A moveable feast:
Towards a better understanding of pathways to food citizenship

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When we feel that we have ownership in something, even if technically and legally we do not, or that our livelihood depends upon it, then we care. If we care, we watch, we appreciate, we are vigilant against threats. But when we know less, or have forgotten, we do not care. Then it is easier for the powerful to appropriate these common goods and so destroy them in pursuit of their own economic gain... The rapid modernization of landscapes in both developing and industrialized countries has broken many of our natural links with land and food, and so undermined a sense of ownership, an inclination to care and a desire to take action for the collective good (Pretty, 2002, p. 2).
Abstract

Although the globalised food system delivers unparalleled food variety and quantity to most in the developed world it also disconnects consumers from where, how and by whom food is grown, which discourages food citizenship. This thesis explored people’s participation in their usual food procurement environment and their relationships to food, which revealed pathways to food citizenship.

This research used narrative inquiry methodology and purposive sampling to gather stories through focus group conversations. Fifty-two people voluntarily attended focus groups comprised of food procurers from one of five sources: community gardens, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), farmers’ markets, fresh food markets or supermarkets. A narrative was constructed for each of these groups of food procurers; their commonalities and particularities were illuminated through a final interpretive narrative.

The findings showed that people’s meaning-making of food can be very complex and at times contradictory, both within and across the different food procurement environments. Food procurers, who actively participated in their chosen food system, enjoyed a ‘contemporary relational food culture’ and more consistently and enthusiastically enacted food citizenship. There is a continuum of engagement with food citizenship from the community garden food procurement environment at one end and the supermarket at the other. The community gardeners made meaning of food through their connections to the earth and to others. They rejected food available through supermarkets; instead, they grew, processed and prepared their own food, a pleasurable and meaningful use of their social time. The CSA and farmers’ market groups similarly disconnected from mainstream assessments of food quality and re-connected in new ways. However, for the CSA members, these values were put aside when clock time imposed itself. Both the farmers’ market and CSA facilitated food citizenship, as the farmers made organic, seasonal, local and ethically produced food available for their customers. The farmers’ market shoppers became absorbed in their shopping experiences, where they developed relationships with farmers and a desire to support more sustainable food systems. Further along the continuum, the complexity and contradictions of food choice became more apparent in the fresh food market shopping environment. This food procurement environment did not enable meaning-making of food through intimate connections to the food producer or the place in which it was grown. Convictions about sustainable food practices
amongst this group were inconsistent and often contradictory, making the path to food citizenship unclear. The supermarket shoppers at the end of the continuum expressed that supermarket food was inferior to other food, but still used it. They did not tell stories of the importance of where or by whom food was grown, but described their meaning-making of food through cooking and sharing meals. Clock time overwhelmingly prevented these shoppers from spending social time on food-related activities. This group’s disconnection from those who grew their food and where it was grown disempowered them from making sustainable food choices. This thesis provides preliminary qualitative evidence that local food systems can enable people to re-connect with their food and become food citizens.
Acknowledgements

As I reach the closing stages of my doctoral journey, I acknowledge publicly the contribution that many others have made in helping me achieve this milestone in my life. Firstly, I reflect on the people who encouraged me to reach my academic potential, in my formative years. My parents, Arthur and Ronda Boyd, and their parents before them, all valued education highly, so from a very early age they supported my learning not just financially, but practically and emotionally. Through their role-modelling, I also learnt the value of perseverance and hard work. I am very grateful for their continued dedication and support.

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The participants who told me their stories gave me far more than they will ever imagine. At the time of the focus groups, I enjoyed their company and their thoughtful, reflective,
insightful and often entertaining stories and anecdotes. As I analysed the focus group material I was struck by their language in describing their relationships to food. They spoke in ways that I could never have contrived if I was alone in trying to construct a narrative on this topic. I am very grateful for their time and insights. I have learnt so much about others’ very meaningful relationships to food.

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Introduction

Relationships to food

Instrumental food culture

Contemporary relational food culture

Temporality—its impact on past, present and future relationships to food

Social time—investing time in pleasurable food-related activities

The aesthetic and sensory attributes of food

An emotional attachment to food

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Chapter 1: Introducing the moveable feast

Making the decision to undertake doctoral studies was not taken lightly, as I still had two primary school-aged children and I was heading into the latter phases of my career. I had worked as a dietitian for over twenty years, mostly in rural community health, before being lured serendipitously into working in a rural university, teaching nutrition and dietetics.

As my experience within my profession expanded across the years I became increasingly aware that my practice as a nutritionist and dietitian had severe limitations. The Australian Dietary Guidelines (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2013), had been a key document in my toolkit of practice. Yet, I suspected that people were rarely selecting food according to these evidence-based recommendations. Nutritional science has become too narrowly focused on the biological and biochemical and is not taking sufficient account of the social and environmental factors influencing people’s food choices. Pollan (2008) goes so far as to say that the ideology of ‘nutritionism’ has actually contributed to poorer health outcomes, by focusing too much attention on the nutrient content of food and not enough on the food itself; or as Fischler (2011) suggests, there is too much emphasis on the eating behaviours of the individual and not enough on commensality, representing collective eating patterns.

My role as a dietitian had been to help people navigate their way through the maze of our food system and I conscientiously did so. However, I was never confident that working in this capacity would yield positive results. I felt powerless to set a positive agenda for food and nutrition and push back the overwhelming force of the food marketers that promoted highly processed, energy dense and nutrient poor food products (Story, Kaphingst, Robinson-O’Brien, & Glanz, 2008). The principles of the Ottawa Charter (World Health Organisation, 1986) and the approaches of the New Public Health (Baum, 2008) had been added to my toolkit along the way, but from my observations in practice and in life, the rise in obesity and other dietary-related diseases continued unabated. My voice and that of my colleagues in public health nutrition had been muffled by the cacophony of ‘Big Food’ (Coveney, 2014).

In parallel with the food system problems that I identified for consumers’ health, were the challenges being faced by farmers who needed to be more competitive to survive. To achieve this goal, farmers had to increase production and buy more land to benefit from the economies of scale (Lawrence, 2005). In Australia, dealing with impending drought is ever-present, and
south-east Australia experienced a severe drought in the first decade of the 21st century, which further affected the viability for many farming enterprises (ABARES, 2012). My husband and I were among those who had turned to off-farm income to supplement our income, even in our early days on the family farm, and eventually left commercial farming altogether. We were simply not big enough to weather further setbacks from poor prices and climatic conditions. As a city girl who had gone to live in the country, I remember feeling angry and frustrated, reading letters to the Sydney Morning Herald1 penned by city folk, who labelled all farmers as whingers for not quietly coping with the drought. Some would pontificate about the marginal lands that were expected to support agriculture when, under good climatic conditions, these districts produced generously. I had grown to love my farming community, whose resilience under extreme pressure was nothing short of inspiring.

It was from this vantage point as a community nutritionist and dietitian and partner in a farming enterprise that I began to reflect more on the way in which the general public understood the food system. I wondered if they were in complete awe of the food that is available in Australia or whether they scarcely thought about it. Food had become ubiquitous, so perhaps it was taken too much for granted. I asked myself if benefits for both individual and planetary health would flow if people valued food more highly and felt connected to the food system, especially to those who grow our food. Was it possible to change the focus of nutrition and dietetics’ practice away from helping people to select foods wisely from our complex food system to one that focused on creating an environment where people could deeply appreciate food? Fischler (1988) argues that people’s relationship to food is a complex one, with a multi-dimensional character that is too often ignored by researchers. I did not want to be amongst them.

The global context of the study

My personal experiences of a food system that was increasingly under strain were being addressed in the international context. The word ‘sustainability’ entered the vernacular in virtually every manner of human activity to encourage desirable behaviours in people and organisations, but not always with a clear understanding of its definition (Gillespie, 2009). In a broad sense, ‘sustainability’ means, ‘the ability to keep (something) going over time or

1 One of Sydney’s major newspapers
continuously’ (Online Oxford Dictionary). Sustainability refers to the ability of the socio-ecosystem to support human populations—using the analogy of the three-legged stool—with economic, ecological and social ‘legs’ (Gillespie, 2009). The most commonly used definition of sustainable development comes from the Brundtland Report by the UN World Commission on Environment and Development (1987), which demonstrates the underpinning philosophy of a more equitable distribution of the world’s resources. Sustainable development is ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’ (Bruntland, 1987, p. 43).

‘Food sustainability’ became and continues to be a critical issue in the agricultural and environmental sciences and public health nutrition in the context of population growth, rising obesity levels, climate change and the environmental degradation that occurs as a consequence of our modern food system (American Dietetic Association, 2007; Beeton et al., 2006; Coveney, 2000; Pretty, 2002; Tilman, Cassman, Matson, Naylor, & Polasky, 2002). The food and nutrition system is defined as:

the set of operations and processes involved in transforming raw materials into foods and transforming nutrients into health outcomes, all of which functions as a system within biophysical and socio-cultural contexts (Sobal, Khan, & Bisogni, 1998, p. 853).

Human and natural resources form the basis of the food and nutrition system, but technology, policies, economics, education, socio-cultural trends and research also affect the way the food system operates (American Dietetic Association, 2007).

When considering the challenges to food system sustainability, Gillespie (2009) argues that ‘sustainability’ is not an attribute of a particular process or product, but rather a dynamic state in which social and biophysical processes are in equilibrium. A sustainable food system, for example, should be resilient and able to adapt to changes in population size, consumption patterns and climate changes, without disintegrating (Gillespie, 2009). So, the combination of social and biophysical processes within the food system, at any one time, will either be contributing to more or less sustainability. A sustainable food system, therefore, is not a static or stable system, but one that is constantly changing (Gillespie, 2009), more like ‘a journey we embark on together, not a formula upon which we agree’ (Kirschenmann, 2008, p. 113). Hence, there is never an endpoint to food system sustainability, but food systems require the development of resilience to ensure a future food supply that protects both human and environmental health (Tagtow & Harmon, 2009).
interest group of the American Dietetic Association (Tagtow & Harmon, 2009, p. 2) defines food system sustainability as:

a sustainable and resilient food system [that] conserves and renews natural resources, advances social justice and animal welfare, builds community wealth, and fulfils the food and nutrition needs of all eaters now and in the future.

Implicit in this definition is the involvement of people in working towards a more sustainable food system. Food democracy was a term first introduced by Lang (1999) to express the idea that people can and should be active participants in shaping the food system, rather than remaining passive observers; it gives power to citizens to determine policy and practices in relation to the food system locally, regionally, nationally and globally (Hassanein, 2003, 2008). This term is related to ‘food citizenship’, which is defined by Wilkins (2005, p. 271) as:

the practice of engaging in food-related behaviours (defined narrowly and broadly) that support, rather than threaten, the development of democratic, socially and economically just, and environmentally sustainable food systems.

Such practices might involve procuring food that is grown using regenerative systems, processed and retailed in ways that distribute rather than concentrate wealth, and locally transported (Wilkins, 2005).

As these definitions about food system sustainability, food democracy and food citizenship were being developed, a group of prominent nutritional scientists met in Giessen in 2005 to reconsider the scope of nutritional science. This group recognised that to meet the needs of the 21st century, the New Nutrition Science had to integrate the biological, social and environmental sciences, and to understand the broader context of human and planetary health (Beauman et al., 2005).

This change in the focus of nutritional science, along with the global imperative to move from a market driven food system to a sustainable one, fuelled my desire to undertake research that contributed to improving food system sustainability. I wanted to help redress the imbalance of nutritional research that focused on individuals’ nutritional profiles and undertake research that examined populations’ food cultures and people’s relationships to food. The nutrients required for an individual’s good health is well known, but very little is currently understood about the influence of food systems and collective food choices on the health of populations and the planet (Wilkins, Lapp, Tagtow, & Roberts, 2010).
The need for this research

As a practitioner whose experience is firmly grounded in communities, my contribution to this emerging body of knowledge lay within a local context, notwithstanding the importance of the global perspective. Of the different components of sustainable food systems, it is the social aspects that I will be exploring most keenly for two key reasons. Firstly, if, as Kirschenmann (2008, p. 113) says, sustainability is ‘a journey we embark on together, not a formula upon which we agree,’ then there is a need to understand more fully what a socially sustainable food system might look like from the perspective of consumers. There may be academic understandings of this concept, but knowing more about people’s experiences and understandings of a socially sustainable food system is essential if this journey is to be inclusive and meaningful for all. Secondly, Coveney (2000) draws attention to Western cultures’ tendency to privilege the economic ‘bottom line’ over environmental and social considerations in the food system. This thesis is unique in that it responds to his call to examine the food systems that may be more socially profitable than others, ones that ‘build community wealth’ and food citizenship. It draws on other disciplines’ discourses on food and makes links between complex functions of food and the role that participation and relationships play in working towards more sustainable food systems.

The research question

In the Western world, where ‘nutritionism’ dominates and consumers are vulnerable to passively accepting the food on offer from the global system, there was an urgent need to uncover possible pathways to food citizenship and improved food system sustainability. Doing so required a better understanding of people’s relationship to food and their level of engagement in the food system. So the research question asked:

*What does people’s participation in their usual food procurement environment and their relationship to food reveal about pathways to food citizenship?*

Three questions helped to answer the over-arching research question:

1. How do people who procure their food in different food procurement environments make-meaning of their food?
2. In what way does participation in people’s usual food procurement environment affect relationships to food?
3. In what way does participation in some food procurement environments facilitate a clearer path to food citizenship than others?

To answer these questions, I used focus groups to speak to people who favoured one food procurement environment over another, a novel feature of this thesis. It was not expected that people used just one food environment to meet their needs, but rather, selected one as their major source of food for their household. I use the word ‘procurer’ instead of ‘shopper’ in some circumstances throughout this thesis, because community gardeners do not purchase their food, but procure it. Using the term ‘food procurement environment’ rather than the more encompassing term of ‘food system’ was done deliberately to delineate the scope of this research. This thesis did not attempt to explore people’s experiences with take-away shops or restaurants, which are also part of the current food system. The 52 people who shared their stories of their food experiences for this research were drawn from five different food procurement environments: community gardens, community supported agriculture (CSA) enterprises, farmers’ markets, large fresh food markets and supermarkets.

The location of this research project

I conducted my research in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) region (Figures 1 and 2), which is defined for this research as ‘Canberra plus one’ (C+1), which incorporates the regions within one hour’s drive of the Territory (Turner, Pearson, & Dyball, 2012). The ACT has a population of 356,586 people, with a median age of 34 years. Nearly 11% of those living in the ACT hold a Bachelor degree or above, which is greater than the proportions recorded in both Sydney or Melbourne (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). Sixty-five per cent of the ACT population is in full-time employment—above the Australian average—and one-fifth of employment is in the public sector, in government administration. People in the ACT receive an average household weekly income of $AUS1920, considerably more than the national average of $AUS1234 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011).

Canberra is a planned city and was founded in 1913 as the capital city of Australia (Australian Government, 2010), approximately half-way between the two major cities of Sydney and Melbourne. It is on the eastern border of the Riverina, a major food growing region, which includes dryland farming and irrigation (NSW Government, 2013). The ACT relies on the surrounding region for most of its food requirements, but there are a small number of agricultural businesses in the ACT, raising sheep (mostly for wool) and cattle and producing
wheat, vegetables, fruit and nuts. In the immediate surrounds, there are olive growers and wine, chocolate and honey producers (Turner et al., 2012).

Figure 1: Australia and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT)

Figure 2: The Canberra region, as it is situated within NSW.
The five food procurement environments

The food procurement environments used in this project encompassed alternative food systems and the dominant food system. Of these five food procurement environments, the community gardens, CSA enterprise and farmers’ market are classified as alternative food systems, and the large fresh food markets and supermarkets are classified as the dominant food system. There are several terms used to describe alternative food systems that form part of a social movement to counteract the dominant, industrialised food system (Feenstra, 1997; Kloppenburg, Lezberg, Master, Stevenson, & Hendrickson, 2000; Lyson & Guptill, 2004). These alternative food systems may be called ‘civic agriculture’ (Lyson & Guptill, 2004), ‘foodsheds’ (Kloppenburg, Hendrickson, & Stevenson, 1996), ‘local food systems’, or ‘community food systems’ (Feenstra, 1997). For the purposes of this research, I use Feenstra’s (2002, p. 100) definition of a local food system as:

> a collaborative effort in a particular place to build more locally based, self-reliant food systems and economies – one in which sustainable food production, processing, distribution and consumption is integrated to enhance the economic, environmental and social health of a particular place.

Community Gardens

Community gardens may be allotment gardens, where individuals have ownership, or they may be shared spaces, where the food production is pooled amongst the community (Bartolomei, Corkery, Judd, & Thompson, 2003). The community gardens studied here follow the ‘allotment’ model rather than the ‘shared space’ model (Bartolomei et al., 2003). The community gardeners who participated in this research were all members of the Canberra Organic Growers’ Society Inc. (COGS), a non-profit organisation that began in 1977, operating 11 community gardens in the ACT (Canberra Organic Growers Society, 2010). Anyone in the community can apply for a plot, which requires payment of a small levy to cover water and other administrative costs. Both the ACT government and the Queanbeyan Council support the community gardens, but the organic produce is only permitted for home consumption (Canberra Organic Growers Society, 2010). Figure 3 depicts one of the community gardens and some typical activities.
CSA enterprises are a relatively new concept, having originated in Japan and Switzerland in the 1960s and designed to share the risks and benefits of food production between the farmer and the consumer (Hawkins et al., 2003). There were two CSA enterprises in the ACT region at the beginning of this research, but neither of them continues to operate as CSAs (Joyce, Allsun, Gundaroo, personal communication, 13th August 2014; Briony, 21st September 2013). Across Australia, the number of CSAs is small; Robert Pekin, founder of the Brisbane CSA ‘Food Connect’ (www.foodconnect.com.au), estimated it to be somewhere between 50 and 100 (personal communication, 13th September 2013). In the Australian context it is difficult to find CSAs that operate in the traditional model, where the consumer shares the risk with the farmer by paying upfront membership fees (Lea, Phillips, Ward, & Worsley, 2006). To my knowledge there is only one such farm in NSW, Purple Pear Farm, west of Newcastle, which has approximately 20-25 members (Kate Beveridge, personal communication, 1st September 2014 www.purplepearfarm.com.au). The largest CSA in Australia is ‘Food Connect’ has 3000
regular subscribers and is classified as a ‘multi-farmer CSA hybrid’. Of these regular subscribers only 10% of members pay in advance, while the remainder pay for a weekly box of food with no requirement to pay in advance (Robert Pekin, Food Connect, personal communication 14th August 2014).

The CSA in this thesis had only five members and was situated in a small town near Canberra, with a population of approximately 1500 people. I have given this town the pseudonym ‘Bundalea’. Briony (pseudonym), the farmer conducting Bundalea’s CSA had a very informal arrangement with members and did not ask for a subscription fee upfront, nor did she expect participants to work on her small farm. Instead, she received payment from the members as the food parcels were delivered or collected (Briony, personal communication, 10th October 2010). She produced her food organically, but she did not have official organic certification (Briony, personal communication, 21st September 2013). Figure 4 shows pictures of the CSA at Bundalea and Briony using her three-wheeler bike for food delivery.

Photos: B. Lynch

Figure 4: The Community Supported Agriculture enterprise in the Canberra region
The Farmers’ Market

Farmers’ markets are open-air markets that operate regularly within a community, at a focal public location, where farmers and food producers sell farm-origin, mostly fresh and some prepared foods directly to customers (Coster & Kennon, 2005; Hawkes, 2008). The number of farmers’ markets in Australia is growing. In 2004, there were a total of 70 farmers’ markets nation-wide and in 2011 this number more than doubled to 152 markets (DAFF, 2012). At the beginning of this research, there were two farmers’ markets serving the population of Canberra. However, an additional farmers’ market opened in 2013 on the University of Canberra campus (Canberra farmers' market, n.d.). The one chosen for this research is the largest of these markets: The Capital Region Farmers’ Market, which is held on the north side of Canberra every Saturday from 7.30 – 11.30am. It was founded by the Rotary Club of Hall and opened its doors in 2004 with 18 stallholders. It now has more than 100 stalls each week, selling fruit and vegetables, meat, eggs, chicken, fish, bread, honey, cheese, nuts, oils, chocolate and wine. There are in excess of 5,000 customers each week, and the farmers travel as far as 300km to get to Canberra. Some products are organically produced, but it is not a requirement of the market to be certified organic. Flowers, trees and shrubs are also sold at the markets, but there are no craft or clothing stalls. Coffee and hot food can also be purchased at the markets (Rotary Club of Hall, n.d.). Figure 5 provides a variety of perspectives of these farmers’ markets.
The Belconnen and Fyshwick fresh food markets

The two fresh food markets are classified in this research as ‘specialised food stores’ (Hawkes, 2008) located under one roof. They are groups of small full- or self-service stores specialising in one product (Hawkes, 2008). The Belconnen Fresh food Markets began in 1976 and are located in the north-west of Canberra, in a major shopping and business district. It offers a wide selection of stores, including fruit and vegetable, meat and poultry, delicatessens, seafood, bakeries and cafés, operating from Wednesday to Sunday, 8am – 6pm. Some of the butchers and poultry stores specialise in organic food (Belconnen Fresh Food Markets, 2012). The website states that these markets offer locally grown produce (Belconnen Fresh Food Markets, 2012), but the operations manager of one fruit and vegetable store revealed that the majority of fresh produce comes through Sydney Markets, which sources food from across Australia (Don Gaudiosi, personal communication 13th September 2013). The Fyshwick Fresh Food Markets are the oldest markets in Canberra, located on the south-
east side of the city and offering a very similar range of stores to the Belconnen Fresh Food Markets, with virtually the same trading days and hours (The Fyshwick Fresh Food Markets, n.d.). Figure 6 shows the layout of the specialised food stores at both the Belconnen and Fyshwick markets.

Photos: G. O’Kane & Australian Local Search P/L

Figure 6: The Belconnen and Fyshwick markets

The supermarkets

The definition of supermarkets encompasses: independent supermarkets, which carry all major foods, household goods and personal care items and are independently owned; traditional chain supermarkets, which carry similar items to the independent supermarkets, but belong to a chain of supermarkets; superstores, which carry more food items and have in-store bakeries and meat departments and a significant amount of general merchandise; hard discount stores, largely specialising in packaged groceries with practical furnishing and lower prices; and warehouse club stores, which are membership-based and food is supplied in multi-pack sizes (Hawkes, 2008).
The ACT and surrounds are well served by a variety of supermarkets. These include: Woolworths, Coles, IGA (Independent Grocers Association), SupaBarn, Aldi and Costco. Coles and Woolworths are Australian companies that dominate the grocery and liquor sales in Australia; while there is some dispute regarding the extent of their market share, it lies somewhere between 68–77% of sales (Deloitte Access Economics, 2012; Merrett & Smith, 2013; Spencer & Kneebone, 2012). All supermarkets operate seven days per week and have varying opening hours, with Coles and Woolworths offering the most extended hours from 6–7am through to 10pm – midnight. Figure 7 depicts some of the variety of supermarkets in the ACT accessed either directly in a suburban shopping centre or within a mall.

Photos: G. O’Kane

Figure 7: Supermarkets in Canberra

The contents of this thesis

This thesis contains a further nine chapters. Chapter 2 contains the literature review, which uses two explanatory frameworks to guide the reader: one for the global food system, and one
for local food systems. It begins by discussing the challenges of the current dominant food system, followed by the responses that have been mounted to address these challenges. It delves into the food discourses from sociology and food cultural studies, which are notably different to most found in the realm of public health nutrition. Much of the literature to date reveals people’s motivations for using particular food procurement environments, but it does not examine commonalities and particularities in people’s meaning-making of food across different food procurement environments. Nor does it explore people’s participation in their chosen food system. These are two major gaps in the literature that this research will make a contribution towards satisfying, as it uncovers possible pathways to food citizenship.

Much of the food system literature pits the ‘dominant’ or ‘conventional’ food system against the ‘alternative’ food systems, in ways that suggest that the challenges of our modern food system lie firmly with the ‘dominant’ system, while ‘alternative’ food systems are idealised and uncritically appraised as the panacea for food system sustainability (Goodman & Goodman, 2007; Holloway et al., 2007; Sumner, Mair, & Nelson, 2010). Such language fails to capture the true complexities of our contemporary food systems, but finding more precise language can be elusive. In place of ‘alternative’ food system, I use ‘local’ food system to eschew the political overtones of the word ‘alternative’ where appropriate, but ‘dominant’ or ‘conventional’ still remain within my vocabulary. Maxey (2007) uses the term ‘sustainable food’ rather than ‘alternative food’ to circumvent the conventional–alternative divide, acknowledging that our relationship to food and food provisioning is heterogeneous and dynamic. I applaud this nuanced thinking and use of language and apply it when possible throughout this thesis.

Chapter 3 explains the methodology and methods chosen to conduct this qualitative research project. Although the choice of narrative inquiry methodology was not an obvious fit with my scientific background, it was a natural fit for the research question I wanted to answer. You will discover that I found the research journey to be a rich and rewarding one. Some narrative researchers use the words ‘story’ and ‘narrative’ interchangeably (Riessman, 2008), but I have chosen to use the word ‘story’ when describing people’s personal stories that project ideas proximal to them, and ‘narrative’ to describe a story that evolves from a combination of stories to capture complex ideas that are more distal to particular individuals.

Chapters 4 to 8 present the voices, views and experiences of the five groups of food procurers. Each chapter has an accompanying illustration and a three-dimensional model that helps to
capture the essence of each narrative and to represent the key findings. The models portray a ‘moveable feast’ from the perspective of each group of food procurers. The three narratives from the local food systems come first, followed by the two representing the dominant food system. In each chapter, the narratives are presented first, using the words and stories of the participants, followed by an analysis of their ‘moveable feast,’ which incorporates the pertinent literature.

Chapter 4 presents the community gardeners narrative, where you will read of the pleasures of gardening and the learning that takes place in the community gardening space. The CSA narrative follows, which tells the story of a small group of people who enjoy ‘painless’ shopping, receiving their weekly food parcels tied up with ‘real string’ from their beloved producer. The boisterous farmers’ market shopping group enter the story in chapter 6. This group of shoppers simply love ‘the event’ on a Saturday morning, where they get to meet up with like-minded friends, chat to the farmers and buy their fresh, flavoursome food. Next is the narrative that combines the stories of those who attend either the Belconnen or Fyshwick fresh food markets. Similar to the farmers’ market shoppers, this group of shoppers love ‘the theatre’ of the markets and catching up with family, neighbours and acquaintances. In chapter 8, you will meet the supermarket shoppers, who will describe their shopping experiences in candid, often humorous ways that will leave you in no doubt that shopping in supermarkets is all about speed!

In chapter 9, you will find the narrative that traces the commonalities and particularities across all five narratives, revealing a complex pathway to food citizenship. You will learn that as a narrative inquirer, I was situated in the three dimensional space of people, place and time throughout the research process, so a three-dimensional model to tell my story about food and food citizenship was entirely consistent. A static model could not adequately reveal the varying importance of people, place and time on meaning-making of food for the five different groups of food procurers. It needed to be a moveable, three-dimensional model—‘a moveable feast’! I had heard the expression before, but could not remember its origin. From a religious perspective, it pertains to moveable feast days, such as Easter (Martin, 2014), but it was also a metaphor used by Ernest Hemingway. He told his friend, ‘If you are lucky enough to have lived in Paris as a young man, then wherever you go for the rest of your life, it stays with you, for Paris is a moveable feast’ (Hotchner, 1966, p.55). It was such a thrill to find that this metaphor had been used by one of the great 20th century novelists for its consistency with
my methodological choices. It was also ideal for its resonance with the stories of many of my participants, who spoke animatedly of their memories of significant people and places that influenced their great love of food, which they have carried with them over the years.

The final chapter considers the implications of this research and future directions. I invite you now to pour a favourite drink and find a comfortable chair in which to sit as you read and interpret this story; my story of ‘a moveable feast’. Enjoy!
Chapter 2: The challenges facing the dominant food system and the responses to them at the individual and community level

To come to a better understanding of the pathways to food citizenship, it is first necessary to establish what is currently understood in this field. This chapter begins by briefly tracing the historical development of the modern food system, including some discussion of the power relationships within this system. It outlines its impact on the environment and food supply and then evaluates the social and health costs that are the unintended outcomes of this system. Consideration is then given to the current knowledge about customers’ experiences in the dominant food system—through supermarkets and grocery stores—and the way these consumers value food. This review then examines the potential role of local systems in addressing the negative impacts of the dominant system, from social, economic and environmental perspectives. It evaluates the existing knowledge of people’s motivations and meaning-making of food for those who participate in these food systems. Finally, ‘food citizenship’ will be discussed from a theoretical perspective before exploring consumers’ current engagement with sustainable and ethical consumption practices. The literature incorporated into this review is from English language texts and mostly come from North America, Europe, the United Kingdom (UK), and Australasia, as these continents are highly engaged in the global food system and have the means to sustain academic research.

Explanatory frameworks

I have created two explanatory frameworks based on previous work (O'Kane, 2012), which represents my conceptualisation of the literature in relation to the global and several local food systems. These frameworks provide the structure to analyse what is currently understood about contemporary food systems and people’s experiences of it, while arguing for the need to understand people’s meaning-making of food, their participation in the food system and, possible pathways to food citizenship more fully. The first framework (figure 8) explains the upstream processes of the current globalised food system, through intervening outcomes to system outcomes, which provides the background for this research. These processes are discussed first, followed by what is currently known of consumers’ experiences of the dominant food system through their interactions with supermarkets and grocery stores.
Upstream influences on the current food system

Globalisation

The current global food system faces major challenges in being able to produce sufficient food in a way that addresses the economic, environmental and social imperatives of sustainability for a growing world population. In the last four decades, the modern industrialised food system has been extremely successful in achieving a doubling of world food production, which has kept pace with world population growth (Pretty, 2002, 2008; Tilman et al., 2002). However, these increases have not been uniform across the globe. It seems extraordinary that there are more than one billion people who suffer from food insecurity and malnutrition (IAASTD, 2009), mostly in the developing world, while there are others suffering from chronic disease as a result of overconsumption (Ikerd, 2006; Pretty, 2002; Tilman, 1999). Much of the growth in obesity and chronic disease is now occurring in developing countries undergoing a ‘nutrition transition’, where consumption of foods high in...
fats and sugars is rising, driven by urbanisation and globalisation, replacing traditional starchy, high-fibre staples (Hawkes, 2006; Popkin, 1998). With global population projections at around 9 billion people by 2050, the demand for global crop production is expected to increase by 100–110% between 2005 and 2050 (Tilman, Balzar, Hill, & Beford, 2011). This increase in demand is not just driven by the predicted rise in population, but also by expected increases in per capita real income and further shifts in dietary patterns that will include more grain-fed meat (Tilman et al., 2011).

To achieve high production rates, agriculture became more mechanised from 1930 onwards, leading to a reliance on finite stores of fossil fuels to run large machinery and pumped irrigation systems, and to produce artificial nitrogen fertilisers (Horrigan, Lawrence, & Walker, 2002; Kirschenmann, 2008; Pretty, 2002). With increasing mechanisation has come larger farms and fewer farmers (Lawrence, 1999; Pretty, 2002). In an attempt to gain production efficiencies, farmers began growing specialised crops such that in 1997 three main grains—wheat, maize and rice—accounted for more than half of all plant-based food energy and 85% of the total volume of world grains produced (FAO, 1997; Weis, 2007). In more recent years there has been a growing awareness of the need for agricultural plant diversity and there have been improvements, but more still needs to be done to protect plant diversity (FAO, 2010).

**Power and politics in the globalised food system**

The industrialised food system that has given rise to these increases in production and inequities has been developing for centuries, but it has been since the Bretton Woods conference in 1944 that a new era of global food trade started to emerge. Three supranational institutions, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) were established to facilitate economic growth and trade across the world. In 1994, member nations of GATT created the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to set trade rules and settle disputes between nations (Norberg-Hodge, Merrifield, & Gorelick, 2002).

However, it is the wealthy industrialised nations that benefit most from globalisation (Kutting, 2004; McMichael, 2000). Large transnational food companies, often based in the global north, wield the most power in WTO negotiations (Kutting, 2004; McMichael, 2000). Their sheer capital base and use of horizontal and vertical integration strategies—whereby smaller,
similar or complementary companies are purchased to prevent competition—allows them to control the food system and dominate world markets (Lawrence & Grice, 2008). Agricultural restructuring in recent decades has also meant that retailers and food manufacturers increasingly determine what farmers grow, providing strict specifications of their requirements in contractual arrangements, leaving farmers with less control over what they produce (Lawrence & Grice, 2008).

Supermarkets are also exerting greater control over the food production sector by manufacturing their own ‘private’ label products, often sourcing cheaper raw ingredients from overseas sources rather than locally (Burch & Lawrence, 2005). The food retailing sector has become increasingly concentrated across most of the developed world (Lawrence & Burch, 2007), but none more so than in Australia and New Zealand (Merrett & Smith, 2013). Consumers’ views and experiences of these changes in food production, distribution and retailing need to be more closely examined if they are expected to engage in more sustainable consumption practices in the future.

**Consequences of the current food system: Food as a commodity**

Today’s modern globalised food system trades food as a commodity, just like any other item in the marketplace. As a result, according to some researchers, linking food production to a particular place—and thereby that place’s cultural and historical significance—rarely occurs (McMichael, 2000; Pretty, 2002). People have become disconnected from nature and the way that food is produced, so many care little about the degradation that has occurred in the environment or just fail to notice. In parallel with this phenomenon, people are encouraged to think that their food comes from multinational companies rather than from farmers and the earth (Pretty, 2002). This has resulted in an acceptance of an anonymous and homogeneous food supply, which has contributed to the rise in diet-related diseases across the globe (Caraher & Coveney, 2004; Hawkes, 2006; Klein, 2001; Pretty, 2002). This change in the role of food within the global food system cannot be ignored, but these generalisations may not resonate with all consumers. There may be some groups of consumers who reject this trend towards viewing food as a mere commodity. This thesis involves speaking to people who use different types of food systems to explore their meaning-making of food. It aims to build a more complete understanding of the way consumers experience food in the modern world.
Intervening outcomes of the current food system

Environmental impact

The industrialised farming practices that have been tailored to achieve maximum productivity for economic gain have led to a myriad of inadvertent environmental costs (Conacher & Conacher, 1995; Godfray et al., 2010; Horrigan et al., 2002; Pretty, 2002; Tilman et al., 2002). Intensive agriculture has led to land degradation, so there is now a steady decline in arable land worldwide (Godfray et al., 2010; Horrigan et al., 2002; Tilman et al., 2002). In countries such as the USA and Australia, which have implemented programs to improve soil erosion, the impact of soil erosion is still high (Campbell, 2008; Kirschenmann, 2008; National Land and Water Resources Audit, 2001). The modern agricultural system affects water resources by diverting water from other potential uses (Horrigan et al., 2002; Pretty, 2008; State of the Environment 2011 Committee, 2011) and by reducing water quality through pollution caused by high use of fertilizers and pesticides, and through increased sediment and salt loads that occur as a result of soil erosion and salinity (Beeton et al., 2006; Horrigan et al., 2002; State of the Environment 2011 Committee, 2011; Tilman et al., 2002).

Australia’s eco-system is not very resilient to external pressures and, as a result of extensive land clearing for agricultural purposes and overgrazing, biodiversity is in serious decline (Beeton et al., 2006; Department of the Environment, 2009; Sattler & Creighton, 2002). Monocropping also relies heavily on the use of artificial pesticides to avoid disease and pest damage to crops, which further reduces biodiversity (Horrigan et al., 2002; Johnson, 1999). Many of the genetically uniform high yielding crop varieties commonly used in modern agriculture are often less resistant to pathogens and pests, which threatens the sustainability of the current food system (Heller & Keoleian, 2000; Margosian, Garrett, Hutchinson, & With, 2009).

The final way in which modern industrialised agriculture affects the environment is through its contribution to climate change (Beeton et al., 2006; Godfray et al., 2010; Horrigan et al., 2002; Land and Water Australia, 2008), which amounts to 10-12% of greenhouse gas emissions globally (Smith et al., 2007). Energy use from fuel and electricity also contribute to greenhouse gas emissions from the agricultural sector (Land and Water Australia, 2008). Beyond the food production section of the modern food system, the carbon emissions that are generated through transportation of food also present challenges for the current food system.
The term ‘food miles’ is a proxy measure for the distance that food travels from paddock to plate, but in fact, the impact of food transport on the environment depends more on the type of transportation than the actual distance (Saunders, Barber, & Taylor, 2006). For instance, carbon emissions generated from food transported by boat are nearly four times lower than the carbon emissions from food transported in large trucks (Saunders et al., 2006).

Global food waste across the entire food system amounts to approximately one-third of edible food produced, which has a negative impact on food security, economic development and the environment (Gustavsson, Cederberg, & Sonesson, 2011). In wealthier countries, a high proportion of food waste occurs at the household end of the food chain (Godfray et al., 2010; Gustavsson et al., 2011), much of which ends up in landfill, where it rots and emits methane (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2013). In USA, 20% of all methane emissions are generated from landfill (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2013), so producing food that is not consumed adds unnecessary carbon emissions from food production, all the way through to waste disposal.

Food procurers’ understanding of the environmental implications of the conventional food system is central to this research. There is a need to establish their views on these issues, and more importantly, to understand more about those who are taking action through their food procurement to avert further damage to the environment.

Social and economic impact

Apart from these environmental costs, the social costs of our current food system are also significant. The success of farms and food businesses depend on people working together for a common purpose, which depends on the civility of the society (Ikerd, 2006). Social capital is described by Putnam (2000) as the quantity and quality of social relationships, civic participation, norms of reciprocity and trust that exist in a community—which have all traditionally been high in rural communities (Lawrence, 2005). However, the food system as it functions today weakens personal relationships between farmers, and between farmers and food processors and retailers because of its competitive nature (Ikerd, 2006; Renting & Van Der Ploeg, 2001). To survive financially, farmers have had to sacrifice long term sustainability for higher productivity to compete in world markets, making it difficult to stay viable in the industry (Lawrence, 2005; McMichael & Lawrence, 2001). Furthermore, with a depressed agricultural economy, supporting rural industries also struggle to survive, leading
to the decline in the size and vitality of rural communities and diminished social capital (Conacher & Conacher, 1995; Lawrence, 2005). Urban populations’ awareness and concern for the decline in rural economies and social capital requires further investigation, if there is to be involvement by urban food procurers in food citizenship. This thesis aims to explore with predominantly urban food procurers, their connections to others, especially farmers, in their chosen food system. It also seeks to understand how these connections, or lack thereof, affect people’s food choices and pathways to food citizenship.

Food and nutrition impact

The nutritional impact of the current food system on the consumer is insidious. The literature from the USA provides a comprehensive illustration of the disturbing intermediate outcomes of the globalised food system for food and nutrition. The estimated average adult energy intake in the USA in the 1970s was 10.07MJ/day, but by the turn of the century this had increased to 12.16MJ/day (Swinburn, Sacks, & Ravussin, 2009). Between 1970 and 1996, there was a 22% increase in the amount of fats and oils in the food supply, and a 23% increase in consumption of sugars and sweeteners (Kantor, 1999). Between 1997 and 2007, there was a doubling of the number of fast-food restaurants in the USA (Powell, Chaloupka, & Bao, 2007) and sales through restaurants have increased 14 fold since the 1970s (National Restaurant Association, 2011). Energy dense fast foods may undermine people’s normal satiety mechanism and induce passive over-consumption (Prentice & Jebb, 2003). In Australia, similar trends appear to be developing. Comparing national dietary survey data from 1983 and 1995 shows that the mean energy consumption of Australian adults living in cities increased by about 3-4% or about 350kJ/day over that period (Cook, Rutishauser, & Seelig, 2001; Stubbs & Lee, 2004). Preliminary data from the most recent national dietary survey of 2011–2012 show that 35% of total energy consumed by Australians aged two years and over comes from ‘discretionary foods’, which have little nutritional value. The main discretionary foods and beverages consumed by Australians are alcohol, soft drinks, cakes, muffins, confectionary, pastries and biscuits (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014b).

System outcomes of the current food system

The next section of this review demonstrates the way in which consumers experience the effects of the intervening outcomes of the dominant food system. Although the negative health and social effects of the modern food system are not central to this research project,
understanding the extent of the issues provides clues to the type of food system communities might prefer and from which they might benefit. In such communities, it is probable that people can begin to adopt food-related behaviours that may lead to more ‘democratic, socially and economically just, and environmentally sustainable food systems’ (Wilkins, 2005, p. 271).

**Obesity and chronic disease**

According to global estimates, in 2005 there were 1.6 billion overweight people over 15 years of age and a further 400 million people who were obese, with projections that by 2015 there will be 2.3 billion overweight people and 700 million obese (World Health Organisation, 2006). Figures from 2010 show that nearly three quarters of the adult population in USA is classified as being above the healthy weight range (Ogden & Carroll, 2010). In Australia, between 1995 and 2007/8, there was a growth in the proportion of people who were overweight or obese, from 64% to 68% for men and 49% to 55% for women (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009). Diet-related diseases accounted for the highest mortality and morbidity levels in Australia in 2007, and they were amongst the top seven disease groups that accounted for nearly half of the health budget for 2004/5 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010).

**Food insecurity**

Research from both the USA and Australia has found that there are more fast-food restaurants in lower than higher income neighbourhoods (Powell et al., 2007; Thornton, Bentley, & Kavanagh, 2009). Cheap, energy dense foods are preferred by those who are food insecure, because these foods supply more energy for each dollar spent; however, too much energy is consumed, and excess weight results (Drewnowski & Specter, 2004). Food retailing has changed over the past four decades such that large supermarkets, which often provide a greater variety of fresh food more cheaply than smaller corner stores, are less accessible without car transport (Guy, Clarke, & Eyre, 2004; Nolan, Rikard-Bell, Mohsin, & Williams, 2006; O'Dwyer & Coveney, 2006). This change in the food retailing environment has led to the development of ‘food deserts’: places where people experience both economic and geographical barriers to accessing healthy food (Beaumont, Lang, Leather, & Mucklow, 1995; Guy et al., 2004; O'Dwyer & Coveney, 2006). This research does not specifically recruit those who are food insecure, but food procurers’ understanding of ‘community’ within their chosen
food procurement environment will be explored. These conversations may uncover people’s views about social inclusiveness and the ability for everyone to access healthy, fresh food.

**An unsustainable food system**

This body of literature demonstrates that the globalised food system—which promotes competitiveness, devalues personal relationships, discourages connections with nature and with food producers and imposes the substantial environmental, social and health costs—cannot remain sustainable (Bambrick, 2005; Feenstra, 2002). None of the environmental costs that come from the production and transport of food are included in the cost of food for the consumer. It will be up to future generations to pay for these hidden externalities of our current, ‘efficient’ agricultural production and distribution methods (Norberg-Hodge et al., 2002; Pretty, 2002; Wilkins, 1995). The sustainability of the food system may not be central to the concerns of all food procurers. When it comes to procuring food, some, perhaps most people’s personal values and preferences may be considered more important than the sustainability of the current food system. If there is to be a better understanding of pathways to food citizenship, different groups of food procurers’ concerns about the sustainability of the food system and their contribution towards improving it need to be examined.

**Consumers’ experiences in the dominant food system**

The dominant group of food procurers in western countries are the supermarket and grocery store shoppers. This section reviews the scholarly literature that has been documented to date about this group’s experiences of shopping. It provides a theoretical understanding of the complexity of food choice, as well as current knowledge of shoppers’ motivations for using these stores. It also presents some shoppers’ concerns about the current food system and their subsequent reactions. Consumers’ experiences of the modern food system occur at the ‘intervening outcomes’ level of the system, as they purchase the food made available to them by the system (figure 8).

Bridging the globalised food system to the domestic world of food choice is one that most consumers undertake on a regular basis (Cook, Crang, & Thorpe, 1998). The private and usually mundane activities of purchasing, using and eating food within a household extend into the public arena, as these decisions are both shaped by and have an impact on the global food system (Cook et al., 1998). For example, if a consumer wishes to purchase a free-trade
product, their ability to choose depends on availability and accessibility of these products at the local level. In reverse, choosing free-range eggs or chicken has consequences for those who produce it, usually in a distant location (Cook et al., 1998).

Price is still a major driver for most people’s food purchases, especially for those on lower incomes (Chambers, Lobb, Butler, Harvey, & Traill, 2007; Ellaway & Macintyre, 2000; Glanz, Basil, Maiback, Goldberg, & Snyder, 1998; Steenhuis, Waterlander, & de Mul, 2011). Other factors, such as sensory appeal (Falk, Bisogni, & Sobal, 1996; Glanz et al., 1998; Steenhuis et al., 2011), range of goods on offer (Chambers et al., 2007), and nutrition and health (Glanz et al., 1998) also feature in the literature.

