part time tutoring of the proposed research.

According to what has been exposed in this agreement letter the parts sign bellow.

Joan Gross  
OSU Principal investigator

Rebecka Daye  
OSU student

[redacted]  
Board director

Myriam [redacted]  
Finca [redacted]
Appendix 2: Discussion Guide

Cuestionario de la entrevista personal en Español

1. Please tell me about your experiences with [Red Ambiental/Finca Urkuwayku].
   *Por favor, hableme algo sobre sus experiencias con [Red Ambiental/Finca Urkuwayku].*

2. What are some of the opportunities you have experienced as a result of working with [Red Ambiental/Finca Urkuwayku]? ¿Cuáles son algunas de las oportunidades que usted ha experimentado como resultado del trabajo con [Red Ambiental/Finca Urkuwayku]? 

3. What are some of the difficulties you have experienced while trying to work with [Red Ambiental/Finca Urkuwayku]? ¿Cuáles son algunos de los difíciles que usted ha experimentado en intentando trabajar con [Red Ambiental/Finca Urkuwayku]? 

4. How have the [Red Ambiental/Finca Urkuwayku] programs affected local food security in the area? ¿Cómo han afectado a seguridad alimentaría en el área de [Red Ambiental/Finca Urkuwayku] por los programas? 

5. In what ways have the agriculture programs met with your expectations? ¿De qué manera los programas de la agricultura se han encontrado con sus expectativas? 

6. In what ways have the agriculture programs fallen short of your expectations? ¿De qué manera los programas de la agricultura no han podido resolver sus expectativas? 

7. In what ways do you think the program could be improved? ¿De qué maneras usted piensa que el programa podría ser mejorado?

8. Do you have any suggestions for increasing local support for organic farmers in the area? ¿Tiene usted sugerencias para aumentar la ayuda local los granjeros orgánicos en el área?
9. Do you have anything else to add?  
¿Algo más que a usted gustaría comunicarme?