Complexity of food choice

Food choice is a complex activity, but Furst and colleagues (1996) developed a food choice model, using a constructionist approach, that helps to simplify and analyse the decision-making processes. This model, which has been developed further by Sobal and colleagues (2006) has three major components: ‘life course’, ‘influences’ and ‘personal system’, which incorporates food choice decisions that are based on conscious reflection and those that are automatic or habitual (Furst et al., 1996; Sobal et al., 2006). ‘Life course’ includes the social, cultural and physical environments to which an individual has been and is exposed (Falk et al., 1996; Furst et al., 1996; Sobal et al., 2006). It is the experiences of people’s life course that subsequently forms the basis of the ‘influences’ that affect food choice. The five influences explained by this model are ideals, personal factors, resources, social framework and food context. These influences then inform and shape people’s personal systems—a mix of conscious, dynamic value negotiations and unconscious, habitual and routine strategies that people employ when making food choices in any given situation (Furst et al., 1996; Sobal et al., 2006).

Giddens (1990) suggests that in the past, people based their decisions about future action on traditions handed down from previous generations, requiring little conscious thought. Traditions were not entirely static, as the next generation re-interpreted and reinvented the cultural heritage it received from those who came before (Giddens, 1990). In contrast, in the modern era, people are inundated with information from across the globe through technology, travel, migration and the media (Beagan, Ristovski-Slijepcevic, & Chapman, 2010; Giddens, 1990). This new found knowledge provides people with an array of options that requires them
to make choices for themselves, after careful consideration of their individual values and priorities (Beagan et al., 2010; Giddens, 1990). This self-conscious, self-aware and very deliberate way of making choices in daily life is what constitutes reflexivity (Adams, 2006; Beagan et al., 2010).

As already stated, not all food choices are thoughtful; they can also be habitual or routine. Halkier (2001) introduces the notion of ‘practices’, which are the activities that people undertake in everyday life, as either actions or routines. ‘Actions’, are intentionally chosen activities that have been arrived at after conscious consideration by an individual, and can be articulated explicitly (Halkier, 2001). Reflexivity may be intentional, but not necessarily rational in the strict sense (Halkier, 2001), which may have consequences when choosing food. Alternatively ‘routines’ are denoted by a continuous stream of activity that is taken for granted and form a person’s tacit knowledge base (Halkier, 2001). Within the theory of social practices, ‘practice’ is considered a routinized behaviour that contains several interconnected elements that include bodily functions, mental activities, know-how and motivational knowledge (Reckwitz, 2002). In essence, practices, such as shopping and cooking, are both doings and sayings that are co-ordinated through people’s understandings, procedures and engagement (Warde, 2005). Warde (2005) argues that people’s different approaches to everyday practices offer an alternative way to differentiate social behaviours beyond the usual socio-demographic factors. It is through contrasting understandings, levels of competence and degrees of involvement in practices that behavioural variation can also be generated (Warde, 2005).

However, the food choice model (Furst et al., 1996), despite its usefulness in some contexts (Falk et al., 1996), is not sufficient to explain people’s engagement in food behaviours that relate to the development of more sustainable food systems. This thesis adds additional insights into consumers’ food choices that focus on the collective good, not just on choices that reflect personal or family food preferences. It will explore people’s everyday practices of procuring, cooking and consuming food, according to the type of food system used and whether there are differences in understandings, procedures and engagement in these practices, across the different groups.
The importance of time and demographics in assessing shopping behaviour

Change in gender roles within households has occurred in recent decades, just as food choice has become more complex. The activities and responsibilities involved in maintaining family life, such as providing food, clothing and shelter, is classified as social reproduction, which has traditionally been the domain of women (Laslett & Brenner, 1989; Szabo, 2011). However, with few women at home full-time today, most people have to balance the demands of employment and social reproduction. This creates more pressures on time and energy in households (Jabs & Devine, 2006), with shorter blocks of time available for food-related activities (Szabo, 2011).

The importance of time in people’s lives and how much of it is devoted to food purchasing is one matter that features prominently in the current literature (Barton, Kearney, & Stewart-Knox, 2011; Clarke et al., 2004; Warde, 1999; Warde, Cheng, Olsen, & Southerton, 2007). Many people perceive that they have insufficient time to complete all necessary daily tasks, which is part of the attraction of convenience in modern life (Jabs & Devine, 2006; Warde, 1999). According to Warde (1999, p. 522), we have become ‘the society of the schedule’ as we try to include more activities into the day by arranging and re-arranging their sequence. In his view, it is not so much about having less time available, but more about the way in which people manipulate time or the timing of activities, which often causes people, particularly women, to feel constantly harried (Warde, 1999). For example, supermarkets, with extended shopping hours that also offer suitable parking facilities, enable householders to re-arrange their daily schedules to suit their personal circumstances. Householders can multi-task to maximise the logistics of time and space by going past the supermarket on their way home from work (Webber, Sobal, & Dollahite, 2010), rather than setting aside time during the day or on the week-end to shop for groceries. With the shopping taken care of after work, more time is available for transporting children to and from extra-curricular activities or engaging in personal interest pursuits (Warde, 1999).

Similarly, while some people may consider cooking well worth their time and effort (Jabs & Devine, 2006), others prefer convenience food; a choice that may be driven by a desire to allow more time for leisure and social activities, including children’s activities (Barton et al., 2011). As two focus group participants in a UK study explained: ‘it’s got a lot to do with the fast pace of life. Everything’s more convenient now and it gives you more time to do things socially’, and ‘like kids have got youth clubs and that to go to. It’s the time element. It all
depends on how much time you have’ (Barton et al., 2011, p. 376). In these circumstances, food preparation, like shopping, becomes an activity that is fitted around other responsibilities, family routines or pleasures, which suggests that it is not a household activity of high priority (Clarke et al., 2004).

Research also shows that there are differences in the way men and women approach shopping. A study in the USA by Noble and colleagues (2006) found that men appear to be more interested in seeking information and convenience than women, while women are more prone to uniqueness, assortment seeking, social interactions and browsing. Convenience was defined as minimizing time costs for the customer, while maximising shopping opportunities by having sufficient product assortment; it was also concerned with greater access to the shops through extended shopping hours (Noble et al., 2006). The study also found that women were more loyal to local shops than men; the authors theorized that women were guided by communal concerns, not just for their own personal connections to the community, but also to maintain a sense of community, of which the local retailers are a part (Noble et al., 2006). Similar research in Australia found that when supermarket shopping, men were more interested in speed and efficiency than helpful staff or friendly and accurate checkout operators. Their main aim was to complete the shopping task as fast as possible (Mortimer & Clarke, 2011).

Other demographic variables, such as income, life-stage and education, also have an impact on people’s attitude to shopping and shopping behaviour. The authors of a quantitative study in Belgium categorised customers into four groups, based on their income and available time: money-poor, time-rich; money-poor, time-poor; money-rich, time-rich; and money-rich, time-poor (Van Kenhove & De Wulf, 2000). Regardless of whether people were money-rich or money-poor, the results showed that time-poor customers did not like grocery shopping, while time-rich customers did enjoy it. The time-poor customers wanted to find what they needed quickly and get served as efficiently as possible at the check-out. The money-rich, time-poor and the money-rich, time-rich customers preferred one-stop shopping, with the authors suggesting that the former do not have the time or the need to shop in different stores, while the latter might prefer one-stop shopping because of their age (Van Kenhove & De Wulf, 2000). A UK study with older people (Madgwick & Ravenscroft, 2011) found that those with cars preferred to shop at one supermarket where parking is free and easily available, which adds weight to the suppositions presented by Van Kenhove and De Wulf (2000).
The place to shop depends on accessibility and convenience

Different approaches to shopping according to gender and perceived time available are not the only factors that have an impact on the shopping experience. Some of the most influential factors affecting where people purchase their food are based on accessibility, convenience, price, range of goods on offer and the services available in the store (Clarke et al., 2004). Most people use one main store in which to do their larger weekly shop, but then top up at a local store (Clarke et al., 2004). Some people exercise their choice by travelling further to the places where they prefer to shop, but others abrogate those choices by remaining with the stores with which they are familiar and that comply with their household habits and routines (Clarke et al., 2004). Older participants in a small UK study were prepared to travel to multiple, favourite stores to purchase tasty, good value food and to fulfil their cultural connections, but still used the supermarket for bulk items and convenience foods (Madgwick & Ravenscroft, 2011). In another qualitative study in the UK, many thought that it would be an enjoyable and worthwhile experience to shop for local foods, but they did not do so on a routine basis, owing to lack of time and opportunity (Chambers et al., 2007).

However, there are shoppers who are aware of some of the shortfalls of the food system, including supermarkets, but continue to use them for their cost competitiveness and convenience. Some customers express dissatisfaction with current production and distribution methods, but prefer to either not think about it (Duffy, Fearne, & Healing, 2005) or make pragmatic decisions based on price (Beagan et al., 2010; Duffy et al., 2005; McEachern, Warnaby, Carrigan, & Szmigin, 2010) and lack of time to source food from other stores or outlets (Colasanti, Conner, & Smalley, 2010; Duffy et al., 2005; McEachern et al., 2010). For example, in a recent Australian study, both young and old shoppers preferred to use large supermarkets because it was quick, easy, and offered good parking facilities, but this did not mean they were satisfied with the shopping experience (Dixon & Isaacs, 2013). The older members of the community spoke of not trusting the large supermarkets and were saddened by the decline in social interactions while shopping, but they still made use of them. Those with young families stated a preference for purchasing fresh food from smaller stores, but they did not necessarily support such businesses, and instead shopped at the supermarket for convenience and to save time (Dixon & Isaacs, 2013). This research will explore whether these contradictions are peculiar to supermarket shoppers alone, or whether they occur in other food procurement environments. Part of developing a deeper knowledge of possible
pathways to food citizenship requires delving into the complexity of people’s decision-making processes, which includes ascertaining some of the road blocks to achieving desired outcomes.

The motivation for most consumers using supermarkets lies with convenience and the speed and efficiency with which shopping can be completed (Madgwick & Ravenscroft, 2011; Mortimer & Clarke, 2011; Noble et al., 2006; Webber et al., 2010), often to free up time for other activities (Barton et al., 2011; Clarke et al., 2004; Warde, 1999). The research to date indicates that many, particularly those who are ‘time-poor,’ do not enjoy the food shopping experience (Van Kenhove & De Wulf, 2000). If supermarket shopping is an unenjoyable activity and approached by shoppers with as much speed and efficiency as possible, it may be difficult to become a food citizen. Understanding people’s time constraints is an important knowledge-base from which to further explore other aspects of people’s experiences while shopping, especially any relationships with others that develop while food shopping.

Some previous research, introduced above, indicates that older people miss the social interactions of shopping in smaller stores since the advent of supermarkets (Dixon & Isaacs, 2013), and that older people (Madgwick & Ravenscroft, 2011) and women (Noble et al., 2006) tend to enjoy shopping where they can enjoy a sense of community. This desire by women and older people to participate more in the shopping experience and form relationships with shopkeepers and the wider community is a useful leverage point from which to further examine connections between the time devoted to food procurement and the development of relationships within the food system. Changing from a passive consumer to a food citizen requires participation in shaping the food system into one that is more socially and economically just, and environmentally sustainable (Hassanein, 2003; Wilkins, 2005).

Knowing more about the value people place on developing relationships with others in the food system, especially those who sell them their food, will help to build a greater understanding of pathways to food citizenship, for all groups of food procurers.

While many studies report that people select food on the basis of price (Chambers et al., 2007; Ellaway & Macintyre, 2000; Glanz et al., 1998; Steenhuis et al., 2011) taste (Falk et al., 1996) and nutrition and health (Glanz et al., 1998), there is still little understanding of people’s meaning-making of food in the supermarket shopping context. Becoming a food citizen requires making food choices that move beyond meeting individual requirements for health and well-being, to those that will benefit society and the environment (Wilkins, 2005). This
thesis aims to make important links between people’s participation in the food system, their relationships to food and what these relationships mean about their engagement with food citizenship.

Finally, much of the previous research presented in this review examined people’s experiences of shopping across particular demographic variables, particularly gender and age (Mortimer & Clarke, 2011; Noble et al., 2006; Van Kenhove & De Wulf, 2000), which fails to capture other layers of complexity in the food procurement experience. This thesis examines the experiences of food procurers based on their chosen food system to ascertain the way in which these choices offer a better understanding of the pathways to food citizenship.

**Local food systems as an emerging response to the dominant food systems**

The second explanatory framework, shown in figure 9, shows the upstream influences on local food systems, followed by their intervening outcomes. The current social, economic and environmental impacts of local food systems are discussed as a whole, as much of the literature covers each of these elements together. Within this discussion there will be an evaluation of the politics of local food systems before moving to what is understood, at this stage, about the systemic outcomes of local food systems.
Upstream influences on local food systems

In spite of many consumers’ ambivalence about how much they need to know about the origins of their food and their impulse to forget (Cook et al., 1998), there are now a growing number of consumers who are asking more questions about the way food is being produced, where it is being produced, and by whom (Goodman & Goodman, 2009; Turner & Hope, 2014). They are seeking alternative ways to source their food that endeavour to curb the environmental impact of the global food system and address its social and economic injustices (Goodman & Goodman, 2009; Turner & Hope, 2014). The local food system models being used by these consumers include farmers’ markets, community-supported agricultural enterprises (CSAs), roadside stands, box schemes, pick-your-own enterprises and community gardens (DeLind, 2003; Feenstra, 1997; King, 2008; Kingsley, Townsend, & Henderson-Wilson, 2009; Pretty & Hine, 2001; Schnell, 2007; Wilkins, 1995). Local food systems are not necessarily designed to completely isolate themselves from trade; rather, they aim to adapt local food production and markets to suit the environmental, social, economic and health priorities of a community (Feenstra, 1997).
Intervening outcomes of local food systems

Local food systems are a recent phenomenon, so the intervening and system outcomes of local food systems are still being studied. Kloppenburg and colleagues (1996) provide a set of principles by which to examine the potential roles of local food systems in addressing food system sustainability. These principles are ‘the moral economy’, ‘the commensal community’, ‘proximity’, ‘nature as measure’, and lastly, ‘self-protection, secession and succession’, which forms part of the evaluation of the power and politics of local food systems, in the following section of this review. The principles span the environmental, social and economic components of sustainability, so they are dealt with holistically.

Social, economic and environmental impact

The evocative imagery of the ‘foodshed’, analogous to the geographical term of a ‘watershed’, was introduced by Kloppenburg and colleagues (1996) to visualize the flow of food into a particular place where authentic relationships can develop. Replacing ‘water’ with ‘food’ brings together culture (food) and nature (shed), so that a foodshed becomes the unifying and organizing metaphor for place and people, for nature and society, in the context of a food system (Kloppenburg et al., 1996). Kloppenburg and colleagues’ paper advances a set of guiding principles for developing foodsheds, which is still relevant today, to which they invite others to add. These principles are important to keep in mind, as this research seeks to understand more about pathways to food citizenship. It may be that these foodshed principles are critical to building effective pathways to food citizenship, but there may be additional or alternative principles that this research can reveal.

The moral economy

The first of these principles is the ‘moral economy’, whereby foodsheds re-embed food production within primarily human requirements rather than yielding to the needs of the free-market economy, which is profit driven. In the moral economy, food becomes central to human life, where family, community and civic culture revolves around food production and consumption, allowing close relationships between food producers and consumers to develop (Kloppenburg et al., 1996). Literature from sociology and human geography discusses several related concepts, including ‘social embeddedness’, ‘marketness’, ‘instrumentalism’ and
relations of regard’ with respect to local food systems (Hinrichs, 2000; Kirwan, 2004; Sage, 2003; Seyfang, 2006; Winter, 2003).

‘Social embeddedness’ is concerned with the principles of social connectedness, trust and reciprocity, sometimes described as ‘social capital’ in other literature (Covenev, 2000; Islam, Merlo, Kawachi, Linidstrom, & Gerdtham, 2006; Putnam, 2000). These principles are often associated with local food systems, rather than the dominant food system where personal relationships between the producer and the customer are considered virtually immaterial (Hinrichs, 2000; Kirwan, 2004; Sage, 2003). Granovetter (2011) argues that all markets are influenced by social relationships, even though neoclassical economists claim that competitive markets are devoid of such relationships and operate purely through self-interest.

Hinrichs (2000) values using social embeddedness to evaluate local food systems, but she also draws on other related concepts of marketness and instrumentalism to help provide a more nuanced understanding of the power dynamics at play in these food systems. All economic transactions incorporate some degree of marketness, so that at high levels of marketness, price dominates the transaction, and at low levels of marketness, non-price considerations are elevated in importance (Block, 1990). Similarly, instrumentalism, a measure of motivation, also operates on a continuum in an economic transaction. High instrumentalism occurs when players behave opportunistically to achieve their economic goals, while low instrumentalism occurs when non-economic goals—such as friendship, family ties or morality—take precedence (Block, 1990; Hinrichs, 2000). Hinrichs (2000) argues that while personal connections occur in local food systems, they do not preclude instrumental behaviours or the relevance of price.

Similarly, the concept of ‘regard’, first introduced by Offer (1997), conveys an attitude of esteem, which is granted and pursued through personal interactions and includes acknowledgement, attention, acceptance, respect, reputation and friendship. Regard is communicated through a gift, which can be imparted through language with a simple ‘please’ or ‘thank you,’ but is a powerful incentive for trust (Offer, 1997).

**The Commensal Community**

Closely associated with the concepts described above is the principle of the ‘commensal community’ (Kloppenburg et al., 1996). The word ‘commensal’, derived from the Latin word
‘mensa’, meaning table, refers to those who eat together (Kloppenburg et al., 1996; Sobal & Nelson, 2003). Kloppenburg and colleagues (1996) extend the meaning beyond the family setting and imagine foodsheds as commensal communities that seek to embrace socially and environmentally sustainable food systems, where people work co-operatively to ensure that food is produced without damage to the land and with respect to animals. All people, including marginalized groups, participate in the decision-making processes of the food system and access to food is equitable (Kloppenburg et al., 1996).

**Proximity**

The spatial aspect of the foodshed, ‘proximity’, is a necessary component for developing foodsheds, considering that excessive distance between the place of food production and consumption has become a major problem in the globalised food system (Kloppenburg et al., 1996). As Casey (2001) contends, in our postmodern globalised world, the place-world has been ‘thinned out’ as place merges with space. ‘Place’ is not just a portion of space; it is a ‘setting or landscape of profound meaning and connection to an individual by virtue of personal, direct experiences’ (Lockwood, 1999, p. 368), while ‘space’ is the volumetric void in which things, including people, are positioned (Casey, 2001). Within the globalised food system it no longer matters where food is produced, so there is an increased blurring of a locale of food production with ‘every other place in global space’ (Casey, 2001, p. 684; Feagan, 2007). A foodshed, then, acts in opposition to this merging process, as people re-engage with others and places through relations of regard, and with knowledge of place-histories and food customs, resulting in the ‘thickening’ of the place-world (Feagan, 2007). In Kloppenburg and colleagues’ (1996) view, foodsheds will uphold the principle of relative proximity while having no fixed boundaries, specific locations or regions. The scope of an individual foodshed will be a function of its many overlapping features, such as plant communities, soil types, cultural traditions and culinary patterns. However, in spite of their ill-defined boundaries, foodsheds will still be socially, economically, ethically and physically embedded in particular places (Kloppenburg et al., 1996).

**Nature as measure**

Another important principle of the foodshed is concerned with ensuring that human activity and natural systems work in unison, considering that food produced in a particular place will have constraints on its production, owing to its unique climatic and geographical features
However, these constraints are not viewed negatively; rather, they are viewed as an opportunity to learn respect and affection for the natural world, to embrace regional food, and to eat in harmony with the natural rhythms of the of the places in which we live (Kloppenburg et al., 1996).

**Local food systems – idealism or realism?**

It could be argued that these foodshed principles are too idealistic, but they can be used as a benchmark to assess the extent to which local food systems engage with these principles. Other early discourses on the role of these local food systems came from academics reporting on their observations and interpretations of current activities in these spaces, rather than from empirical evidence (Feenstra, 1997; Peters, 1997; Pretty, 2002; Wilkins, 1995). The common themes discussed in these reports were that local food systems provided access to nutritious food for all; they helped to develop bonds between farmers and their customers; allowed community members to more actively participate in the food system and contributed to social cohesion; encouraged satisfying social and cultural interactions around food; developed social responsibility and stewardship of local land; supported biodiversity; and enhanced a community’s economic vitality (Feenstra, 1997; Peters, 1997; Pretty, 2002; Wilkins, 1995). It would appear from this work that local food systems have been elaborating on Kloppenburg and colleagues’ (1996) foodshed principles with vigour.

However, whether the foodshed principles underpin people’s meaning-making of food, particularly amongst those who use local food systems, remains unclear. This research seeks to illuminate more about the factors that are important to consumers’ meaning-making of food. It also strives to understand whether these principles, or other hitherto unidentified principles, drive sustainable food practices amongst food procurers and enable them to become food citizens.

**Politics and power in local food systems**

In spite of the potential gains for improved social, economic and environmental outcomes through local food systems, it would be naïve to think that politics only occurs in the globalised food system. There is already dispute over whether the turn to local food systems represents a radical rejection of the dominant food system or merely an incremental or niche phenomenon undertaken by particular groups within communities (Jackson, Ward, & Russell,
Direct marketing through local food systems may only serve to irritate the dominant, corporate food sector, rather than transform the entire food system (Feagan, Morris, & Krug, 2004; Hassanein, 2003; Kirwan, 2004). Kloppenburg and colleagues (1996) suggest that, rather than simple reform, a fundamental transformation of the dominant food system is necessary. They note that some groups on the margins of contemporary society, such as home gardeners, seed savers, perennial polyculturalists and others, have ‘seceded’ or withdrawn from the dominant system or created alternatives; others are more interested in ‘succession’, which is more of a conscious or incremental move of resources or human commitment from the dominant food system to the foodshed (Kloppenburg et al., 1996).

Apart from contention over whether the move to local food systems ought to be radical or incremental, several authors also suggest that there is a danger that local food systems may become exclusive and inward-looking, providing niche markets for expensive foods—sometimes labelled ‘yuppie chow’—rather than food systems that focus on equitable food access and community food security (Feagan et al., 2004; Hinrichs, 2003; Winter, 2003). Hinrichs (2003) argues that there will need to be a far more fundamental change at a societal level before local food systems, which address social justice concerns, become the principal sources of food. There is limited research in the Australian context about the exclusivity of farmers’ markets and the relative cost of food at farmers’ markets and supermarkets. One study comparing the cost of fruit and vegetables at farmers’ markets and supermarkets showed that there were no significant differences in the cost of these foods, nor in terms of food quality, as assessed by the researchers (Millichamp & Gallegos, 2012). So, the criticisms levelled at farmers’ markets elsewhere, may not be applicable in the Australian setting.

There is also the fear that marketing campaigns promoting local foods focus too heavily on appealing to the individual consumer, rather than promoting collective responsibility for building community and more just and sustainable food systems (DeLind, 2011; Hinrichs & Allen, 2008). Populist slogans to ‘buy local’, used by medium to large retailers, can also very quickly lose sight of the particular; that is, particular ecologies of place, where relationships between people and their environment have the opportunity to grow and develop in their own unique way over time (DeLind, 2011). Local food systems, according to DeLind (2011), need to remain ‘place-based,’ where people’s identities, memories and meaning is tied to place, and where a sense of the collective is nurtured through community building.
These critiques of local food systems that challenge the likelihood of these systems being able to achieve a just and sustainable food system are welcome. Food democracy and food citizenship require a level of political engagement as people take responsibility for identifying food system problems and then participate in finding solutions to them (Hassanein, 2003, 2008; Wilkins, 2005). The degree to which people must ‘secede’ or ‘succeed’ from the dominant food system to achieve desirable food system outcomes is still not clear. This thesis aims to shed more light on how far people are prepared and able to secede from the dominant food system. It will explore the factors that motivate them to do so and their meaning-making of food, which may include a connection to place and to others. These factors will help to map a better understanding of the pathways to food citizenship and, ultimately, to more sustainable food systems.

**System outcomes of local food systems**

The evidence that local food systems are less detrimental to the environment than the current food system is still not clear. Organics are common in these systems, but not exclusive (Kloppenburg et al., 2000; Lea, 2005), and it is unclear whether their production and distribution systems mitigate carbon emissions (Ackerman-Leist, 2013; Foster et al., 2006). Local food systems offer opportunities to procure healthy, fresh food (Cox et al., 2008; Feagan et al., 2004; Kingsley et al., 2009; Kirwan, 2004), but the evidence that better eating habits ensue is limited, though there is some understanding that fruit and vegetable consumption is increased through farmers’ markets, community gardens (McCormack, Laska, Larson, & Story, 2010) and CSA enterprises (Oberholtzer, 2004; Perez, Allen, & Brown, 2003). There is some support from the community garden literature that local food systems address inequities and provide solutions to food insecurity (Allen, Alaimo, Elam, & Perry, 2008; Armstrong, 2000; Bartolomei et al., 2003; Saldivar-Tanaka & Krasny, 2004), but this is less clear in other local food system literature (Hinrichs, 2003; Winter, 2003). In fact, as discussed earlier, some local food systems may engender power differentials between social groups, but the evidence is somewhat insubstantial.

In summary, the evidence regarding the systemic outcomes of local food systems is still inconclusive. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to add to this body of knowledge directly. Instead, it adds to the evidence-base at the intervening outcomes of local food systems by examining people’s level of participation in several local food systems and their desire and
ability to undertake sustainable food activities. It seeks a greater understanding of food procurers’ orientations to the farmers who produce their food. It also explores people’s meaning-making of food, rather than their eating habits per se. Nonetheless, having some indication of the outcomes of local food systems has helped direct this research.

Consumers’ experiences of local food systems

Armed with the knowledge of foodshed principles, the observations of researchers in the field and the possible system outcomes of local food systems, this section of the review discusses what is known about the motivations, views and experiences of consumers who have made the choice to procure their food through community gardens, CSAs and farmers’ markets. It provides the perspective of farmers, when appropriate, to understand their motivations for being involved in these local food systems. Current understanding of the meaning of food for those who have made the ‘quality turn’ (Goodman, 2003) to these local food systems, as they seek alternatives to the food offered through supermarkets, is also discussed. This knowledge base will inform the aspects of people’s relationships to food that need further exploration, to enable a better understanding of pathways to food citizenship.

Community gardens and food sustainability

There has been a strong focus on the social aspects of sustainability in community gardens, as the research has often been focused on poorer communities to address poverty and food security, particularly in North America (Allen et al., 2008; Irvine, Johnson, & Peters, 1999; Saldivar-Tanaka & Krasny, 2004; Wakefield, Yeudall, Taron, Reynolds, & Skinner, 2007). However, gardens have also been developed in response to a variety of other issues, such as environmental degradation, food safety, health and mental health (Armstrong, 2000; Bartolomei et al., 2003; Ferris, Norman, & Sempik, 2001; Holland, 2004; Kingsley et al., 2009; Stocker & Barnett, 1998). As a result, some of the benefits that have emerged from community gardens include a variety of social and health advantages, such as community development, civic pride, trust, friendship, enjoyment of nature, pleasure in gardening, improved nutrition and increased physical activity (Alaimo, Packnett, Miles, & Kruger, 2008; Armstrong, 2000; Bartolomei et al., 2003; Ferris et al., 2001; Kingsley et al., 2009; Milligan, Gatrell, & Bingley, 2004; Stocker & Barnett, 1998; Teig et al., 2009; Twiss et al., 2003; Wakefield et al., 2007). Interestingly, according to Holland (2004), in the British experience, food supply is not one of the major aims of community garden projects. Education,
community development, leisure, skill development, health issues and protection of the area rate much more highly.

Community gardens have proved themselves to be agents of change for sustainability by providing people with fresh, safe foods, opportunities for social and cultural interactions, and for engagement with the land (Kingsley et al., 2009; 1998). They can also function as a space for research and development for community science, horticultural techniques and innovative technologies (Stocker & Barnett, 1998). An analysis of the roles of different community gardens in the San Francisco Bay area supports this notion (Ferris et al., 2001). The leisure gardens, which were typically neglected urban sites occupied by teenage gangs and drug dealers, produced flowers and vegetables as a result of local activism. These gardens have become sites for integrating refugee groups into the community, providing job training and employment, and providing a space for healing and therapy for hospital patients, while also providing food (Ferris et al., 2001). Some community gardens have been specifically designed as programs for disadvantaged youth (Allen et al., 2008). They are sites where young people can learn gardening, interpersonal skills, patience and responsibility, while offering an informal environment for inter-generational relationships to develop (Allen et al., 2008).

Community gardens are valuable ‘aesthetic’ and ‘therapeutic’ landscapes that offer people a more holistic understanding of health and well-being (Hale et al., 2011; Litt et al., 2011; Milligan et al., 2004). When community gardeners report higher levels of social involvement and more positive perceptions of neighbourhood aesthetics, they also report higher fruit and vegetable intake (Litt et al., 2011). The authors suggest that perceiving more aesthetically pleasing neighbourhoods may help to influence improved dietary behaviours. Community gardeners’ emotional attachment to the landscape is fostered by escaping into the garden where they become absorbed in the sensory and aesthetic features of their garden, such as the colour, smells and sounds, which have therapeutic benefits (Hale et al., 2011; Milligan et al., 2004). Some older gardeners have reported pleasure in being on their own in their garden to enjoy its peace and beauty, but they can also appreciate the social support and reciprocity offered by others in the garden, which helps to buffer life stressors (Milligan et al., 2004).

The study by Hale and colleagues (2011) delved further into the connections gardeners experienced between nature and the food they produced. These gardeners enjoyed digging in the dirt and eating their own vegetables, as it connected them to their cultural roots. They felt
a great sense of pride, purpose and awe in their ability to produce food that they thought was better than food purchased in stores. The emotional attachment to food that comes from growing their own food is inter-connected with the sensory pleasure that these gardeners experience when the food is harvested (Hale et al., 2011).

The studies presented here demonstrate the diversity and complexity of community gardens. Some studies showed that strong social connections and a moral economy can be built through community gardens (Armstrong, 2000; Bartolomei et al., 2003; Ferris et al., 2001; Kingsley et al., 2009) and that proximal, commensal communities are achievable (Bartolomei et al., 2003; Saldivar-Tanaka & Krasny, 2004; Wakefield et al., 2007). Others indicated that community gardens can be places where learning takes place (Allen et al., 2008; Stocker & Barnett, 1998), and gardeners can develop deep relationships to food (Hale et al., 2011; Milligan et al., 2004).

However, the factors that contribute to people becoming food citizens as they engage in their food system and determine its direction are still uncertain. Research by Turner (2011) showed that not all those involved in community gardens were interested in purchasing organic produce all the time, so it cannot be assumed that these food procurers are more inclined to have a strong commitment to more sustainable food systems than others. Other research has also shown that involvement in community-based projects for sustainability does not always mean that participants change their behaviour to more sustainable lifestyles (Middlemiss, 2011). This thesis will build on the work of Hale and colleagues (2011) by focusing on the way in which community gardeners make meaning of the food they grow and eat, and will draw links between these relationships to food and their participation in the food system. Exploring these matters in greater depth will provide a better understanding of pathways to food citizenship.

Community Supported Agriculture and food sustainability

The farmers involved in CSA enterprises tend to be well-educated and may not have a farming background (Cone & Myhre, 2000; Schnell, 2007; Sumner et al., 2010; Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007; Worden, 2004). People who become members of a CSA are also generally well-educated and have high incomes (Cone & Myhre, 2000; Landis et al., 2010; O'Hara & Stagl, 2001; Perez et al., 2003) with some exceptions (Cox et al., 2008; Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007).
From the producer’s perspective, the main reasons for their desire to engage in CSA enterprises is to make an adequate income and to find markets for their specialty products (Feagan & Henderson, 2009; Wells, Gradwell, & Yoder, 1999). They also want to be involved in what Worden (2004) describes as an associative economy, where there are direct and informed exchanges between the producer and consumer, with greater equity and satisfaction for both. For example, producers expressed philosophical motives, such as a desire to build communities, educate their customers about agriculture, improve farm diversity to benefit the environment and model a community-based food system (Feagan & Henderson, 2009; Schnell, 2007; Sharp, Imerman, & Peters, 2002; Wells et al., 1999). One CSA producer said, ‘it’s really education that makes a difference, the nutrition and the cooking; making food, something pleasant and something shared’ (Wells et al., 1999, p. 41).

Other producers indicated that they were growing food they had never grown or eaten before, so they were learning from their customers (Wells et al., 1999). They valued co-operating with nature and other people, who bring different expertise and experience (Sharp et al., 2002; Wells et al., 1999). Some farmers expressed an intimate connection with the land and they wanted their customers to share this same sense of connection (Schnell, 2007; Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007). Indeed, a producer from a CSA in north-eastern USA suggested that the world would be a happier place if more people had a chance to engage with the soil and be more in touch with food (Worden, 2004).

Motivations for starting a CSA may be far less philosophical, as some producers in Cox and colleagues’ (2008) study expressed their simple desire to grow organic food for local people to reduce ‘food miles’. However, on closer examination, these producers also put subscribers in touch with their closest two ‘EarthShare neighbours’, so that they could share the collection of their food boxes, which has the potential for social benefit as well as reducing ‘food miles’ (Cox et al., 2008). The study by Feagan and Henderson (2009) uncovered some of the difficulties and conflicts for CSA farmers as they struggled with setting a fair price for their produce. The farmers spoke of their sense of obligation and the stress they felt when a season did not go well, knowing the food had already been sold to their members, who had paid their share at the start of the season. The ideals that may be held by CSA farmers when they start such an enterprise can conflict with the requirement to make ends meet (Feagan & Henderson, 2009).
As opposed to farmers, consumers’ motivations for joining a CSA enterprise are much less concerned with broad societal benefit (DeLind, 2003). Most of the survey data from different studies indicates that joining a CSA is ‘all about the food’ (Pole & Gray, 2013, p. 96). In the main, members join so that they can purchase fresh, organic, seasonal produce (Cone & Myhre, 2000; Cox et al., 2008; Landis et al., 2010; O'Hara & Stagl, 2001; Perez et al., 2003; Sumner et al., 2010), but they also want to know where it was grown (Cone & Myhre, 2000; Landis et al., 2010; Sumner et al., 2010) and in some cases, local produce is considered more important than organic (Pole & Gray, 2013). The notion of sharing the risk of production with farmers does not feature as strongly as a motivation to join a CSA in some studies (Cone & Myhre, 2000; O'Hara & Stagl, 2001; Pole & Gray, 2013). Interestingly, in the large survey by Pole and Gray (2013), it was those who were less well-off who were more prepared to share the financial risk with the farmers than those who were on higher incomes. The authors surmised that perhaps wealthier people have more social networks, and thus do not need or are not attracted to the sense of community offered by a CSA.

It appears that the more people participate in a farm, the more committed they become to broader ecological issues and develop a greater reverence for the food they eat (Cox et al., 2008; Feagan & Henderson, 2009; Pole & Gray, 2013; Sumner et al., 2010). Members of one CSA indicated that as they became more involved in the scheme, their awareness of environmental issues increased and they became more thoughtful about their food consumption (Cox et al., 2008). One participant said that being a member of a CSA had a spiritual and health dimension: connections with the landscape, the place where she lived and where her food was produced were important for her sense of well-being (Cox et al., 2008). One study showed that those who had been involved in a CSA for longer were more engaged in social and political issues and felt more integrated into the community (Pole & Gray, 2013). Women who did not work outside the home were the most committed to farm activities and to building trusting relationships with the grower, which indicates that the amount of time available for farm activities may be an issue for some (Cone & Myhre, 2000).

It also seems that to more deeply understand the philosophical approach of a CSA enterprise requires a time commitment. The study by Feagan and Henderson (2009) categorised CSA members into two groups: one functional-collaborative group and one instrumental group. They found that those in the former group visited the farm more regularly and interacted more with the farmer than those in the latter group. They also appreciated the produce, viewed the
unfamiliar vegetables as a challenge and a learning experience and changed their eating habits since becoming a member. Those in the instrumental category, in contrast, had a limited understanding of the goals of the CSA, were not interested in interacting with the farmer and did not report changes in their eating habits. These CSA members were much more interested in the convenience that came with home delivery (Feagan & Henderson, 2009).

Some members of CSA enterprises develop empathy with the farmer through close connections, which, in turn, deepens their pleasure in food. A study from the mid-west USA used a historical-reflexive concept of enchantment to analyse the material gathered in their study (Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007). Briefly, this conceptualisation is considered a social construction that highlights non-instrumental, anti-bureaucratic and anti-scientific impulses that exist within modernity, which is evidenced, for example, by enduring fascination with Eastern mysticism. The authors suggest that the CSA partially redresses feelings of disenchantment with the disconnection imposed by the globalised food system by romanticising local farms and personal relationships with farmers. A CSA encourages both the farmer and consumer to move away from efficiency-enhancing technologies required in food production and meal preparation (Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007). The study found that the members valued the variety and sensory aspects of food, such as the different colours, textures and flavours of the produce obtained through the CSA. The tasting events and farm tours that were offered by the CSA helped members to rectify the emotional detachment and sheer ignorance that comes from the separation of food production and consumption, which led to a greater appreciation of the difficulties that producers go through to food. They described a joy in being able to touch and handle food that was not packaged and, in the case of a chicken, may still have feathers on it. These CSA members learnt to cook food from scratch and were pleased to teach their children about different foods and cuisines, all of which improved their family life (Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007).

From this mainly North American research, it appears that CSA enterprises have the capacity to develop stronger relationships between the producer and consumer and to help consumers to experience greater reverence and pleasure in food. The capacity to develop these relationships is dependent upon a regular and enduring commitment to this model of food production and consumption (Cone & Myhre, 2000; Feagan & Henderson, 2009). Social embeddedness and relations of regard were strong in some CSA enterprises, where social connections and trust were built and valued (Cox et al., 2008; Sumner et al., 2010; Thompson
& Coskuner-Balli, 2007), but weak in others, where it was merely the food that mattered (Cone & Myhre, 2000; Pole & Gray, 2013).

The principle of the commensal community (Kloppenburg et al., 1996) that incorporates inclusiveness and working co-operatively with others to produce food without damage to the environment was another factor that was variable across these studies. For example, many members of CSA enterprises were on high incomes, but they were not motivated to join the CSA to share the risk with farmers or become involved in the farm activities (Cone & Myhre, 2000; Pole & Gray, 2013). It was the qualitative studies that more deeply revealed participants’ relationships with food within the CSA local food system (Cox et al., 2008; Feagan & Henderson, 2009; Sumner et al., 2010; Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007). Hence, this thesis—which uses qualitative material gathering in the Australian context—further explores people’s connections with others and the earth through their choice of food system. It also aims to understand more of people’s level of participation in food producing activities, what this means for their relationship to food, and their commitment to behaviours that work towards more sustainable food systems.

Farmers’ markets and food sustainability

Farmers’ markets, like CSAs, contribute to providing farmers with a decent return for their produce without having to involve any middle men (Nousiainen, Pylkkanen, Saunders, Seppanen, & Vesala, 2009). They allow farmers to have greater control over the marketing of their produce and they personalise the food system by providing face-to-face interactions between producers and consumers (King, 2008; Kirwan, 2004; Nousiainen et al., 2009; Peters, 1997). Farmers’ markets also raise awareness amongst consumers of seasonal foods, promote social interactions, contribute to a sense of community and boost the local economy (Hunt, 2007; Peters, 1997). Some research suggests that farmers’ markets also allow consumers to make a political statement about retaining choice within the food system (Alkon, 2008; Kirwan, 2006).

Motivations for purchasing food at a farmers’ market appear to go beyond the usual price arbiter of food choice, to that of freshness and quality of the produce, an enjoyment of the social interactions that take place (Archer, 2003; Baker, Hamshaw, Kolodinsky, & Kolodinsky, 2009; Feagan et al., 2004; Kirwan, 2004; Spilkova, Fendrychova, & Syrovatkova, 2013; Szmigin, Maddock, & Carrigan, 2003) and a desire to support local
farmers and purchase locally grown food (Conner, Colansanti, Ross, & Smalley, 2010; Feagan et al., 2004; Hunt, 2007; Svenfelt & Carlsson-Kanyama, 2010; Szmigin et al., 2003; Thomas & Mcintosh, 2013). For example, the customers in a farmers’ market in Canada expressed their understanding and appreciation of these social interactions using terms such as, ‘ambience’, ‘talking to people and farmers’ and ‘a people-bonding place’ (Feagan et al., 2004).

The inter-dependence between producers and customers that is deemed desirable amongst farmers’ market shoppers and vendors demonstrates alignment with foodshed principles, particularly the moral economy (Alkon, 2008; 2004; Hunt, 2007; Kloppenburg et al., 1996). For instance, farmers’ markets allow opportunities for influencing attitudes and practices of producers and customers (Hunt, 2007) and for exchange of knowledge and concerns (Feagan et al., 2004). Kirwan’s (2004) research in the UK support these findings. The producers in his study wanted to value add and cut out the middle man, so their motivations for involvement in farmers’ markets were economic, but they also liked the atmosphere and enjoyed the relationships that developed at the markets (Kirwan, 2004). Research with farmers selling at farmers’ markets in northeast USA revealed similar motivations (Griffin & Frongillo, 2003; Hunt, 2007).

The customers in the UK study (Kirwan, 2004) expressed a desire to eschew the dominant food system, and to build trusting relationships with producers. Quality, in the farmers’ market context, was tied to naturalness, being locally grown and fresh, rather than devoid of blemishes. Even more than this, high quality food related to the time and care that the farmers took in growing food that was going to nourish the customer (Kirwan, 2004). Allowing discussions between producer and customer was not seen as a guarantee of quality but it did allow an assessment of the trustworthiness of the information provided by the producer and through the customer’s assessment of the producer’s integrity (Kirwan, 2004). The producers felt pride in what they produced and had a sense of satisfaction selling directly to consumers rather than operating through a faceless food system. Consumers enjoyed shopping at farmers’ markets rather than supermarkets that were seen as ‘soulless’ or a ‘zombie like experience’ (Kirwan, 2004). An alternative perspective of the motivations of farmers’ market attendees is offered by Holloway and Kneafsey (2000, p. 294), who propose that those who attend farmers’ markets are seeking a return to a ‘golden age’ when ‘food was supposedly more nutritious and life in general more wholesome.’
Beyond the importance of enabling strong relationships between producers and customers to develop, farmers’ markets seem to provide a medium to exercise value-based food choices, which requires dedication (Connell, Smithers, & Joseph, 2008). The authors of a Canadian study (Connell et al., 2008) identified three food-buying factors that were most readily associated with farmers’ markets, derived from previous studies: ‘in season’ (fresh), (associated with quality and freshness), ‘grown or produced locally’, (associated with local embeddedness) and ‘grown or produced by someone known’, (associated with social embeddedness) (Archer, 2003; Feagan et al., 2004; Kirwan, 2004). These three factors were then combined as the ‘farmers’ market’ factor, which was used to investigate the importance of shopping at farmers’ markets as a component of ‘good food’ choices (Connell et al., 2008). The results showed that those who purchased at farmers’ markets more frequently rated the ‘farmers’ market’ factor as more important than those who were less frequent farmers’ market shoppers. Also, those who attend farmers’ markets most often take more factors into account when purchasing food, which suggests that farmers’ markets can be considered places not just to buy ‘good food’, but also as a medium for expressing values associated with food choices (Connell et al., 2008).

Taste, an elusive but critical aspect of food appreciation, has been explored in a UK study through interviews with farmers’ market shoppers, with some insightful findings (Spiller, 2012). These findings showed that taste appears to have much less to do with the physiology of taste sensations, and much more to do with intangible properties that almost belie description (Spiller, 2012). Participants described their preference for the taste of farmers’ market food, as opposed to supermarket food, on the basis of the context and the places in which the food is encountered. For example, one participant ‘likes good tasty wholesome food that she feels will benefit her family’ (Spiller, 2012, p.103). However, when pressed to elaborate on her understanding of ‘tasty’ she did not really think she had the expertise to discern between food flavours, because she was not a gourmet cook. Another person, who was very enthusiastic about food, considered that the food he buys at the markets seems fresher and tastes better, but he suspected this evaluation is based on psychology. Still others based their assessment of taste on their underlying philosophy of food. One participant, who likes to buy locally and prefers to eat meat that has been well looked after says, ‘the meat is certainly better…in my mind I know it has been well looked after, it's been a happy cow or deer or whatever’ (Spiller, 2012, p. 104).
Farmers’ markets have been found to be effective in educating customers about environmental issues, the diversity of foodstuffs available, and the role they play in supporting organic and small scale farmers (Feagan et al., 2004). They may also enable more socio-cultural interactions within communities by promoting local food traditions and increasing levels of self-sufficiency and local food security (Feagan et al., 2004). These attributes of farmers’ markets indicate that they may be places where the foodshed principles of ‘commensal community’ and ‘nature as measure’ can develop. However, the authors recommend that further research is required to more deeply explore the reasons that farmers’ markets are so important for social interaction and for providing a socially satisfying experience (Feagan et al., 2004).

The farmers’ market research to date indicates that customers are open to experiencing the shopping experience in ways that are different to the supermarket experience. It appears that meaning-making of food in the farmers’ market context may be tied to the quality of the food available in these spaces (Kirwan, 2004, 2006; Spiller, 2012) and the social interactions that occur, particularly for those who are regular farmers’ market shoppers (Connell et al., 2008). This thesis is specifically designed to add to the research of Connell and colleagues (2008), Kirwan (2004, 2006) and Spiller (2012) to more deeply understand the ways in which farmers’ market shoppers make-meaning of the food they purchase. It will also explore farmers’ market shoppers’ interest in social interactions and community building to come to a better understanding of their commitment to developing more sustainable food systems.

The meaning of food through cooking and sharing meals

The meaning of food for people does not just rest with the food procurement experience, but moves into the domestic world of food preparation, cooking and sharing of meals. The human relationship to food is complex and multi-dimensional (Fischler, 1988). On one dimension, it has a biological function of nourishing the body, and a cultural function of symbolising belonging and love, for example. On another dimension, food links the individual to the collective through its psychological and social functions (Fischler, 1988). It seems hardly surprising, then, that food is central to our identity, as individuals and as members of a cultural group (Coveney, 2014; Fischler, 1988; Lupton, 1996).

The choices we make about what is eaten, and all the rules that are created around how we eat, with whom and how much time is allocated to cooking and eating, is deeply embedded in
culture and society (Visser, 1986). The French are renowned for their cuisine and love of eating, so the results of a study that compared the psycho-social influences on food choice and eating patterns between the English and French were not surprising (Pettinger, Holdsworth, & Gerber, 2004). They found that the French were more likely than the English to spend more time on shopping and cooking; to consider a home-cooked meal as the basis of healthy eating; to gain more pleasure from eating; and to view the meal as a social occasion (Pettinger et al., 2004). Other research shows that the French continue to spend more time when eating than many other nationalities (Warde et al., 2007).

Commensality is considered one of the most enjoyable aspects of eating (Fischler, 2011; Sidenvall, Nydahl, & Fjellstrom, 2000). It is around the table that family and friends get together, in a convivial atmosphere, to celebrate festive occasions and share favourite foods (Fischler, 2011; Lupton, 1996). Even within the ordinariness of everyday life, the ritual of sitting down together for a meal is still considered an important symbol of family life (Lupton, 1996).

The literature suggests that cooking is still very much a gendered activity, with women usually assuming the role within households (Bahr Bugge & Almas, 2006; De Vault, 1991; Murcott, 1982), although there is some evidence that men are taking up this role (Bove & Sobal, 2006; Cairns, Johnston, & Baumann, 2010). For women, preparing ‘proper’ meals for the family forms part of their identity as wife and mother, and offers a powerful sign of their love and devotion (Bahr Bugge & Almas, 2006; Lupton, 1996; Sidenvall et al., 2000) as they cater to the preferences of family members (Cairns et al., 2010; Sidenvall et al., 2000). It is also a household task that many women enjoy, because it is a creative activity that provides great satisfaction for themselves and the recipients of the meal (Lupton, 2000; Sidenvall et al., 2000). The study by Sidenvall and colleagues (2000), in which older women were interviewed, also found that women enjoyed going to extra trouble for visitors by preparing the table with flowers and candles to create a more beautiful and intimate atmosphere.

Cooking food from scratch, rather than using convenience foods, represents nostalgic family memories and communicates dedication and effort (Moisio, Arnould, & Price, 2004). In a study with young suburban mothers, it was the working class women who prepared more traditional meals, while the middle-class women were more experimental with their cooking (Bahr Bugge & Almas, 2006).
This division of foodwork along gendered lines does not mean that all men are excluded from cooking, but rather that the approach to cooking by men is viewed differently. It has been found that men often take care of the outside cooking, such as the barbecues (Bove & Sobal, 2006), or they view cooking more as a leisure activity or a hobby (Cairns et al., 2010). However, if men engage intensely enough with their cooking role within the family, they can take on the caring practices too, and not just view food preparation as an opportunity to show off their skills (Lupton, 2000).

In a Canadian study, both men and women, who identified themselves as people who had a passion for learning about food and eating, spoke of the great pleasure they receive from cooking food, serving new and different foods and eating it with friends (Cairns et al., 2010). Participants characterised food as ‘a sacred act’ and had a commitment to slowing down their eating and savouring their food (Cairns et al., 2010), which suggests that there are some groups of people who are keen to eat ‘like the French’. While much of the research in the area of food preparation and cooking highlighted here has a gendered perspective, this thesis will explore whether participation in people's food procurement environment has any influence on their pleasure in cooking and commensality.

**Food citizenship**

The focus of the research question is concerned with uncovering a better understanding of pathways to food citizenship, so a synthesis of current theoretical understandings of this concept and its practical application is presented here. ‘Food citizenship’, ‘food democracy’ and ‘ecological citizenship’ denote slightly different meanings, but they each convey the consumer-level goal of community food systems, which is to appropriate power in the food system for all citizens (Hassanein, 2003, 2008; Lang, 2005; Seyfang, 2005; Wilkins, 2005). By actively participating in shaping the food system, citizens are no longer passive consumers, but informed about food and environmental issues and involved in determining food system policies and practices at all levels of government (Hassanein, 2003). Wilkins (2005) suggests that the first step in becoming a food citizen is to start to think about the kind of food system that is worth supporting and make food choices that reflect this decision. It also entails a commitment to values that consider not just economic aspects of well-being, but also social and environmental ones, such that societal health is as important as the health of the individual (Lang, 2005; Seyfang, 2006; Wilkins, 2005). Food democracy and ecological
citizenship call for a re-evaluation of what is meant by ‘wealth’, ‘prosperity’ and ‘progress’, and emphasise the potential for citizens to work together to overcome the powerlessness and individualisation that is inherent in the mainstream model (Seyfang, 2006).

These laudable theoretical perspectives provide a useful framework to consider the way in which food citizenship may play out, but reporting consumers’ ethical or sustainable consumption behaviours is critical to understanding the complexity of the lived experience. Ethical consumption is not a singular or static aspect of culture, according to Johnston and colleagues (2011, p. 298), but encompasses a broad set of cultural practices, ideas and habits, which is referred to as an ‘ethical eating repertoire’. From their own interview material (Johnston et al., 2011) and that of Johnston and Baumann (2010), they found that the ethical eating repertoire usually incorporates three main themes: ‘local provenance and seasonality’, ‘organics and sustainability’ and ‘animal welfare’, as well as one minor theme concerned with ‘social justice, labour issues and community development’. Johnston and colleagues (2011) also found that those who were wealthier and better educated were more likely to want to reduce their meat intake, buy organic food, be concerned about animal welfare and support local farmers, but this demographic profile was no guarantee of ethical eating.

McEachern and colleagues (2010) interviewed self-identified ‘conscious consumers’ who recognised inconsistencies in their own behaviour and even felt guilty about it, as they made ethical choices for some things and not others. For example, only a minority of participants went to farmers’ markets regularly, while others preferred the convenience of one-stop shopping at supermarkets, open every day of the week (McEachern et al., 2010).

One of the only studies that examined participation in sustainable food activities—rather than focusing just on motivations—found that, on average, respondents only engaged in an average of three out of 13 possible activities, including: buying ecologically friendly and organic food, being vegetarian, attending local food systems, preserving food, and composting (Griffin & Sobal, 2013). Only four per cent of the sample engaged in sustainable grocery shopping, primarily using farmers’ markets, food co-operatives or health food stores for their food requirements, and very few belonged to a community garden (3%) or a CSA enterprise (2%). Women and older people participated in farmers’ markets more often and gave more consideration to ecological issues (Griffin & Sobal, 2013). Larger households were more likely to compost and belong to community gardens, while the employed more often chose organic food, used a food cooperative and were vegetarian. One quarter of the sample was
engaged in some preserving, and it was more likely to be women, older people and those with more education. It was this same profile of respondents who engaged with a greater number of sustainable food activities than other demographic groups (Griffin & Sobal, 2013).

Concern for the environment is not necessarily the main reason for consumers purchasing organic produce, as personal health and food quality are considered more important (Lockie, 2008; Pearson, Henryks, & Jones, 2010). One review of the literature suggests that organic food buyers exist across all demographic groups, with some trends towards higher education, greater affluence, being female and having young children (Pearson et al., 2010). Apart from these demographic indicators, organic buyers may also be inclined to grow their own fruits and vegetables and be vegetarian (Pearson et al., 2010).

However, having a positive attitude towards organics does not necessarily translate to purchasing them (Griffin & Sobal, 2013), because the higher prices (Basgoze & Tektas, 2012; McEachern et al., 2010; Pearson et al., 2010), reduced choice (Basgoze & Tektas, 2012) and accessibility (Beagan et al., 2010) of organic food means that conventional food is often prioritized over organics. Other barriers to ethical consumption for some consumers is the time, energy and research required to make ethical food choices (Basgoze & Tektas, 2012).

The knowledge required to make the most appropriate food choice should not be underestimated. Australian research found that even though well over half the respondents agreed that a range of food-related actions were needed to improve the environment, many of the necessary actions cited were considered the responsibility of farmers and food manufacturers, rather than consumers themselves. For this sample, composting and buying locally were the two most commonly performed behaviours, but purchasing organic food or consuming less meat were not considered very important (Lea & Worsley, 2008).

In the Canadian study by Beagan and colleagues (2010), some social and cultural groups in different parts of the country were more likely to talk about ethical consumption than others. The European British Columbia (BC) participants spoke of ethical consumption regardless of income and educational levels, showing concern about factory farming and use of pesticides, while several were vegetarian owing to concern about animal rights. The other groups made food choices based more on traditional eating practices. The European BC group suggested that it was easy to engage in ethical consumption in Vancouver, because there was local
availability of organic produce and participants found that the more they purchased organics, the more the price came down (Beagan et al., 2010).

Atkinson’s (2012) research offers a more nuanced approach to the issue of ethical consumption practices. She interviewed white, middle-class, well-educated people who considered themselves socially conscious. Instead of viewing ethical consumption as an unwelcome imposition, the participants transformed consumption costs into benefits for themselves and the broader community. They valued authentic food, social embeddedness through farmers’ market shopping, empowerment—as they informed themselves of where food came from and who produced it—and self-actualisation, as participants acknowledged their personal growth in becoming the socially conscious person they wanted to be (Atkinson, 2012). These participants still faced the issues of increased cost of organic food, shopping inconvenience and a reduced variety of food, but they viewed these sacrifices as pleasurable (Atkinson, 2012).

The current literature on consumers’ engagement with ethical and sustainable food practices, which is mainly drawn from quantitative studies, indicates that women and older people (Griffin & Sobal, 2013) or the better educated (Johnston et al., 2011) are more engaged with these practices, but this is not conclusive (Beagan et al., 2010; Johnston et al., 2011; Pearson et al., 2010). The evidence to date suggests that there is a gap between motivations and actual behaviour when it comes to sustainable food activities (McEachern et al., 2010; Pearson et al., 2010). The qualitative work by Atkinson (2012), cited above, offers some hope that it is possible for consumers to view ethical and sustainable consumption in a positive light, rather than as an imposition.

While the quantitative studies offer useful insights into the demographic groups that engage in sustainable food activities, it is important to explore with people who use different food procurement environments, the factors that may enable people to become food citizens. Atkinson’s (2012) work provides a window into understanding that personal relationships within the food procurement environments, and a preference for authentic food both have a positive effect on engaging in sustainable food behaviours. This thesis will extend these ideas by speaking to people who procure food from five different food procurement environments. It will draw comparisons between groups about the importance of their relationships with others in the food system, their meaning-making of food, and how these factors influence
behaviours that support a more democratic, socially and economically just, and environmentally sustainable food system.

**Concluding remarks**

This review has established that the globalised food system, as it functions today, is not sustainable from an environmental, social and economic perspective. The consumers who use supermarkets and grocery stores generally express a desire for convenience and efficiency in their shopping experience because they do not always enjoy shopping, or they prefer to allocate their time for other daily activities. Food is frequently purchased on the basis of price (Chambers et al., 2007; Ellaway & Macintyre, 2000; Glanz et al., 1998; Steenhuis et al., 2011), but if this were the complete profile of the supermarket shopper, then it would seem difficult to suggest that these shoppers would participate in working towards more sustainable food systems. However, people’s food choices are very complex (Furst et al., 1996; Sobal et al., 2006) and their relationships to food and food procurement are heterogeneous and dynamic (Maxey, 2007). Given that people still engage in sustainable food activities without being regular local food system shoppers (Griffin & Sobal, 2013), some of whom classify themselves as ‘conscious consumers’ (McEachern et al., 2010), suggests that there is scope to encourage this group of shoppers to be active participants in sustainable food activities. However, to do so requires more understanding of the factors that influence pathways to food citizenship (key research question).

The literature about local food systems does demonstrate that closer relationships between food producers and consumers is possible and that deeper relationships to food can develop in these environments, but whether this translates to a real desire to become food citizens is still not clear (key research question). The act of being involved in a local food system is considered a sustainable food activity in itself (Griffin & Sobal, 2013), but studies also revealed that for some, being a member of a CSA, for example, was still all about the food, rather than a desire to engage in broader societal and environmental concerns (Cone & Myhre, 2000; DeLind, 2003; Pole & Gray, 2013) (sub-question 3).

Other studies showed that food quality and knowing where food comes from and who grew it are important to farmers’ market shoppers (Connell et al., 2008; Feagan et al., 2004; Kirwan, 2004, 2006), but these motivations may not be altruistic (Hinrichs, 2003; Winter, 2003). Nevertheless, some of the local food system literature does profile some people who very
deeply engage in the local food system experience and value the relationships that develop and the food that is produced (Cox et al., 2008; Feagan & Henderson, 2009; Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007), leaving little doubt that they behave as food citizens. This thesis aims to build on the work of these researchers by seeking to draw links between people’s level of participation in their chosen food system, the relationships they have with food, and their ethical consumption practices (sub-questions 2 & 3).

Other aspects of people’s relationships with food, beyond food provisioning, are developed through cooking and commensality. Much of this literature to date has been concerned with the gendered nature of food preparation. This thesis seeks to understand more about both men and women’s approaches to cooking and sharing meals, and to determine if there are differences depending on their level of participation in their chosen food system (sub-question 1).

Food system sustainability is not an endpoint that is fixed, but rather a dynamic process seeking equilibrium through social and biophysical processes (Gillespie, 2009; Maxey, 2007). Active engagement and participation by all consumers in working towards a more sustainable food system is a key component of this process, but is still under-researched (Maxey, 2007). This thesis aims to shine further light on the factors that influence people’s participation in the food system and their relationships to food and what these two components reveal about pathways to food citizenship (key research question).
Chapter 3: Turning to narrative inquiry

The exploratory nature of this research project warranted a qualitative methodological approach. This chapter presents the turning points I made towards one such methodology: narrative inquiry. It uncovers my personal journey of embracing a methodology that reconnected me with a way of knowing that I had been ignoring, albeit unwittingly. It also describes the methods I selected to collect and analyse the research materials that enabled the construction of stories, which reveal people’s preferences for a particular place of food procurement and what this shows about their relationship to food and food citizenship.

Turn 1: From paradigmatic to narrative thinking

I was tempted to use quantitative research methods for this project, having been a practitioner in the science-based profession of Nutrition and Dietetics for many years. However, I knew such methods did not have the scope to deal with the complex human-centred issues that were at the heart of my research question (Webster & Mertova, 2007). In this research, I explored the connections between food shoppers and the producer; connections with family, friends and others in the food system; between eaters and the earth; and how these connections affect people’s meaning-making of food and pathways to food citizenship. It was the complexity of these inter-connections that interested me. As I was making methodological choices, I was inspired to find that others recognised the importance of narrative in making sense of life and affirmed that knowledge generated in this way is equally as valid as other ways of knowing.

I discovered Bruner (1986), who argues that there are two modes of thought—paradigmatic and narrative—which, while complementary, have distinct ways of ordering experience and constructing reality. Paradigmatic thinking, or logico-scientific thinking, is aligned with formal, mathematical systems to explain or describe different phenomena and, in Western societies, is often viewed as the dominant mode by which trustworthy and valid knowledge is generated (Bruner, 1986; Czarniawska, 2004; Polkinghorne, 1995, 2007). This mode of thought, which labels something as belonging to a particular category, is used in quantitative and some qualitative research designs (Bruner, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1995). In contrast, a person using a narrative way of thinking applies a bottom-up approach and uses the text or story to explore reality; to reconstruct or deconstruct it, acknowledging its relational, temporal and continuous nature (Bruner, 1986; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). The narrative ‘imagination’ leads to good stories that are believable, but not necessarily ‘true’ in all contexts. It deals
more with the changeable nature of people’s intentions and actions as part of life’s course and situates experience in time and place. Paradigmatic thinking can establish a ‘truth’ through formal and empirical proofs, while narrative thinking establishes verisimilitude (Bruner, 1986).

**Turn 2: Valuing contextual knowledge**

As I started having focus group conversations with those who procured their food from community gardens, the CSA enterprise and the farmers’ market, the need for a narrative orientation became more persistent. I knew that I did not want to lose the context of each person’s story, which was bound to occur through a line-by-line analytical method, but I had difficulty in articulating what I meant by ‘context’. Over time, I realised that it was the contextual knowledge gained (Cousins, 2009; Goodfellow, 1997; Halliday & Hasan, 1985) as I met with people, conversed with them and learnt about their lives, combined with my own contextual knowledge and personal experiences, that needed to be incorporated into my interpretation of the research material.

I also found myself resisting a narrow analysis of the material, as I recalled the personalities of those who attended the focus groups. It was not just the content of the conversations that intrigued me; it was the way in which the participants recalled events or expressed ideas that fascinated me, some with a great deal of passion and others speaking in a very ‘matter-of-fact’ manner. I reflected on the different dynamics of each focus group: some were very lively discussions; particularly the farmers’ market ones. Others were often quiet and thoughtful, which were not so easy to facilitate. In these circumstances, I felt the pressure to prompt discussions and then wondered if I was interfering too much in the conversations and thereby imposing too much of my view of the topic onto the participants.

Being an extrovert, I generally feel more comfortable in an atmosphere of lively discussion, so possibly even my own personality affected the way in which the stories were delivered. As I listened to the recordings, hearing myself laugh at some of the participants’ engaging stories was an indication of the relationship developing between us. I was pleased that I had given the participants ‘some room to speak’; to express their views and tell their stories (Mishler, 1986, p. 69; Trahar, 2009). I had certainly not entered the material gathering phase expecting to hear so many interesting stories, but now that I had, I felt a need to preserve their integrity. I was being drawn closer to narrative inquiry’s relational view of the researched and researcher,
rather than an objective one. The participants in my study were not bound, static, atemporal or decontextualized and, by turning to narrative inquiry, I would not have to pretend otherwise (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). I was confident that my participants’ stories were an important form of knowledge that needed to be re-presented in my research project.

Reading Moore’s critical reflections of her own use of a grounded theory, which uses paradigmatic thinking to analyse a personal story (Goodley, Lawthorn, Clough, & Moore, 2004), added to my resolve to use narrative inquiry. She acknowledges that breaking the story down to an analytical structure led to a fragmentation of the material. Moore does not blame grounded theory entirely, but she does suggest that the analysis did obscure the voice of the central character (Goodley et al., 2004). I decided that I did not want to obscure each participant’s voice in my analysis, so I turned to narrative inquiry, where both the stories and the people remain visible (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007).

**Turn 3: The functions of stories**

I returned to the narrative literature and the experiences of other researchers to find out more about the role of stories. As I did, I began to understand the way in which my participants had been storying their lives through our conversations. Polkinghorne (1995) describes ‘story’ as a particular type of discourse that shapes events and actions into a unified whole by means of a plot. The plot is temporally organized, with a beginning, middle and end, and provides the structure through which people describe the choices they make in their lives (Polkinghorne, 1995). Stories, though, have other important functions. They provide a meaning-making function for people, a way to make sense of their experiences and construct their identity (Mishler, 1986; Riessman, 2008).

Stories retain the complexity of a situation in which an action occurred, while also holding the emotional and motivational meaning attached to it (Polkinghorne, 1995). They also offer a way to reconstruct memories of our past, which may be somewhat fragmented and possibly painful; they can also be used to argue a case or justify a position (Cousins, 2009; Riessman, 2008). They are useful for the audience, too, because humans live storied lives, so when others tell their stories, those receiving the story can understand the actions of others through recognition of similar experiences in their own life (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Mishler, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1995).
My foray into understanding the function of stories more deeply helped me to realise, like Goodfellow (1997), that I had been searching for a way to more fully understand and express what it means to be human. As Webster and Mertova (2007, p. 2) assert, ‘narrative should not be looked upon as separate from real life, but as forming a meaningful connection to that life.’ I had found a research methodology that is holistic, revealing life with all its complexities, contingencies and contradictions in an ever-changing context of time, experiences, places and people. I knew that human behaviour was driven by values, beliefs, feelings and motives, which are also affected by context and circumstances, but I had discovered that narrative inquiry enabled me, as researcher, to show others the value of this methodology for advancing knowledge (Goodfellow, 1997). Others researching food justice have also acknowledged the importance of narrative inquiry to more deeply understand the constraints on people as they try to nourish themselves (see Dixon 2014). I was pleased to be part of a move amongst food researchers to adopt this methodology. I embraced it and understood that narrative is, indeed, a legitimate form of reasoned knowing (Bruner, 1986; Czarniawska, 2004; Polkinghorne, 1995).

**Moving from process to product**

The delight in finding this way of thinking and having identified the ways in which it would surface new knowledge about participants’ lives gave me a sense of surety that I was on the right path. I was pleased to be locating myself within the three dimensional space of time, people and place, where I could observe and enjoy the storied landscape of my participants. I had entered into the lives of my participants at a particular time, in the midst of their living and telling the storied experiences that make up their lives, but I had to commence my role as researcher to analyse and interpret these stories and re-present them for other audiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I then had to tell my story, the research story (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). My next question was, ‘What does quality mean in narrative inquiry and what are its indicators?’

**Quality frameworks in narrative inquiry**

The concept that narrative inquiry is a continuous interpretive process was both exciting and concerning. The process starts as the researcher interprets the opinions and interpretive stories told by participants, and then constructs a story from research material or a story about stories. Further interpretations are made again by the reader as they engage with the participants’ and
researcher’s stories (Riessman, 2008). It seemed intuitive to grasp that narrative knowing deals very effectively with people’s changeability of intentions and behaviours as they negotiate the vagaries of life. However, it took longer to realise that my thesis will present possibilities for interpretation as readers reflect on their own storied experiences and consider the trustworthiness, plausibility and verisimilitude of the stories contained within (Bruner, 1986; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007; Polkinghorne, 1995, 2007).

A key feature of narrative inquiry is that it focuses on the particular rather than attempting to generalise or theorise across stories (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007; Polkinghorne, 1995; Riessman, 2008). Accordingly, instead of searching for and naming commonalities across each of the five interpretive stories that I have constructed, I have attended, instead, to the similarities and differences between them, valuing their uniqueness.

**Authenticity and trustworthiness**

To evaluate qualitative research findings, I use ‘authenticity’ rather than validity (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). A reader should consider whether the findings from a piece of research are sufficiently authentic that others would be moved to act on their implications; that is, are the findings trustworthy and congruent with the way others might construct their social world? To produce a trustworthy account that would resonate with others, I ensured that the complexities, contradictions and contingencies that were part of each participant’s lives were faithfully represented in the stories. I started by checking that the transcripts correctly attributed stories or viewpoints to the corresponding person. I made notes in each focus group to allow me to trace any discrepancies between the transcript and my notes. In most cases this was not necessary, as it was clear in the recordings as to who was speaking throughout the focus groups.

For my stories to be authentic, the participants in my research needed to feel comfortable with how much they revealed about their personal lives during the focus groups, knowing that the findings of my research would also move into the public domain (Bakan, 1996). Many people frequently try to project a positive self-image to others, so do not always feel comfortable revealing their true felt meanings (Polkinghorne, 2007). Each person’s level of comfortable revelation is bound to be different, but one way I assisted people to share their storied lives freely and openly was to clarify the notion of confidentiality at the start of each focus group session, as well as through the information sheet distributed in advance via email. While
anonymity is not possible in a focus group, confidentiality, which is concerned with privacy, is possible to achieve. So I asked that everyone use only first names during the focus groups and, if discussing the outcomes of the focus group with others outside the room, no names should be mentioned. I explained that any presentation of research at conferences or in publications would use pseudonyms to protect each participant’s privacy (NHMRC & Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee, 2007). I also made it clear that there were no right or wrong answers to my questions, demonstrating my openness to their meanings without judgement.

As a person with a constructivist stance, I embraced the active involvement of the participants in my research (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Each participant was only interviewed once in a focus group, but it was still important to build a reciprocal relationship with the participants rather than a hierarchical one. I returned the drafted stories to participants, for them to check whether my interpretations were plausible representations of what they had said. I encouraged participants to clarify their thoughts and to delve further into the meanings of their viewpoints and stories, to enable me to interpret their story as faithfully as possible (Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995; Polkinghorne, 2007). As time passed, of course, lives had moved on and one participant told me of a change in circumstances that was critical to the narrative, so this was noted as a postscript.

Another aspect of authenticity is the notion of fairness (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). As I developed each of the group stories, I ensured that each participant’s voice was heard. Some participants said more than others, of course, but all perspectives and voices are included and are identified by a pseudonym. Each participant was given the opportunity to clarify or correct any of their viewpoints or stories if they felt I had misrepresented them. As I compiled each of the stories, I also gave voice to my participants by using their own words as much as possible (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). By using people’s pseudonyms in the texts as well as their voices, I was taking careful account of the particular so that the reader would be able to track the views and stories of individuals as they read the entire story. It is this attention to the particular that leads to resonance, plausibility and verisimilitude (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

A further strength in focusing on the particular is that all humans live storied lives, so as new experiences present themselves, people can draw on previous storied experiences that might be analogous, while also considering how the new experience may be different from previous ones (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Polkinghorne, 1995). It is the particularities contained
within each person’s collection of stories that enables application in other situations or circumstances (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007).

My approach to this research was to understand the world rather than control it, which meant that I had to reveal the multiple truths in people’s lives and acknowledge that there is no single truth and no single way of knowing (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007).

**Researcher reflexivity**

The authenticity and trustworthiness of this research account is strengthened by revealing something of my own position and values regarding food procurement and preparation. I am the wife of a hobby farmer, living on a 40 acre property just outside the ACT. I work full-time as an academic at the University of Canberra and have two children still living at home. I shop at the Capital Region Farmers Market if I do not have to take children to Saturday morning sport. Alternatively, I favour going to the Belconnen fresh food markets and seek out my butcher in a suburban shopping centre. I rarely purchase fresh fruit and vegetables at the supermarket, because, like many you will meet in this thesis, I wish to support farmers and independent fruit and vegetable stores. Since undertaking this doctorate, I have started growing some of my own food, inspired by the participants from the community gardens. I enjoy cooking and experimenting with different foods, but still find myself seeking specific foods for recipes, rather than purely using seasonal produce.

Of all the groups, I expected to relate to the farmers’ market group, because of my own enjoyment of them. However, there was resonance for me across all groups as participants told stories of their experiences with food that were genuine and insightful. Acknowledging my own preferences, I still remained close to the words and concepts of the participants in all food procurement groups, as I constructed each narrative.

**The unfolding of the narrative process**

Having completed this journey of turns to narrative inquiry, I now describe my narrative approach to research in practice. I begin by explaining my application of narrative reasoning in my analysis, which lays the foundation for my interpretation of narrative inquiry practice. I discuss my reasons for using focus groups for research material gathering and provide details
of the sampling and recruitment methods used. I then outline the practical aspects of the focus group settings and time frames used, and describe my approach to focus group moderation that captured participants’ stories. Finally, I provide details of how I dealt with the extensive transcripts and undertook the analytical process that led to the compilation of stories.

**Analysis of narrative or narrative analysis**

There are two different kinds of narrative inquiry, ‘analysis of narrative,’ and ‘narrative analysis’ (Polkinghorne, 1995). ‘Analysis of narrative’ uses stories as data, from which themes are developed that hold across all the stories, while ‘narrative analysis’ uses descriptions of events that are configured by the researcher into a story by means of a plot. McCormack’s (2004) approach draws on both narrative inquiry frameworks using a process described as ‘storying stories.’ In this process she gathers participants’ personal experience stories, from which she composes further stories about those experiences. The participants in the focus groups gave me many stories and also used descriptions of events or offered opinions about the matters under discussion, which were not in storied form. Thus, my final analysis applies an adaptation of McCormack’s (2004) methods of ‘storying stories’.

**Collecting the stories**

To create these stories, I chose the Canberra region to speak to people who procured their food from a range of different food systems, which have been outlined in the introduction. I applied a ‘settings approach’ to this research for its focus on combining people’s health and well-being with a healthy environment (Baum, 2008). A ‘settings approach’ is a strategic approach used in health promotion that considers the physical, social and cultural environment in which people live (Fleming & Parker, 2007), congruent with an exploration of food system sustainability. The principles underlying this approach aim to make changes in people’s physical and social environment—and ultimately individual behaviour—to improve the health of people and the environment (Baum, 2008). I chose to speak to those who used each particular food system frequently to enable me to more clearly evaluate the similarities and differences of the stories that emerged from the five different food procurement environments.
Choosing focus groups

As I immersed myself in narrative inquiry texts and journal articles, it became clear that narrative inquirers often use in-depth interviews to collect their research material (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Howie, 2010; Riessman, 2008). There was a real need, nonetheless, to explore both the depth and breadth of my topic, as very little is known about the social connections people experience across the five different food systems and the way in which people make-meaning of food in each environment. Focus groups, which bring together approximately 4-12 people (Twohig & Putnam, 2002), offer a useful way to access both the depth and breadth of people’s insights, attitudes and experiences on a topic within a social environment (Davidson, Halcomb, & Gholizaheh, 2010; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). Food procurement is a social activity (Madgwick & Ravenscroft, 2011) and I was keenly interested in the social connections that occur while shopping. Thus, focus groups that mimic other social settings by stimulating interaction, conversation and even lively debate between participants (Barbour, 2007; Davidson et al., 2010; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006) made them an attractive method for research material gathering. Goss and Leinbach (1996) go so far as to suggest that focus groups revive the fun and joy in the research process and, with the guidance of a skilled moderator, can sustain participation better than in-depth interviews. Kirwan (2004), who used focus groups to explore the complex, context-specific interactions that occur between farmers and their customers at farmers’ markets, would agree. He found that the participants really enjoyed interacting with other like-minded people as they reminisced and made wider connections, which also demonstrated the synergistic capacity of focus groups to yield rich research material (Kirwan, 2004).

Other reasons for deciding to use focus groups lay in their congruency with my methodological choices. Focus group discussions are highly contextual and dependent upon contributions made by others and the dynamics of the group (Barbour, 2007; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006), which was consistent with my turn to narrative knowing (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Barbour (2007) argues that the context-specific nature of focus groups should be considered a virtue rather than a weakness, because they reflect the way in which people actually change their thinking. The inconsistencies and contradictions in people’s stories and opinions that often surface in focus groups only become a problem if one views attitudes as being fixed, which is likely with those taking a positivist stance (Barbour, 2007) rather than a narrative one. Barbour (2007) suggests that it is through the process of focus group discussions that researchers come to understand not just what people think, but how they have
formed these views. This unique research material develops as participants offer their perspectives and explain their viewpoint, often through storytelling, challenging beliefs and assumptions on a particular topic (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). It is through this process that an assessment of the extent to which participants agree or disagree with each other, often referred to as ‘the group effect’, can be made, which cannot be achieved through individual interviews (Carey & Smith, 1994; Morgan, 1996; Morgan & Krueger, 1993). Further, Goss and Leinbach (1996) suggest that the stories produced through the collaborative performance of a focus group reflect the social nature of knowledge better than the summation of individual stories that are produced from in-depth interviews. However, the opportunities offered by focus groups to provide group meanings of different phenomena (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2001) does not mean that individual voices within the discussions are lost (Barbour, 2007).

There were epistemological reasons for me to opt for using focus groups for material gathering too. I found authors who asserted that focus groups can serve to assuage concerns about establishing a hierarchy between the researcher and the participants (Frey & Fontana, 1991; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). As a constructionist researcher, I was comfortable with taking responsibility for the direction of the research, but I was pleased to be assured by others that focus group conversations generate material that reflect multiple voices, which together create co-constructed stories (Frey & Fontana, 1991; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). This does not imply that I viewed my role as an objective observer. Rather, I was keen for my participants to take centre ‘stage’ and have the freedom to express their views and tell their stories, without viewing me, as the ‘expert’ (Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rook, 2007).

**Sampling and recruitment methods**

With my decision to use focus groups made, I had to gird myself for the difficulties in sampling and recruiting participants. In the following sections regarding sampling, recruitment and procedures for conducting focus groups, I discuss the theoretical aspects of these methods in-text, while the technical aspects are placed in the appendices for reference. All processes and materials were approved by the University of Canberra Human Research Ethics Committee (project number 10-68).

I used purposive sampling to select people with particular, crucial insights to answer the research question that cannot be obtained through alternative means (Barbour, 2008;
Liamputtong, 2010). This was particularly important for those who procured their food through local food systems, because the proportion of the population in the Canberra region procuring food through these systems was likely to be small given that the proportion of the population who shopped at the farmers’ market was approximately 1.7% of the ACT population over 18 years (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014a; Rotary Club of Hall, n.d.) and those using the Canberra Organic Growers Society community gardens represented approximately 0.09% of the adult population in the ACT (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014a; Steensby, 2014). Within the population of fresh food market and supermarket shoppers, convenience sampling was possible, as it allowed me to recruit those who were conveniently available and willing to participate (Liamputtong, 2010). Snowball sampling was also used (Liamputtong, 2010).

Focus group participation in ethical research must be voluntary (Hennick, 2014), so there is always a risk that self-selection may lead to participation by those interested in the research topic. The particular viewpoints offered by these participants may not necessarily reflect the views of others within the targeted population who choose not to be involved in the research. However, focus groups still have the ability to uncover a variety of viewpoints, even when the sampling methods are somewhat crude (Barbour, 2007). My methods for recruiting participants for each group of food procurers can be found in Appendix I. To encourage attendance, potential participants were offered refreshments, which is recommended by Bloor and colleagues (2001) to show appreciation for the time people invest in someone else’s research project. Offering refreshments has the added advantage of encouraging a relaxed atmosphere within the focus group setting (Barbour, 2007).

*Bringing people together for conversation*

All potential focus group participants, except those in the CSA focus group, were given the opportunity to attend a day or evening focus group and were offered several meeting place options. The focus groups were held at the University of Canberra, as this venue was considered central and easy to find, and had good parking facilities for the convenience of participants (Stewart et al., 2007). For the CSA focus group, all participants lived in a small town near Canberra, so the focus group was held in the town’s community centre in the early evening.
The methods for conducting each focus group followed standard procedures (Barbour, 2007; Bassett, 2004; Bloor et al., 2001) with information sheets distributed on arrival and consent forms and demographic questionnaires completed prior to discussion commencing. Expectations for confidentiality within each focus group were discussed (Barbour, 2007). More details of these focus group procedures, including focus group length and recording methods, can be found in Appendix II.

As facilitator and researcher, my role was to create an atmosphere in the room that allowed the participants to feel comfortable enough to contribute to a rich and meaningful discussion. My way of creating such an atmosphere was to be friendly and welcoming to all; offering each person a drink and something to eat as they arrived; introducing everyone if they had not met (Bassett, 2004); and explaining that there were no right or wrong answers to the questions being asked (Puchta & Potter, 2004). I was interested in a range of points of view and in the interactions between group members (Bloor et al., 2001). Another approach I used to encourage a relaxed and comfortable ambience to develop was to use pauses, hesitations and informal words; to laugh with the participants; and to invite the quieter members of the groups to make contributions to the discussions (Bloor et al., 2001; Puchta & Potter, 2004). I aimed to be a background figure rather than a foreground one, to be ‘the theatre manager rather than the director of the play’ (Bloor et al., 2001, p. 49).

My interview schedule was semi-structured, but there was sufficient flexibility to allow groups to take the discussion along different pathways if they chose to do so (Stewart et al., 2007). There were some occasions when I had to steer the conversation back to my central research questions, but this was not common, nor unmanageable. Four major open-ended questions were planned, but probing questions were also used to seek further clarification of participants’ ideas. In the groups where conversations waned, I asked additional questions to help direct the conversation (Stewart et al., 2007). Refer to Appendix III for the focus group questions. At the conclusion of each of the focus groups, everyone was thanked for their contributions and their time. I also explained that further clarification and a deeper analysis of the conversations may be sought from them and that I would like them to review my draft interpretive stories to gauge fidelity to the meanings they wished to impart.

A professional transcription service was used for each of the focus groups with instructions for each person to be differentiated on the transcript, so that the contributions made by individuals could be followed (Bloor et al., 2001). All recorded speech was transcribed,
including the hesitations or pauses—such as ‘um’ and ‘ah’—without being tidied up, and laughter was also noted (Bloor et al., 2001). I checked the transcripts for accuracy and completeness by listening to the recordings while reading the transcripts. If there was any confusion about any aspect of the transcripts, they were sent out to appropriate focus group participants for their clarification. The exciting process of analysis was now awaiting my attention.

The analytical process

I returned to the narrative inquiry literature seeking practical guidelines for developing interpretive stories from the material I had gathered. There I found McCormack’s (2004) process of storying stories. My attraction to McCormack’s (2004) method of transcript analysis lay in her desire to avoid fracturing the data into codes and building themes that hold across stories that fit into a researcher’s conceptual framework. Instead, her approach to analysis maintains the complexity of people’s lives, with all its contingencies and contradictions, which was appealing for its transparency and lifeliness (Bruner, 1986; Dibley, 2011). Constructing interpretive stories would allow me to retain the immediate context of the focus group and the broader socio-cultural context of people’s lives, made possible by attending to the contextual, structural and performative aspects of the participants’ language (McCormack, 2004). Further, the interpretive stories created through such a process, which are based on stories reconstructed from research participants’ life experiences, would then be available for multiple interpretations by subsequent readers (McCormack, 2004). I was pleased to have found a method that allows the reader to follow particular characters within each story, or to take the more conventional path of starting at the beginning and reading through to the end. Interpretive stories give readers the opportunity to construct meaning from the multiple voices contained within the text, reflect on their own lives, and learn about themselves by following the past, present and future experiences of the characters within the story (McCormack, 2004).

In practical terms, I adapted McCormack’s (2004) methods in two main ways. Firstly, I constructed group narratives from transcripts that contained stories told by a number of people who attended a focus group, rather than individuals who were interviewed several times over a number of years. Secondly, my focus group participants had not storied all their experiences, but had provided viewpoints in answering my research question, which I then incorporated in storied form.
Howie’s (2010) method of narrative analysis is drawn from Goodfellow (1997) and Polkinghorne (1995) and offers a practical, if not slightly formulaic, approach to narrative analysis. Her methods proved useful, as they offered guidance on systematically stepping through different phases of the story creation process (Howie, 2010). Briefly, Howie (2010) describes three main steps in data analysis, beginning with reviewing the transcript, followed by story preparation and then story creation, which will be expanded upon in phase 1 of the draft story process, with examples.

I initially began the narrative analysis phase by developing individual draft stories of the participants from the CSA, farmers’ market and community garden focus groups. By exploring the individual motivations, ideas and attitudes of participants, as I read and re-read each transcript, linking the stories and opinions of individuals as I went, and subsequently constructing their stories, helped me to gain a more complete understanding of the whole group narrative. As my processes became more refined and practiced, I moved to constructing group stories from each focus group and finally a narrative for each food procurement environment. The following section outlines each of the phases and the steps I took to construct each narrative.

**Phase 1: Draft stories begin to take shape**

The first step of the story creation process required full immersion in the transcript to get a sense of the whole focus group discussion (Howie, 2010; McCormack, 2004). During this process, I paid particular attention to some of the novel ideas that emerged, the use of language, metaphors and imagery and the strength with which stories or viewpoints were told (Howie, 2010). I also actively listened to the recordings, checking their accuracy, noting the dynamics within the group, the main characters in the conversation and my reactions to others (Howie, 2010; McCormack, 2004). As Howie (2010) suggests, I also took this opportunity to reflect on any issues that were avoided or minimised by participants.

The stories told by the participants were then located in the transcript. The narrative process of ‘stories’ is differentiated from surrounding text by boundaries with a beginning (an orientation describing who, what, where and when) and an end or coda, which brings the story to a close. The intervening sections of a story contain an abstract, which summarises the point of the story, and an evaluation, which conveys the storyteller’s emotions and attitudes to the narration (Labov, 1972; Labov & Waletzky, 1967; Riessman, 2008). The story will also
usually contain a series of linked events or complicating actions that may be organised thematically or chronologically (Labov & Waletzky, 1967; McCormack, 2004; Riessman, 2008).

Other narrative processes that may not be represented as stories, such as theorizing, argumentation, augmentation and description, are then identified in the transcript (McCormack, 2004; Rosenthal, 1993). For example: as people tell stories they may ask themselves why they behaved in a particular fashion—which is theorizing—or they may include an abstracted element outside the story—which is argumentation (Rosenthal, 1993). Augmentation is the process people use to make additional comments to their story to help with plot development, while description gives details about people or places that help the listener to get a more complete picture of the story (McCormack, 2004). Not all stories contain each of these narrative processes and there may be variations in their sequence (Riessman, 2008).

McCormack (2004) also focuses on language when reviewing transcripts and recordings. This enables the researcher to examine what is said and how it is said, while also paying attention to what is not said, such as the periods of silence in conversations, the tone, the hesitations and the emotions. She also considers the particular context of an interview and the broader cultural context of participants’ lives. Some of the contextual considerations that I applied to my work concerned the interactions between group members in the focus groups. Who did most of the talking? Who interrupts whom? Why did some focus groups have extended periods of silence, while others moved very rapidly? As I reflected on the wider cultural, historical and political context in which these focus groups took place, I pondered: who used strong language in relation to the politics of food and why? Who drew on distant historical influences on their lives as they told their stories? What can I learn from those who acknowledged the importance of culture in relation to the way food is procured and used? As people storied their lives and reconstructed their sense of self, how did they accommodate, resist or challenge the cultural context of their lives? Were there epiphanies in people’s lives, or moments where they altered the way they viewed themselves and their direction in life (McCormack, 2004)?

An extract from the supermarket story illustrates some elements of narrative processes and language described above. Clive, a supermarket shopper, tells a story to explain the difference
in his experience of shopping at the supermarket to other ways of sourcing his food. I added the orientation.

**Orientation**
Clive enjoys closer connections with those who produce the food he eats and explains that,

**Abstract**
‘When I shop at the supermarket; what about it? I don’t care. But if I buy [food] from a roadside stall or if I’m going to someone’s place and they’re cooking it,

**Description**
and they’ve said, oh, you know, we slaughtered the cow and shucked the corn and do all this sort of stuff,

**Abstract**
I do have a different appreciation of what’s going on there;

**Evaluation**
the contact between – the distance is much less. I feel more available to that process than I do just picking it up off a shelf. I disconnect from that.

**Theorising**
I just go in there and go into remote, I think. Just look for the ingredients to go home and do the thing.’

**Augmentation**
Even the fresh eggs given to him by his next door neighbour, occasionally, just ‘taste different’. They have that ‘chicken coop taste;

**Coda**
I mean that’s appreciation,’ he exclaims.

The next step in this analytical process was story preparation, which began with creating headings that reflected the central concepts and events relating to the research questions (Howie, 2010). For example, the first two headings chosen were ‘social connections in the food system’, which was colour-coded in blue, and ‘appreciation of food’, which was colour-coded in red. The relevant material in the transcripts was colour-coded accordingly. In preparation for constructing each draft story, the key stories and ideas presented under these headings were recorded as brief summaries, making note of the line numbers in the transcript. During this process, it became clear that other pertinent headings were required, as participants made political statements about the dominant food system and told stories of their connections with the earth as they grew some of their own food. So, two further headings
were created: ‘politics in the food system’ and ‘connections with nature in the food system’, which were colour-coded in purple and green respectively. An additional heading was used for each story constructed for the community gardeners, called ‘history of gardening’, as this was a major focus of discussion in this group, colour-coded in yellow. Again, the pertinent material in the transcripts was colour-coded with assigned colours. Under these new headings, the additional views and stories proffered by participants were added as brief summaries to each preparatory story, with line numbers from the transcript noted. A process that helped me ensure I had incorporated all relevant research material was to return to the transcript to check the lines without colour-coding. If these sections of the transcript contained relevant material for the development of a plot, they were colour-coded and summarised under the appropriate headings.

The third step in the analysis was the story creation, where I began the process of creating an interpretive story of participants’ experiences under the four (or five) headings, expanding on the brief summaries (Howie, 2010). Howie (2010) recommends the use of third person past tense in the construction of a story, adding direct references from the transcript where appropriate. As I wrote each section of a story under the headings, I repeatedly returned to the transcripts to check my understanding and to make sure that I used each participant’s words as much as possible, so that meaning and nuances were not lost. Larger quotes from participants are indented, but smaller ones are not, to retain the narrative flow.

As I developed the prose by expanding on each brief summary, I also drew on the work of Polkinghorne (1995, drawing on Dollard, 1935), who offers guidelines for developing life history stories based on criteria developed by Dollard. As I was not attempting to create a full life history of individuals, I adapted these guidelines to create stories that conveyed people’s connections in their chosen food system and the way in which they made-meaning of food at that time in their life. As each story’s plot developed, I considered the historical continuity of each participant; the impact that family and friends had on their views and experiences; and the motivations that led to their chosen actions and pursuit of personal goals (Polkinghorne, 1995). Polkinghorne’s (1995) guidelines also suggest that when constructing a story, the researcher should include details that differentiate a particular story from similar ones, because the power of the story is in the presentation of its unique elements. The final guideline that helped me to create coherent stories was to configure the research material in a chronological fashion or towards an outcome that was plausible and understandable.
(Polkinghorne, 1995). I used a narrative smoothing technique, including only the key elements and stories from the transcript that contributed meaningfully to the development of the plot, as not all of the participants’ conversations conformed to a coherent storyline (Polkinghorne, 1995).

Having followed this protocol, I produced draft stories, which were returned to the participants via email to allow them to offer feedback on my interpretations (Howie, 2010). Some chose not to offer any feedback at all, while most did not request any changes. I made changes to content and wording in response to requests by two participants to correct minor misunderstandings.

**Phase 2: The refining processes for developing group narratives**

As I then moved into the next phase of the analytical process of building the group narratives, I claimed interpretive authority as the narrative researcher (Chase, 1996). The first step in the process of refinement started with my returning to all the draft stories relating to each food procurement environment. While the voices of all participants are heard in each narrative, the narrative smoothing techniques that had been used for the drafted stories were employed again to include only the key elements and stories that helped with the development of the plot (Polkinghorne, 1995). After the story middle of each narrative was constructed, the next step was to create the beginning (orientation) and end (coda) for each.

McCormack (2004) suggests setting the scene for the reader in the orientation, giving them a context for what is to come in the middle section of the story. As I wrote the coda for each group narrative, I tried to convey the way people were feeling at the end of the focus groups. To write the title of each story, I used words or an expression that came directly from a participant that captured the thoughts of the whole group. I also adapted each of the headings within each narrative to more fully convey the meaning expressed by those in a particular group. For example, the title of the community gardeners’ story is ‘You can’t beat the taste of a home-grown tomato,’ while the title for the CSA members’ story is ‘This is a wonderful place to be.’ Rather than using the heading ‘Appreciation of food’ in the community garden group story, I re-named this to ‘Food from the garden is astonishing: The intrinsic qualities of food are highly valued’, partially using Wayne’s words.
The last step in refining the construction of group narratives was to do selected secondary analyses. After each group narrative was constructed, there were elements that roused my curiosity further and I wanted to delve a little deeper. For example, I wanted to know more about what participants in the community garden story meant when they said that gardening was ‘in their blood’. What did Rosemary, from the farmers’ market group, mean by the statement, ‘It’s that act of the soil; the soil brings people together’? I wanted to understand the significance of Garry’s history as an apprentice carpenter, mixing with migrants from southern Europe, in relation to his meaning of ‘good food’ purchased through the farmers’ market. I emailed participants to ask these and other questions to more fully understand their thinking on particular topics, so that the narratives I constructed were as faithful to participants meaning as possible (Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995; Polkinghorne, 2007). From their clarification and additional information I was able to enhance each of these narratives and contribute to their validity (Polkinghorne, 2007).

After constructing each of these five narratives, I identified the perspectives of a ‘moveable feast’ for each group, placing the participants’ views and stories within the context of the appropriate literature, considering their contribution to answering the research question. From there, I undertook the narrative analysis phase and told my story, delving into each narrative to discover the similarities and differences between them, constructing a broader interpretive framework as I applied my own interpretations of the narratives as a whole (Ezzy, 2002; Polkinghorne, 2007; Riessman, 2008).

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I explained my turns to narrative inquiry, which offered an excellent way to answer my research question. I also described the way I carried out narrative inquiry research in practice, providing details of my material gathering methods, analytical processes and attention to ethical practice that enabled the development of five interpretive stories. Finally, I illuminated the way in which I have developed my story to uncover people’s explanations of their preferences for a particular place of food procurement and what this reveals about their relationship to food and pathways to food citizenship. Now it is time to reveal my interpretive narratives of the five groups of people who procure their food either through community gardens, a CSA, a farmers’ market, fresh food markets or supermarkets in the Canberra region.
Prologue to the narratives

The following five findings chapters are structured in the same way. At the start of each chapter, the pseudonyms and some pertinent details of each character in the narrative are provided, followed by the key concepts that the chapter uncovers. The narrative then unfolds, after which, the important perspectives of a ‘moveable feast’ that help to answer the research question are discussed, with reference to the relevant literature. At the end of each chapter is a three dimensional model that conveys a moveable feast, using the concepts of each group’s meaning-making of food and their level of participation in their chosen food system, which helps to visualise pathways to food citizenship. In each model there is a pie chart representing each group’s food culture. Within each pie chart, there are proportions of influences from traditional, ethical and instrumental food choices that each group experiences. The spheres surrounding the pie charts vary in size and colour. Large and coloured spheres portray the high level of importance that the group places on this factor in their relationship to food. The arm and hand reaching out to the apple or ‘food citizenship’ depicts the group’s level of participation in their chosen food system, signifying their commitment and ability to engage in food citizenship.

In these next five chapters you will hear the voices of mostly middle-aged women, but that does not mean that younger women and men did not express their views and tell their stories with any less conviction. It is just that there were fewer of these demographic groups represented in the focus groups. You will find that most of the participants were living in a partnership with children still living at home, but a considerable proportion of households had grown up children, who were living independently. There were few participants who were poorly educated or engaged in unskilled work, as most were well-educated and had careers in the professions or administration. There were two women in the supermarket narrative who were living in Australia for a short period while studying. One was from the Kingdom of Swaziland and the other from Ghana. A table follows that provides the spread of demographic characteristics for each group of food procurers.

There was one focus group held for the community gardeners and CSA members. There were two for the farmers’ market and Belconnen and Fyshwick market group, and three for the supermarket group.
Table 1: Participants' demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Community gardeners</th>
<th>CSA members</th>
<th>Farmers’ market shoppers</th>
<th>Belconnen/Fyshwick market shoppers</th>
<th>Supermarket shoppers</th>
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<td>F</td>
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<td>26-72</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 – Other - Home Duties/Casual Employment</td>
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<td>-</td>
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</table>

**Family type:**
1 – Single/Divorced/Widowed without children at home
2 – Single/Divorced/Widowed with children at home
3 – Married/Defacto without children at home
4 – Married/Defacto with children at home

**Employment status:**
1 – Working full-time
2 – Working part-time
3 – Still in education
4 – Unemployed
5 – Retired
6 – Other - Home Duties/Casual Employment

**Occupation:**
Most participants’ occupations were either professional—such as academics, teachers, accountants, economists, health professionals, engineers, building contractors and ICT workers—or administrative—such as public servants, office workers and sales assistants. There was one electrician and no unskilled workers.
Chapter 4: You can’t beat the taste of a home-grown tomato: The community gardeners

Introduction

There are six characters in this narrative that belong to two different community gardens on the north side of Canberra. There are three grandparents in the group—Roslyn, Jim and Genevieve, aged between 58 and 65 years—and three parents—Meredith, Diane and Wayne, aged between 37 and 41 years. Roslyn and Meredith are mother and daughter.

Through this narrative you will come to appreciate that these community gardeners have a deep pleasure in growing their own fresh, organic food. They enjoy devoting time to growing food, admiring its intrinsic qualities and cooking it, but they are still keen to learn more from others and to pass these skills on to their children and grandchildren.

The first of a series of focus groups is about to start. I hastily return from another building on the campus, clutching a second recording device in case there are glitches with my library loaned recorder. I introduce myself to this group of community gardeners and apologise for not being at my office door to greet my guests. While I get the kettle boiling, the six participants introduce themselves, all of them knowing at least one other person in the group. We get started ...

Gardening is ‘in their blood’: An ancestral history of gardening

A love of gardening, for this group of community gardeners, is ‘in their blood’. Genevieve ‘grew up with home grown vegetables’ and has ‘always grown her own vegetables’. However, she’s ‘got a garden full of old trees, not enough sun, big yard but cannot grow vegetables’, so her solution is to grow vegetables in her community garden plot, because she ‘needs to do it somewhere’. Given that both of Wayne’s grandfathers grew their own vegetables, he quips, ‘I’ve got some genetic urge to grow vegetables, especially tomatoes … Well, it’s probably more nurture than nature’. As a child, Wayne’s paternal grandfather regularly gave him ‘a paper bag full of his home-grown cherry tomatoes, with a little added salt’, which Wayne ate with relish. This fond memory of his childhood is at the heart of his continuing ‘obsession’ with growing tomatoes. Roslyn recalls that when her parents retired to the mid-North coast of NSW, they put in a ‘lovely orchard with very different and exotic
fruits’ and just loved ‘eating off the land’, and were ‘very environmentally conscious’. Meredith’s paternal grandmother, whom she called ‘Nana Coleslaw’, had a garden too, ‘where she grew cabbages, cauliflowers, beans and broadbeans … I used to go in and find frogs in the garden […] and pull the timber back and take all the little frogs out’. Jim, the eldest of this group, when reflecting on his continued interest in community gardening, said ‘I guess it has stayed with [me]’ from ‘the time when I was a kid and my father had an allotment back in Wales.’ For doing the weeding he ‘had a section of the garden’ to grow his own vegetables. Diane’s association with gardening emerged from very different historical circumstances, as she explains, ‘I grew up on a farm [contaminated with] a lot of DDT² and a lot of relatives have cancer … My mother [has] three lots of cancer; the children have [health] issues; so, trying to grow and eat and you know, trying to be healthy and […] trying to avoid all that; we’d like to be self-sufficient.’

I’ve got to have that! The importance of produce variety

Growing a whole variety of different types of produce, especially tomatoes, is a key aspect of the pleasure this group gains from gardening. ‘I have a passion for growing most things,’ says Jim, ‘so a couple of years back, there was an open day in Charnwood³; as it turned out … I happened to get a plot there and that was able to satisfy my desire to grow organically.’ When Roslyn joined the community garden she ‘went mad’. ‘I think it’s about growing vegetables; you go along, you see a different tomato type. Oh, I’ve got to have that’, she exclaims. ‘So, I’ve got a yellow one, a low acid one, and a green one’ and ‘they look beautiful when you put them in a basket’, says Roslyn. ‘We ended up, at the height of the season, we were picking six, seven kilos every second day and my freezers were full. We could not move in the freezers, I bought a tomato processor thing […] so then I had to learn about the Italian way of using the beer bottles, things like that.’

Meredith, Roslyn’s daughter, likes to grow many of the heirloom tomato varieties, and she has about 15 different varieties growing in her garden at the moment. She tries to ‘grow more heirloom things than just standard variety things’ because she ‘can go to the supermarket to buy that [the standard variety]’. She explains, ‘I mean cost is a factor a lot of the time because we’ve got a, you know, sort of a large family so […] cost for us over the years was quite

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² Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane
³ Charnwood is a suburb in Canberra
difficult. If you’re buying commercial seeds, you can’t always save that food [seed]; it will not produce or you can’t save it from the things you buy in the supermarket; it just does not grow.’ So with a large family of four children, growing her own food from saved seed helps Meredith to keep the family food budget manageable.

For some of this group, seed-saving is not just about saving money. Wayne suggests that ‘you don’t want to have a monoculture of anything. Different varieties were “created” in different areas by different people, and it seems a shame to see them disappear. The plants are a physical reminder of the people and places that made them.’ A concern for Jim is that ‘conglomerates involved in food production are selectively choosing seed varieties, which, if it goes unchecked, will result in a smaller gene pool of seeds and hence vegetable varieties. The introduction and maintenance of community gardens provides a level of insurance against the loss of seed variety … COGS actively supports seed-saver activities.’

Apart from these important considerations for future food supplies, Wayne and Genevieve both grow different varieties of food for personal enjoyment and satisfaction. Wayne starts by planting a few things in and then he says to himself, ‘they won’t all come up’, but then ‘they all come up’ and then ‘you think, I’ll just put a few over there.’ And so it goes on, to the point where Wayne is now ‘self-sufficient in tomatoes’. In the past, Wayne ‘grew quite a few chillies for the look of them.’ He tried many different varieties, ‘just for the joy of having something weird in the garden’. He jokes about having had this ‘ever growing stockpile of dried chillies’ because he liked to keep growing them, even though he does not eat a lot of hot food anymore because his children do not like it.

Wayne says he gardens ‘because [he] think[s] it a good use of [his] time. It’s fun; I enjoy particularly the act of gardening and the chance to grow things you can’t easily get otherwise.’ He also enjoys the physical activity associated with digging and weeding and he feels a sense of achievement when he can stand back and admire the outcome of his efforts: ‘Producing some of the food you eat […] strikes me as connecting you to the many humans who have done so since farming began.’ So, too, Genevieve really enjoys ‘the doing of it … The picking it and using it immediately. Just the fact that, every year’s different, and you never quite know what you’re going to get’ from the garden appeals to Genevieve.
These gardeners like to ‘see things being done’: Experiential learning

Diane reveals some of the social reasons for becoming involved in community gardens, saying, ‘[I am] trying to get the children into a community, actually, because growing up on 3 000 acres can be quite isolating … So, you know, we’ve got a lot of different community avenues, but learning from others as well and swapping knowledge and feeds and chickens; things like that; it’s excellent. My children also go to the high school where the garden is, so they’ll often go to the gardens, grab some food and walk home. So it’s good in that way too, because the children are eating healthily and getting physical activity, according to Diane. She also thinks that through her children talking to their friends about the importance of the garden there will be less vandalism of the garden.

Giving children first-hand experiences of growing food is important to some of the community gardeners. Genevieve has three little grandchildren ‘who live in a concrete backyard’ in Sydney, so when they come down to Canberra a couple of times a year, they go out to the community garden every day, where they ‘pick the raspberries […] and get some food for the chooks4, and get involved in whatever is going on at the time. They ‘know Joe5 perfectly well because every time they go there they see him and they all chatter away with each other.’ Roslyn, another grandmother, thinks her grandchildren ‘need to learn’ how food is grown, because ‘they eat better if they understand the growing process’, so she is busy training the seven year old to water plants. When the older granddaughter, aged 11, found out that Roslyn was getting a second plot at the garden, she ‘wanted her own plot straightaway’; so she is soon to have her own section of the garden. Roslyn and her husband are very family-oriented and one of the special ways in which they can demonstrate their love for their extended family is through gardening and sharing their produce. Roslyn explained how her youngest daughter, who does not have the time to garden or make tomato sauce, really enjoys her home-bottled tomato sauce. ‘She keeps saying, “have you got any more of those tomatoes” and I say, “I’ve only got four bottles left. It’s got to last us until next February.”’ It [is] the nicest thing [I] could give her’, says Roslyn. Roslyn’s husband knows that their daughter’s family love to make meatballs using Roslyn’s home-made tomato sauce, so he makes meatballs for them from time to time. ‘And now, he’s built her a garden bed, you

4 Australian slang term for chicken
5 Another community gardener
know, with the concrete sleepers [as] her birthday present … So we’ve planted out half the box now with things that just came up in my garden, [such as] spring onions and strawberries and little broccolini and kale and things like that; garlic. She’s so excited, but whether she’ll water it is another thing.’

The community garden is also a place where people can ‘exchange views’ and, as Jim says, ‘there is a whole reservoir of experience and expertise that you can draw on.’ After all, he does not think ‘anyone would be able to cover the full spectrum of gardening to the extent that they say they are an expert on everything … Being traditionally a backyard gardener, you’re not aware of what’s available to you until you immerse yourself in the community garden.’

For Jim, ‘owning a plot in a community garden provides the environment where one can focus entirely on the hobby of gardening […] and isolate oneself from the trials and tribulations of modern life.’ The garden ‘opens up other avenues’ for Jim too, such as bee keeping, so now he’s ‘got a site for [his] bees and a couple of hives.’

Genevieve also finds the community garden useful for sharing ideas about how to grow food; it offers opportunities ‘to see things being done’ without having to rely on being told about different gardening techniques. Instead, she can actually observe these methods first-hand. She likes to swap different plants with others in the garden and ‘try them out’. By way of example, Genevieve explains that Joe ‘comes in and plants half a garden full of just artichokes, so we all ask him, you know, about what he does’. So, at the next communal barbecue, his wife ‘turns up with this huge platter of prepared, cooked, beautiful fried artichoke hearts for the whole garden to try.’ The following spring there were about ten more plots with artichokes growing in them, because Joe had given people his artichoke plants to grow.

**Community spirit ‘happens by osmosis’: Community, knowledge sharing and friendship in the garden**

This story of Joe and his artichokes epitomises the way in which Jim believes that the community spirit occurs within the garden. He elaborates,

‘my experience tells me that it happens by osmosis, to some extent, as opposed to a deliberate attempt to well, hey, I mean, there are some individuals that, you know, have surplus to their requirements. And, you know, have that opportunity to swap and it happens in a random manner rather than by deliberate attempts to bring people
together … I mean … I try to take the opportunity where, you know, there was Michelle\(^6\) down the garden. I said, “Oh look, do you want some beetroot?” So I gave her some beetroot … So you’re not giving it to get something back, but I think what goes around comes around, if you know what I mean? I mean it’s just building up again […] a positive spirit thing within the garden, which is really part of the […] big scene in community, you know what I mean. It all underscores community.’

Nearly all of the women like to share knowledge with others and form friendships, in the community garden and beyond. On Fridays, fellow gardeners gather together, bringing something they have cooked, ‘usually from produce in the garden and sit and talk, swap seeds, recipes and gardening magazines, and then we all garden’, explains Meredith. ‘We even have some of the local Men’s Shed\(^7\) fellows join us occasionally,’ adds Roslyn. The women consider the friendships that have developed in the community garden as wonderful, because they are able to share ideas and discuss problems they are having with growing particular plants that they are unable to do in their home garden on their own. Meredith grows a very diverse range of vegetables in the community garden, reflecting different cultures, so she likes to share her knowledge of these vegetables with others, as well as sharing the vegetables themselves. Meredith also swaps seeds with her mother, and compares their methods of gardening: ‘We grew similar things and we compared and she had a dripper system and I was hand watering, so we could look at different, you know, how different things were.’ Growing different types of vegetables has also encouraged Meredith to try different recipes, particularly when she has an overabundance of a particular product.

While the social interaction that takes place in the community garden is not necessarily the primary reason for Wayne using it, he does like the social aspect of going to the garden because, as he says, ‘You can’t have too many chats with yourself in the garden.’ There are people that he has met through the community garden that he would not have met otherwise. At the social events that are organised, such as the barbecues, he has heard many entertaining stories that he has enjoyed. Although, Wayne also pointed out that there are some people who may not wish to engage with others at the community garden—but these people are not considered out of place. However, COGS is organised such that the community gardens are open plan with no fences between the plots, so while gardeners are not obliged to be sociable, Wayne believes there is an implication that community gardening is concerned with some

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\(^6\) Another gardener
\(^7\) Men’s Sheds are a community-based organisation advancing the health and well-being of men.
social engagement and recalls a significant social event in the garden, illustrating that not everyone has the same view. Robert, the previous president of COGS, ‘used to have a thing that if someone new came’ to one of the monthly barbecues: ‘they’d get a bottle of wine’ as an incentive. So, ‘they were sitting there one day drinking a bottle of wine and it was all the same people as usual came’ and Wayne says, ‘Here comes such and such, and such and such walked in, walked to his garden, picked something and walked out and left again’. Wayne said to Robert, ‘Well, you’re safe there’, indicating that Robert would not have to part with one of his bottles of wine. Instead, the bottle was shared amongst the regulars, because the incentive clearly did not work! Genevieve agrees that it is the same people that come to the monthly barbecues, saying, ‘Yeah, it’s the same people, I mean there’s people in ten years who have never turned up.’

While Wayne does not claim that the friendships that develop are especially deep, he thinks it is ‘good to know people in your suburb or region.’ Jim adds, ‘as in any communal endeavour, bonds of friendship will only occur in isolated instances and be influenced by people’s chemistry. The depth of the friendship will vary and will generally extend to the gardening activities alone.’ In his view, ‘the social gatherings serve to underpin the essence of community gardening. Such gatherings are not for everyone, but only through such gatherings can the bonds of friendship and co-operation grow.’ While he is aware that some individuals do not join in the social activities, the vast majority of people respond positively, which he thinks underscores the ‘community element’.

**Food from the garden is astonishing: The intrinsic qualities of food are highly valued**

Genevieve appreciates the seasonal nature of food production, such as the enjoyment of ‘looking forward to the asparagus’ coming into season. Being in Canberra, Wayne is now more aware of the seasonal nature of food, and he tries to avoid buying out-of-season produce, because it does not taste as good. ‘I bought some [tomatoes] the other day at the farmers’ markets out-of-season, because one of my kids asked for some tomatoes and [they] didn’t taste anywhere near as good being out-of-season, even though it was grown somewhere in a glass house. The texture and the temperature were all wrong.’

Freshness is a major attribute of the food Jim grows, as opposed to supposedly fresh food sold in the supermarkets: ‘As a gardener you soon realise very quickly how un-fresh the food is;
you know what I mean?’ Roslyn agrees that ‘you can’t beat’ the freshness of home grown produce. Wayne really likes the direct connection he experiences with some of the food he eats. ‘The taste benefits of a salad made with freshly picked ingredients’ and ‘the visual entertainment of bruschetta made with yellow tomatoes and purple basil’ give him a real thrill. Wayne adds, ‘Yeah, and there’s also the fresh, the picking something and eating it like a good cabbage’ grown ‘the other year for the first time’. Wayne ‘went and got the cabbage and cut it, and just the sound of me cutting the cabbage was just incredible; like God, there’s like this crispness, crunchiness noise [from the] cabbage, but it’s astonishing. And the same with fennel, you pick it and you’re kind of astonishing noise … Yeah, it’s good.’

Growing and preparing food that reflects family cultural origins is important for some members of this group. Meredith explains that her family’s diet is very Mediterranean, as her husband is Italian, so she likes to ‘grow unusual vegetables and cook some of the traditional things that he likes’, preparing lots of pastas and tomato sauces with her own produce. ‘Italians are passionate about their food and family and this is something that is wonderful for me as it is just what I love to do; garden, cook and look after my family.’ The family grows their own olives, and makes their own salamis, coppa, pancetta and pork sausages, ‘simply because they are better and no bread filler and preservatives’. Friday night is ‘pizza night’ in her household, made from all these homemade ingredients.

Roslyn delights in the fact that her grandchildren are taking an interest in the origin of their food and in home prepared food, rather than eating convenience foods. ‘We’ve got a seven year old granddaughter … The other night we were around there, and the parents were going out and we were minding the kids; this is Jacqueline and she said to me, “Now, what’s in this? Is any of this out of your garden Nanny?” “Oh yeah, some of it is”, and we went through; she said, “I’ve got a friend at school and we sit down and we discuss what we ate for dinner last night as to what was made from scratch basically.”’

Diane claims that while she considers herself to be a ‘foodie’ she ‘can’t afford to be’ so. Instead, she grows a lot of her own really ‘expensive foods’, such as asparagus and cherries, and the food ‘just tastes better’ in her view. ‘I also preserve food in a way that is considered “fine food” by the delis, smoked meats and preserves […] to buy that would be out of the question for me, so I grow and make it.’ Diane has found that encouraging her children to grow their own food has helped them to overcome food aversions. For example, ‘One of my children wouldn’t eat pumpkin and she grew a pumpkin and then entered that pumpkin in [an
agricultural] show and won a prize. She eats pumpkin now.’ One of her other daughters would not eat broccoli, so Diane got her to grow some broccoli ‘and she was down on her hands and knees nibbling at it still growing and saying “Mmm, you won’t get fresher than that”.’

I’ve always been very anti-spray: These gardeners like to avoid chemicals in food

This group of community gardeners have very clear views about the types of food they enjoy eating and growing, but they also have opinions about what they do not like to purchase or eat. Genevieve, for instance, showed concern about the amount of importation of food that occurs in the current dominant food system. She exclaims, ‘they’re [the supermarkets] also, at this time of the year [spring] they’ve got asparagus from Peru or from Zimbabwe, for God’s sake.’

Meredith likes to support a shop in North Lyneham⁸, which ‘tend[s] to sell local growers’ [produce]. They will also put on a kilometres travelled on the food, so you can see where it comes from, how far it’s travelled and you can make a choice of what you want to buy, whether it’s organic or just ordinary standard fresh stuff. And a lot of the stuff is bought in that day and it’s turned over very quickly; it’s not left on the shelf for, you know, a couple of days.’

The women in the group are troubled by production practices in overseas countries. ‘Imagine what the Chinese spray; imagine what the Chinese are putting on their [produce]!’ They worry about the ‘nasty chemicals’ that we may be exposed to, given that many of these countries do not have food safety regulations. Roslyn is also very apprehensive about imported food from countries such as China, where sanitation is poor. ‘I will not buy [food from China], and a lot of them have, you know, some of these hepatitis diseases that are working on farms.’ Even Australian grown food—such as bananas that are sold through the large supermarkets—are of concern, as they may have hormones injected into the stem to make them grow larger, according to information she received recently. She also heard on a news bulletin that, according to a survey, dangerous contaminants such as PCBS⁹ can be found in the plastic lining of tinned acidic foods, and in bottled food with rubber ringed seals.

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⁸ Suburb of Canberra
⁹ Polychlorinated biphenyls
As a consequence, she has scarcely bought tinned tomatoes since. Roslyn and her husband do not ‘like [to eat] food if [they] don’t know what’s been sprayed on it.’ She does buy tomatoes from the farmers’ markets at times, but she is still very wary of eating anything other than home-grown food. ‘I’ve always been very anti-spray and so we just don’t like food, if we don’t know what’s been sprayed on it. So we try to grow as much as we can.’

Meredith also has very strong views about the way food is produced, where it is produced, how it is packaged and where she purchases her food.

‘I won’t touch anything from the poly tunnels anymore … Overseas, now, they’re actually banning the poly tunnels […] and the other thing, going back to buying through the supermarket, you’re buying everything in plastics. And you’ve then got all this plastic that you’re throwing away and I’m finding so much stuff in my bin that I couldn’t recycle; it was all plastic. The garbage bin is full of plastics and tomatoes or some, you know, your leaves and spinach and things like that, that you’re buying, are all in plastic … I really buy everything in glass or paper bags or you try to reduce it [plastic] … What you’re throwing away, you pay for it as well and it’s going to go into landfill.’

Meredith’s concerns are not merely about the environment, but also about health. She wonders ‘how long those items have been in the plastic for and what they’ve absorbed; you’re eating those. Yeah, that’s where causing troubles with hormones and changes everyone … A program we saw many years ago, which made it look into the problem was fish; they were finding fish were having genetic deformities with male organs and things like that. And it’s also been seen coming through, genetics through humans as well; males are affected with that.’ Given that Meredith has four young boys she has decided to avoid plastic wrapped food to ensure her family eats food that is uncontaminated.

According to Diane, knowing where food comes from and how it is produced is really important for children. She thinks that people are too detached from food. ‘When you tell people you can slaughter a chicken, they’re horrified, absolutely horrified.’ However, she takes the view that if it horrifies people that she can keep lambs and chickens and then kill them to eat, then people should not ‘go to the morgue in the supermarket and buy it.’ It is ‘bizarre’ that ‘children don’t know where eggs and milk come from.’ When she suggested to visiting children that they come with her to collect the eggs, they thought that ‘eggs come in cartons on the shelf’ and some of them have been ‘afraid of day old chicks’. So, because of her professional background in community development, Diane tells people about the community gardens so that others can teach their children about how food is produced. At the
schools where she works or does volunteer work, she tries to encourage the development of gardening activities and running chooks in the school.

Roslyn views this matter slightly differently, in that her focus is on the way fruit and vegetables are presented in supermarkets and the role that supermarkets play in contributing to people’s detachment from food.

‘This becomes a worry as people are happy to purchase what the supermarket offers them, not knowing the real vegetable taste. They won’t purchase food with marks, even superficial marks that are part of the growing process. This is giving more money and power to supermarkets, which will only purchase “perfect” fruit and vegetables and demand the same from growers. Those who grow their own food know that vegetables and fruit come with marks and funny shapes and it doesn’t affect their quality. Our growers are placed under too much pressure to produce perfect food and therefore there is a lot of wastage. Our world cannot condone this sort of practice when so many people need food.’

Roslyn thinks that one of the best weapons against the supermarkets is the proliferation of farmers’ markets. People need to be more informed and take notice of the ‘potential disaster’ they may be contributing to, in relation to the future of farmers.

As our discussions draw to a close and the recorder is about to be switched off, I am not surprised by the question, ‘Have you learnt something from us?’ ‘Have I? I’ve learnt heaps’, I reply to this group of people for whom learning and teaching others about gardening and fresh, unadulterated food is so important.

Community gardeners’ perspectives of a moveable feast

Pleasure in gardening

The deep pleasure that this group of community gardeners derived from growing their own food is patent. Their joy came from their immersion in the physical, social, cultural and aesthetic experiences inherent in this community gardening space, where they could withdraw from the demands of everyday life. They enjoy being able to immerse themselves in the community garden, where they can isolate themselves from ‘the trials and tribulations of modern life’. One member of the group described his interest in bee keeping, explaining that hobbies and pleasures other than gardening have arisen from his involvement in this ‘therapeutic landscape’. Both the geographical and health literature describe the notion of ‘therapeutic landscapes’, which are particular environments that promote both mental and
physical well-being (Gesler, 1992; Hale et al., 2011; Milligan et al., 2004). This literature offers a lens through which to understand more fully the lived experience of this dedicated group of gardeners. These therapeutic landscapes not only provide people with an identity—allowing them to make deep connections to place and satisfy a human need to lay down roots—but also offer a locale in which to develop social networks and undertake therapeutic activities (Gesler, 1992; Milligan et al., 2004). It is, therefore, not merely the physical features of particular landscapes that make them therapeutic; it is the relational nature of people with place, through physical, social and emotional interactions that makes them so (Conradson, 2005; Hale et al., 2011; Milligan et al., 2004).

Arising from my research is the addition of ‘aesthetics’ in extending this concept of ‘therapeutic landscapes’, given that so much of this group’s expression of love of gardening and appreciation of food is linked to aesthetics. ‘Aesthetics’ can be viewed very broadly as being what the senses notice and the way in which these sensory experiences are interpreted (Hale et al., 2011). The garden landscape offers a unique way in which to experience the therapeutic and aesthetic benefits of physically cultivating the soil and engaging with the sights, sounds and smells of nature (Bhatti & Church, 2000; Milligan et al., 2004). Some members of the group experienced the community garden ‘therapeutic landscape’ through the physical ‘act of gardening’, such as digging, weeding and picking fresh produce. They also experienced it through the emotions, as they described their sense of achievement when they stood back to admire the fruits of their labour, or when they expressed the excitement of waiting for each new season’s crops coming up. Wayne, in spite of his no longer using chillies in cooking, still grew them in his garden purely ‘for the joy of having something weird in the garden’, suggesting an emotional attachment to his garden and an appreciation of the unique aesthetics of chillies. The experiential therapeutic attributes of the community gardening landscape contributes to developing particular aesthetic values by combining the relational nature of people and place with the concept of aesthetics (Hale et al., 2011).

Aesthetic values were highly developed amongst this group of community gardeners as they worked with the rhythms of nature to produce their food, feeling pride in being co-creators, which intersected with their philosophy of organic food production and their meaning-making of food.

Growing a wide variety of organic, heirloom tomatoes and other food that is not easily obtained from supermarkets was a source of great personal pride for Meredith. She
demonstrates great skill, patience and commitment in being able to successfully grow so many plant varieties. Growing many varieties of food was particularly important for maintaining cultural connections to her husband’s Italian heritage, which is a motivation found in other research on community gardeners from different ethnic backgrounds (Bartolomei et al., 2003; Saldivar-Tanaka & Krasny, 2004; Wakefield et al., 2007). It was also an expression of her identity as a wife and mother, evidenced by her statement, ‘Italians are passionate about their food and family and this is something that is wonderful for me, as it is just what I love to do: garden, cook and look after my family.’ Beyond the immediate personal and family benefits of growing a wide variety of food, Meredith also showed a commitment to plant diversity and organic food production, which suggests her status as a food citizen.

All of these gardeners, whose motivations for being part of the community garden varied, gained pleasure from being immersed in the community garden landscape. They devoted their time and effort into working the soil, experimenting with different plant varieties, and taking on related hobbies to produce culturally and aesthetically pleasing food.

Stories of the past

The community gardeners all said that gardening, was ‘in their blood’, or they had a ‘genetic urge to garden’, which came from their parents’ and grandparents’ commitment to and love of gardening. The gardeners spoke of their experiences in gardens from their childhood, which involved positive interaction with their relatives and the environment. Other research with community gardeners in Canberra reveals similar comments. For example, ‘it’s an urge that you feel you need to satisfy or something’ (Turner, 2011, p. 514). Similarly, other community gardeners in Denver, USA, have commented that they were ‘born into gardening’ or they have ‘grown up with an affinity for growing’ (Hale et al., 2011, p. 1858). Avid gardeners, although not community gardeners, have reported being motivated to be gardeners as adults because of observations of their parents as gardeners, in their childhood (Hamilton & DeMarrais, 2001). It appears that the positive influence of past experiences of gardening as a pleasurable past-time is very affirming for these gardeners, who share aesthetic values with other gardeners, including their relatives, past and present (Hale et al., 2011; Hamilton & DeMarrais, 2001; Turner, 2011).
Social connections and community

The social interactions that are an important feature of therapeutic landscapes, where friendships and reciprocity flourish, are also central to the motivations of this group of community gardeners. They spoke of the strengthening of family bonds and friendships that occurred through the garden, especially by sharing plants, seeds, magazines and recipes. The regular morning teas were also more than a conduit to build personal friendships within the garden; they were also a mechanism to engage with community more broadly, as the women included those from outside the community garden, such as men from the local Men’s Shed. The women liked to engage their children and grandchildren in the garden too, so bonds have developed within and across generations. Others allowed friendships to develop by ‘osmosis’ rather than through concerted efforts to make friends. This happened through informal exchanges of ideas and expertise in the community gardening space and also through sharing excess produce with others. These themes of forming social networks and reciprocity are very common findings in many other studies of community gardens, which may be culturally and socio-economically diverse or not. In fact, in some instances, the role of some community gardens as a vehicle for social connections may be of greater importance than their food provisioning role (Bartolomei et al., 2003; Hale et al., 2011; Kingsley et al., 2009; Milligan et al., 2004; Saldivar-Tanaka & Krasny, 2004; Teig et al., 2009; Wakefield et al., 2007).

The regular barbecues, which also frequently coincided with working bees, were another avenue to meet people, form friendships and build community. The garden barbecues were considered a good way to bridge social barriers and enable food cultural exchanges, which was highlighted by the story of Joe and his artichokes. Gardens can be a great leveller, as people of all ages, ethnicity and age work together to build a community spirit (Teig et al., 2009).

These gardeners believed that bringing people together in the community garden, combining their ideas, skills and resources could achieve so much more than a gardener could do on their own. The social processes within the community gardening space that are described here reflects what the literature labels ‘collective efficacy’, whereby people feel connected to others, experience mutual trust and have shared expectations of what can be achieved together, which is then linked to actions that are undertaken for the greater common good (Sampson, 2003; Sampson & Raudenbush, 1997; Teig et al., 2009). There is a growing body of evidence that ‘collective efficacy’ in the community gardening space can help to mediate
health by encouraging social support and sharing community human and financial resources (Milligan et al., 2004; Sampson, 2003; Teig et al., 2009). This ‘collective efficacy’ is also applicable to finding pathways to food citizenship, as people build relationships and work with others, sharing gardening skills and ideas, which contribute to a more just and sustainable food system.

Informal learning

Apart from people’s desire to form friendships and build a co-operative community garden space, woven throughout this narrative is the enthusiasm with which each of the gardeners pursued learning about growing plants, seed saving, and rearing animals, and all of it in a social context. The most interesting and important ways in which people learn is through informal pathways that occur in their every-day lives (1999). Foley (1999), who studied the way people learn, started by observing and analysing the learning that took place in his own family when pruning roses! Not quite community gardening, but certainly an every-day activity to which these gardeners could relate. All of these gardeners first learnt about gardening through their parents and grandparents. Jim, a traditionally backyard gardener, had an epiphany when he joined his community garden and became aware of all the expertise and opportunities for learning from others.

Social learning theory, first developed by Bandura (1977), has as its central premise that people learn through observing others, without having to undertake trial and error for each new learning activity. In addition, humans have the ability to use symbols, which enable them to process and preserve experiences in representational forms that guide future behaviour. Such self-regulatory processes allow people to select, organise and monitor their own actions, rather than assuming that they merely react to outside stimuli (Bandura, 1977, p. vii, 13). Reed and colleagues (2010) argue that Bandura’s conceptualisation of social learning is not sufficiently precise, because virtually all learning takes place in a social context. Instead, they propose that social learning must demonstrate a change in understanding by the individuals involved in the learning activity, which may be at a superficial level or at a deep level, such that attitudes and worldviews may change. The learning must also go beyond the individual to a broader community of practice and occur as part of social interactions (Reed et al., 2010). Ecological learning, a specific adaptation of social learning, is learning that occurs as people participate in direct, hands-on aesthetic experiences in the garden landscape (Hale et al., 2011). People in a garden environment learn more than just about the processes of growing
food, but also about the broader biophysical systems that support plant and animal life (Hale et al., 2011).

The community of gardeners in this narrative demonstrated their participation in social and ecological learning by seeking opportunities ‘to see things being done,’ rather than being told about different gardening techniques. Returning to the story of Joe, who was the expert on growing artichokes in the community garden, created interest from others, as few other gardeners were familiar with them or had knowledge of how to grow them. His wife subsequently prepared them and brought them along to a community barbecue to share, and by the following spring, many other garden plots had artichokes growing. Watching the plants grow, then tasting and enjoying them, was sufficient inducement for many of the other gardeners to learn how to grow them. People really value learning from other more experienced gardeners, who are pleased to share their knowledge and expertise (Evers & Hodgson, 2011).

Some of the gardeners in this study were involved in seed saving activities, because they believed that it is important to preserve plant variety, providing another example of social and ecological learning in what Reed and colleagues (2010) would describe as a ‘community of practice’. Some gardeners participated in ecological learning by swapping seeds and then applying different watering techniques to ascertain which methods produce the best results in their gardening plots. All of the gardeners used organic methods to produce their food and, despite no discussion of how they avoid pest infestation, it is likely they have learnt some of these techniques through others in the garden. Their very dedication to organic growing suggests that these gardeners have concern for, and interest in, the broader eco-system in which they grow their food. For example, some made efforts to reduce their waste by using less packaging, and bought local food that had not travelled long distances. It is through their own aesthetic experiences within the garden and with each other that this learning takes place.

These types of ecological learning activities were similar to those employed by the gardeners in the study by Hale and colleagues (2011). For example, participants in the Denver community gardens learnt about different composting materials, ways to improve the soils, how to best nurture and harvest certain plants, and optimal methods of pest control through their own direct engagement with their gardening plot. However, they also learnt by watching each other, asking questions, experimenting and comparing results. One of the gardeners in the Denver study spoke of his pleasure in learning from others, saying ‘I really enjoy the
social aspect of talking to other people who are from all walks of life, who have enjoyed gardening. And you learn different things about gardening you never knew before’ (Hale et al., 2011, p.1858). It would seem that Jim, from this narrative, has a kindred spirit in Denver.

Beyond their own learning, these gardeners are very keen to have children learn about how food is grown, because ‘they eat better if they understand the growing process’. Some children were able to overcome their food aversions by learning to grow their own food and by having their efforts rewarded with a prize in a local show, or by experiencing the sensory feast of fresh broccoli growing in the garden. These children, through their own aesthetic experiences, have learnt new values about food, which has resulted in a more extensive appreciation of food flavours. Much can be learnt from the way children learn as they enter a garden environment, as their senses become attuned to the new environment (Neves, 2009). Through these sensory interactions they learn that they can become emotionally connected to each other and to the nature that surrounds them (Neves, 2009). Diane’s daughter, as she gets down on her hands and knees and nibbles at her still growing broccoli and says, ‘Mmm, you won’t get fresher than that!’ exhibits an emotional connection to the garden and an engagement in aesthetic ecological learning.

Other studies of community gardens or kitchen garden school programs have also showed that giving children exposure to growing food or at least home-grown produce helps to make them more willing to try new, unfamiliar foods (Allen et al., 2008; Block et al., 2011; Hale et al., 2011; Lautenschlager & Smith, 2007). In two school gardening programs in USA, the children learnt much more than the climatic requirements of growing food and the practical skills to grow their own food; the programs also engendered a connection with and a respect for nature, often through the emotional engagement that occurs through the garden landscape (Lautenschlager & Smith, 2007; Williams, 2008). In an Australian kitchen garden program, children expressed that they gained more than skill development in both the kitchen and garden; they also learnt about the environment, sustainability, nutrition, geography and cultural diversity, amongst other things (Block et al., 2011). This research shows the benefits of aesthetic ecological learning in a community garden setting with parents, who are themselves dedicated to gardening and learning as well. The inter-generational learning that takes place for these community gardeners complies with Reed and colleagues (2010) view of social learning, as the learning extends to a community of practice that includes the children.
The aesthetic and sensory aspects of food

Where my research diverges from many of the studies from a geographical, health or community development perspective is through a deliberate deeper investigation of people’s meaning-making of food. This community gardeners’ narrative illustrates the importance that this group places on the aesthetics of food. They delight in growing different varieties and colours of plants, providing them with ‘visual entertainment’ by combining yellow tomatoes with purple basil, for example. These gardeners express their wonder and awe at the hand of nature in producing such wonderful, colourful and ‘noisy’ produce. Other sensory aspects of food, such as freshness, taste and texture, are also central to their meaning-making of food. Certainly, previous studies have shown that community gardeners value access to fresh, better tasting food (Armstrong, 2000; Hale et al., 2011; Kingsley et al., 2009; Wakefield et al., 2007), but there is little further exploration of the aesthetic values they hold about food beyond these two descriptors of freshness and taste. However, the literature does reveal more about other intrinsic qualities of food that gardeners, and other local food procurers, deem valuable. Like the community gardeners in this narrative, who appreciate organically grown food that is seasonal and local, so too do others who are involved in community gardens, box schemes, CSAs and farmers’ markets (Feagan, 2007; Hale et al., 2011; Perez et al., 2003; Torjusen, Lieblein, & Vitterso, 2008; Turner, 2011; Wakefield et al., 2007). Community gardens also nurture the positive aesthetic experiences of taste, smell, touch and sight (Hale et al., 2011). One gardener in the study by Hale and colleagues (2011, p. 1859), was quoted as saying that gardens are a good place ‘to learn, to play, to taste … Gardens should be tasted, you know’, which mirrors the thoughts of the community gardeners in this narrative.

Food processing and cooking

Enjoying the aesthetic qualities of their produce is not where appreciation of food ends for this group of community gardeners. Diane is a self-declared ‘foodies because she loves fine food, but cannot afford to buy it, so she grows and makes much of it herself. Meredith enjoys a Mediterranean diet, influenced by her husband’s Italian heritage, so she makes pastas and sauces and other traditional foods that she knows he and the family love. The women emphasised their commitment to preparing food from scratch, which reflected their desire to feed their family with food that they considered unadulterated, tasty and healthy. It was also an expression of their love of family and their desire to teach their children about ‘good’ food.
Research on gender and food found that as some participants made the lifestyle choice to avoid supermarket shopping and purchase local foods, their culinary choices changed with it, to making meals from raw ingredients (Little, Ilbery, & Watts, 2009). As one participant said, ‘I prefer to cook from basic, real stuff.’ Another expressed their view that cooking from scratch was about commitment, and if people consider this style of food preparation a priority they will find the time to do it. Participants believed that to be able to prepare food from scratch requires that women do not work full-time (Little et al., 2009). Similarly, in this research, the women who did not work full-time were the ones who expressed a commitment to cooking from scratch, so having the time to devote to cooking this way may make it easier to meet their ideals.

**Conclusion**

The relational nature of this group of community gardeners’ meaning-making of food is clear. Figure 10 diagrammatically shows the inter-relationships between people, place and different aspects of time that influence this group’s meaning-making of food. Through their active participation in their local food system, these community gardeners are empowered to take responsibility for their own food requirements. ‘Linear’ or ‘clock’ time does not impose itself on this group. They are pleased to devote their time to using methods of food production, distribution and consumption that help to improve the health and well-being of their families and the environment, which demonstrates their desire and ability to reach out and ‘grasp’ food citizenship.

The strong inter-relationships that exist between the past and present family members of this group of gardeners, as well as with fellow gardeners, are embedded within the community garden space. It is here that learning about plant propagation, preserving seed variety for future generations, growing food organically and preparing, preserving and cooking fresh, tasty, colourful and healthy food, takes place. By their very participation in a community garden, which requires considerable dedication of their social or personal time, this group of gardeners have made their value-based food choices. They have made decisions to produce, process, and consume food based on traditional methods and values of generations past, but which also reflects their commitment to ecological and ethical practices in the current food environment. They want food that is chemical-free, does not have hormones injected into it, has not been produced in poly tunnels, that is local and seasonal. They object to purchasing
food imports that have travelled large distances, and they enjoy the anticipation of waiting for their favourite foods to come into season. Ultimately, the connections to earth, the community garden, each other, past relatives, and indeed, all humans, gives them a deep appreciation of the food they produce.

Figure 10: A representation of the community gardeners’ food culture and their high degree of engagement with food citizenship

In the next chapter, you will meet a group of three women and one man who were part of a small CSA enterprise. CSAs have not been taken up in Australia with as much enthusiasm as they have in the USA and Europe, but this did not reduce the interest of this group in using a local food system that took them back to the way food used to be grown.
WELCOME TO
BUNDALEA
Chapter 5: This is a wonderful place to be: The Community Supported Agriculture members

Introduction

There are four characters in this narrative that belong to a small CSA in a historic town near Canberra, called Bundalea. There is one man, Hamish, and three women, Susan, Denise and Marian, all aged between 40 and 64 years. None of this group has children, so they are quite a different demographic group to the community gardeners in the previous chapter. The farmer, Briony, and her partner, Margaret, have been involved in producing food for others for about 2 years.

From this quiet and considered group of CSA members, you will learn that their enjoyment in receiving food from Briony lies in their appreciation of her efforts and a desire to return to the way food used to be grown. They are conscious of not wasting food that their farmer has grown, but have a very different view of food purchased through the supermarket. You will also discover that their adherence to strongly held principles about food is sometimes put to one side, when life gets busy and convenience takes precedence. Life can get complicated!

*Our small group of CSA members gathers in the otherwise empty Community Health Centre in the late afternoon one spring, huddled around the audio recorder balancing precariously on a child’s plastic chair. We are surrounded by play equipment used by the local play group. Our discussion begins …*

Community in Community Supported Agriculture

Marian joined the small CSA in the small town of Bundalea because, as Briony’s neighbour, she considers her support of the enterprise a ‘lovely neighbourly thing’ to do. She moved to Bundalea in recent years and has found the CSA a good way to get to know people; according to Marian, ‘it’s got a nice community feel to it’. As such, she feels part of a select small group of people receiving good food. Hamish and his partner are personal friends of Briony, so he wanted to support her in this enterprise, because she ‘had made a bit of a leap’ to give up other work and income streams to devote her time to producing food for others. He also thought it was an interesting project and the CSA represented the ‘way food used to be grown; it was local, it was fresh, it was seasonal and it was worth supporting.’
Overwhelmingly though, Hamish prefers to purchase food through the CSA because of what he has gained from his relationship with Briony. He shows some interest in growing his own food but, he ponders, ‘Why would I bother when Briony and Margaret produce that beautiful stuff and I don’t really have the time?’ Hamish now eats foods that he had never tried before through Briony’s influence. ‘I just wouldn’t have picked up [some vegetables] at all, either because I wasn’t too sure what to do with them or just out of my habit and Briony would say, “Try these and let me know what you think of it.” So, that sort of made a difference because there was a bit of encouragement and I could give feedback and I knew Briony actually wanted feedback.’

Apart from Denise’s enjoyment of fresh, tasty, healthy food, she also has pleasure in going around to Briony’s to collect her ‘basket of vegetables that she has put in a brown paper bag in a basket for [her] tied up with real string. It’s ‘a social thing [to go] to collect from Briony or [have] her turning up at home on her three wheeler bicycle with a basket of veggies … And I know it’s […] supporting the local economy.’ All the customer has to do is select from the list of available food that Briony emails to all members, and then it is all ready for collection on a Monday. ‘You just go in, pay your money, pick your basket up and off you go.’ In fact, Marian suggests, ‘It’s painless shopping’.

The care Briony takes in presenting food to her customers gives Hamish a strong sense of belonging to a community. He explains, ‘I distinctly remember, maybe it’s part of the challenges of living here … [The] middle of winter can be pretty bleak. It mustn’t have been winter though when this was happening. I was just having a really bad day and I thought I’m sick of being here and then I called into Briony’s […] and got my big basket of veggies […] and I think they’d given me a drink or something when I was there in that five or 10 minutes and where else would you get this? I don’t want to leave here; this is a wonderful place to be. It totally changed my mood and perspective on the day. And to go home with a basket and the way even they present it, sort of brim full and bursting with green’, leaves a deep impression on Hamish.

Marian also reflects on the value she places on the food bought from Briony, saying,

‘I think I make more of an effort to try and actually eat everything I have bought from Briony and Margaret because I feel a sense of guilt if I am going to chuck something out, because we got a bit slack and didn’t actually cook that cabbage. Or, you know, if we get a big pumpkin, “Oh no, we’ve got this big pumpkin, we’ll have to make
masses of soup.” I guess we’re kind of valuing it more, because of where it’s come from, and I know the growers, whereas I probably wouldn’t think of throwing out an apple that had gone bad because I hadn’t bothered eating it from the fruit bowl if it had come from the supermarket.’

Hamish laughs, as he agrees with Marian about his same sense of guilt if he wastes any of Briony’s food, adding, ‘I’m convinced that we eat more vegetables, although we always ate quite a lot, because of that sense of obligation, but in a positive sense.’ ‘A bit of ownership’, adds Marian.

On a different note, the CSA members are aware of the financial support they must provide Briony to ensure the viability of the enterprise. ‘I saw how hard […] she worked […] and sometimes, especially through the winter, where it might […] be $11 you’re handing over [for the basket of food], because there just wasn’t very much’, recalls Susan. ‘Gee that’s a lot of work to go through for that amount of money [so] how will Briony sustain that?’ Hamish wonders. Susan remembers being aware as a child of how hard Italian market gardeners worked, putting in ‘seven days a week, 12 hours a day’, which, she says, is not highly valued in our society.

Marian, using her own words to define a ‘socially sustainable food system’, proffers that such a system would be affordable and accessible for everyone, and one in which the producers receive a reasonable return for their effort. Other aspects of a socially sustainable food system—from Marian’s perspective—is one that avoids too much waste, given that homeless and disadvantaged people currently go hungry, while supermarkets throw out so much food; it is ‘very out of whack’.

Marian also has a strong sense of reciprocity, as she has taken to returning the paper bags that Briony uses to pack the food for each customer, but she is also keen to barter with food. ‘It is good to get something for nothing and swap’ so that people can ‘help each other out’, she opines. Susan believes that growing some of your own food and then swapping with neighbours is ‘part of community’, which is what people used to do in days gone by. The old cheese factory in town has recently been refurbished by a local family, so that it now has a cider press. This allows people to bring their own apples, rent the press and make their own cider, or buy cider made by the resident family. ‘They’ve got seeds there too. Last year […] they had cheese making courses, bread making and will get other courses, I expect’, adds Susan. Bundalea also has a fruit club, another community activity involving food, where
people get together and pick ‘apples from the side of the road and they all get together and make all sorts of things. When the mushrooms are on’, they dry them too.

**Pleasure and practicalities in growing some of your own food**

These CSA members like to dabble in their own food production too, but none of them has extensive vegetable gardens. The fact that Briony does such a marvellous job producing food means that they do not feel compelled to grow their own food. However, strawberries are a different matter. Denise recalls the time her mother, who ‘had lived in the city all her life’, came down to the country to live with her ‘in the last years of her life’. She gave her mother a taste of one of her home-grown strawberries and ‘it was like watching a kid’s face. You know, her face just really lit up.’ Marian and her partner are ‘just sort of starting a sort of a food garden in the backyard’, she explains. ‘So far, we’ve got some berries and things like that planted and we had our first strawberry yesterday; cut in half … [We got] half each. So, it’s still on a very small scale, obviously.’ It has been since ‘the big move to the country’ and having their own place ‘after years and years and years of renting […] and not having to move away […] when the owner decides to move in or whatever’, that has swayed their decision to establish a food garden. There are other influences too, according to Marian, such as ‘Briony […] across the road, you know; just the whole experience in seeing how great their garden is and tasting the stuff.’

**Food from Briony – gee it tastes good**

When it comes to considering food quality, Denise wants to eat ‘healthy food that [she] know[s] has real […] nutritional value. Appreciation of food is for me, it’s about […] how fabulous it looks when it’s fresh … The flavour of it, the knowledge that you’re actually putting proper good nutrients into your system too … And it lasts longer in the fridge.’ Food from Briony at the CSA fulfils these roles, but it also simply tastes better: ‘Gee it tastes good.’ In Susan’s mind, good food has not been bred to cope with long distance transport, like the tomatoes that are produced for the supermarkets. ‘You’re paying a little bit more, but that doesn’t bother me at all’, says Susan. Similarly, Hamish appreciates food that is healthy, fresh and local, but the visual appeal, the tastes and textures of fresh food, is also important to him.

‘Organic things, like the grown things, are maybe not always as pretty as what they might be in the supermarket. You know, they’re not always that regular sort of shape, and they don’t have the wax on the apples and that sort of thing. The tomatoes can be
a bit askew and a range of sizes. They don’t all come sort of pre-packaged sized, so that then makes me appreciate the work that gets done; even that mass production of how hard it must be to live up to all of those requirements and what, you know, hard work and maybe not necessarily good things they have to do to meet that sort of strange demand that we have perfect tomatoes. They haven’t a taste, but they look good.’

The social aspects of food appreciation are paramount for Hamish and Marian. They both enjoy cooking and sharing meals with others. Marian believes that food is ‘a really important aspect of our lives and something to enjoy and savour and not just […] bolted down just because we need fuel, but it’s much more important […] than that.’ It is vital to plan dinner, ‘to think about it and prepare things well and try out new recipes […] and to gather people around to have a special meal and things like that.’ Hamish likes getting feedback on his attempts at cooking, saying, ‘Oh that worked, or that didn’t work and “What can we do differently?” So it’s another interest that you can sort of focus on and enjoy, but it’s not hard work; it’s enjoyable.’

**It’s hard to trust a food system that is designed purely around profits**

This group is thoughtful about their food decisions and expresses their political views quietly, but with conviction. ‘We’re going to have to be locally producing as much as we possibly can if the food system is to remain sustainable,’ suggests Denise. By buying locally, the global community will avoid ‘all the costs to the planet’ that come from ‘the delivery and the importing and exporting’ of food. She is annoyed that the Australian Government is discussing trade deals with America and China, resulting in food being imported from ‘ridiculous places’. Marian is also concerned that those in the developed world, who can pay for expensive imported foods, may be doing so to the detriment of the welfare of those in the developing world. She explains,

‘In the week-end magazine in The Australian\(^{10}\), they had this feature about the fishing industry in Thailand and how corrupt and terrible it is and how people are just kept as slaves and given money to go on these boats and then […] they end up at sea for two years and they don’t see land […] so that we can get our prawns and things like that, that we buy in bulk from the supermarket … It’s sort of scary to think too, that I might be responsible in a way by buying something like that to furthering that sort of industry.’

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\(^{10}\) A leading Australian national newspaper
Susan questions whether food production in Australia can remain sustainable ‘as the drought just showed us that there could always be a problem with water; we’re just lucky at the moment.’ She is also concerned that ‘we keep subdividing great arable land’ that she thinks could be better used for food production, rather than for residential use.

Hamish finds the push to keep consuming ‘just a little bit unsettling’. He reflected on the issue of rice, as it takes a lot of water to produce rice and considerable land space, and it then needs to be transported over long distances. ‘There’s always that push to buy more and more food and so we have this situation where people are really almost abusing the land to produce the food to feed people or to throw it in the bin, even worse. There [are] terrible consequences of waste and obesity I suppose and it’s not a sustainable system. It’s hard to have trust in a system that’s designed just purely around profits.’ He elaborates, saying, ‘I don’t sort of have faith in the supply system we have and the big retailers in particular, when you see what they squeeze, and they squeeze the primary producers and the profits that they make and the takings that they have to squeeze out smaller retailers.’ He adds, ‘I certainly don’t trust them, but to a large extent we sort of have to use them for certain things. It leaves me a bit torn, because sometimes I am better at, I’m buying local and living up to my sort of principles, I suppose, about not getting strawberries flown from Perth and lemons that have come from California and other times, because of time pressure, you know, go to Aldi, and get whatever they’ve got.’ However, he does draw the line at some purchases, saying, ‘I won’t buy the snow peas from China; that’s my one rule’, at which Marian pipes up saying ‘I draw the line at most things from China.’ However, Marian, like Hamish, makes pragmatic decisions too, from time to time. ‘We’ve got an order coming from Woolworths this week ‘cause we got a bit desperate for time, you know, shopping, ‘cause I’ve got lots of things on this week and just can’t do the shopping. So, you know, the van does come … We haven’t done it for ages, but it was just like, oh you know, we’re running out of this, and running out of that and haven’t got time’.

Susan is very direct about her opinion of the dominant food system. ‘I just don’t trust food. I hate it when I have to buy bananas; I mean, I love to have a banana every day, but I always wonder what the process is for storing them; I have heard they gas them.’ A reason that Denise nominated to be part of the CSA is that she is seeking ‘trust in labelling’, because she is also concerned about animal welfare. When she buys organic free-range eggs, she looks on the packaging for the certification label to confirm that they are indeed organic. By
purchasing from Briony, she knows the production methods are ethical. Hamish has a slightly different view even though he does not like ‘factory farming at all’. He thinks that if the ‘animals have had a good life and they’re dispatched humanely and people really appreciate what they’re eating and understand the whole process’, then that is ‘probably more sustainable than getting bits of meat in a plastic tray’. 

The evening of discussion with this reflective group of CSA members comes to a close. The course of the conversation has not always flowed easily, but I have time to mull over their views as I drive the couple of hours back to Canberra, realising the significance of this small group’s contribution to my thinking about pathways to food citizenship.

Postscript

Some six months after the focus group, Hamish responded to one of my emails that was seeking clarification of some matters discussed in the focus group. From his responses, I incorporated the relevant pieces of information into the narrative, but there had been a change in his circumstances, which meant he no longer sourced Briony’s food. He explains, ‘I do feel a bit of a fraud now, because I’ve hardly bought anything from Briony since she moved to her new model of selling on a Saturday morning. I very rarely get into town on a Saturday morning before lunch time, so I miss out on Briony’s produce. Maybe when we’ve finished our renovations, I’ll be better at doing it.’ This indicates that pathways to food citizenship are not always straightforward, at least for some.

CSA members’ perspectives of a moveable feast

Relationships, loyalty and contradictions

For this group of CSA members, the personal relationship with the grower is central to their appreciation of the ‘good food’ she grows for them. Their motivation for joining the CSA was a desire to support an enterprise that was worthwhile—not least of all because it showed courage and commitment from Briony, the producer, who had given up other income streams to embark on a new and risky venture. For their part, these CSA members receive local, seasonal, organically grown fruit, vegetables and meat from ethically raised animals, which are important food and environmental values held by this group.
However, the CSA also represents for them a food production and distribution system that is reminiscent of the way food used to be grown and distributed. They declare that it has a ‘community feel’ and offers a unique, pleasurable and social way to shop. Arriving at Briony’s garden and picking up a basket of food in a brown paper bag, ‘tied up with real string’ or delivered by Briony on her three-wheeler bicycle, takes them back to an era when there was time for social interactions between vendor and customer and time for the vendor to present food to the customer in a way that demonstrated that the relationship mattered.

It is not unexpected, then, that these CSA members also like to sustain this small town’s local economy and sense of community more generally. For instance, they speak enthusiastically of one of the other food-related businesses in town, the ‘Old Cheese Factory’, which offers cheese and bread-making courses and fosters community activities such as food swapping and the fruit club. It also reflects a bygone era, where people processed much of their own food and engaged in food bartering. Marian eventually wants to become a participant in food swapping once her skills in home gardening are honed, so that she and other members of the community ‘can help each other out’.

The literature overwhelmingly shows that other CSA members in the UK and USA share similar motivations for joining a CSA as the participants in this narrative. That is, they provide the opportunity to source organic, fresh and seasonal food, which is congruent with their desire to attend to individual and environmental health, and they offer an avenue to support local farmers and the local economy (Cone & Myhre, 2000; Cox et al., 2008; Landis et al., 2010; McEntee, 2011; O’Hara & Stagl, 2002; Perez et al., 2003; Sharp et al., 2002; Sumner et al., 2010).

It is noteworthy that each CSA member in this narrative valued their relationship with Briony, but none of them appeared to value social interactions between each other. This may be a result of no ‘on farm’ activities in which they could participate and interact with each other. It is also possible that this group of CSA members found other avenues to feel connected to their community and did not need to find it with each other through the CSA. Other research indicates that time and participation are the ingredients needed to develop commitment to a CSA and to feel more integrated into the community (Cone & Myhre, 2000; O’Hara & Stagl, 2002; Pole & Gray, 2013). This can be achieved simply by belonging to a CSA for a longer period (O’Hara & Stagl, 2002; Pole & Gray, 2013), but also, importantly, by attending a farm and participating in activities (Cone & Myhre, 2000). Possibly, ‘community’ for the CSA
members in this study was more of a ‘community of interest’ rather than one based on mutual relationships that entail rights and responsibilities, as Cone and Myhre (2000) have previously noted. Indeed, for many members, belonging to this CSA is a nostalgic journey back to an imagined rural community where social connections were strong; similar to the conclusions of Holloway and Kneafsey (2000) in their farmers’ market research. The reality of modern life, with all its demands and limitations, does not allow people to live this imagined life (Cone & Myhre, 2000).

In this narrative, it is Hamish and Marian who are both unable to live this imagined life, as they often make the pragmatic decision to buy food from the supermarket when life gets busy. Hamish goes so far as to describe himself as a ‘fraud’ in the postscript. During the focus group conversation, he recalled the time when he collected his basket of fresh food from Briony after having had a bad day, and realises that living in his small town, where he experiences a strong sense of community, is a ‘wonderful place to be’. And yet, within six months, after Briony changes her marketing model to a Saturday morning produce market, he no longer purchases her food because shopping at this time does not match his lifestyle.

Hamish was motivated to join the CSA to support Briony’s new venture, but he also sought the convenience that it offered, which is not unlike the findings of other similar research (Perez et al., 2003). It might be tempting to categorise Hamish’s—and to a lesser extent, Marian’s—approach to the CSA as instrumental, but they did understand the goals of a CSA and they spoke of their changes to eating and cooking habits after joining—which is not congruent with the instrumental category, as described by Feagan and Henderson (2009). Nonetheless, Marian’s intermittent and Hamish’s complete withdrawal of support for Briony’s enterprise over time does hold in sharp relief the contradictions and contingencies that modern life imposes on people.

It does not seem fair to conclude that Hamish or Marian or indeed the other CSA members have merely a nostalgic sense of community, rather than a genuine concern for Briony, her enterprise, or the broader societal benefits of a less industrial agricultural system. Rather, the stories generated from this group indicate that this CSA displays socially embedded characteristics (Hinrichs, 2000; Sage, 2003; Winter, 2003) with low levels of marketness and instrumentalism (Hinrichs, 2000), as well as relations of regard (Offer, 1997). A small example is Marian’s contribution to community and to reciprocity through her return of the paper bags that Briony uses to package the weekly food baskets, for recycling purposes,
showing care at an individual and broader societal level. Marian would also like to become involved in food swapping for its community connections, a finding replicated in a study from mid-west USA (Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007). Marian’s interest in community activities is also consistent with findings from a quantitative study that showed that those belonging to a CSA had higher rates of community engagement than in the general population (Obach & Tobin, 2014).

Hamish learns through Briony about different types of food he has never tried before. In return, Briony receives feedback on how much he enjoyed them, allowing her to improve her enterprise to suit her clientele, which incorporates elements of reciprocity and regard. Another example is the trust this group places in Briony, who raises free-range animals and uses organic methods of food production to produce tasty, fresh food. They also show empathy for Briony who, by their account, appears to gain insufficient financial reward for her efforts, even though they are ‘paying a little bit more’ than if they purchased through conventional means, causing them to be concerned for the long term viability of the enterprise.

It appears that the balance of marketness does not favour the producer at this stage, so may need further adjustment. The impact of such an adjustment on continued loyalty to Briony and the CSA is unknown, but the issue does highlight the importance of marketness and instrumentalism—in tandem with social embeddedness—when considering the contribution of CSA enterprises to more sustainable food systems (Hinrichs, 2000). A really concrete way in which some of the members of the CSA show their genuine gratitude for the food Briony produces, is through their use of all the food that they received from Briony each week. Two spoke of the responsibility they feel in using Briony’s food because they know her and are aware how hard she works; they do not feel this same sense of obligation with the food they source elsewhere. It is through this close bond with the producer that they express a greater ‘ownership’ of the food she supplies. This response reflects the essence of community or citizenship, whereby people acknowledge both their rights and responsibilities (Cone & Myhre, 2000).

There are few other studies in the local food system literature that convey this point with the same poignancy. Perez and colleagues (2003) did report that some CSA members in their study felt compelled to eat the food provided through the CSA, but the reason given for this behaviour was not out of a sense of obligation to the producer, but rather, because they had paid for it. Other research with CSA enterprises and similar local food systems do report on
the importance of trusting, reciprocal relationships between the producer and their customers and the way in which these relationships affect people’s appreciation of food (Cone & Myhre, 2000; Cox et al., 2008; Kirwan, 2004; Seyfang, 2006, 2008; Sumner et al., 2010). For example, comments such as, ‘I like this thing of trust; I really like the thing of looking at that person and feeling that they have worked hard and it’s an exchange … Me saying thank you very much […] for taking the time to look after the way you have produced the food that is going to nourish me’, represent similar sentiments to those expressed in the aforementioned studies and the CSA members in this narrative (Kirwan, 2004, p.404). A reflection by a participant in the study by Cone and Myhre (2000, p.195) takes on a more spiritual tone—which may not be directly attributable to the trusting relationship between the producer and this CSA member, but perhaps a more holistic embracing of locally produced food—saying, ‘It’s changed the way I view and experience food; how I wash it, put it away, how I cook with it. There’s a different reverence for it […] a deepened reverence for it.’

**Good food**

Apart from the appreciation of the food produced by Briony, as Hamish and Marian expressed, this group also frequently describes her food as ‘good food’ and values it for its health giving, aesthetic and sensory qualities, such as freshness, taste and texture. They also prefer to choose organic, local food that has been ethically produced and has not been bred to travel long distances or selected for its perfect shape, which is congruent with their concerns for the environment, the ethical treatment of animals and their preference for taste.

The participants in this narrative described ‘good food’ in a similar fashion to Sage (2003) and Renting and colleagues’ (2003) first and second category of food quality, which is authentic, derived from a particular place and produced with care for animals and the environment. This group also valued the food artisan activities in the Old Cheese Factory in their small historic town, where cider-making, cheese and bread-making courses have been revived, which also reflects the first category of food quality, according to Renting and colleagues (2003). An important point that these researchers also make is that before the advent of the industrialised food system, perception of food quality was gauged through personal observation and social contacts, rather than through government regulation and labelling mechanisms, which have now become the norm (Renting et al., 2003). Marian, in this narrative, lives across the road from Briony and has started growing some of her own food, partly because she has seen Briony’s wonderful garden and tasted her produce. Her
first-hand experience of tasty, home-grown food provides a powerful appraisal of food quality and a strong recommendation for engaging in home gardening.

Neither of the definitions of ‘good food’ or ‘quality food’ from Sage (2003) and Renting and colleagues (2003) specifically mention taste or other sensory and aesthetic qualities of food, which are important aspects of appreciation of food for this group of CSA members. Much of the research with CSA enterprises or box schemes has little to report on these specific aspects of food quality (Cone & Myhre, 2000; Cox et al., 2008; Landis et al., 2010; Perez et al., 2003; Sumner et al., 2010), although some studies reveal people’s priority for ‘high quality food’ and ‘freshness,’ which are not clearly defined (McEntee, 2011; O’Hara & Stagl, 2002; Torjusen et al., 2008; Wells et al., 1999). However, Thompson and Coskuner-Balli’s (2007) study using in-depth interviews does discuss these aspects of food quality. As one woman commented, ‘I like that, I think it’s interesting you get different flavours, different textures, different looks, different colours, food doesn’t look boring. I don’t mind that it might cost a little bit more because I think the quality is better than the mass produced tomato without any flavour shipped in from I don’t know where’ (Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007, p. 282). These comments bear a strong resemblance to those expressed in this research. When it comes to the matter of taste, the conversations in this narrative did not delve into how people understood taste specifically. However, the way they articulated their appreciation of food suggests their assessment is very much based on their ‘descriptions’ and ‘philosophies of taste’ (Spiller, 2012). For instance, Denise, who prefers food that has been organically and locally produced says, ‘appreciation of food is for me, it’s about […] how fabulous it looks when it’s fresh […] the flavour of it, the knowledge that you’re actually putting proper good nutrients into your system too […] and it lasts longer in the fridge.’ She thinks the food that Briony produces simply tastes better, saying, ‘Gee, it tastes good.’ These comments imply that, in Denise’s view, food from other sources, like the supermarket, is not as nutrient dense, as fresh or as flavoursome.

**Cooking and conviviality**

Another important way in which these CSA members make meaning of food relates to planning meals and trying new recipes, as well as the social aspects of savouring food and sharing meals with others. Few studies amongst the CSA enterprise and box scheme literature discuss the importance of meal conviviality, but some do show that more meal planning and food preparation does occur in the home as a consequence of membership of such schemes.
(Cohen, Gearhart, & Garland, 2012; Perez et al., 2003; Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007; Torjusen et al., 2008). For example, Perez and colleagues (2003) report that people plan their meals around more vegetables, cook more creatively, and try new recipes after they join a CSA enterprise. In the same study, participants also reported that they ate more vegetables and a greater variety of vegetables after joining the CSA (Perez et al., 2003). Another study from USA found that CSA membership was associated with greater and more varied fruit and vegetable consumption compared with those who were not CSA members, despite their similar socio-demographic characteristics (Landis et al., 2010). These findings are in agreement with Marian and Hamish’s comments about their increase in vegetable intake since buying Briony’s food.

It is the Slow Food movement—a non-profit member supported organisation (Slow Food, 2012a) established in Bra, Italy in 1986, in response to the growing concern about the impact of ‘Americanised’ fast food on local food cultures (Miele & Murdoch, 2002)—that offers the most compelling way in which to consider this group’s desire to savour food. For these CSA members, meal times are considered an opportunity to take time out from a busy day to appreciate the food being eaten, rather than devouring it quickly just to meet the physiological requirements of fuel for the body. The whole principle of ‘slowness’ in the Slow Food movement is concerned with sourcing local produce, adhering to local cuisines and eating food in a relaxed and convivial manner (Miele & Murdoch, 2002). In contrast fast food—or indeed, a ‘Fast Life’—reduces eating to a functional activity, which allows for little appreciation of food flavours or spending time with others over a meal (Andrews, 2008). The Slow Food movement challenges the frenetic lifestyle of the modern era, which diminishes the importance of pleasure in food and eating, cultural identity and sense of place (Andrews, 2008).

The Slow Food approach to eating and living (Slow Food, 2012b) is congruent with Marian’s lifestyle change since moving from the city to a small country town with her partner, buying their own place, joining the CSA and establishing a small food garden. Others in this narrative share similar views about their chosen lifestyle, but Marian’s changes in her lifestyle in more recent years puts her choices sharply into focus.
Sustainable food systems

This group’s enjoyment of good food, with all its aesthetic, sensory, organic and seasonal qualities, and its central role in the gift-relationship of family and social gatherings, reveals their proximal attitudes, beliefs and values about food. However, this group also expresses distal attitudes, beliefs and values about the broader food system. They are unequivocal in their dislike and distrust of the current globalised food system, and speak of their concern for a variety of environmental, economic and social issues that are the consequence of this system. They believe that socially sustainable food systems should be affordable and accessible for all, provide producers with a fair return, and should avoid waste, given the number of people who go hungry. There was concern expressed for the welfare of poor, unpaid workers in the fishing industry in Asia, and an acknowledgement that farming is an undervalued occupation in our society. They are aware that they pay a little more for the food that Briony produces, but they are happy to do so. They appreciate how hard Briony works; she is ethical in her treatment of animals and uses organic methods to ameliorate the environmental impact of food production, values shared by others involved in CSA enterprises and box schemes elsewhere (Cone & Myhre, 2000; Seyfang, 2006, 2008; Torjusen et al., 2008). In their view, social justice within the food system ought to be a priority, within both the Australian and global context.

These opinions are equally as strident as those expressed by CSA members in the study by Thompson and Coskuner-Balli (2007), where one participant commented on the detrimental role that USA’s Wal-Mart has played in the food system, by disadvantaging both domestic and foreign workers in the interests of increased market share and profit. Allen and colleagues’ (2003) interviews with leaders from a range of Alternative Food Initiatives (AFIs) in California—such as alternative agri-food educational programs, food advocacy networks, CSAs and other similar initiatives—found some similar views about the importance of a socially just food system. These authors assert that if AFIs are to be truly transformative, then social justice for all those involved in the food system needs to be addressed (Allen et al., 2003). Otherwise, from a social justice perspective, they may achieve little more than the current global food system.

Hamish has some related concerns, believing that the modern food system and the broader economic system encourages people to keep consuming more and more food, which has an impact on food waste, the sustainability of the food system, and rising obesity levels. He also
distrusts a food system that is designed purely for profits and disadvantages the producer. This unease is shared by academics and theorists across a range of disciplines (Caraher & Coveney, 2004; Dobson, 2003; Hassanein, 2003, 2008; Lang, 2005; Seyfang, 2006; Wilkins, 2005). Ecological citizenship, a concept which is aligned to food citizenship, is concerned with the responsibilities and implications of our actions on the environment and on others, and is both non-territorial and non-contractual (Dobson, 2003; Seyfang, 2006). Seyfang (2006) proposes that ecological citizenship, which requires people to reduce their ‘ecological footprint’ by using fewer resources (Wackernagel & Rees, 1996), could be the driving force for sustainable consumption, achieved through the greater use of local organic food networks. By their heightened awareness of the issues facing the global food system and their engagement with a CSA, this group shows that they are capable of being ecological or food citizens.

**Conclusion**

This narrative highlights the complexity and contradictions of food choice when purchasing food. Figure 11 highlights the importance of people, place and time in this group’s meaning-making of food. This group of CSA members enjoy being a part of a food system that has both traditional and ethical values; that is organic, seasonal and local; that respects and supports the primary producer, who raises animals in a free-range environment; and that encourages healthy eating, through the provision of many different vegetable varieties. They describe the intrinsic qualities of food with detail and have clear philosophies of taste. These CSA members enjoy spending their social or personal time over preparing and eating food with family and friends, but this investment of time does not extend to growing very much food or participating in farm activities with Briony.

A keen awareness of the problems inherent in the current global food system does not always mean that these CSA members act in accordance with their principles about how the food system should operate. Marian and Hamish, both full-time workers, acknowledge that they do not always live up to the principles or values they hold about food, and purchase food from the supermarket when ‘linear’ or ‘clock’ time is scarce. Their lack of active participation in their chosen food system means that their commitment to behaving as food citizens is somewhat diminished, symbolised by the short extension of the hand towards the apple (figure 11). They express discomfort with not adhering to their own belief system, but it is not
uncommon for people to struggle with considering their own personal requirements and lifestyle against the needs of the broader community (Cone & Myhre, 2000). In our busy 21st century world, where convenience overrides other purchasing considerations, some people, possibly most, are obliged to live with their own contradictions.

Figure 11: A representation of CSA members’ food culture and their inconsistent engagement with food citizenship

The personal connection that this small group shared with their one food producer, the next group shared with many farmers. The farmers’ market narrative tells of customers’ desire to seek out their favourite food producers and form relationships with them as they attend their weekly ‘event’ where they purchase fresh, unadulterated food. The experience and the produce are so much better than the offerings of a supermarket.
Chapter 6: The soil brings people together

Introduction

In this narrative you will meet six women and four men who regularly shop at the Capital Region Farmers’ Market, who attended one of two focus groups. Most of this group are married or live in a defacto relationship and have children living at home. David, Garry, Alicia, Natalie and Wendy, aged between 41 and 64 years, belong to this category. There is one woman, Ronda, retired and in her 60s, who is a widow with grandchildren. There are two women, Tina and Rosemary, both in their 50s, living with their partners. And finally, there are two single men, Aiden in his 40s and Tom in his 20s.

From this very boisterous, outgoing group you will learn that their meaning-making of food has much to do with their relationship with the food producers and knowing where and how their food was grown. They relish the time they spend on their Saturday morning expedition to the markets. It sometimes takes them back to previous positive food experiences, but also offers them a way to learn more about food and cooking, which can be passed on to the next generation.

As I busy myself organising the tea and coffee, the group of dedicated farmers’ market shoppers start chatting amongst themselves. I find myself joining in the conversation before getting down to business. I feel a little nervous, but the conversation begins ...

The event, the social interactions and community in the food system

‘I like the event. I like walking around looking at all the shops, whether you buy or not. I like the people, the sort of people … It’s better than a supermarket; it is […] the smells, textures, the sounds, the producers. It’s something from the past that has been reinvented, which I guess gives a kind of comfort’ says Garry. ‘On a convenience level it’s easier in some ways to just pop down to my local supermarket and do a one-stop shop, [but] it isn’t just a trip to go shopping; it’s more than that.’ It is a ‘social occasion’ to meet up with ‘like-minded’ friends, who value what the markets have to offer. ‘It has that whole community feel … I mean my husband always says I can’t [have a] weekend without it because it’s a bit like a therapy for me to go there’ says Natalie, and it has such a ‘relaxing atmosphere’, where people just take their time to walk around chatting to friends, the vendors, or even people they don’t know.
Ronda likes to have a ‘little chat while […] waiting for the banana man or the fish man and talk[s] to complete and absolute strangers […] standing in a stall at the markets … You don’t do that in a queue in a supermarket’ she emphasises.

When Garry reflects on all the ‘tucker’ he has bought from the markets to make pizza in his home-made pizza oven, he says to his wife, ‘“Oh look, chook from Gilgandra, pork from Temora, bloody tomatoes from Bungendore”, you know, on and on and on.’ Sometimes Garry purchases chickens from a producer who raises free-range chickens in the Bega Valley. According to Garry, he moves the chickens around from paddock to paddock regularly:

‘I speak to him and his mate about his passion [raising free-range chickens] whenever I buy one from him … All of a sudden this guy has become part of our meal because his passion has added taste to it—I’m sure he doesn’t do it for the money … There is an Italian family who makes small goods, so when I need salami, I go there. They produce it; they know their product and they can give you very valuable advice on which product to buy for a particular pizza. Again, their passion has added taste to my food. In the end, silly me has taken all day and is knackered before I start cooking, but I end up with great pizzas … And if that’s the event; that’s what makes it taste better, I reckon.’

The farmers’ market provides a way to support ‘a community of farmers’. The stallholders are ‘all bloody interesting’, friendly, and willing to have a chat and offer genuine advice and information about their products, which makes the experience of going to the markets so attractive to these shoppers. ‘There’s “an energy” to the food [at the markets] … it’s been picked and grown naturally [and] because you’re actually talking to the people who grew it, and they have an appreciation of it, because it is their livelihood.’ Indeed, as Alicia says, ‘You can have relationships with them […] and you feel a loyalty to them … They’ve given you their food; they’ve given you advice.’ ‘And you can believe it.’ Aiden comments that he ‘can actually sit down and talk to the guy’ that produces the free-range pork and bacon, to ‘find out what sort of pigs he has, how [they’re] produced’. In relation to Alicia’s favourite apple vendor, she says, ‘You can actually say to them, “so which ones are good this week?”’ and they will say, “Go the Fujis this week.” You know? ‘They won’t last more than two weeks, so go Fuji; and then the Pink Lady.’’ Garry’s personal relationship with ‘Tall Paul’, the oyster man from Bateman’s Bay who regularly sells at the farmers’ markets, is such that Garry’s

11 Bega Valley is 225km to the southeast of Canberra and a major dairy production area of NSW.
‘pinched’ oysters ‘off his [Tall Paul’s] racks at Bateman’s Bay [...] while he’s watching me, you know’, quips Garry. He elaborates on his sense of connection with the producer and where it is produced: ‘But that’s the beauty of it, you’re there […] you see it, you actually physically see it [the food], where it’s been produced and then you’re buying in a market’ from a producer that ‘I [have] got to know […] over the years … He’s just a busted arse bloke like the rest of us that relies on his market to sell; and if he didn’t have that, you know, he’d have to take his oysters somewhere else.’

The flexibility to be able to negotiate prices directly with the producer at the markets is impressive for some customers. Tom recalls, ‘Aiden and I went to a [...] barbeque, a fundraiser, a couple of weeks ago, and went around and we bought a lot of food. And one of the places we went to was the mushroom guys and they did $5 a bag for mushrooms. But they didn’t have that deal on when we were there and we bought a stack of mushrooms and they sort of said, “Oh, that’s a lot of mushrooms” and we told them what we were doing and they went, “Oh yeah, we’ll look after you, don’t worry.” And [they gave us] quite a good discount. You’re not going to get that from the supermarket.’ David also likes it when a vendor throws in a ‘few more spuds just for you to try the different variety’, which provides a ‘nice touch to a transaction that you could never get any more in a supermarket or a local’. In fact, according to David, these sorts of interactions are partly responsible for men being more willing to go to the markets than to shop at the supermarkets.

‘The one thing that’ Aiden ‘has definitely noticed is, there’s a lot more people with children at the farmers’ market […] and the children are much better behaved. You don’t seem to get children who are distracted or bored; they seem to be engaged. That’s something I’ve always noticed […] and a lot of couples as well. So it’s not just the woman dragging the child around the supermarket; it’s actually the couples together. I’m not sure if that’s a Canberra thing though. I mean, there might be lots of reasons for it … But definitely this idea that families go to the farmers’ market together seems to be quite a big thing.’ Ronda is fond of taking her grandchildren aged 13 and 11 to the markets, because they are both quite good cooks and very fussy about their ingredients, and she knows that the parents only shop at the supermarket. So, the children ‘taste test their way around […] and taste things that they probably wouldn’t taste

12 Garry is speaking of an occasion when he met up with ‘Tall Paul’ while at Bateman’s Bay
13 Australian slang –used to express that this man has the same financial troubles as the average man
at home.’ She thinks it wonderful that the vendors explain to how to use the different, unfamiliar foods that are available at the markets, so it becomes a valuable learning experience. Tina often takes her ‘little 3 year old grandson’ to the markets too, and she admits that it is a ‘bit of a hobby horse’ of hers that she wants children to have an understanding of where food comes from. Tina is a former principal of an independent school in Canberra, which has a focus on community and ‘hands on activities’. They had ‘gardens there [and] the children grew things’ when she was Principal, so really, her whole life has ‘been about developing community [and] educating children to be part of a community; to be social; to be responsible, social people.’

While the markets may not be able to completely demonstrate the concept that ‘chops come from an animal’ because there are no live animals there, there are other features of the markets that give children clues as to how food is produced. For instance, Tina likes the way that food is displayed at the markets: ‘There is no subtlety about it. It’s all heaped up’, and there is dirt on the vegetables, but that is actually what she likes. ‘Perhaps there’s some psychology there about having moved away so much’ from how our food is produced, she argues, so she needs to feel that she could get back to the way food used to be grown, in the way her grandfather did when he had his allotment. In essence, farmers’ markets are places that bring people together. ‘It’s that act of […] the soil; the soil brings people together’, says Rosemary. She explains, ‘there is nothing we eat that does not have its origins in the soil; the healthier the soil, the better the food.’ On one level, according to Rosemary, there is an interaction between food producers and the soil; and on another, there is interaction between people and the planet.

The ‘community feel’ of the markets runs very deep for this group of farmers’ market shoppers. If the markets do not open some weeks because of another community event that has been scheduled, then this group of farmers’ market shoppers get ‘very resentful’ because ‘we give up something truly precious for something rubbish, quite frankly’, says Ronda. They declare that it is not ‘yuppie’ or pretentious; people from all walks of life come to these farmers’ markets. Alicia would love it if more of the population could enjoy the farmers’ markets, but realises that it ‘only goes for a few hours on Saturday morning’, so it ‘is difficult to be accessible to all’. Households with families ‘have sport […] and there is this narrow little opportunity’; and as Aiden argues, ‘you’ve also got to have a car to get there as well.’
A return to traditional ways of growing and processing food

Some of the influences on this group’s desire to be involved in the farmers’ markets are rooted in their past and their need to interact with food and the soil. When Garry was ‘first married and went to the country town and got local produce and you could actually taste it.’ He continues,

‘I did my apprenticeship in the 1970s with all the Europeans that came here after the war … I’m a carpenter by trade, so I’d be sitting around a building site having smoko […] with my devon\textsuperscript{14} on white bread sandwich […] and here’s these bloody Italians and Greeks and Croats cutting a chunk of home-made salami off and breaking cheeses, breaking homemade breads, sitting there … I mean that’s where my life began … Their food had the same passion and taste as the [farmers’ market food] so that’s what I enjoy about [the farmers’ market], especially that. So it’s more of an event for me to go there than a supermarket.’

The whole experience of the markets has now encouraged Ronda to ‘go back to veggie gardening’, which she had not done for many years. ‘All of a sudden I find that I grow […] the basic stuff, tomatoes, cucumbers, zucchinis. I’ve dug potatoes in the last 12 months or so, trying to get proper soil.’ Tina now lives in a community housing development in Canberra, where she grows some vegetables. ‘We’ve only a small plot, but I like to get my hands dirty’, she explains. While Rosemary does not produce a lot of her own food, she does have some chooks and a little veggie plot in the backyard. Rosemary’s next door neighbour is a Thai chef, so when she and her husband have a glut with their vegetables, they hand the excess over the fence and in return they receive some beautiful prepared food. ‘This morning her husband came in with some stir-fry and noodles, which is great. That’s dinner tonight’, adds Rosemary. Rosemary clearly enjoys the exchange of food that occurs when growing some of her own food.

Aiden does not grow his own food, but this does not mean he is not interested in being tactile with food. ‘I guess it, it sounds silly when you say it’, says Aiden, ‘but there’s no interaction with your food [at] the supermarket. I don’t know how to express it in a different way; whereas at the farmers’ market you can sort of pick stuff up and look at it and sniff it and feel how fresh it is.’ ‘I have a little “bend” of stuff and so the broken celery, that’s my fault, because I’ve checked,’ jokes Ronda. Garry pipes in, ‘but we need interaction with food.

\textsuperscript{14} Processed sausage meat
Otherwise we’d be running around the bush catching a rabbit and just tearing it apart and eating it. We’ve evolved into interaction,’ he adds with a laugh.

**Good food is colourful, flavoursome and fresh**

Amongst the ‘simply dozens of reasons why’ this group loves to shop for food at the Capital Region Farmers’ Market is the ‘noticeable difference in the quality, but more importantly, the flavour. There’s a pork stand there and it is such beautiful pork. It’s so tender’, and there’s the ‘very tender beef’ produced by the Galloway\textsuperscript{15} family. It also ‘lasts longer than what I buy from the supermarkets […] and it tends to be cheaper for us’, Alicia claims. ‘The stuff is fresher. Yeah, just the pure freshness of your fruit, the freshness of the meat and the freshness of the vegetables is definitely there.’ For Rosemary and her husband, both vegetarian, ‘the freshness’ and ‘the crunch’ of the vegetables are particularly important. ‘You get home and here you are with this glowing bunch of celery that’s all sort of standing up with the green bits nice and […] bright, and the neighbour is standing there with a bunch of wilted stalks they got from the [supermarket].’ Fresh food makes Tina feel better psychologically. So, when she is preparing and eating it, there is ‘this sort of feel good factor’. She thinks to herself, ‘I just bought that at the weekend and it’s probably just dug up the day before’, which gives her a good feeling and she considers that it is contributing to her sense of well-being.

Aiden really enjoys different colours in his food. When he hosts dinner parties with friends, he likes to present food that looks ‘spectacular’ on the plate, like the purple potato that he bought at the markets recently. ‘Everything [at the markets] is seasonal, so you’re actually eating more in tune with the rhythms of the seasons, and there is the opportunity to look forward with anticipation to new produce becoming available as the seasons change. For instance, melons … You know when you see them in the farmers’ market and they’re really cheap in the farmers’ market because there’s lots of them and you know they’re going to taste well because they’re in season; whereas you go to a supermarket, you just, you didn’t know anything about the seasons and melons, you get them from all over the world. The flavours aren’t there, because you just, everything just tastes bland.’ Seasonal food from the markets now drives what Alicia eats: ‘I plan my meals ritually, and I only buy what I plan to eat’, which has helped her to reduce food waste in her home.

\textsuperscript{15} Local beef producing family
Eating local food that is organic and knowing where food is grown is important for this group. ‘If you buy a carrot at the supermarket there is nothing on that carrot to indicate where it might have grown … There is no dirt on it, there’s no roots on it, there’s no green stuff on it.’ Produce, such as fruit from the farmers’ market, ‘you know it’s been stored and transported properly. It hasn’t gone too far, it’s less likely to be damaged, it’s probably better quality [and it] hasn’t had as much packaging’ as fruit available from the supermarkets.

David also prefers the taste and variety of the food bought direct from the producer at the farmers’ market that is unprocurable in Sydney or elsewhere. David is very proud that Canberra, where he has lived for 40 years, has access to ‘the best provisions [and] the best food’, with many differentiated products offering unique flavours at a ‘genuine’ farmers’ market, not ‘a trendy once a month thing that you have in Sydney or Melbourne or elsewhere.’ He believes that Canberra, a very modern, sophisticated city in the middle of a diverse food producing area, provides a unique lifestyle with food credentials that are still emerging, and not yet fully appreciated. For instance, he enjoys buying different varieties of tomatoes that do not have hard skins, like those that are able to be kept chilled for two or three months. He is pleased he can purchase products at the markets, such as fresh figs, that will not last in a normal food distribution system, along with wider varieties of ‘named’ potatoes and apples and the like, that he cannot find elsewhere. ‘There’s a few of the suppliers there with the apples, some of them sell actually tree-ripened Fujis, you know, rather than … Their Fujis are pretty good. But, you know, they will have a few crates out the back, of tree ripened fruit, which is sometimes a little bit more, got hail damage, which sweetens it.’

In more recent years, being exposed to the farmers’ markets on a weekly basis has made Aiden so much more aware of the colour and texture of authentic fruit direct from the farm, so that the waxed, shiny, colourless apples at the supermarket no longer appeal to him. He ‘just looked at it [the supermarket apple] and thought, oh that it looks horrible. [It] just doesn’t look natural or right or anything.’ Garry agrees,

‘I mean, this little old Asian lady; the other week I went in there. I needed some tomatoes for—is it Margarita oysters? My wife makes them ones—yuppie ones, I call them; bocconcini, tomato, garlic. Anyway, this little Asian lady, the scruffiest woman you’ve ever seen in your life; the tomatoes, you know, this is how blind we are, have become. The tomatoes were put in a styrene container, roughly wrapped up in Gladwrap™. I mean you wouldn’t buy them if you were supermarket educated. And I asked her, I wanted to try one, and it was just the most beautiful tomato you’ve ever
tasted in your life, you know. Little cherry tomatoes and all different sizes and dings in some of them. Beautiful.’

Ronda marvels at how much the markets have grown over the last few years, as she has been going to the markets since they were first opened. ‘And I just love the fact that now you go to just so many choices. I mean, how many egg places are there? Mushrooms are another thing; all these mushroom places.’ This variety of different produce available at the markets, combined with her love of cooking, has inspired Ronda to be experimental with her cooking. She elaborates, ‘well, I’m incredibly lucky; I’ve been on my own for a very long time and you tend not to take; it’s hard to cook for one and enjoy it. Where I now have a man who loves to eat, and I love to cook, so it’s really a good combination, and it stretches me. So, I look sometimes at a recipe and think, ‘I’ve never used that, but I know I can get it at the market, because I’ve seen it there, but didn’t know’ how to prepare it.

Sharing meals with the family around a table is an important feature of appreciation of food for Wendy. ‘In my family it was actually gathering for a meal … They’re our celebration points during the year; so anyone’s birthday and any anniversary, it’s a family meal and everyone does their dish and brings it … When we get together, my mother, and my sister and family; it’s around a table … Everyone has their spot at our table […] and if you [sit] in the wrong spot then you [are] in trouble!’ Tina marvels at the way in which her daughter and partner cook together, with their small child too. ‘They are all in the kitchen together’ adds Tina, unlike in previous generations, where ‘the men were either at the pub or maybe having a beer’ while the wife did the cooking; although in her family, her father cooked too. Having said this, Tina also recognises that we live in a ‘time-poor society’ and even though she no longer works full-time, there are other things that she would ‘actually rather be doing than being in the kitchen’.

For Mary-Anne, the central role of good food in health should not be underestimated. She remembers that health considerations affected the way in which her mother prepared food. Her ‘father was sick for quite a long time and [her mother] focused very much on […] having greens’, cooking with no salt, and avoiding overcooking food. She thinks that ‘as the population is ageing, we’re living longer, but also with the amount of information there is now about the effect of food on health, people getting cancer, what food you should and shouldn’t have … Staying [away] from preservatives […] additives and MSG and all the rest of it. So, I think the effect of food on health has raised the appreciation of what good food is.’
These shoppers vote with their feet and avoid the supermarket

According to this group of shoppers, good food is not synonymous with supermarket food—but they have other objections to supermarkets apart from food quality. Aiden states very clearly that he has very negative reactions to supermarkets. He ‘would never go into one if he could avoid it’, but does so for convenience and to get essential items when necessary. ‘Despise’ would not be too strong a word for how Aiden feels about the Coles and Woolworths duopoly that exists in Australia, because they have far too much power. Alicia adds, ‘I’m the same, put me down for that one,’ because she thinks that the major supermarkets ‘destroy the little people’. Garry does not object to the large supermarkets needing to make a profit, but they do not need to squeeze the producer to the point at which they cannot make a fair living. ‘Our farmers are struggling enough without getting the lowest percentage.’ ‘When people say we have a competitive grocery market, really they talk about Coles and Woolworths in competition with one another’ argues Aiden. The supermarkets ‘manipulate people and […] their markets’ and Aiden considers their food to be ‘over-priced and over marketed’. They do everything ‘to suck you in.’ Aiden goes so far as to say that he thinks ‘Woolworths should be prosecuted for calling themselves “the fresh food people”16, because […] a lot of their stuff isn’t fresh.’ Garry believes that the connection with the vendors at the markets means that ‘you’re buying [food] off somebody; you’re not buying it off a thing, like the fresh food people!’ He just thinks that food from the markets tastes like real food, but this is not the case for supermarket bought food, which he describes as ‘slop’, and he wonders ‘what the nutritional value is between the fresh food from the markets and Woolies food.’

Aiden prefers to ‘eat local food. It’s produced locally, it hasn’t travelled so far, and yeah, I’d rather that than imported stuff that’s travelled thousands of miles.’ For Alicia, apart from the environmental impact of buying imported food, when ‘you see the farmers struggling and the suicide and you think, we need to—I would pick up an orange juice and I’d look at where the oranges come from’ to make sure they are Australian grown. Another way that Alicia likes to care for the environment is to avoid using plastic bags and packaging. Some of the vendors ‘won’t even give you a bag. If you give them your bag they will just put [the food] in holus-

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16 This is a current Woolworths marketing slogan
bolus. But [if] you don’t like packaging, and I really hate packaging, then it’s awesome. So I just reuse my bags from each week.’

**Economic support for the region**

On a final note, David believes that shopping at the farmers’ market provides

> ‘economic support for the local region. From his perspective, prosperity in the region enhances the lifestyle of residents in Canberra. Regular excursions into the neighbouring countryside are made more enjoyable by the presence of restaurants, vineyards, olive groves, truffle farms and small scale producers of cheese and meat. Many of these producers also use the Farmers’ Market as an outlet for their produce. The Italians and French are well aware of the linkages between regional prosperity and lifestyle in neighbouring cities. There is an opportunity to emulate this in Canberra because of our close proximity and connectedness to the surrounding countryside.’

*This group could have gone on for hours ‘com[ing] up with so many reasons’ for their using the farmers’ markets, but alas, everyone has homes to go to. Reluctantly, the recorder is stopped and the group disperses.*

**Farmers’ market shoppers’ perspectives on a moveable feast**

‘The event’, the weekly farmers’ market held in Canberra, is at the core of this group’s understanding of good food. It is through this ‘truly precious’ event each Saturday morning that people experience so much more than purchasing of food. ‘The event’ connects these enthusiastic farmers’ market shoppers to ‘place’; that is, the soil in which the food is grown, Canberra and the surrounding region, and indeed, all of the places from which the food comes. It connects them with their past, current and future experiences with food, and it connects them to the people who attend, such as family, friends, the community of shoppers, but ultimately to the farmers that produce the food; without them the market would not exist.

According to this group of dedicated farmers’ market shoppers, the atmosphere of the farmers’ markets—relaxing and therapeutic, inviting for couples and families, where people are able to interact with food by feeling it and sniffing it, and talk to vendors to learn about food and negotiate prices—actually makes the food taste better. As Holloway and Kneafsey (2000, p. 290) suggest, it is the nature of the spaces of farmers’ markets that is the key to ‘understanding the meanings and ideologies encapsulated within the act of consumption in this context.’ They argue that not only are particular food products purchased, but the whole space, in a symbolic sense, is consumed (Holloway & Kneafsey, 2000). These farmers’
market shoppers would agree wholeheartedly, as they ‘consume’ the sounds and smells of the market, the passion of the farmers, the interactions with family and friends, the learning from others and the sense of community.

**Community connections through food**

The stories from this group of shoppers indicate that their farmers’ market provides an environment in which community connections, particularly with the farmers, can develop. On one level, the vibrant atmosphere of the farmers’ market in which these participants immerse themselves, as they chat to perfect strangers, engage in banter with food producers, ‘pinch’ oysters or angle for a ‘few extra spuds’, may seem like a superficial assessment of community building. Rather, the regular shopping event at the farmers’ market forms an essential part of family and community life for this group of shoppers, as they either attend with family and friends or meet up with them. It is not just women who shop here; it is men, women, couples and families who come to engage in the activities at the markets, contributing to shoppers’ sense of community (Szmigin et al., 2003). Perhaps part of the joy stems from both producers and consumers having similar ideals, such as wanting fresh, authentic, high quality produce (Kirwan, 2006; Milestad, Westberg, Geber, & Bjorklund, 2010; Norberg-Hodge, 1999). As Norberg-Hodge (1999, p. 212) proffers, ‘social life often flourishes when like-minded suppliers and consumers meet as friends.’ Other authors have also reported that farmers’ markets are enjoyable, sociable (Hunt, 2007; Kirwan, 2004; La Trobe, 2001), ‘people-bonding’ places (Feagan et al., 2004) imbued with ambience (Andreatta & Wickliffe, 2002; Feagan et al., 2004; Holloway & Kneafsey, 2000; Svenfelt & Carlsson-Kanyama, 2010); they are places where people get together with friends, talk to the farmers (Feagan et al., 2004; Hunt, 2007) and even become personal friends with them over time (Kirwan, 2004, 2006).

**Relationships with farmers makes the food taste better**

To imply that the needs of this group of shoppers would be satisfied purely by holding a market that was fun and atmospheric would do them a grave injustice. For most of these shoppers, the relationships with the producers went far deeper than glib, verbal exchanges that enabled smooth and pleasant economic transactions. They valued the trusting, reciprocal relationships that developed through informal learning conversations about nature, production methods, the best produce to buy or advice on ways to prepare the food, which added to this group’s experience of good food. Other research indicates that farmers also enjoy the social
interactions with customers and learn from them too (Griffin & Frongillo, 2003; Kirwan, 2006; Milestad et al., 2010). In the farmers’ market environment, the inter-connectedness of the producer and customer is revealed, as farmers produce healthy, wholesome food for customers whom they come to know personally, while the customer feels an obligation to the producer, who is part of the community (Hendrickson & Heffernan, 2002; Kirwan, 2006).

This group of shoppers appreciates the food from the markets because they have the opportunity to speak directly to the people whose livelihood depends on growing food for others. Shopping at the farmers’ market is a co-operative venture between producer and customer, where the hard work and integrity of the producer is acknowledged and valued (Kirwan, 2004, 2006). The farmers’ market shoppers in this research also wanted to support farmers whom they believed were being ‘squeezed’ by the retail chains, and who may have suffered mental health problems as a result of struggling to make a reasonable living from farming. Results from other studies in North America and Europe also indicate that supporting local farmers is a key motivation for attending farmers’ markets (Baker et al., 2009; Feagan et al., 2004; Kirwan, 2004; Svenfelt & Carlsson-Kanyama, 2010; Winter, 2003). This research adds to this body of knowledge by revealing some of the reasons these farmers’ market shoppers want to support local farmers.

This group of shoppers was not completely immune to food prices. Indeed, some participants considered the markets to be cheaper than supermarkets, a motivating factor in frequenting the markets. On the whole, however, food purchasing decisions moved well beyond purely price point considerations towards those centred on a desire for tasty, high quality food from people they know. According to some participants, there was ‘an energy’ and a ‘feel good factor’ associated with the food that comes from this market. This partly reflected the intrinsic qualities of the food being sold, such as colour, crispness and flavour, but also came from the social interactions that occurred between the people at the market, particularly between the customers and the farmers. Getting to know these farmers, who are passionate about their role in producing good food, is enough for some of the farmers’ market shoppers to think their food tastes better. It is the direct exchange between them and the person who actually grows it that provides additional food energy.

These farmers’ market shoppers ‘perform taste with conviction’ as they used forceful and passionate language to describe and evaluate the food they buy at the markets as tasting better than food bought elsewhere (Spiller, 2012, p. 105). Garry, for example, expanded on his
reasons for enjoying the food from the markets. He described various encounters as he purchased food for the pizzas that he makes in his wood-fired pizza oven. He revealed how he invests so much time into the purchasing of the ingredients that he is ‘knackered’ by the time he gets home to prepare the pizzas. Garry’s approach to shopping and enjoying food relates to Hendrickson and Heffernan’s (2002) concept of personal or social time. When Garry eats his ‘great pizzas’ from ingredients sourced from the producers that he knows and trusts, he also consumes the social time that he invested in the exchange.

Garry summed up the sentiment of the group when he said that at the markets, ‘you’re buying off somebody; you’re not buying it [food] off a thing, like the fresh food people.’ It appears that as farmers’ market shoppers enjoy buying from local producers, the act of purchasing becomes layered with meaning of trust, quality and morality (Holloway & Kneafsey, 2000; Milestad et al., 2010; Thomas & McIntosh, 2013).

Cooking and commensality

An important aspect of the way in which some of the participants made meaning of good food and its central role in family and community life, was the subsequent preparing, cooking and sharing of food at meal times. Ronda’s story of the way in which the different food available at the markets has ‘stretched’ her cooking skills and repertoire reveals her joy in cooking for others. The markets have inspired her to be experimental with her cooking, but this has been aided by having a new man in her life for whom to cook. As a widow living on her own, she did not enjoy cooking for herself—which is not uncommon (Sidenvall et al., 2000)—but now she has the company of a man who loves to eat the food she prepares. For many women, preparing and serving food for others provides them with considerable personal satisfaction (Cairns et al., 2010; Lupton, 1996; Sidenvall et al., 2000). Indeed, it is considered a gift and a way of demonstrating love and care for others, particularly amongst family members (Cairns et al., 2010; Lupton, 1996; Sidenvall et al., 2000). A change in cooking practices noted by the participants in this study is that the younger generation of men is more involved in cooking with their partners or wives than past generations of men. Cooking in many Western societies has been considered the role of women (De Vault, 1991; Murcott, 1983), but there is support from the literature suggesting that the responsibility for food preparation is changing, with men taking a greater role in domestic cooking (Bove & Sobal, 2006; Lupton, 2000; Szabo, 2013).
Cooking outdoors, particularly using the barbecue, is culturally considered the domain of men, at least in some societies (Bove & Sobal, 2006; Nath, 2011; Sedgman, 1997). Garry’s elaborate story of going to the markets to purchase ingredients for his home-made pizzas suggests that his approach to food purchasing and meal preparation means more to him than a simple get-together with his mates, in contrast to findings from other research (Bove & Sobal, 2006). Garry invested all day in the careful selection of ingredients from his favourite stallholders and then prepared the pizzas in the wood-fired pizza oven that he had built himself. Although Garry did not classify himself as a ‘foodies’, the passion with which he described his experiences of purchasing food at the markets and the life-changing experience of meeting work colleagues from different cultures, who taught him so much about food, suggests that he is in fact a ‘foodies’. Garry reproduces what Hollows (2003, p. 239) describes as a masculine disposition towards cooking that turns ‘domestic cookery into a “special event” and a performance done in “free time”.’ Like some of the men in previous studies in Canada, Garry views cooking as a hobby or leisure activity and a great source of gustatory pleasure (Cairns et al., 2010; Szabo, 2013).

For Wendy, the significance of her enjoyment of food is in the sharing of meals around the table with family, especially for special events, when everyone brings their signature dish and sits in their usual place. As Lupton (1996) proposes, it is not necessarily the food that is the focus of the gathering, but rather the ritual of sitting down to a meal together as a powerful symbol of family itself. It is the commensality, where conversation, fellowship and conviviality occur, that brings joy and happiness to family members (Lupton, 1996; Sidenvall et al., 2000).

**Connections to place**

This group of Capital Region Farmers’ market shoppers experience the importance of place in the enjoyment of food purchasing and food itself in several different, but very important ways. For most, the trusting relationships between themselves and the farmers have been negotiated through proximity and personal interaction, demonstrating the social embeddedness of this farmers’ market (Alkon, 2008; Hendrickson & Heffernan, 2002; Kloppenburg et al., 1996; Sage, 2003). The positive experiences with vendors and food at the farmers’ market encouraged some shoppers to grow more of their own food, connecting them directly with the soil and illustrating Kloppenburg and colleagues’ (1996) notion of proximity with no fixed boundaries.
In a very profound, almost spiritual way, Rosemary used poignant imagery to illustrate humanity’s deep reliance on and connections to place and culture when she said, ‘It’s that act of […] the soil; the soil brings people together.’ Rosemary suggested that the healthier the soil, the better the food, so the way in which farmers and the community care for the soil on which we depend is critical for human survival and well-being. The Capital Region Farmers’ Market reminded her of these deep connections. Rosemary acknowledges the complex web of relationships between soil, human and planetary health that need to be improved rather than ignored, if there is to be a move towards more sustainable food systems (Kirschenmann, 2008).

Rosemary also spoke of the ‘energy’ of the food that comes from the farmers’ market. The ‘energy’ contained within this food is a product of natural food production systems and the positive connections that occur between the farmer and the customer at the markets. Interestingly, DeLind (2002, p. 222, emphasis added) uses similar language when she asserts that ‘soil is an embodiment, both literally and figuratively, of people living in place. It is a public trust, a commons, and a source of cultural energy’. She believes that civic agriculture, unlike the global, corporately-dominated food system, ‘must be about soil and building soil, not only as a medium within which to grow good food, but also as a medium and marker of sacred places—places that tie us to our past, our present, and our future’ (DeLind, 2002, p. 222). Tina’s stories best illustrate DeLind’s point, as she describes the way in which the soil connects her to time through her past, present and future experiences with food. Tina explained that the reason she really enjoyed the vegetables at the markets was because they still had soil on them, reminding her of her grandfather, his garden allotment, and the way food used to be grown. She also spoke of her current connection with the soil as she got her hands dirty growing some of her own food in the backyard. However, these links with the soil do not remain only with her; they continue to the next generation of school children, as she teaches them the skills of growing food so that they understand the importance of knowing that food has its origins in the soil.

Even though ‘to know soil is also to know place’ (DeLind, 2006, p. 136), this farmers’ market connects some members of the group to the provenance of their food in other ways. For Garry, proximity is manifested in the farmers’ market through his eclectic memories of past meaningful and enjoyable experiences with people and food, in different places and times of his life. He recalled his trips to the country when he was first married, where he ate tasty,
local food. He enthused about his encounters with ‘Tall Paul’ at Bateman’s Bay as he witnessed, first-hand, where ‘Tall Paul’ sources his seafood. Finally, Garry purchased food at the markets from farmers who are passionate about their food, which stirred memories in him about ‘where his life began’. It took him back to a place in time, as a young apprentice carpenter, when he met others who were equally passionate about processing and consuming food as these farmers. The physical place of each worksite may have changed over time, but its proximal nature did not (Kloppenburg et al., 1996). It was not surprising, then, that as Garry spoke so enthusiastically of his food purchases at the markets he used a place-name as he referred to each product. ‘Oh look, chook from Gilgandra, pork from Temora, bloody tomatoes from Bungendore.’ He spoke as though he had actually been to each of these places, or was familiar with them, and made connections that added to his enjoyment of food.

There is, indeed, meaning and memory embedded in Garry’s ‘placement’ of food, which DeLind (2006, 2011) vehemently argues should be acknowledged and promoted when advocating for local food systems. According to Lockwood (1999), a person’s attachment to place may be rational, but the over-riding processes are non-rational—the emotional, aesthetic and spiritual—leading to deep and intimate associations with place. It follows that the importance of place and sense of place in people’s lives is strongly linked to well-being (Windsor & McVey, 2005). There is little other farmers’ market research that draws out the importance of place in the non-rational way that Garry’s sentiments so compellingly illustrate. At least Kirwan’s (2004) study notes that some farmers’ market consumers do appreciate knowing the actual place of food production from their own personal experience. However, he does not uncover the underlying reasons for this appreciation (Kirwan, 2004), which may be similarly complex, contextual and emotional.

While Garry’s attachment to place is diffuse, David's is very specific. He has lived in Canberra for over 40 years and is very proud of the way in which the Capital Region Farmers’ Markets has thrived in the midst of a very rich farming region, reminding him of the food culture of France and Italy. He is clearly interested in the authenticity of food production, believing that food quality is determined by the place in which it is produced, in keeping with the French concept of terroir (Gade, 2004).

David also believes in supporting the farmers’ markets and the small artisanal cheese and meat producers in the region, because these enterprises contribute to economic growth and offer a rich and diverse food culture for the people of Canberra. This is part of David’s vision
of developing a ‘culture economy’ in Canberra, which is a set of strategies to transform local knowledge into resources that will benefit a region (Ray, 1998). Like other foodsheds, David supports Kloppenburg and colleagues’ (1996) view that this farmers’ market should aim to increase local and regional food production and processing to boost jobs and the local economy. Some other farmers’ market research demonstrates that customers are interested in supporting local farmers economically (Connell et al., 2008; Feagan et al., 2004; La Trobe, 2001), but this study provides a richer and deeper understanding of the underlying motives for customers wanting to offer this support to local farmers and the region.

Unadulterated, seasonal food

Many of the participants told stories of the comfort they derived from purchasing food at the markets, as it reminded them of past experiences with food, the way it used to be grown and how it used to taste. They spoke of enjoying seeing the way food is displayed at the markets, ‘all heaped up’ with dirt on the vegetables, of being able to source local food that ‘you [can] actually taste’, and being able to touch and interact with food at the markets. They preferred misshapen fruit—unlike the perfectly formed, waxed and colourless fruit found in supermarkets—contributing to a nostalgic view of former food production and retailing systems. Indeed, some of the participants described their return to growing small quantities of food, inspired by the farmers’ market. These participants are not alone in their desire to purchase food produced and marketed by more natural and traditional methods that take them back to their past experiences of better tasting food. Farmers’ market customers elsewhere also report a yearning for authentic, unadulterated food (Kirwan, 2004, 2006; Svenfelt & Carlsson-Kanyama, 2010) that tastes like ‘it used to’ (Spiller, 2012, p. 104).

Linked to the notion of preferring unadulterated food was this group’s desire to eat seasonally, for taste and environmental benefits. Aiden, for example, spoke about ‘eating more in tune with the rhythms of the seasons’ as he looked forward to new products becoming available in the markets as the seasons changed. He liked the fact that when he ate seasonally, the food was both cheaper and tastier than if he had purchased these same foods, year round, from a supermarket. Alicia said that seasonal food drives what she eats, and she plans meals accordingly, which she explained has helped her reduce food waste.

Interestingly, very few of the other farmers’ market studies found that seasonality was an important motivator for customers. The study by Thomas and McIntosh (2013) is an
exception; they found that some participants were prepared to sacrifice variety in their diet in order to eat seasonally. Others, however, were keen to eat seasonally because the food tasted better when it is in season and not transported long distances (Thomas & Mcintosh, 2013), so the emphasis was on taste rather than a commitment to environmental principles. In La Trobe’s (2001) interviews with 146 customers in a farmers’ market in UK, only one respondent gave food seasonality as a motivation for coming to the market. In other studies, the definitions of ‘in season’ and ‘freshness’ are ill-defined, making it difficult to draw conclusions about the importance of seasonality for farmers’ market customers (Connell et al., 2008; Feagan et al., 2004). Wilkins and colleagues (2002) argue that the term ‘seasonality’ is not well defined by food retailers or food professionals and there is little research that seeks to understand this term from the public’s perspective. Certainly in this research, the stories from the farmers’ market shoppers demonstrated that freshness and seasonality were two distinct but related concepts and that, for them, supermarkets prioritised neither freshness nor seasonality.

**Unpretentious, authentic markets**

Without being vociferous, this group of shoppers were involved in building inclusive, democratic, and socially and environmentally sustainable food systems (Kloppenburg et al., 1996). For example, this group was at pains to point out that the Capital Region Farmers’ Market were unpretentious, authentic markets that welcomed people from all walks of life; they rejected the notion that they were ‘yuppie’ markets, a criticism levelled at some farmers’ markets and CSA enterprises, at least in North America (Feagan et al., 2004; Winter, 2003). They were aware that opening times on a Saturday morning excluded some families with children involved in Saturday morning sport and those with limited access to a car, and would prefer it to be more inclusive. Limited opening times of farmers’ markets has been reported as a major obstacle to using this food system on a regular basis (McEachern et al., 2010; Thomas & Mcintosh, 2013).

This group of shoppers also showed interest in ethical and environmental issues, even though not all food choices were primarily driven by these factors. They preferred to buy local food and chose Australian products, which had the dual benefit of avoiding excessive ‘food miles’ and supporting struggling farmers. Alicia disliked food packaging and plastic bags, so she ensured she re-used shopping bags and planned her meals each week to avoid undue waste. In keeping with these findings, a proportion of farmers’ market shoppers have reportedly
eschewed food packaging, reduced their use of plastic shopping bags (McEachern et al., 2010; Seyfang, 2008) and tried to decrease ‘food miles’ by shopping locally (Kirwan, 2006; McEachern et al., 2010; McEntee, 2011; Seyfang, 2008; Svenfelt & Carlsson-Kanyama, 2010). A study of farmers’ markets in the UK also reported that some participants wanted to support their local or English farmers for fear that they would ‘die out’ (Holloway & Kneafsey, 2000, p. 296), which paralleled the significant concerns of participants in this study, albeit within the Australian context.

David enjoyed being able to source less common fruits, such as figs, and a wide variety of ‘named’ potatoes, tomatoes and apples that cannot be purchased elsewhere, which may offer ecological benefits through increasing farm diversity (Svenfelt & Carlsson-Kanyama, 2010). This desire to eat a greater variety of food products may not be consciously motivated by concerns for the environment. Nonetheless, increasing demand for food variety could have these unintended benefits.

This group of farmers’ market shoppers purchased free-range eggs and organic animal products, such as chicken and pork, but their preference for food raised this way was possibly based more on the improved flavour and quality of the food than on their interest in animal welfare or environmental issues. For this group of shoppers, a mix of factors, particularly freshness, taste and being natural in appearance, denotes food quality. For example, fruit and vegetables that are ‘crunchy’, ‘glowing’, misshapen, and have dents and dirt still on them, signify a more authentic, fresher and tastier product. The group also thought that local food is more likely to be stored properly and less likely to be damaged than supermarket food, which also contributed to their view of the superior taste and quality of farmers’ market food. A desire to select free-range eggs and organic meats, which have been raised in a more natural environment without the use of chemicals, is consistent with these preferences.

Other studies have described the range of factors that contribute to farmers’ market shoppers’ perception of good quality food available in this alternative food system. Fresh, free-range, additive-free, organic, natural, unadulterated and tasty are all commonly cited descriptions of high quality farmers’ market food (Andreatta & Wickliffe, 2002; Archer, 2003; Connell et al., 2008; Feagan et al., 2004; Seyfang, 2008; Spiller, 2012; Youngs, 2003). Some studies revealed that a proportion of farmers’ market customers buy organic food for health benefits (La Trobe, 2001; Seyfang, 2008) and environmental reasons (La Trobe, 2001), but even in these studies, customers also seek flavoursome, organic produce. The regular farmers’ market
shoppers in a Canadian study valued food that was nutritional, ‘in season’, natural, and locally produced, over food that was organic (Connell et al., 2008). In two English studies, freshness was considerably more frequently nominated than organic food as a reason for attending farmers’ market (Archer, 2003; La Trobe, 2001). So, it would appear that the farmers’ market shoppers from these studies are motivated to source high quality food, which may include organic produce. However, they do not appear to be primarily motivated by the environmental benefits that may ensue from purchasing organic food.

There were some elements of participants’ stories within this study that suggested good food was related to good health, but none was directly attributable to organic food. Tina, for example, told of her sense of well-being, which she derived from purchasing food from the markets; Garry thought that food from the markets had arguably better nutritional qualities than supermarket food; and Wendy felt that food without preservatives and additives was essential for good health, reflecting on her father’s health problems. Amongst this group of farmers’ market shoppers, the role of organic food in reducing the environmental impact of food production systems was not a feature of the storyline at all. Instead, the focus of this group’s meaning-making of good food was very much on the quality of the food, consistent with Pearson and colleagues (2010) findings. They found that both personal health and food quality were more commonly nominated reasons for choosing organics than environmental ones (Pearson et al., 2010). This may be a reflection of the questions raised in the focus groups rather than an indifference to the role that organics can play in achieving planetary health. Alternatively, it may be that the ‘naturalness’ and ‘localness’ factors of food quality were more important to this group than organics, per se.

**Resistence to the power of the supermarket duopoly**

Labelling this group of farmers’ market shoppers as ‘food system activists’ may not resonate directly with them, but it is clear they did use the farmers’ market as a way to avoid the supermarkets and to make value-based food choices. Farmers’ markets can be spaces of resistance, where producers and consumers can circumvent the powerful actors in the hegemonic food system (Holloway & Kneafsey, 2000). Amongst this group of shoppers, though, there were varying degrees of resistance. Some of the participants tried to avoid any participation in the dominant food system, while others viewed supermarkets as a necessary evil. Aiden was the most vehement in his opposition to supermarkets, but he admitted that there were still times that he used them for convenience or to get essential items. On the other
hand, he felt, as did others, that the supermarkets were ‘over-priced and over-marketed’, very manipulative, and ‘squeezed the little people’, reflecting the ambivalence that other farmers’ market shoppers have expressed (McEachern et al., 2010).

**Conclusion**

It is the socially and locally embedded landscape of this farmers’ market that contributes so much to this group’s meaning-making of good food, which is illustrated in figure 12, with the large ‘people’ and ‘place’ spheres. These dedicated farmers’ market shoppers made conscious, value-based food choices by supporting local farmers economically and socially. They valued the advice the farmers gave them about the best produce to buy and their learning about nature and production methods. They purchased food that had been produced as naturally as possible, similar to the way it used to be grown, was seasonal and had not travelled too far, illustrating a degree of concern for the environment, even if this was not their prime motivation. Hence, their food culture was based on both traditions and ethics.

The whole experience of the markets has prompted some to re-engage with the soil itself, which has allowed them to more deeply understand the links between healthy soil and individual and planetary health. Some have been inspired to become more experimental with their cooking, having discovered such an interesting array of food at the markets, while others plan their meals around seasonal availability, acknowledging the rhythms of nature. Still others, observing the growth of the markets with their rich variety of high quality and unique foods, are filled with deep pride in their hometown, also contributing to their appreciation of good food.

Social time is also prominent in this group’s moveable feast (figure 12). These shoppers showed that they were prepared to give up convenience—the hallmark of the supermarkets—for the privilege of being able to purchase fresh, local and seasonal food from their authentic farmers’ market. ‘Linear’ time has no place here. Shopping, rather than being an imposition, is an enjoyable and relaxing event for this group, where they become immersed in the atmosphere, happily devoting their social time to developing meaningful relationships with the vendors who provide their food. These farmers’ market shoppers are not mere spectators at this ‘event’, but active participants in the shopping experience through their community-building interactions, which is represented by the extended arm in figure 12.
Indeed, there are multiple inter-connections between people, place and time that add to these farmers’ market shoppers’ understanding of good food, which is best illustrated by Garry’s stories. His direct experiences with farmers who are passionate about their produce prompts his wonderful, enmeshed memories of people and places in his past, where he experienced the world of ‘real’ food. The stories from all these farmers’ market enthusiasts confirms that despite the globalised, ‘thinned out’ world in which we live (Casey, 2001), ‘the presence of place in people’s lives persists unyieldingly’ (Pascual-de-Sans, 2004, p. 349). So too, does the presence of people persist, as evidenced by the experiences of this group of farmers’ market shoppers. Their life-world has been ‘thickened’ by having relationships with the farmers who grow their food, by their knowing and caring for the place in which it is grown and by recalling past significant encounters with people who also love their food. These interconnections between people, place and time actually make their food taste better! Not only does it taste better, but these farmers’ market shoppers’ food choices also confirm that they are food citizens, as they help to build more democratic, socially, economically just, and environmentally sustainable food systems.

Figure 12: A representation of the farmers’ market shoppers’ food culture and their consistent engagement with food citizenship.

This group of shoppers clearly enjoyed the farmers’ market event each week, but so do the next group of shoppers: those who frequent either the Belconnen or Fyshwick fresh food
markets. You will read about how they became absorbed in the atmosphere of the markets, in a similar fashion to these farmers’ market shoppers.
Chapter 7: The Belconnen and Fyshwick markets are theatre

Introduction

In this chapter you will meet eight well-educated shoppers: two men—Arthur and George—and six women—Sally, Geraldine, Jacinta, Karen, Helen and Belinda—most of whom are aged between 45 and 72 years, with the exception of Jacinta, who is in her 20s. There is a spread of different family types amongst this group: Jacinta is single, Sally is a widow whose children no longer live at home, and the other six members are equally split between being partnered with children still living at home, and partnered with no children living at home.

Childhood food experiences, both positive and negative, have had a major impact on this group’s appreciation of the variety and quality of fresh food available in Australia. The fresh food markets provide affordable food in a community atmosphere, where these shoppers spend time meeting up with family and friends while enjoying the banter of enthusiastic vendors. You will discover that this group considers some of the ethical and environmental issues of food production, but any change in purchasing behaviour to address them is rarely forthcoming.

This narrative combines the views and stories of participants from a small group of more reserved participants and a larger, more vocal group of people, some of whom were familiar with each other and with me. As a result, I anticipate it being difficult to keep the larger group focused on my research questions. All of them use supermarkets to some degree for their dry goods, cleaning products and even dairy products, but this is not the focus of the impending discussion. Instead, I begin by asking people about their motivations for shopping at the Belconnen or Fyshwick markets for most of their fresh food purchases.

Markets offer choice, affordability and theatre

‘I like the Fyshwick markets because of the theatre’ declares Geraldine boldly. ‘I like watching people; always have liked watching people; so apart from doing the shopping that I need I quite like being accosted by a man with an apple telling me I look gorgeous that day. I suppose it’s the ambience … You don’t get that in a supermarket … You know, the cherry guy saying, “Here, have a taste” […] and the chicken man [is] always shoving something at you.’ According to Sally, ‘the exciting time to be at the Fyshwick [markets] is […] Sunday
afternoon. You know, you get your good cuts of meat for $10 a kilo because they’re getting rid of that lot.’

Jacinta has a Sunday shopping routine at the Belconnen Markets that stems from her student days. She elaborates, ‘they do quite a lot of mark down stuff on Sundays, which is nice. It makes it really cheap and really fresh and they have a huge range of everything; you get lots of different types of apples you can’t just get at the supermarket … Rhubarb and strange vegetables that is quite nice that you just can’t buy anywhere else.’ Belinda has been going to the Fyshwick markets for many years: ‘I started going with my parents because I worked a couple of days a week and I used to take them out with me and they liked to shop out there as well, because we come from a country town, so what was available for us was what was available in season. We come from Orange\(^{17}\); so it’s apples, cherries, that sort of thing. So we used to be able to pick up fresh produce direct from the grower. So I started going out there when, and continued to go and I guess formed relationships with certain shops out there […] but I’m not loyal to anybody.’

Geraldine uses the Fyshwick markets for fresh food and the local IGA for her dry groceries. ‘I’m loyal to our neighbourhood shop, mainly because they carry everything out for me and put it in the car.’ The owners ‘are delightful and they sponsor all the school activities […] and if I want something special that they don’t have they will always get it in for me and ring me when it’s there.’ At the markets, though, ‘I have mixed loyalties … I check out most of the fruit and veggie shops and choose what I think’s best from whichever I think looks nice and what the price is … I do tend to be a roamer. As with the butchers, there’s a very good organic butcher there that’s expensive, but I do like their meat […] for a special cut of meat, but I will go to the discount place when I know I have teenage children who need volume not quality.’

Sally reflects on her history with shopping at the markets, recalling that ‘[it] started off as an excursion for the children and they just loved going from stall to stall and bits of fruit to taste and things like that. Particularly, I think, coming from England, where such things never happened. Then I realised that the fruit and veg there were a lot cheaper than the supermarkets and lasted a lot longer.’ George is under ‘no illusions’ about the reasons why the food lasts

\(^{17}\) Small city in midwest NSW, Australia
longer, because, he asserts, ‘I’m actually a chemist and the reason the food lasts longer is they spray it with sulphur dioxide, so they’re not the reasons I go [to the Belconnen markets] … It’s a one stop shop … I like going into the […] old fashioned delis.’ Arthur pipes in, ‘there’s one fish shop … the health food shop and I can actually buy what I want in the quantity I want. I don’t want to have to buy six lamb chops all in a plastic pack, which I object to anyway.’

Social interactions and relationships are integral to these markets

Beyond some of the practical considerations for using the markets, Arthur remarks, ‘I know a lot of people who are serving me now as a result of going [to the Belconnen markets], so I’ve got a personal relationship.’ Karen adds, ‘I’ve been shopping at Ziggy’s for 30 years and I remember having two young kids and got all my fruit and veg and I got to the checkout and I didn’t have any money. And Ziggy’s mother said, “don’t worry, bring it next week”. So, I’ve been back ever since.’

‘I like how people who are involved with food put that effort into being pleasant to people,’ adds Geraldine. ‘It’s lovely to [observe the vendors] hav[ing] direct discussions with the kids. You know, people will—it’s making the sort of comments that I think children don’t often get. “Gee you look fantastic in that outfit” … Or they come in their soccer stuff and “how did you go today with your soccer, mate?”’ ‘It’s not big stuff’ Sally admits, but it is an ‘acknowledgement’ of the children. ‘And this tends not to happen in big shopping centres. It really doesn’t happen … And there’s just that more relaxed feeling about—and the kids actually, in some shops, get the chance to do some of the choosing and shopping themselves and most of the checkout people are very tolerant of kids handing over the bits of fruit and vegetable to be bought. So, it’s a more family thing.’ Sally has often thought ‘that for the really struggling families in Canberra, if they took them out in the mini-van and taught them where food came from and taught them about [food]; learning how to cook it … [The markets] are an under-utilised resource for having fun; learning how to shop.’ This comment prompted Belinda to comment on the range of people who come to the Fyshwick markets, saying, ‘I think you see a lot more, I guess perhaps below the mean average wage at the markets; certainly on Sundays. And you can get the bus from there too.’ ‘You’ll actually find ethnic groups shopping together.’
‘I guess it’s that [...] familiarity with the customer or the client that I guess makes a more pleasurable experience, rather than just a robotic shop, race in, throw it in a trolley,’ in Belinda’s opinion. ‘So, you know’ says Geraldine,

‘it’s two hours that I actually really quite enjoy and if I look at the fish and I want to smell it, they’ll let me smell the fish. I’ve always shopped with my mother, who, I have four older brothers, so shopping used to be a nightmare because the volume of food that we would go through. But I enjoyed, I learnt to enjoy the occasion, not just as a task, but as something that was quite sociable. And being a chatterer, I tend to chat to people who serve me and they’ll know my name and I’ll chat back. And even when my kids were little they would actually like coming … It was the time that I’d talk about food, where it came from and how long it might take to grow. So, for me, it was a way of educating my kids about food … it was a way of making them value food and so, if they, when it appears on their plate they actually have some recognition of, “Oh, gee, I know what that looks like when it wasn’t cooked”. So, now my kids cook. They love cooking. So it was about embracing the whole thing, not just eating it at the end of the day.’

While the Fyshwick and Belconnen markets are environments where this group of shoppers build relationships with the shopkeepers, they also offer a place to connect with family and friends. ‘I think basically, I go [to the markets] ‘cause we’re having a social occasion; I like shopping with my wife. It’s nice to see her occasionally, you know’ jokes dry-witted George. ‘From my wife’s point of view’, says George, the markets ‘definitely broke down the social isolation when she had kids […] she used to meet others … They used to ring up and say, “Let’s meet for a coffee”. I think that the mother isolation, and father isolation or whatever these days, a good place to come and have a coffee; can’t do that in a supermarket.’

While Jacinta usually goes to the farmers’ market ‘more for the social experience’ with her friends, this does not discount using the Belconnen markets for a similar purpose. ‘I never do the shopping by myself; my housemate comes along. That’s kind of our weekly shop: girl’s talk. “Let’s get the shopping done. What do we need? How was your week? I haven’t seen you since Sunday”. Yeah, it’s nice; just kind of gives you a routine catch-up […] and ‘cause we have quite a few friends who live in Belconnen near us, it’s like, “Oh I’m going to the markets; do you need anything?” and they are, like, “Oh no, I went, but this is really cheap and really nice”. I didn’t think about that before, but that happens quite a lot.’ Jacinta, when she reflects on a sense of community when shopping says, ‘I definitely feel and remember being a student when I go to Belconnen on a Sunday afternoon, ‘cause it’s all students. You see thousands of international students, thousands of Australian students […] working all the
time. They see me with bags labelled reduce and they give me the next bag. “Here you go”, so I do feel a lot of sympathy for the student lifestyle.’

Simple, yet exotic food is to be shared

The ‘student lifestyle’ is often associated with being ‘Spartan’, but this is how some in the group recall their childhood and other previous experiences of food. ‘Spartan by necessity and puritan in values’ is what Helen remembers of her childhood food. ‘So, when I discovered the pleasures of food, “Wow”, and so now I think it’s a great gift to be able to provide healthy and enjoyable food for other people … It’s a bit of a passion in my life, yeah … I have withdrawal symptoms over the summer when the Fyshwick Markets are closed for ten days and over Easter’ says Helen wistfully. ‘I think, after spending years of not much money living in England, and you come back to Australia and you’re nearly overwhelmed by the variety and quality of fresh fruit and vegetables in particular,’ says Sally. It ‘continue[s] to overwhelm me and I think we’re just so lucky and we don’t appreciate how lucky we are … We just take so much for granted that we can eat food from all over the world all the time, no matter what it costs’ she asserts.

Karen recalls, ‘When we grew up on this wind-swept island, it was always tinned vegetables and Deb potato\textsuperscript{18} and dried peas and all that sort of thing. So you didn’t get much in the way of fresh fruit and vegetables and that’s what I appreciate now.’ Arthur, too, remembers the parlous state of the food supply in England at the end of the Second World War; for him, ‘appreciation of food […] was [that] you got something … Kids used to say, “When are we going to have real eggs again?” Because they’ve got these things in shells,’ that they had not seen for a long time, having survived on dried eggs. ‘I can remember the Christmas when I first saw a banana in the flesh.’ Sally chimes in,

\begin{quote}
‘One of the important things is our appreciation of hunger … Many children now don’t, or many of us don’t really know hunger. Another thing that interested me that my sister noticed was some family came [to stay with her] with very fussy kids and they went fishing and they caught a fish and she duly prepared and cooked the fish. But she realised these children were used to having everything microwaved. So, sort of the food and the smell all arrive simultaneously and they fussed around with the food. Whereas, smelling the food cooking for half an hour before it hit the table, they were starving and really ate well, because part of the appreciation of the food is the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{18} Deb potato is a brand of dried potato
appreciation of the process of preparation … One of the great things about baked dinners, isn’t it? The house smells of baked dinner.’

Helen also appreciates the attributes of other cuisines and says, ‘I think that way of eating, where the animal products are minimal and the flavour and the joy comes from, you know, are not so dependent as in a traditional Aussie\(^\text{19}\) menu, on the animal products, I think that’s really important way for us all to be able to still eat well and mostly plants […] for health and the planet’s sake.’ Further, ‘I think […] for animal welfare, Aussies generally probably eat too much protein, don’t pay enough attention to the conditions of the animals that they get their protein from … Really we don’t have a very strong or long culture of getting pleasure from non-meat sources of food, as the Mediterraneans do, the North Africans do, the Asians do, the Islanders do.’

For Geraldine, the ‘authenticity of the seasonality of vegetables’ is an important aspect of appreciation of food. ‘I can’t wait, for example, as autumn comes because I adore mushrooms … My mother was from a dairy farm and they had a big veggie garden, so I was used to bottling Greengages\(^\text{20}\), so I knew when the seasons were coming. The recipes that I would use and try and repeat the recipes my mother would have used.’ Now, Geraldine grows some of her own food:

‘You’re inundated with tomatoes for summer and too many zucchinis, so now I only [put] two plants in, not four. So, to try and mark the seasons, which sort of then fit with the year. They know what’s coming and you look forward to the glut of tomatoes … My children do it too; they mark the seasonality. “Oh great, the apples are coming for autumn”’. And, you know, for me, because I grew up in Tasmania, we used to hunt and shoot and fish. So hunting wallaby and shooting rabbits and skin-diving for crayfish. And so it was not just the eating, it was the hunt, the gather part, which was fun as well.’

As Jacinta’s enjoyment of shopping is grounded in meeting up with friends, so too is her appreciation of food. ‘We have probably a weekly get-together at someone’s house and it’s usually to show off something that you have bought at the markets, like some nice gourmet sausages or some fancy French cheese that you got at the market or, what did we have last week? I think we had black quinoa […] which someone made into a pomegranate salad. So just kind of, because we have this big group of uni friends who have now all got full-time jobs

\(^{19}\) Aussie is a colloquial term for Australians
\(^{20}\) Greengages are a variety of plums
and still in Canberra. It’s kind of a little bit reminiscent of being at uni: “Let’s have a group dinner, so we can save money”, but now it’s more like

“Let’s buy the fancy ingredients because we have real money”, so we can buy nice salami and make something fancy. So […] we quite often get together and do the cooking together. So I think that really helps us appreciate the food. So, it’s not necessarily the food, which is always good, because usually someone else has cooked it, but I think what helps appreciate the food is the fact that all your friends are there and it’s kind of a social event. So you are eating really well, but it’s extra awesome, because all your friends are there and you make an excuse to catch up weekly. Otherwise, you’d just be stuck at home having frozen dinners.’

Similarly, George’s appreciation of food revolves around ‘what you do with it’, not just the quality of the food itself. ‘I’m just spoilt because my wife’s a gourmet cook […] and she likes it. But the point is, she does something with it and she doesn’t destroy it … If she gets it, as you say, seasonal thing, she’ll do something with it that makes it better to eat … But I think your appreciation of food […] changes with the circumstances you’re in. So my appreciation of food, certain foods, has changed because of my wife […] and I think kids also generally expand your horizons on food. Like, I don’t like Chinese food […] but one of my daughters is big on it and so we have Chinese food at home … And my daughter’s got an Indian boyfriend, so they eat a lot more Indian food because she cooks it.’ Similarly, Arthur is interested in cooking and being creative with meal planning. ‘One of the things I do is try not to use the same recipe, preferably not for a month or so. So, you know, every day is different and preferably every, you know, over several weeks you wouldn’t have the same thing twice.’

In George’s view, a component of appreciation of food includes an ‘ethical dimension’. ‘I won’t buy prawns not grown in Australia because they’re just totally ruining ecosystems—the farmed ones … I mean, you can’t avoid them if you go to a Chinese restaurant, because they wouldn’t be able to survive … I know about the eggs; I mean, we’ve moved from cage to free-range and I’m starting to wonder … The only ones I’m really happy with, there’s a lady out at the farmers’ market who’s got pictures of her [chickens] and she proves, it’s Mother’s eggs or Mother’s Chook eggs or something.’

**The tensions embedded in food purchasing choices**

While this group of shoppers is generally very grateful for the abundance, variety and quality of the Australian food supply, they are still aware of some of the problems with the current food system. Karen is concerned about the plight of farmers, who are at the mercy of the
powerful retailers. ‘I’ve heard stories about Coles keeping prices down, as far as the primary producer is concerned, and locking them into contracts where they don’t make as much money as others.’ Sally, discussing the cost and availability of fruit, remarks, ‘I was [having one of] my supermarket chats to the people in the store, and he said, “It’s a pity, because you could get a lot cheaper fruit”, but they cannot sell the smaller second grade, but perfectly nutritious and healthy food, because people only want large, polished, good looking fruit and vegetables. And there is a fairly limited market for things that are irregular in shape and size.’ Belinda recalls,

‘My father-in-law was an orchardist and I guess I didn’t appreciate how much effort and I guess work goes into producing a crop. One particular year [...] because they hadn’t had a lot of rain, all the apples were only, well, what they market now as lunch box size, but they didn’t back then, before my kids were born. The whole crop wasn’t worth picking. Like the markets did not want them; or the middleman didn’t want them. So the whole orchard went to waste.’

Not only has the appearance of fruit and vegetables changed, but also, according to George, so has the taste. He explains,

‘I actually think there was a hiatus here where we had fresh fruit and vegetables and what we call fresh fruit and vegetables, is not really fresh fruit and vegetables, because you have to really seek to find a tomato that tastes like a tomato; avocados are a waste of space … And I think we have gone too far. So everything is, why we have a supply all year is because they have to do things with them to make sure the supply is there. I’m not talking about cherries and things like that. So I think a lot of the stuff is tasteless. I mean you have to search and that’s probably a good reason for the markets, because you can, you know.’

Karen also has concerns about food production methods, adding, ‘I’m looking at going to, which my son already is, is organic, because there’s so many stories now of fruit pickers and vegetable pickers and growers who are getting cancer, because of all the insecticides they use. So, I’m feeling I should be more responsible and buy things in, that’s more expensive, that doesn’t have the pesticides.’

Purchasing at a farmers’ market may help these shoppers overcome some of their concerns. Certainly Jacinta enjoys occasionally shopping at the farmers’ market, but Helen is not so enamoured with them and surprises even herself. She ponders,

‘For someone who is as keen as I am on fruit and veg, I can’t bring myself to go to the farmers’ markets. There’s something, the few times I’ve been, there’s really not been enough choice and I suppose that’s the main thing … It’s not practical for me and I’ve not, I hope I don’t have to reach this stage of life, where I have to limit myself to really seasonal fruit [or]
foods. So, and also the thing about the price, I find off-putting; [it’s] expensive, yeah, and so in the same way, a couple of times I have been shopping at North Lyneham\textsuperscript{21} that comes from local farms and I’d love to be able to support them, but the few times that I have bought things I have sort of resented paying that price … And as a gardener myself, I know how hard it is to grow and so yeah, I’m a bit torn about that. You know, I’d like to be able to support local producers but it still has to be at a price that is reasonable. So I get even more torn about the big supermarkets and what they are doing to producers, squeezing margins, really disapprove of that.’

To appease her conscience to some extent, Helen explains, ‘I buy lamb sometimes from the Lachlan Valley Meat\textsuperscript{22} people thinking that that might be slightly fewer food miles or something.’

\textit{It is starting to get quite late in the evening, so I draw the discussion to a close. As expected, it was quite difficult keeping the discussion on track with the lively group of participants, but it has been a very full and rich discussion; sometimes very amusing, and other times very thoughtful and reflective.}

**Fresh food market shoppers’ perspective on a moveable feast**

**An inclusive, vibrant shopping environment that promotes community**

This group of well-educated shoppers embraced a food environment that thrives on promoting the benefits of small specialty stores, where the customer can request the quantity and variety of produce that he or she wants. These fresh food market shoppers were happy to invest the time required for shopping, rather than doing ‘just a robotic shop: race in, throw it in the trolley’. Instead, the markets offered them fun and excitement as they roamed around at a leisurely pace, comparing prices, being tactile with food and responding to cheeky comments made by the vendors. From all accounts, it appears that these markets are very inclusive, attracting women and men, the young and the old, those who can afford specialty items and those who cannot. Some told of the gourmet foods they liked to purchase from particular butchers or delicatessens, but, equally, others spoke of the pleasure they had seeking out Sunday specials. Children were made to feel welcome by the vendors, who offered them tastings and compliments, and their parents allowed them to participate in family food choices. For this group, shopping is not a chore, but a weekly occasion to chat with vendors

\textsuperscript{21} A suburb in Canberra that has a small grocery store that focuses on selling predominately local food
\textsuperscript{22} A Canberra-based butchery

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and their employees as they socialised with accompanying family, flatmates and friends. These multiple layers of social interactions helped to create a sense of community that, according to this group, cannot be achieved at a supermarket.

Many of the sentiments that allude to enjoying the atmosphere of the markets and the trusting relationships that develop with the vendors are strikingly similar to those expressed by farmers’ market attendees (Feagan et al., 2004; Kirwan, 2004; La Trobe, 2001; Svenfelt & Carlsson-Kanyama, 2010) and small retail store shoppers (Madgwick & Ravenscroft, 2011). Farmers’ market regulars spoke of enjoying the ambience of the markets, of enjoying ‘talking to people and the farmers’, and described the farmers’ market as a ‘people-bonding place’ (Feagan et al., 2004p. 247). Other research has reported participants enjoying the pleasures of shopping at their local shops, where they received more personal service and purchased tastier, better quality food (Barton et al., 2011; Madgwick & Ravenscroft, 2011) while meeting up with friends at nearby cafés (Madgwick & Ravenscroft, 2011). In this study, George was not drawn to the Belconnen markets primarily for the quality of the food; instead, he viewed it as an opportunity to spend time with his wife, which is in keeping with other men’s grocery shopping motives (Dholakia, 1999).

When reflecting on the personal and trusting relationships that develop with farmers at a farmers’ market, a participant in a Swedish study believed that ‘the person who has produced a product feels more strongly for that product, in pride as well as shame, than the person who just piles it on the shelf’ (Svenfelt & Carlsson-Kanyama, 2010p. 461). Geraldine’s stories of her experiences at the Fyshwick market, as she engaged with the fishmongers and butchers, would suggest that small retailers are also proud of their products, expertise and service. She expressed feeling familiar enough with the fishmongers to pick up the fish to smell it and sought out a particular butcher to get a special cut of meat. They willingly ‘put that effort into being pleasant to people’, which contributed to making the shopping experience more authentic, personal and enjoyable. Unlike those who favour purchasing directly from farmers at farmers’ markets and other local food systems, shoppers such as these make their social and cultural connections through their small local stores (Madgwick & Ravenscroft, 2011).

In conjunction with discussions of relationships with vendors, the women in the group raised the issue of loyalty. Belinda, for example, was a regular shopper at the Fyshwick markets, but this did not mean her loyalty extended to particular vendors. Karen, on the other hand, remained loyal to one fruit and vegetable vendor. Also of interest was Geraldine’s expression
of strong loyalty to her local IGA supermarket, because that was her one suburban grocery store that catered to her needs, gave good service and sponsored community causes. Research has found that women are generally more loyal to their local stores than men because they see value in community, and local shops are an integral part of that community (Noble et al., 2006). Perhaps for some of these women, the sense of loyalty and community was generated through the entire Belconnen and Fyshwick market spaces, rather than via particular vendors.

Consumption patterns: Traditional versus ethical

A key feature of the way this group described their current values about food was through references to the influence of their parents, extended family, upbringing or family circumstances during their formative years. For many, their shopping and food preparation habits reflected taken-for-granted ways of behaving and drew on long-held traditions (Beagan et al., 2010), which have been named as ‘habitus’ (Adams, 2006; Bourdieu, 1984).

Geraldine’s learning from her mother about growing, preserving, and cooking food, and her focus on purchasing good quality food, provides a good example of traditional food consumption patterns. She spoke passionately of her love of seasonal food, telling stories of growing tomatoes and dealing with the glut in summer, of enjoying spending time shopping and cooking, and passing these inter-generational food values on to her own children. She, like other busy middle-aged women (Moisio et al., 2004), made a conscious decision to reproduce the home-made traditions that she gained from her own mother. It is clear from Geraldine’s stories that her family’s participation in food-related activities are fun, precious events that connect her to her own childhood food adventures and have become a symbol of family togetherness—not unlike findings from previous research (Moisio et al., 2004).

Belinda learnt from her father-in-law, an orchardist, about the effort and risk involved in producing a fruit crop, which allowed her to more realistically assess the quality of the fruit she purchased. She and other members of the group were aware that irregularly shaped fruit and vegetables did not diminish their quality or nutrient content, even though mainstream supermarkets reject them. Some consumers at farmers’ markets report actually preferring the blemishes and imperfections on fruit, because it denotes a naturalness not found in supermarket produce (Kirwan, 2004, 2006; Thomas & Mcintosh, 2013) and allows the customer to make their own assessment of quality (Spiller, 2012).
This group may not have given unadulterated fruit such a strong endorsement, but they were against unnecessary waste, which may reflect values that persist from their past experiences of food deficits. With an abundance of food now available to them, they prioritise purchasing and eating a wide variety of fresh produce, especially fruit and vegetables, which is consistent with—although not identical to—food ideals of other older adults (Falk et al., 1996; Sidenvall et al., 2000). A study of the eating habits of people who had gone through The Depression could not bring themselves to waste food, and so ate everything on their plate (Falk et al., 1996) and expressed value in eating ‘proper’ meals made from fresh ingredients (Sidenvall et al., 2000).

Alternatively, the ethical consumption pattern—which requires some degree of reflexivity—was expressed through discussion of the impact of food choices on the environment and animal welfare (Beagan et al., 2010). The most ardent ethical consumer amongst this group was Helen, who ate less meat for personal and planetary health. Helen’s ethical consumption patterns generally became routine, but were not always consistent. For example, she was not prepared to buy seasonal food available at the farmers’ markets, or pay a premium for organic produce available at a local greengrocer. She felt that at her stage in life, she ought to be able to select the variety of food she liked, rather than feel compelled to eat seasonally, even though she recognised the inconsistency in her behaviour—an attitude reminiscent of ‘conscious’ consumers in UK, who also made pragmatic food decisions (McEachern et al., 2010). As Halkier (2001, p. 34) asserts, ‘Often, the responsibilities that get priority on consumers’ kitchen table agenda are those that consumers experience as close to them.’ It seems that ethical behaviours only go so far.

Several other members of this group described ideals related to ethical consumption practices, though they were not expressed in strong political language. Seasonality appeared to be part of Belinda’s, George’s and Geraldine’s tacit assumptions about good food (Halkier, 2001) and formed part of their ethical eating repertoire (Johnston et al., 2011). However, they did not feel compelled to always purchase seasonal produce, as evidenced by their regularity at the fresh food markets, which sources year-round produce, rather than the farmers’ markets. Perhaps, in Geraldine’s case, she was able to adhere to her ideals of seasonality and teach her children about seasonality through her home gardening activities. Karen shared her disquiet about insecticide use in modern food production systems and their adverse health effects on farm workers, but was still equivocal about buying organic food. Perhaps she has not yet been
sufficiently reflexive about this aspect of her food purchases (Beagan et al., 2010) and continues with her routine food purchasing patterns (Halkier, 2001; Warde, 2005). She may still be in the throes of re-calibrating her values within her personal system (Furst et al., 1996; Sobal et al., 2006).

**The tension of ethics in practice**

Some of the participants in this study were concerned about the cost of organic food, which is a typical objection to purchasing it (Beagan et al., 2010; Johnston et al., 2011; Pearson et al., 2010; Thomas & McIntosh, 2013), even amongst those who can afford it (Johnston et al., 2011). Just as Geraldine mentioned the superior taste of organic meats, rather than their benefits from a health or environmental perspective, so too do participants in previous studies (Beagan et al., 2010; Seyfang, 2008). Alternatively, there are reports of those who are highly engaged in ethical consumption practices, and thought it was worth the extra expense of buying organic food (Beagan et al., 2010; Johnston et al., 2011; Thomas & McIntosh, 2013). Other engaged ethical consumers spoke of the difficulties of giving up food variety when choosing seasonal produce, but were committed to buying local food for the environmental benefits (Thomas & McIntosh, 2013); something Helen, and presumably others in the group, were not prepared to sacrifice.

Other components of an ethical eating repertoire nominated by this group, such as concern about pesticide use in food production, eating less meat, and avoiding farmed fish to reduce adverse effects on individual and planetary health, are also reported as being important for some consumers (Beagan et al., 2010; Johnston et al., 2011; Thomas & McIntosh, 2013). Helen understood the positive contribution eating less meat and purchasing organics could make to the environment, but only acted on one of them, which is consistent with the behaviours of a group of young Danish consumers (Halkier, 2001). There is indeed complexity and contradictions in this group’s approach to ethical eating practices. On balance, even though this group of shoppers were of high socio-economic status, most were not highly engaged with the dominant ethical eating repertoire. But as Johnston and colleagues (2011) found, such demographic associations do not always hold true.
Cooking and identity

Amongst this group of shoppers, one of the more commonly expressed ideals held about food was in relation to cooking meals, even though it was not directly linked to the discussion. Sally did not speak of her own cooking interests or prowess. Instead, her ideals focused on involving children in food purchasing and preparation. One of her stories illustrated the importance she placed on food being cooked slowly, so that the beautiful smells generated would sharpen the children’s appetites and give them a real appreciation of food that does not involve using a microwave oven. Her interest was not in experimenting with different cuisines and exotic flavours, but in the practical provision of ‘proper meals’ for children and families, which may be tied to her adherence to traditional eating patterns and to her identity as a family doctor. These findings are not unlike those that emerged from a study of retired, older women who held ideals that a ‘proper meal’ had to be prepared and cooked from fresh ingredients and that the purpose of cooking and serving a meal was to satisfy others, particularly husbands and children (Sidenvall et al., 2000). There may also be truth to the argument that cooking home-made food may be considered the way that the older generation of women believe they can safeguard the family from moral decay (Moisio et al., 2004).

Jacinta, a young single woman, embraced opportunities to join forces with friends to source less common food varieties at the markets, to experiment with cooking and to be convivial with like-minded friends. Her approach to cooking is linked to creativity and a sense of self-expression and personal accomplishment that differentiates her from others, which is not uncommon in the younger generation (Moisio et al., 2004) or the better educated (Daniels, Glorieux, Minnen, & van Tienoven, 2012). The exotic dishes she and her friends prepared reflect what Bahr Bugge & Almas (2006) describe as ‘the trendy dinner model’, which demonstrated her food-cultural competence and association with the middle-classes. Much of the pleasure that Jacinta derived from cooking was in the sharing of the activity with friends and then eating together, rather than being ‘stuck at home having frozen dinners’. This finding is in keeping with a quantitative study, which showed that cooking with others was significantly more pleasurable for people than cooking alone (Daniels et al., 2012).

Of all the participants in this group, it was Helen who most convincingly expressed a ‘philosophy of taste’, to use Spiller’s (2012) terminology. Helen thought that a healthy, environmentally friendly and pleasurable meal should be based on small quantities of meat and mostly plant food. Her great gift to others was to share her knowledge and experiences of
good, flavoursome food that reflected the influences of Mediterranean and Asian cuisines, rather than the typical Australian and British-derived fare of meat and three vegetables. Helen follows what Bahr Bugge & Almas (2006) describe as the ‘therapeutic dinner model’, which signifies nutritional competence and valuation of health. This model needs to be extended to include an ethical dimension, to include Helen’s desire to reduce her meat and increase her vegetable consumption for the sake of the planet. Perhaps this could be described as the ‘therapeutic and ethical dinner model’.

However, it was not only the women that expressed joy in cooking. Arthur also spoke of his interest in being creative with meal planning and cooking so that he and his wife could enjoy a diverse and interesting meal pattern over several weeks. He treated cooking as more of a hobby than an obligation, possibly helped by his part-time work status, which is an approach to cooking that other men have reported in previous studies (Cairns et al., 2010; Szabo, 2013).

**Family meal preferences**

The composition, social roles and dynamics within a household all have an influence on food choices (Furst et al., 1996; Sobal et al., 2006). Amongst this group of shoppers, George told the story of his appreciation of food changing in different circumstances. George has had to adapt his meal preferences in favour of those who take charge in the kitchen, but he has embraced the imposed changes, as it has expanded his food horizons. George’s flexibility with the family meal pattern is not unlike the response of a young man reported in Furst and colleagues’ (1996, p. 256) research, who commented: ‘If she doesn’t want to eat red meat, fine. I’ll eat something else.’ George’s food choices, within this family context, may be a reflection of his personal system regarding managing relationships (Furst et al., 1996; Sobal et al., 2006).

**Conclusion**

This rarely researched group of fresh food shoppers do not begrudge the time spent shopping for food, but rather enjoy the fun and exciting atmosphere of the Belconnen or Fyshwick markets as they meet up with family and friends. Hence, social time features prominently in this group’s moveable feast, demonstrating a degree of active participation in their chosen food system (figure 13). This group of shoppers enjoys the interactions with the vendors at the markets, but they are seldom loyal to any particular ones. Nor do the vendors have a strong
influence on this group’s enjoyment of food. The place where food is grown does not feature as an important aspect of appreciation of food for this group, even though one member of the group liked to grow some of her own food. Instead, for many in this group, their relationship to food stems very much from their past food experiences or significant people in their past. However, cooking and preparing meals for others, especially ‘proper’ meals, forms part of their ideals about food and offers some a sense of identity. Two dominant food consumption ideologies—traditional and ethical—are evident amongst this group of shoppers, but there are layers of complexity and contradictions in their food shopping and consumption behaviours (figure 13).

Figure 13: A representation of the fresh food market shoppers’ food culture and their partial engagement with food citizenship

If you, as reader, have confronted some inconsistencies in food procurement behaviour by members of this group, then be prepared for similar revelations in the next chapter, with the experiences of a group of supermarket shoppers.
Chapter 8: Supermarket shopping is definitely business not entertainment

Introduction

This narrative focuses on participants from three supermarket focus groups. Of the 24 participants, only four are men—Ned, Clive, Damien and Martin—aged between 39 and 63, all of whom are married with children living at home, apart from Ned, who is single. The single, separated and divorced women with no children living at home are Aylin, Elise, Lucinda, Alice, Julie and Iris, whose ages range from 25 to 62 years. There are two women—Janice and Suzanne—aged in their 40s and 60s respectively, who are divorced with children still living at home. The remaining women are almost equally divided between those with partners and children living at home, and those who with partners but no children living at home. Those with children living at home are Caitlin, Nerida, Kristy, Jacquie, Lorraine, Donna and Madeleine, with ages ranging from 28 to 52 years. Amongst the women who are partnered with no children living at home, you will meet Bridget, Jeannie, Maryella, Barbara and Catherine, who are aged between 25 and 65 years.

This narrative reveals that this group’s approach to food shopping at supermarkets is to complete the purchasing process as quickly as possible. Some, who are part-time workers or retired, may sometimes take a more casual attitude to shopping and look for social interaction with others as they make their way around the supermarket aisles. This does not mean that some would not prefer to shop at the farmers’ markets or the fresh food markets, but that time and circumstances do not seem to allow them to regularly shop at these alternative shopping venues. Price, value for money and ‘filling up’ family members are amongst the main ways this group of shoppers appreciates food, but they also like to cook interesting meals on weekends when more time is available. This group of shoppers has a high level of awareness of the issues of the current dominant food system, but they are far too complicated for them to be involved in trying to solve them.

Before commencing the focus group discussions, introductions were completed and refreshments were offered to help everyone relax. The conversation begins around everyone’s motivations for using supermarkets for their food purchases.
Supermarkets for convenient, one-stop shopping

Laughter erupts as the first brave participant reveals that her reason for choosing to shop at supermarkets is ‘laziness’. Perhaps ‘a better way of putting it’ is ‘convenience’. ‘I used to go to the Woden Farmers’ Market on Sunday morning’, explains Catherine, ‘but now I can’t get to that because we go to dog training and I guess there’s no reason I couldn’t go to the Fyshwick markets or somewhere; the time factor; so the supermarket’s still convenient.’ ‘I would [shop at the farmers’ market too] but they always run these farmers’ markets so early in the morning and I’m not a morning person’ adds Jeannie. For Caitlin, her ‘local supermarket is a lot closer; it’s two blocks from my house, whereas the farmers’ markets is down in the town centre.’ ‘My local supermarket is about 1500 metres away from my house’, says Damien, ‘so the advantage I have in shopping there with my kids, sometimes, is we often walk there or we ride our bikes.’

There are still other aspects of convenience offered by supermarkets that these shoppers elucidate, even though they are not particularly enamoured by supermarkets. ‘It’s one stop shopping.’ Even though ‘I sort of feel I’m more being taken advantage of and ripped off at a supermarket […] the one time I did go to the Belconnen Markets to look for fruit and things, by the time I looked at this guy’s apples and then that guys and then up there, you think, “I don’t know which one was the best” and I can’t remember what the prices were, so that’s why it is often easier just to go to one place,’ clarifies Caitlin. ‘If I had time, if I had more control in the timing of my day’, adds Jacqui, ‘I would avail myself of shopping elsewhere … I feel I have to shop at Woolies23 after I’ve picked up the kids, then it's five thirty or six o’clock, so then I’m locked into that. So my lifestyle kind of locks me into supermarket shopping.’

Lorraine feels similarly and strongly disapproves of the way that the supermarkets squeeze the margins on products supplied by farmers, but she still returns to the supermarkets for convenience. ‘Sadly,’ admits Lorraine. ‘I get it and I go, oh, you know, “What do you do?” because you do get into a lifestyle … I mean we only have so much time. Patrick [my husband] works all day Saturday, he’s a football coach … I’ve got work to do and you know, I don’t know, it’s just too hard.’

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23 Woolies is a colloquialism for Woolworths supermarket
Even though saving time appears to be a major reason for shopping at supermarkets, other practical considerations are considered by some shoppers in this group. ‘A combination of cost and [...] speed’ motivates Martin to shop at supermarkets. He elaborates, ‘I’m an Aldi shopper; I do about 85% of our shopping at Aldi and the fact that there are just four aisles and the fact that there’s only a choice of three tins of tomatoes. That’s all I need; I don’t need a range of ten. We’ve got four boys and that’s probably the difference between a $300 Coles load is probably about a $200 Aldi load.’ While Martin prefers a narrower choice of items when shopping, Nerida, originally from South Africa, is amazed at ‘the overwhelming choice’ in Australian supermarkets, ‘like in terms of the range of bread or the range of milk … You know, it’s not skim milk and full cream, it’s, you know, a tremendous amount.’ As Catherine points out,

‘You [can] get out-of-season products, because they’ll get them from God knows where overseas [...] whereas at the [farmers’] markets you will only get more “in season” products, which is a plus or minus … I tend to think you get [food] fresher [at the markets], but you still do need to choose or pick a bit carefully. You know how they’re so careful with the quality at Woolies and Coles … You know, they only order certain size potatoes; they’re all graded and everything … But I like, personally, to help the local growers because you know, more and more, they’ll go out of business.’

Supermarket shopping is not a social outing or an ‘experience’, but a means to an end

Some of this group of supermarket shoppers viewed the whole shopping experience as a chore. ‘I just want to get it over with’ remarks Jennie. ‘I don’t enjoy it; it’s a pain in the neck.’ At best, for some others, social interactions in the supermarket are ‘minimal: in, out, grab, go’. ‘The majority of the times that I go [shopping]’ says Elise, ‘would be directly after work or a long day … So there’s no reason to want to interact.’ Barbara, who is new to Canberra, remarks, ‘I’m just a face in the crowd and I don’t know anyone. So for me, it’s really just a means to an end.’ Caitlin has a couple of checkout operators that she likes to find. “Oh good, there’s my girl”; I’ll go and line up for her … and have a chat.’ ‘But in terms of other customers, like avoid, no eye contact, just move through as quickly as possible,’ adds Janice.

Then there are those who really object to checkout operators taking any interest in their shopping. ‘There’s nothing social about [supermarket shopping] for me’ declares Bridget; ‘It’s not important to me [and] what I’m eating is kind of private, like; I’ll take it home and that’s where I’ll eat it. So the fact that everyone’s talking about it or discussing what my
dinner is, going through [the checkout]; I don’t want them to know. So, “shut up and put it in my bag”.’ As Ned points out, even on the basis of design, supermarkets are not ‘a place to stand on the end of the aisle, and oh, you want to have a chat about something, you know. So there’s really no way of having a chat in a supermarket … Everyone’s doing their own thing. You know, someone will look at you if you say “g’day” or “morning” or “afternoon” or something like that, but that’s about the extent [of it].’

There are some amongst this group who are open to engaging in conversations with others while shopping. Maryella does not go ‘looking for [social interaction], but if it happens, if you do meet somebody, then that’s really nice. But I wouldn’t put it down as a reason to go shopping.’ ‘It’s funny,’ says Suzanne, a part-time worker, ‘I don’t mind going [food shopping]; I enjoy going and spending the time, ‘cause you always see somebody you know … I find it’s good to catch up with people that you don’t necessarily have a social life with; that you may only see in the supermarket or out shopping … You can have a lovely reunion or catch-up […] and then you mightn’t see them for another year, but it doesn’t matter because they’re not a social friend, they’re just an acquaintance, I suppose.’ Julie even enjoys talking to people she does not know: ‘I read labels on things and it’s interesting when you’re stopped and you’re reading a label to find someone else who’s doing the same thing and it’s good to compare notes and sort of talk about things in foods.’ Donna, even though she is a busy working mother, takes her two children shopping with her. According to her, ‘both [children] just talk to anyone and everyone in the shopping centre. We have a lot of fun just meeting people and you usually take about an hour and a half for a shop that would only take half an hour back in the day. But it’s good; you get to meet a lot of different people.’ Some of the retired people with more time on their hands also find they can enjoy food shopping. As Clive explains, ‘I don’t have the time pressure [and] I’m a bit more relaxed … I want to be more open and chuck smiles out there […] and [ask] a regular shopper “would you know where the bi-carb is, because I have no idea what that does”. Yes, but I am not sure that’s like making a friendship or even having an extensive conversation.’

Despite most of the group not experiencing nor seeking social interactions while shopping at the supermarkets, ‘it’s different in the markets; the Fyshwick markets,’ according to Jacquie. Janice agrees, saying ‘I’ve started going to the fish market at Belconnen and I really enjoy that experience and … [I] always have a chat with the girl on the till. And yeah … It’s so fresh; there’s a lot of diverse products there; there’s things that you won’t have encountered
that you can ask, “Well how do you cook this?” So it’s broadened my mind a bit about all the different types of fish and how they can be prepared.’ Catherine, who used to be a farmers’ market shopper, finds the vendors are ‘so much more friendly and helpful’ at the markets than at the supermarkets. ‘They’ll give you […] lots of information about the product, which is really good, I find … And certainly at the market, they have a little coffee area, you know, where you can go and if you bump into someone, have a coffee. So, they’ve made the markets much more sociable.’ Madeleine bemoans the fact that the ‘fabulous’ markets she has experienced in Melbourne24 are not replicated in Canberra, to her knowledge. ‘I find that if I go to, like the Bus Depot markets25 that, I feel like it’s upper market; like the prices are higher because there’s this expectation that if you go there that you pay more … I don’t know, it’s almost like a gourmet as opposed to a farmers’ market.’ All of this discussion about the excitement of shopping at markets prompts Martin to suggest, ‘There’s that fine line between shopping and entertainment, isn’t there? … As opposed to going to the supermarket, where it’s definitely business; you want to go in and out quickly … It becomes an outing, doesn’t it, rather than just a chore.’

Supermarkets: A place of alienation or community?

For this group, supermarket shopping is usually the antithesis of a community-building exercise, but there can be exceptions to the rule. The experience of supermarkets is ‘very alienating […] you know’ says Janice. ‘I don’t feel like, on one level, I don’t feel like I’m in a community. I just feel like I am a person on a mission, just my own independent purpose. I find I get irritated at people … If someone is dithering in the aisle, I’ll feel a sense of irritation … It’s almost like road rage,’ ‘Trolley rage’, quips Ned. ‘After all, I’m in a hurry … I don’t feel like I’m part of a big loving community when I go to a supermarket’ continues Janice. Caitlin fully appreciates Janice’s single-minded approach to shopping in the supermarket, but ‘Some days […] I don’t know, I’m just ready to help people when they are struggling with two kids and a really heavy trolley […] or just have a chat, you know. Sometimes there’s that little spark, where you meet someone and you can say something off-hand and have a bit of a laugh and it feels like a flower growing through the concrete a bit. Just making a link in a rebellious little way.’

24 Capital of Victoria, Australia
25 Old Bus Depot markets at Kingston, Canberra sell jewellery, gifts and food
Ned recalls his positive experiences with buying direct from farmers, as opposed to his experiences of supermarkets. ‘When I lived in Melbourne, we used to have a market every Saturday morning, just down the road from me. [We would] go and chat to the farmers, and you know, talk to them about their product; and you knew you were getting fresh product, because it was only there for the day … But yeah, just react with people; whereas you don’t have any of that reaction in a supermarket.’ Most the group agreed that you get a ‘gormless look’ and ‘non-plusness’ from people in the supermarket. Any sense of community is ‘completely lacking in a supermarket—dash and run in; hit and run in sort of thing’.

There are some participants who think that community can be created through shopping at supermarkets, but not at the major supermarkets. Catherine suggests that

‘it’s very impersonal in the big supermarkets […] but I find, [at my local shops], because we have a lot of Middle Eastern people and that Halal butcher and greengrocer, [that] there was a familiarity of people; and the Italian deli … We’ve got such a different mix of cultures at the shops … So, I do, in a way, get a bit of a sense of community there … And you see a lot of familiar faces. You may not know them, but you see the same people and I’m sure the shop assistants get to know us.’

‘When I was living in Florey and I went to the IGA there’, adds Aylin, ‘I think they put up a sign saying we sponsored such and such league club or such and such kiddie club and I feel like, oh that’s nice, you know; makes you feel like a real community, I guess.’

Lucinda’s experience of community at the larger shopping centres is completely at odds with the rest of the group. She has ‘made friends with the staff at the supermarket’, so she takes ‘the time to have a chat. The managers know me; they’ll tell me when something is coming in [and] they’ll tell me the dog food’s cheaper … And they’ll say, “Oh look, I’ll take it up to the check out for you”. So, I’ve really got a sense of community there. Because they will say, “Oh look”, you know, “Gee you’re not well today; look, sit down”, and they have actually sat me down out the back … And even when I’ve been really sick, they’ve even formed a posse to come out; found out where I lived, come out to see if I needed anything. And I thought that was wonderful … So, maybe I just get special treatment, I don’t know, but maybe it’s because I’m a Queenslander26 and talk to everybody!’ It may be that Lucinda, who is retired and lives alone, has been proactive in developing her local shopping mall as part of her social network.

26 Queensland is one of Australia’s states
When asked whether the group felt that they missed out on a sense of social connectedness by shopping at the supermarket rather than, say, a farmers’ market, Clive responds, ‘I weigh it up with what I am trying to achieve.’ For example, he says, ‘I’m cooking a cake. I’ve forgotten the caster sugar; you just run down and get it, sort of thing. [You] don’t hang around for half an hour chatting about where the sugar’s grown.’ Also, there are still some supermarkets that do offer a greater sense of social connection for Clive, but ultimately this is still no substitute for more direct connections to the farmers themselves. ‘I found this supermarket down at Tuggeranong … The atmosphere in there is delightful and […] the people there seemed friendlier, the aisles were wider, the products seemed different. I don’t know, more vibrant, or available or something. But [there’s] still the “missing out” context, I think, is not getting it from the horse’s mouth, sort of thing. There’s a “miss out” component there that I just sell off for convenience’s sake and got to go in and get this and get out.’

Food: we like eating it; it satisfies hunger; but as far as enjoyment from cooking is concerned—well, that depends…

As the conversation turns to people’s appreciation of food, some show little discernment, while others express their dislike of the food they find in the supermarket. Jeannie, as she starts this discussion, draws on her self-deprecating humour, saying, ‘Yes, I like it a lot; we like it a lot, as I think you can tell’, at which the room dissolves into fits of laughter. ‘I absolutely hate cooking. I love food … I like eating it … But I sure hate preparing it’ she chuckles. Madeleine concedes, ‘I don’t like supermarket food, but I use it. I think it doesn’t last.’ Janice agrees, explaining, ‘I only just started going and shopping for fish [at the fish market], but my kids now are really starting to enjoy it … I talk to them about the freshness and where we got it and get some context for that particular type of fish. And, you know, it’s only simple, but I know it’s fresh; I know it’s healthy; it’s good for them and it makes me feel really good. Yeah, so I get a lot of enjoyment and satisfaction … But, I haven’t felt like that in the past with the stuff I’ve got from the supermarket, because I sniff it. “Well, they wouldn’t sell it if it was off, surely”. Then I have another sniff, and I think, “Not sure”. I don’t get that beautiful feeling of wellbeing with that kind of greyish rubbery looking thing.’ ‘Well, it’s not off; you won’t get sick’, says Ned reassuringly; ‘It’s just got no taste to it.’ Similarly, for Barbara, the ‘critical’ components of food appreciation are ‘freshness and [being] unadulterated, so as natural as possible; so no sauces, flavourings’. She elaborates, ‘I want
whole food or real food […] that hasn’t been processed—unflavoured food. So I will choose a piece of steak as opposed to a piece of marinated steak.’

However, tasty, fresh and healthful foods are not everyone’s priority. Price is the benchmark that Suzanne applies to gauge her appreciation of food. She explains, ‘I see something like this that looks sort of gourmet-ish, and I see a slab of cheese which will do just as well. So, I would pick just the slab of cheese. I might appreciate that a bit more, if I had time to sit down and think, “Oh, this is yummy”, but is there any point? I can still satisfy my hunger with the plain piece of cheese and a cracker. And the taste lasts, is so quick; it’s the getting full.’ Kristy agrees, adding, ‘We’re very budget tight, so I appreciate the better value for things, so often we will use like the multi-buys. If it’s something we know we’re going to use, because we can save a bit of money. Like it may be only a dollar [here] or a dollar there, but in the end it adds up, so I appreciate definitely the value of food.’ A break from regular meal preparation and being able to forgo concerns about the weekly household budget is something Kristy enjoys. ‘I appreciate it when someone else makes a meal, because then you don’t have to cook, ‘cause I’m the one who cooks all the time. So, if someone else makes something for me, or I go to someone’s house, that’s really appreciated […] especially when you don’t have to pay for it and you don’t know the price or something.’

For others who are also on a tight budget, it is not worth sacrificing taste to save money. ‘Even a little piece of “mousetrap” cheese’ needs to be ‘the nicest tasting “mousetrap” cheese’ Lucinda opines. ‘Plain old cheddar; but you know, there are certain ones and you think, well that’s like eating plastic. I think that’s a waste of money; it’s a waste of my time; it’s an insult to me. I can’t be bothered with that, but a nice tasty piece of cheddar, if somebody else is serving it; I think, oh well, they had some consideration for me. If I’m serving it, it’s because I have consideration for other people. But you can buy within your price range; you just have to look a bit harder.’

For others, appreciation of food comes through cooking. Ned playfully declares that he ‘didn’t get this fat and ugly by not being able to cook’. His self-assessment seems a bit harsh! ‘I love food and I love cooking it and experimenting; appreciating different cultures and different styles.’ Alice, from Ghana, sometimes called ‘the cooking giant’ by friends, says, ‘I cook a lot. I enjoy cooking … I buy very little food outside … It is my traditional food, that’s prepared […] the way I was brought up from home. My Mum, she used to cook a lot and […] I really enjoy cooking my own food and eating at home.’ Elise’s ‘appreciation of food
changes … I like whole food and when I have time I will create from scratch as much as possible and I tend to cook to what I crave during that day, which means I end up going to the supermarket quite a lot … But then, in the middle of the day, if I have time for a lunch break, it will be whatever I can eat at that time, ‘cause I’m starving. So my appreciation changes, depending on my body, definitely.’

There were some supermarket shoppers who differentiated between their approach to cooking during the week and on weekends. For Martin, ‘the working week is catering and the weekend is actually cooking.’ Martin tries to look for short-cuts through the week by making simple pasta dishes and using up leftovers. In Martin’s view, it is about keeping ‘the kids fed during the week. And then on the weekend, when you’ve got time, you might want to do some slow cooking or some curries and that sort of thing.’ He adds, ‘You really appreciate that you’re free to cook on the weekend, but during the week, it’s get them fed really well.’ Madeleine agrees, saying, ‘My husband thinks of it as fuel. Like he has to keep his body going, so it doesn’t really matter what it is.’

The way that Donna and her husband demonstrate their appreciation of food is to eat on their own, having fed the children and put them to bed. Then, Donna says, ‘I wind down and actually cook us some dinner. So, then we really appreciate it, just the two of us and get to sit there and enjoy it without having to worry about who’s eating what and who’s, you know, got table manners.’ Donna admits,

‘Most nights, if I’m tired, I won’t cook a really tough meal at all … It just depends on how I feel, but I always find that even if I’m really stressed out, the moment I start cooking and actually getting all the produce out and just sitting there and chopping things and you’ve got it all in your head exactly how you’re going to put this meal together … It just completely relaxes me … So, I guess, yeah, we do appreciate food in that way.’

Clive enjoys closer connections with those who produce the food he eats and explains, ‘When I shop at the supermarket; what about it? I don’t care. But if I buy [food] from a roadside stall or if I’m going to someone’s place and they’re cooking it, and they’ve said, oh, you know, we slaughtered the cow and shucked the corn and do all this sort of stuff, I do have a different appreciation of what’s going on there; the contact between—the distance is much less. I feel more available to that process than I do just picking it up off a shelf. I disconnect from that. I just go in there and go into remote, I think. Just look for the ingredients to go home and do the thing.’ Even the fresh eggs given to him by his next-door neighbour occasionally just ‘taste
different’. They have that ‘chicken coop taste; I mean that’s appreciation’, he exclaims. Jacquie would agree with Clive’s sentiments, adding ‘I think food is a social thing and yeah; if you know […] the person that’s grown it; you know, when you cook it, it’s got more meaning. So, I don’t know, you enjoy it more.’

When Janice thinks of appreciation of food, she may not think about the food producer, but she certainly thinks ‘about who cooks the food … You know, you go to a family thing, so then, I think that’s kind of an appreciation thing; if someone’s gone to that trouble … I think it does express that there’s some care for who they’re cooking for … When I’m cooking for people […] then I care about what I do, because I care about them.’ Caitlin adds, ‘Sometimes, the food that someone makes can become a symbol of the whole relationship … Like Aunty Cathy’s chocolate cake […] or, you know, those roast potatoes that Mum does at Christmas time … Just the thought of it means so much more than the food that it is.’

While some of the group derive more meaning from food if they know who has grown it or cooked it, still others’ identities as mothers are tied to meal provision. For example, Janice explains:

‘Well, I personally get a lot of satisfaction, as a mother, if I’ve given my kids a good breakfast or a good dinner … So, I’ve got a bit of a thing, with my youngest, who loves fruit. And, so every morning I do him a fruit platter and I have to cut the mango up in that special way. Then he has strawberries, kiwi fruit [and] banana … I get enjoyment, he gets enjoyment; I know I send him off to school with good healthy food and I just feel this real sense of reward and I don’t know, it just feels really great.’

Dissatisfaction with the dominant food system, but whose fault is it?

Despite most of the group being aware of the challenges facing the dominant food system with which they usually engage, they do not necessarily get involved in action to change the status quo. Martin says,

‘I guess I get particularly concerned about the amount of food that we waste that could be used in a better, more socially responsible way. And I think that shows a huge imbalance across the globe and I tend to also get worried about where we get concerned about global markets and we seem to be worried about that and I’m wondering why? Why isn’t it okay to grow things here and import things or export things and why do we have to be so protectionist about our own markets? Isn’t that helping our global market? We do it with everything else. Why, that’s where my confusion is at the moment, getting the balance right between the global market and also the balance between what we waste, which is pretty outrageous.’
Janice, too, is concerned about the lack of ‘equity between countries. So, we’re consuming a lot of products that come from other countries, where the people live in those countries aren’t necessarily getting access to them … I guess I’m thinking that a lot of poorer countries are geared to the export dollar. The export dollar is going to get a higher price if they can sell it to our markets. So, they’re more likely to export the food than sell it to their locals or give their locals the not as good quality food. Or it might not be food that is well suited to that climate. It might not be suited to their culture, but it’s still being produced because it’s economical.’

From some shoppers’ perspectives, much of the responsibility for food waste lies with the corporate sector rather than the consumer. ‘The way supermarkets run food growing and harvesting and packaging and choosing—the waste happens long before it gets to the shop’, which is unsustainable, according to Caitlin. ‘Unfortunately, the customer wants, well, […] the perfect fruit.’ But Ned thinks that the supermarkets ‘push a bit too much’, such that ‘We’ve been told to want it, I think. We’ve been educated; oh, that’s got a mark on it; I won’t take that. Whereas, nine times out of ten, all the oranges and that, what’s inside are fine.’ Others think that much of the problem of waste is more firmly embedded in our culture. Iris adds, ‘It’s an interesting point on the wastage, because what has struck us as Africans, when we came here, we saw a lot of waste, you know. In our culture you don’t throw away food, you’d rather give it to somebody else, you know.’ ‘Well’, says Maryella, trying to unravel the reasons for all the waste in the system, ‘everything’s compartmentalized, isn’t it; so that we’re the buyers and users and then there’s the suppliers and then there’s the transporters and it’s not our problem, is it?’

Beyond the issue of waste, Madeleine expresses her concern about the power of the supermarket duopoly in Australia, saying,

‘I worry that the big supermarkets take so much of the market and even I, I guess, I add to it, because I continuously go back for convenience; but I worry that one day there’ll be nothing else and that we will have no choice and we’ll have to go to them and there’ll be all imported vegetables and fruit and that sort of thing, that we have no control over; about how they’re grown, what chemicals they use, that sort of thing, overseas, when we have such good opportunities here. And they’re using more and more of their own, you know, the home brands’, and there is little ‘knowledge of the origins’ of food.

This discussion prompts Caitlin to think of the Woolworth’s advertisement on television—‘It’s my Woolies, it’s my Woolies’—which she believes encourages society to unrealistically expect a year round supply of food. Caitlin claims that ‘it’s never our Woolies; it’s our
farmers’ market, but it’s never our Woolies. They’re enforcing that single-minded selfishness that lets you take everything for granted […], that the food will always, that every kind of food will always be there where we want it, when we want it, whether it should be or not, at the lowest possible price, which totally disregards most of the little farmers who have to grow it. And Woolies just say, nah!’ Still others agree that Woolworths and Coles wield far too much power. ‘Well, I think that’s a big problem with Woolies and Coles,’ adds Ned. ‘“You want to sell us tomatoes; we’ll give you a dollar a kilo. If you don’t want to sell it to us for a dollar a kilo then we won’t buy it,” you know. They’ve got them by the short and curlies, so to speak; and I think it’s wrong. Woolies and Coles have got eighty per-cent of the market.’

Regardless of who is in control of the food retail sector in Australia, the social implications of the shift to greater importation of products really concerns Catherine. ‘You try and select Australian grown, but it’s really hard. This is the tinned products and everything.’ On the other hand, says Jeannie, ‘I don’t get carried away about that, because I reckon we are exporting a whole lot of stuff and I expect people overseas are buying stuff made in Australia.’ But Maryella wants to know where the food originates: ‘But they’re not [telling you] honestly anymore … And we’re getting stuff, fresh vegetables from New Zealand that are actually from China … And I’m not sure … The jury’s still out for me on Fire Blight and New Zealand apples and that sort of thing, because I think those are the things that threaten our sort of clean industry. So, I want to know, I want more information and they can do it in England, supermarkets in England have got all sorts of origins.’ It does not seem reasonable to Madeleine, ‘when you have farmers that are just ploughing in their oranges and apple trees … And yet we’re going to Woolworths and we’re seeing these beautiful big oranges, because they’re [from the] US and they look pretty. They look good. And they last 20 seconds; [they] selfimplode on the way home in the car!’

A solution to some of these issues might be to grow your own food, according to some members of the group. ‘I think we probably should, as Australians, grow more in our backyard … The majority of people have decent sized yards and we don’t use that land very well for what we have’, in Madeleine’s view. ‘And parents and grandparents […] grew tons of stuff.’ ‘I think there’s a bit of a move back, from what I read in the papers, [to] community gardens and things’ suggests Catherine. ‘They’ve got a trading system at the community gardens [where] they’d swap some eggs for some cabbages or something’, says Barbara. Nonetheless, according to some, there are drawbacks in growing food at home. Barbara
continues: ‘Just establishing [your own vegetable garden], that’s quite expensive.’ ‘And it’s time consuming and you don’t want to go away for the holidays and stuff like that’ adds Maryella. ‘I think our lifestyles are just different now. It just doesn’t have the room for those sorts of things. I mean up to a point.’ Martin wonders if ‘people are doing it more out of sort of a hobby rather than a real need? You know, probably in our parents’ day there was a need.’ Maryella does not think she ever saved much money by having a garden: ‘And what I have salvaged from all the seedlings I’ve bought and all that sort of stuff, and going away in the middle of summer and coming back and finding everything’s died … I don’t know that I’m much ahead in cold hard cash terms. I would have been better just spending a few more hours at work.’

Alice suggests that a socially sustainable food system will entail buying local produce to help the local farmer: ‘That will also connect us, the consumers, then to know where their food comes from, because this current kind of food system, the conventional way, it makes the food look so far away from us. We just go to the supermarket, pick the food, you don’t have an idea where it’s coming from … Here in Australia there [is] this kind of denial state. People don’t want to know how the animals are killed and things or it will affect the way they consume meat. So, we don’t know what goes on at the background. You just see the food and you pick it. That kind of connection is not there.’

In this context, the concept of food miles was raised: ‘I’m thinking, no miles, so local’ food would be preferable, in Janice’s view. ‘[And] seasonal,’ she adds, ‘so number one, not flying things in. Number two, not having things produced in another country, where it’s not necessarily suited to that production, but because it caters to our needs its created, even though it’s not rational in that society.’ Ned believes that these practices are entrenched because of money and greed. He suggests that the big agribusinesses that produce the seed are responsible for controlling the production systems. He explains the process, saying, ‘“Because your chemical will only work on that product, so therefore you’ve got to buy the seed off me, because you can use my chemical. You can’t use anybody else’s chemical.” It’s all down to greed, you know, it’s the struggle with the world. It’s all greed.’ Janice opines: ‘But we all kind of expect to find certain things year round, where maybe a more sustainable expectation on our part would be to have things at the time they’re produced and we don’t expect them at the time that they’re not produced locally.’
There are some ways in which some shoppers think they can readily make ethical food choices within the supermarket environment, although not everyone thinks the labelling systems are honest. Caitlin is now much more conscious of the way chickens are raised these days, saying, ‘I think years ago, I might not have cared or perhaps it wasn’t so clearly labelled or something. But you know; you just see what they go through, those poor caged chickens. And you think, well no, if I can prevent that and encourage Pace Farms\(^27\) out here to [...] either do them cage or do them free-range, I’ll say, do it free range. Let’s swing your market a bit. And so I don’t really care where they come from, as long as they’re moral.’ ‘And as long as they’re not cheating’, Clive chimes in. ‘Information I heard the other day is that they don’t have the supply of free-range eggs for the demand, so they’re sticking cage eggs in a certain amount, two or three in the boxes to keep up with the shelf requirements.’ ‘So’, says Janice, ‘that tends to make me, I’ll make a trip to Kingston markets and get my eggs there, where it’s a small provider. Just because I’ve got to know. Like my whole family, we’re very, well my kids, get very upset about the caged-egg thing; they would flatly refuse to eat an egg that wasn’t free-range.’

When Clive considers his understanding of a socially sustainable food system, his ‘mind straight away went to something that’s more of a community thing, [a] social activity [like] community gardens’ rather than just the interaction that occurs in his ‘vegetable plots in the backyard where [family members] interact with one another in growing some tomatoes or some herbs and stuff.’ Although, on further reflection, he adds: ‘We’ll swap eggs for cucumbers or tomatoes or what have you with the neighbours, so there’s a social aspect to that, that I haven’t thought about. But yeah, just getting out there and plodding around in the dirt and pulling out weeds and putting the furrows in and seeing the little baby things come up … I guess that’s some sort of social content there.’

Nerida has the view that you ‘cannot separate the social from the economic and political … What makes sense economically in terms of where and how you get your food’ may not make sense from a political perspective. ‘But you’ve got to wonder too about the effect of climate change and there are certainly areas in Australia that are theoretically producing crops and primary produce that really, it isn’t sustainable anymore, [such as] rice; we shouldn’t be trying to grow rice in Australia.’ ‘Mind you, you see, we are growing rice extremely

\(^27\) Pace Farms are Australian egg producers
efficiently.’ Australia should ‘grow what we’re good at growing, in the right areas’, ‘and stop them putting houses on prime agricultural land’. ‘It is a very complex issue.’ ‘That’s right,’ says Maryella. ‘And it’s all too hard if you go and hide your head in the sand and go to Coles or Woolies.’

As the discussion of these complex issues draws to a close, questions are raised about the prices and the opening times of the farmers’ market on a Saturday morning. ‘What’s that like? I’ve never been. I’ve just heard about it.’ Alas, with time running out, this conversation will need to be pursued at a later date. Perhaps change is afoot.

Supermarket shoppers’ perspective on the moveable feast

Utilitarian approach to food purchasing—Food priorities amidst other household priorities

The dominant view of this group was that supermarkets provided the convenience of one-stop shopping. Convenience is framed in several ways by this group of supermarket shoppers. For some, the supermarket was simply the store closest to home, and thus easily accessible. Others considered themselves too lazy to bother shopping at many different shops; they did not enjoy the experience, and would rather get it done as quickly as possible to enable them to allocate time to more enjoyable pursuits. Still others who have tried other types of shops, such as the Belconnen or Fyshwick fresh food markets, found that it was too time consuming to compare prices and quality across a range of vendors, requiring complex decision-making. It was simpler and more time efficient for them to shop within one supermarket.

The participants who were working full-time and had children living at home, viewed supermarkets as suiting their busy schedules. In this instance, the convenience of supermarkets lies in their extended opening hours and location, which may be near their home or on the way home from work. In essence, much of this group’s discussion of convenience is concerned with time allocation and prioritisation of food shopping within the context of other competing commitments and leisure activities, suggesting that they are part of ‘the society of the schedule’ (Warde, 1999, p. 522). In this narrative, Jacquie illustrated that she, like other householders, can multi-task to maximise the logistics of time and space (Webber et al., 2010) as she spoke of calling past the supermarket on her way home from work after collecting the children. This may create the impression that all supermarket shoppers try to minimise the
imposition that shopping places on householders. However, for Damien, supermarket proximity enabled him to combine the benefits of doing some physical activity and spending time with his children, while also completing a household task.

Many of the views of the participants in this study are shared with others in previous studies. Convenience (Archer, 2003)—which may mean proximity to home or at least a location that is easily accessible (Colasanti et al., 2010; McEachern et al., 2010; Seyfang, 2008; Webber et al., 2010) and has extended opening hours (McEachern et al., 2010; Seyfang, 2008)—is an attribute that people seek when shopping. Supermarkets are also considered beneficial for those with limited time, as the task of shopping can be completed quickly (Chambers et al., 2007). As Martin suggested, shopping at markets is more about entertainment than a chore, while supermarket shopping is purely for business.

Amongst this group of supermarket shoppers were those who would prefer to choose other places to procure their food, such as the farmers’ markets, for their opportunities to engage in friendly, social interactions and learn about food, but felt constrained by their lifestyle—a finding also reported elsewhere (Chambers et al., 2007; Colasanti et al., 2010). For these people, the supermarket could be considered more socially possible than other food purchasing environments (Clarke et al., 2004). Food shopping at markets or stores other than the supermarket requires more physical effort and time, which some participants in this research did not wish to invest in, so they abrogated their choices for others to assume and remained with the familiar and habitual family routines (Clarke et al., 2004). Madeleine could have been persuaded to make use of farmers’ markets, but the Old Bus Depot market she had encountered in Canberra was too exclusive for her liking, which is a criticism directed at some farmers’ markets (Feagan et al., 2004).

In this study, some participants who were money-poor and time-rich enjoyed shopping, while virtually all those who were time-poor, did not, which echoes the findings of a Belgian study (Van Kenhove & De Wulf, 2000). Jeannie, however, who was both time-rich and money-rich, held a view that was counter to these findings; she did not like shopping and wished to get it over and done with as quickly as possible. She expressed a preference for one-stop supermarket shopping, but whether this preference was fundamentally related to age or other factors is uncertain. It is likely that Jeannie viewed grocery shopping as a mundane activity—an opinion expressed by other grocery shoppers, particularly women (Dholakia, 1999), who
want to accomplish the task with as few disruptions and confrontations as possible (Webber et al., 2010).

**Large supermarkets are not places for community-building**

Janice did not feel like she was part of ‘a big loving community’ when she did her ‘alienated’ shop. Instead, she was on her own personal, hurried mission to get in and out of the supermarket without being held up by ‘someone dithering in the aisle’. Several of the younger participants, who often shopped after work, did not want to interact with staff or other customers in the supermarket either, and took a purely utilitarian approach to the task. Supermarkets are not designed for interaction anyway; they are designed for quick and easy product selection, rather than communication (La Trobe, 2001). This group of shoppers concurred that people in supermarkets generally have a ‘gormless look’ and rarely talk to others, making them very impersonal environments in which to shop. As Szmigin and colleagues (2003) purport, there is little interaction between customers in supermarkets and limited communication between customers and supermarket employees; the checkout operators’ primary role is to process each customer’s purchases efficiently so that the next customer can be served (Szmigin et al., 2003).

Gender differences in approaches to shopping do appear in the literature, with men seeking information and convenience—which is essentially about minimizing time costs—while women prefer uniqueness, product assortment, social interaction and browsing (Noble et al., 2006). Martin’s views were certainly in keeping with these findings, but otherwise in this study there did not appear to be clear distinctions between the attitudes of women or men regarding the need for convenience or quick and efficient service at the supermarket checkout. It did seem that assortment was more important for women, while uniqueness and browsing were not discussed. Some women commented on how much variety was available in Australian supermarkets, including out-of-season products, and they were impressed with the quality, noting that supermarkets were very particular about offering high grade fresh fruit and vegetables that conformed to size and shape specifications. The study by Chambers and colleagues (2007) found that their focus group participants noted positively the high-quality standards of the supermarkets too.

Seeking friendly, helpful service and social interactions with other customers and staff appeared to be more important for those with more time available, who were usually older
people without full-time employment. Lucinda, an older woman who could be classified as money-poor and time-rich, spoke most enthusiastically of her shopping experiences at Coles in one of Canberra’s major shopping centres. She felt welcomed and accepted amongst the staff and management and even became good friends with some of them, which is in keeping with other findings of low income grocery shoppers in upstate New York (Webber et al., 2010). An Australian study with older adults found the most important determiner of a satisfactory supermarket shopping experience was the human element (Pettigrew, Mizerski, & Donovan, 2005). These older shoppers sought efficient, courteous and friendly supermarket staff, who genuinely wanted to engage in meaningful interactions with customers (Pettigrew et al., 2005). Some participants suggested that to appeal to older customers, having a ‘hospitality person’ who could offer assistance by locating products and taking groceries to the car would be helpful (Pettigrew et al., 2005, p. 308). It would appear that the Coles store that Lucinda frequents has taken this suggestion on board.

**Smaller stores for a sense of community**

While many of the participants in this study thought that the larger supermarkets were impersonal, they thought the smaller ones in local shopping precincts were friendly and community focused. It was generally the women in the group who commented on the cultural benefits of the local shopping centre or the way in which the smaller supermarkets made an effort to get to know their customers and to engage in community support by sponsoring community sporting clubs. Women are generally more loyal to local shops than men, and are keener to maintain a sense of community (Noble et al., 2006). The stories and opinions that emerged from this group of shoppers revealed that shopping at the big supermarkets was generally concerned with expediency rather than social interaction, while shopping at smaller local shops or markets was where sociability and pleasure were derived. Clive, who grew some of his own food and also liked to engage with others while doing a leisurely shop, still spoke of times when he wanted to make practical purchases at the supermarket. Janice, who usually wanted to get in and out of the supermarket with as few disruptions as possible, told stories of her encounters at the fish market where she spent time chatting with the vendors and learning about different fish species and how to cook them. Customers do have varying attitudes and behaviours about their food shopping choices, according to the specific social and spatial contexts in which they find themselves (Clarke et al., 2004).
Food appreciation is mainly based on price and pragmatism, but sometimes it is about love

This group of supermarket shoppers were consistent in their thinking about the inadequacies of supermarkets, despite their continued use of them. They declared that supermarkets did not offer an enjoyable shopping experience, but their stories indicated that neither did they provide fresh or tasty food in comparison with food available elsewhere, which is in keeping with findings reported elsewhere (Barton et al., 2011; Chambers et al., 2007; Madgwick & Ravenscroft, 2011).

Few participants in this group spoke of their supermarket food purchases in terms of sensory experiences, unless it was in the negative. Janice’s story of her tentative fish selection at the supermarket, after smelling it and hoping it had not spoiled, is one such example. Fischler (1988) laments that ‘modern food is less and less identifiable by its consistency, flavour, smell and texture. It is processed, packaged, “presented”, as if it were dematerialized, stripped of its sensory characters, reduced to appearances and signs’ (Fischler, 1988, p. 289). Catherine viewed the quality of the fruit and vegetables available at the major supermarket somewhat favourably in terms of their appearance, but this did not equate to their high quality taste or texture. She also commented that supermarkets had out-of-season products available, which offered shoppers greater choice, but may pose disadvantages for local producers. These views are similar to those reported by Chambers and colleagues (2007), a study in which participants were aware that fruit in-season tasted better, but they still wanted to be able to purchase fruit out-of-season.

There was only one person in this group of shoppers who expressed a desire to buy fresh, unadulterated, unprocessed, ‘real’ food within the supermarket environment. Others made food choices based on price and sought food that was deemed good value for money. They generally had more in common with those from the English sample than the French in the comparative study by Pettinger and colleagues (2004). Not only were the French inclined to make food shopping a priority, they also appreciated high quality food and thought that money spent on food was worthwhile, even though they worried more than the English about the cost of food (Pettinger et al., 2004). The English, on the other hand, were also more prone to perceive food purely as fuel (Pettinger et al., 2004), which is aligned to the views of some supermarket shoppers in this research, who spoke of being satisfied with food that staved off
hunger, provided sufficient fuel and remained within their budget. Men, too, including Madeleine’s husband, eat food to become full, rather than to savour it (Roos & Wandel, 2005).

Lucinda, of limited means, had an alternative view, because she would rather seek out a tasty cheese than eat a poor quality one. The influence of price on particular food purchases amongst low income householders in upstate New York also varied, according to the importance shoppers placed on some items over others (Webber et al., 2010). For example, some families prioritised vegetables and found ways in which to accommodate such purchases within their budget (Webber et al., 2010). So, a limited budget does not necessarily mean that taste and food preferences need to be compromised.

It was Clive’s comments about the way in which he valued food differently, according to the context in which it is grown and procured, which were remarkable for their variation from other perspectives within the group. He cares little for, and feels ‘disconnected’ to, the food he purchases at the supermarket, but appreciates food that has been grown or produced by people he knows. Food grown by those he knows has ‘got more meaning’, which is much more in keeping with the way in which those who use local food systems make meaning of good food (Holloway & Kneafsey, 2000; Kirwan, 2004; Sage, 2003).

**Meal preparation is catering through the week—cooking on weekends**

When this group of supermarket shoppers spoke about the way in which they appreciated food, it commonly involved discussing cooking and meal preparation. After all, the way in which people derive meaning from food comes as much from the rituals and routines of eating as from individual foods (2005). Marshall (2005) argues that most research on food choice is concerned with the intrinsic, sensory properties of food, rather than on the way in which our choices are directed by the tradition of eating meals, most of which are fairly conventional and routine. The younger members of the group, who were working full-time, and those who lived in households with full-time workers and children, spoke of the temporal and spatial contexts in which they enjoyed cooking and those in which they did not. Alice was a keen cook under any circumstances, but Elise, another single person, liked to cook from scratch in the evening, but was too rushed and hungry during the day, so she devoured whatever was quickly and conveniently available at work. Donna, a wife and mother, found cooking a
relaxing and creative activity when the time was right, usually after the children were in bed. Otherwise, for many, cooking was considered a chore after a day at work.

Szabo (2011) uses the feminist theory of social reproduction—originally introduced by Laslett and Brenner (1989)—to provide a framework from which to comment on the challenges of re-engaging with food. With more women in the workforce over the past few decades, there is less time for households to devote to social reproduction, with shorter blocks of time available for preparing meals (Szabo, 2011). It is not surprising, then, that many of the participants only enjoyed cooking when they felt they had the time to devote to it—a viewpoint supported by data from a quantitative survey (Daniels et al., 2012). During the working week, meals were often more hastily prepared, simple and even mundane affairs, while on the weekends there was more time to create more complicated dishes, such as curries, or meals that reflected some participants’ cultural heritage—also similar to findings from Australia and overseas (Bahr Bugge & Almas, 2006; Engler-Stringer, 2010; Lupton, 2000; Marshall, 2005). Alice enjoyed preparing many of her traditional recipes from Ghana, passed down from her mother, another dedicated cook. Perhaps like the young women in a Norwegian study (Bahr Bugge & Almas, 2006), Alice valued her mother’s dinner practices.

Although not overtly stated, it appeared that Martin took primary responsibility for the food work in his household, which reflects a more egalitarian distribution of social reproduction in contemporary households (Bove & Sobal, 2006). Andrew, a participant in an Australian study by Lupton (2000) who falls into an equivalent demographic category as Martin, negotiated the division of food provision and meal preparation with his partner to suit their circumstances. Andrew found it quite therapeutic to cook, so it was he who took on this household responsibility (Lupton, 2000). Although Martin did not always enjoy ‘catering’ through the week, he still took the role of preparing ‘proper’ meals for his wife and four boys seriously, which was also expressed by other men interviewed about their involvement in domestic cooking (Szabo, 2013).

Ned, who lived alone, was the only man to express a real love of food and cooking. He was a ‘foodies’ who enjoyed experimenting with different culinary flavours and styles. Without having to consider the day-to-day concerns of providing meals for others, he was able to treat cooking as more of a hobby than an obligation. Other studies came to similar conclusions about the way in which some men approach cooking (Cairns et al., 2010; Roos & Wandel, 2005; Szabo, 2013). Ned spoke of his cooking in terms of Szabo’s (2013) ‘traditional culinary
masculinities’, which may be considered a practical skill, a culinary art, or leisure, without concern for nutrition. Martin’s cooking, on the other hand, displayed more ‘traditional culinary femininities’, an approach to cooking that displays love and care and the satisfaction of pleasing others (Szabo, 2013).

There were those who did not like cooking at all, including an older woman who declared that she loved eating but hated cooking. Another thought that once she had retired she might enjoy cooking more, but now that she has retired, she cannot be bothered anymore. Not everyone necessarily thinks that spending time cooking is worth the effort (Jabs & Devine, 2006).

Widowed, elderly women in an American study expressed similar views, with one saying, ‘I was a darn good cook! I really was. But I am sick of cooking!’ (Falk et al., 1996, p. 262). Kristy, who works casually and has limited financial resources, loved other people to cook for her. This allowed her to temporarily avoid having to concern herself with a food budget, while also giving her a break from her usual cooking responsibilities. Other research suggests that many women are not happy being assigned the role of sole dinner decision-maker and cook (Bove & Sobal, 2006; Engler-Stringer, 2010). Perhaps some women, like Kristy, who is only in her twenties, are looking for others to take responsibility for the cooking aspect of social reproduction.

Some women, though, told stories of the symbolic role of cooking and meal preparation as an expression of love for others. Often, specific foods were associated with particular relatives, such as ‘those roast potatoes that Mum does at Christmas time’. In this context, the meaning of good food had more to do with the gift of contributing to conviviality and commensality than the food itself. Janice, who liked to prepare a fruit platter for her son’s breakfast, felt a great deal of satisfaction knowing that she had sent him off to school with food that he loves and that she knows is nutritious. For many women, preparing meals for the family and gathering loved ones around the table is both pleasurable and satisfying, and forms part of their identity as wife, mother, daughter or friend (Bahr Bugge & Almas, 2006; Daniels et al., 2012; Lupton, 2000; Moisio et al., 2004; Sidenvall et al., 2000).

**Aware but passive consumers**

In spite of this group’s mindfulness of global and even national food inequities, there did not appear to be an interest in taking any action. It was generally viewed more as a systemic problem that probably needed to be solved at that level, consistent with other research.
findings (Duffy et al., 2005; Kriflik, 2006). Viewpoints expressed by some in one study examining people’s interest in food production issues were brutally frank, with one participant saying: ‘When you’re shopping you’re in a hurry to get in and out. You’re not standing there going, I wonder if they’re screwing that third world man. You just buy the cheapest and off you go’ (Duffy et al., 2005, p. 27). Although no one from this study spoke in such blunt terms, their behaviours were aligned with these sentiments, given that most of them spoke of shopping as quickly as possible and did not claim to read food labels conscientiously. As another very honest respondent in the Duffy and colleagues’ (2005, p. 29) study said, ‘You might care, but it doesn’t necessarily mean you act upon it.’

Another issue raised by this group was the power of the supermarket duopoly in Australia. Madeleine realised that by buying all her food at the major supermarkets, the end result may well mean that Australians will have less choice about their food in the future. There was recognition that the supermarkets ‘squeezed’ the farmers and that Australian fruit growers were ploughing up their fruit trees while the supermarkets imported fruit, which seemed unreasonable to them. There was concern that as Australia imported more fresh fruits, vegetables, and fish, there will be a rise in food safety concerns, apart from the devastating effect on Australian farmers’ and fishers’ livelihoods. Then there were the problems of an increasing number of home-brand products being sold in supermarkets, of which customers know little of their origin.

Previous studies indicate that the views of these supermarket shoppers are similar to other shoppers, at least in the UK (Chambers et al., 2007; Duffy et al., 2005; McEachern et al., 2010). The perception was that most of the blame for farmers and small retailers being driven out of business lay with the supermarkets (Chambers et al., 2007; Duffy et al., 2005; McEachern et al., 2010). This was despite participants in these studies admitting that these practices enabled them to buy cheap products (Duffy et al., 2005; McEachern et al., 2010). Some participants were not prepared to pay more for their food or subsidise farmers, and did not consider it their responsibility to do so (Duffy et al., 2005). There were respondents who preferred to buy British food, just as some in this study were keen to buy Australian products, but others were prepared to buy food produced overseas, provided there were established hygiene standards (Duffy et al., 2005).

Related to the concerns about the importation of food was the matter of food system sustainability. This group was generally dissatisfied with some food production practices and
the power of some of the multi-national agribusinesses and supermarkets. Some took the view that Australians needed to buy more local, seasonal foods to support farmers and to reduce ‘food miles’. They also wanted to source ‘free-range’ eggs out of concern for animal welfare issues. Participants in the study by McEachern and colleagues (2010) had similar views, preferring not to buy food that has travelled long distances and wanting supermarkets to do a lot more about ethical issues. On the other hand, some participants in another study did not give much thought to issues of animal welfare or the way their food was produced, while others trusted the supermarkets not to source food from systems where animals had been mistreated (Duffy et al., 2005). There were those who bought free-range eggs because that was an issue that they knew something about (Duffy et al., 2005). Still others did not want to be put off eating the food they enjoyed, so preferred to remain ignorant of food production methods—and likely could not afford to buy more expensive alternatives anyway (Duffy et al., 2005). Ultimately, like most of the group in this thesis, the concerns of shoppers in previous studies were tempered by pragmatism; food choices involved trade-offs between principles, cost and convenience, with the result that people continued to shop in the supermarket (Duffy et al., 2005; McEachern et al., 2010).

Conclusion

The stories and viewpoints offered by this group of supermarket shoppers showed that shopping was a household task that was preferably completed within a minimal timeframe and approached instrumentally. Hence, the prominence of ‘linear’ time in this group’s moveable feast is not surprising (figure 14). Shopping was generally not considered an enjoyable or community activity, although there were some who used supermarket shopping as an opportunity to briefly engage with shop assistants or other customers, catch up with neighbours or spend time with their children. Although not a dominant view, there were participants who expressed an interest in purchasing elsewhere, knowing that the markets were more enjoyable, the food was fresher, and the atmosphere was more friendly and welcoming, but time did not allow them to pursue this option.

Meaning-making of food for this group of shoppers rarely related to the people who produced it, with the exception of Clive and Ned, who liked procuring and consuming food that came directly from the producer. The provenance of food was not high on the agenda for this group, although some did value knowing that their food was Australian grown, but any further
specifics about where it was grown was not discussed. The lack of importance placed on people and place for this group’s relationship to food is represented in the three-dimensional model as small grey spheres (figure 14).

Price and good value for money were the important ways with which this group appreciated food, with a minority seeking healthy, whole food. The sensory aspects of food were mentioned in the context of taste, but there were few detailed descriptors of the intrinsic qualities of food that they preferred. Some did derive meaning from cooking food, mainly on weekends. These participants were able to re-connect with their traditional cuisines or experiment with more complex dishes that required more time. Still others’ identities as mothers were tied to providing food that their families enjoyed. The moveable feast model shows that traditional and ethical approaches to food choices only take up a small proportion of the food culture ‘pie’ (figure 14), as the instrumental approach dominates.

The participants’ attitudes to the dominant food system and subsequent behaviours can be examined through Giddens’ (1990) four ‘adaptive reactions’ to modern life. The first of these is ‘pragmatic acceptance’, which is about survival, accepting that changing the food environment is outside an individual’s control. Lorraine’s response at her frustrations with the way supermarkets deal so poorly with farmers provides a good example here. She metaphorically threw her hands in the air, saying, ‘What do you do?’ Family life for her was hectic, so the only food purchasing environment that suited her lifestyle was the supermarket, but she still felt some discomfort with her decision.

The next adaptive reaction is ‘sustained optimism’, whereby faith in social and technological solutions to the global food system can and will be found (Giddens, 1990). Martin and Jeannie are two participants whose reactions could be described in this way, as they had faith that the market economy would succeed. An opposite set of attitudes is ‘cynical pessimism’, which is a reaction that uses humour to dampen the anxieties that the modern food system invokes (Giddens, 1990). Ned, who held strong views about the excessive power of the supermarkets and multi-national companies, was one person to react in this fashion.

The fourth ‘adaptive reaction’ is ‘radical engagement’, so those taking this stance have the attitude that despite major problems, people can mobilise to reduce their impact or transcend them; such people will become involved in social movements like local food systems (Giddens, 1990). Given that this group were supermarket shoppers, they have not made a
personal decision to opt out of the dominant food system. The only person to be evaluated as having a reaction close to ‘radical engagement’ was Clive, who grew some of his own food and valued other forms of food provision apart from the supermarket (Giddens, 1990).

Webber and colleagues (2010) introduce yet another adaptation to the modern food system: ‘opportunism’, which was found with at least one of these supermarket shoppers. Lucinda expressed ‘opportunism’ as she took advantage of opportunities to save money, using existing options within the current system, and cultivating face-to-face relationships with employees in her favourite store.

Amongst this group of shoppers, the overwhelming reaction to the modern food system is ‘pragmatic acceptance’, as they, like Lorraine, expressed dissatisfaction with elements of the food system and were aware of the challenges it faced, but did not think they were in a position to change it. They were, indeed, passive consumers. Unsurprisingly, the arm and hand in the moveable feast model is scarcely reaching out to food citizenship, because this group’s participation in their chosen food system is minimal.

The five narratives are now complete, but this is not the end of the story. In the final chapter, you will read my story as I analyse the commonalities and differences across these five different narratives. The story will make connections between people, place and time, and what these connections mean for the different groups’ meaning-making of food. It will also present the critical factors needed to forge pathways to food citizenship. And most importantly, it will reveal the complexities and contradictions involved in people attempting to become food citizens.
Figure 14: A representation of the supermarket shoppers’ food culture and their minimal engagement with food citizenship
Chapter 9: A moveable feast

Introduction

Over the course of this thesis, five different groups of food procurers told their stories about their experience of social interactions and sense of community in their chosen food system, and the ways in which they appreciated food. This revealed their engagement with food citizenship. Following each of the narratives, the perspectives on a moveable feast from each group were discussed within the context of the current, relevant literature. In this chapter, I will draw on each of the group narratives and perspectives of a moveable feast and their implications for pathways to food citizenship, which you, as an interactive reader, may have already started to consider in light of your own experiences and interests.

As a researcher who has been immersed in these group stories for several years now, my interpretive story will highlight the significance of concepts of time, in all its different guises, and the relative importance of people and place for each group’s experience of food. I will show that possible pathways to food citizenship depends upon strong inter-connections between people, place and a particular dimension of time—that is, social or ‘meaningful’ time (Fitzpatrick, 2004). I will also discuss the complexities involved in becoming food citizens, and the contradictions within people and across groups as people grapple with their individual and collective food priorities.

When I started this research I was interested in exploring people’s connections in five different food systems, so I knew that the threads of people and place were always going to be woven through this interpretive narrative. However, time made a late entry into the research landscape as I listened to participants’ stories and constructed the group narratives. Indeed, it came to dominate my thinking as I whet my appetite, tasting morsels from each table of my moveable feast, wondering why linear or clock time (Adam, 1995) had encroached so ferociously on deep, meaningful food experiences for some, providing, instead, what I describe as ‘instrumental’ food. Clock time or linear time (Adam, 1995), a quantitative and independent measure of time (Fitzpatrick, 2004), pervades so many aspects of people’s lives, through timetables, work schedules and appointments. I began asking questions such as ‘How, why and when does the notion of linear time impact on experiencing a deep, multi-dimensional relationship to food and engagement with food citizenship?’ Conversely, I was also asking, ‘How and why do some groups of shoppers or food procurers ensure that social
time pervades their lives, facilitating deep, multi-dimensional relationships to food and engagement with food citizenship? ‘How are these groups able to keep linear time at bay?’ Within this context, some of the structural barriers to people’s engagement with food and food citizenship will be discussed, particularly in relation to time.

This chapter begins with a discussion of people’s relationship to food, which will show that the supermarket food procurement environment fosters an ‘instrumental’ approach to food where clock time dominates. It then uncovers the components of a ‘contemporary relational food culture’—to use my language—which includes the aesthetics of food, the philosophy and performance of taste, a relational aesthetic of food, conviviality and the social, and temporal dimensions of time. I call this food culture a ‘contemporary relational food culture’ for two reasons. Firstly, in the modern world, there are both traditional and ethical influences on people’s food decisions. These decisions incorporate food values from the past, but also adapt them to deal with the sustainability of the current food system. Secondly, ‘relational’ is concerned with the inter-connections between people, place and different concepts of time, which will be discussed in more detail in this interpretive narrative.

The chapter also reveals possible pathways to food citizenship, which entails active participation in the food system and engagement with the concept of ‘relational reflexivity’. You will learn that it is the local food systems that best foster a contemporary relational food culture and relational reflexivity. Finally, my interpretive story will show that there is a continuum of engagement in food citizenship. The community garden food procurement environment enables the most engagement with food citizenship, and the supermarket food procurement environment, the least.

Hopefully, this story of food that relates some of the ‘most mundane and intimate aspects of people’s ordinary lives’ (Watson & Caldwell, 2005, p. 1-2) will reveal, ‘like any good biography or travelogue, a much bigger story’ (Freidberg, 2003, p. 4), the significance of people’s connections with food and what they mean for a sustainable food system.
Relationships to food

Instrumental food culture

For the supermarket shoppers, the dominance of linear time in their lives meant that their relationship to food was mostly instrumental. Linear time is used and controlled as a commodity (Adam, 1995; Fitzpatrick, 2004), which has become the philosophy of modernity (Fitzpatrick, 2004). In our modern world, people have become ‘less the agents who embody time and more the subjects that commodified time embodies’ (Fitzpatrick, 2004, p. 202). People feel compelled ‘to use time productively, so that it is not wasted (Fitzpatrick, 2004, p. 202, original emphasis). Fitzpatrick (2004) argues that people have a right to ‘meaningful’ time in their lives, and it is in the relational dimension of time that people negotiate for this time. Relational time, unlike linear time, is contestable and never completely fixed (Fitzpatrick, 2004).

The supermarket shoppers spoke of needing to be efficient in their use of time, and often shopped on their way home from work after collecting the children, even though they might prefer shopping at places that require a greater time commitment. They did not think they had the time to devote to cooking during the week, so they took shortcuts in food preparation in order to ‘cater’ to their families’ needs. The very fact that some participants had experienced shopping at markets means that they have been able to negotiate time, but not frequently enough, given their propensity to shop in supermarkets. At a societal level, ‘meaningful’ time is a positional good that is constantly being reconfigured, as those with the most power take control of the meaning and distribution of time (Fitzpatrick, 2004). It appears that the dominant modern notion of linear time meant that some supermarket shoppers, especially those who were working full-time and had children living at home, did not have the control over the meaning and distribution of time that they might prefer. They felt constrained by the lack of time they had available to purchase and prepare family meals.

Beyond the influence of linear time on this group’s orientation to food procurement, many thought that the function of food was primarily to satisfy hunger and provide fuel for the body to meet its physiological requirements. Their assessment of food quality was consistent with the orientation of the modern industrialised food system, which emphasises low cost, convenience, reliability and predictability (Harvey, McMeekin, & Warde, 2004). It can be argued that these qualities of food are neither more or less valuable than those described by
other groups of food procurers, particularly those from the local food systems (Harvey et al., 2004). However, if food procurers only recognise food quality using these descriptors, they limit their opportunities to engage with food in deeper, multi-dimensional ways. This group, for example, rarely described any aesthetic or sensory aspects of food that they enjoyed, perhaps other than the occasional mention of taste. They were divorced from food’s sensual properties. One older woman, for example, who was retired, well-educated and financially secure, exclaimed that she loved food and loved eating, but did not like shopping or cooking. When pressed for further clarification of what she loved about food, she had little to add. She did not describe any intrinsic or extrinsic properties of food that she enjoyed.

This was not the case for all people in the group or at all times, but the dominant message from this group was that grocery shopping, cooking and consuming food was very much a part of their ‘ordinary consumption’. This concept describes essential daily activities that are not necessarily highly visible, but are subordinate to other more meaningful activities (Gronow & Warde, 2001). They approached their shopping expeditions as a routine activity, requiring little conscious thought, which enabled them to complete the process in minimal time and with little disruption. Routines allow people to reduce the complexity of decision-making, save energy and make daily life considerably easier and predictable (Ilmonen, 2001).

When describing their interactions in their usual food system, these shoppers did not refer to a need to know where their food came from or who grew it. Some were interested in buying free-range eggs and had a preference for Australian produce, but these desires did not transform their shopping habits or impact strongly on their meaning-making of food. Their priorities regarding food were different to the other groups of food procurers. Supermarkets, which facilitate a quick and efficient shopping experience, do not foster a deep engagement with food, where people can develop meaningful relationships with others, place, or the food itself.

The supermarket group was not the only group to treat food purchasing as an instrumental, domestic activity. The CSA group also admitted that there were times when they also resorted to buying food from the supermarket, especially when time was short. In fact, one member of this group no longer sources any food from his beloved friend and farmer because she now sells her produce at a Saturday morning market, which does not suit his lifestyle. Linear time has an impact on many households’ priorities when it comes to food.
Contemporary relational food culture

The food procurers from the local food systems described their meaning-making of food in some different and significant ways to those using the dominant food system. The analysis that follows combines the multiple intrinsic with the extrinsic qualities of food that the local food procurers judged to be valuable, in order to elucidate a contemporary relational food culture, which provides important insights into pathways to food citizenship. This does not imply that those who shopped at either the fresh food markets or the supermarkets did not share some of these same ways of making-meaning of food, and their perspectives are included where appropriate. Nor does it mean that those who procured their food locally always engaged with food in multi-dimensional ways. They also sometimes made pragmatic food choices more in keeping with those from the supermarket group.

People’s food choices and relationships to food are undeniably complex (Fischler, 1988; Furst et al., 1996). The findings from this research revealed the perspectives of different food procurers, which has provided further colour and texture to an already interesting portrait of people’s meaning-making of food. This colour and texture was provided by each group’s different way of expressing their relationship to food, which includes the importance of temporality and social time, the aesthetic and sensory attributes of food, people’s emotional attachment to food, their philosophy and performance of taste, and a relational aesthetic of food. Some food procurement environments highlighted that both the temporal and social dimensions of time can be prioritised to experience a more contemporary relational food culture.

Temporality—its impact on past, present and future relationships to food

Temporality is unidirectional, so people cannot undo what has already been done. But this does not stop people from talking about past, present and future experiences in relation to people and events (Adam, 1995). Participants in this thesis spoke regularly of their experiences with food in relation to people and past events, even if they could not recall the exact time of these experiences with food. The community gardeners, for example, spoke of memories of their grandparents growing food and involving them in gardening activities during their childhood and their desire to involve the next generation in growing food. Those in the fresh food market group spoke of both positive and negative food experiences in their past that involved people and significant events, such as World War II, or growing up in a
carefree existence in Tasmania where fishing and hunting for food was commonplace. Members of the farmers’ market groups spoke of moments in their life when other people’s eating habits made a positive contribution to the way they now make meaning of food. Hence, across a range of food procurement groups, temporality connected people to the historical provenance of their food, creating a valued connectedness to food that enabled them to resist the constraints of linear time.

**Social time—investing time in pleasurable food-related activities**

A common way in which people generally refer to time in their everyday lives is about ‘not having time’ to do what they would like to do. Slow living is a response to the modern world’s desire to have more ‘time for meaningful things’ (Parkins, 2004, p. 364). People need to invest their time and effort into doing activities that give them pleasure and engage in ‘mindful’ practices rather than ‘mindless’ ones (Parkins, 2004). In a similar vein, Hendrickson and Heffernan (2002) use the terms ‘personal’ or ‘social’ time to describe the time it takes to build trusting and committed relationships between the consumer and the farmer in the context of local food systems—a concept of time that is not available within the dominant globalised food system. They suggest that those who purchase through local food systems get to know the people who produce their food, so social time is triggered by eating that product (Hendrickson & Heffernan, 2002).

In this thesis, both the CSA and farmers’ market food procurement environments offered opportunities for people to spend time getting to know the farmer or farmers, which was viewed as a pleasurable and meaningful activity and added to the enjoyment of food. These food procurers also valued the time spent cooking meals and relaxing with friends and family. The community gardeners, who actively tried to produce and eat food in a community context, spent their social time enjoying the pleasures of gardening, learning from other gardeners, and passing on skills and attitudes about the benefits of gardening to their children and grandchildren. They also preserved their produce and enjoyed cooking meals from ‘scratch’.

The fresh food markets similarly created an environment where shoppers willingly invested time building relationships with their spouses, other family members and their neighbours, rather than with farmers. Hence, social time was still triggered by eating food from these markets, but not in the same way as those who used local food systems. Some of these
shoppers also liked to cook unique foods and hold dinner parties to show off their skills and enjoy the convivial atmosphere. In contrast, for the supermarket shoppers, there is little social time invested in developing trusting and committed relationships with shopkeepers or indeed with others, particularly through the large supermarkets. There was some desire to build relationships with owners of the smaller stores and supermarkets, and pleasure was expressed by some in experimenting with cooking and preparing traditional meals, so social time was invested in these situations.

Our modern, globalised world that is built on the commodification of time leaves many people feeling like they do not have the time to devote to shopping, cooking and consuming their food (Jabs & Devine, 2006). The local food systems in particular provided opportunities to shift power within the contested space of ‘relational time’ to bring greater value to personal or social time—at least in the context of food procurement—offering people more ‘meaningful’ time in their lives. It was in four of the five food procurement environments that people valued spending social time to shop, cook and consume food. Those in the supermarket narrative spoke of not having the time to shop or cook to the extent that some may have preferred, but others chose not to use their personal or social time for food-related activities. It is temporality and an investment in social time that that allow people to more fully experience a contemporary relational food culture. Local food systems—and to a lesser extent, the fresh food market environment—appear to help people value both temporality and social time in their meaning-making of food.

It is important to acknowledge that people who work full-time, especially those who also have family responsibilities, have more constraints on their time than others, leaving discretionary time for more leisurely shopping and cooking experiences more difficult. However, it was not just the supermarket shoppers who were full-time workers, or those with family responsibilities. There were full-time workers with children living at home who sourced food from the farmers’ market or the fresh food markets, devoting their discretionary time to food procurement. As Warde (2005) argues in his perspective of the theory of social practice, other factors, apart from socio-demographics, such as people’s understandings, levels of practical competence and degrees of commitment to particular practices, also influence behavioural variations in consumption practices. Socio-demographics offer some explanation for people’s ability to allocate social time to food-related activities across the different groups of food procurers, but they do not explain everything about people’s behaviour in this regard. It may
be that some groups of food procurers are more committed to their food-related practices than others.

**The aesthetic and sensory attributes of food**

Moving from the different dimensions of time to the intrinsic qualities of food, it is the local food systems that again facilitate more intimate assessments of food quality. The community gardeners, the CSA members and the farmers’ market shoppers were all in awe of the high quality food they either grew themselves or purchased. The more involved they were with producing and processing food themselves, the more they spoke of the aesthetic and sensory aspects of food. The community gardeners, for example, enjoyed looking at different coloured tomatoes sitting in a basket, or having something a little weird growing in their garden just to be admired, or being visually entertained by bruschetta made with yellow tomatoes and purple basil. They also found the ‘crispness’ and ‘crunchiness noise’ of freshly picked food from their garden ‘astonishing’, and loved the taste of ‘in-season’ tomatoes for their superior texture and flavour. The CSA members and farmers’ market shoppers valued the freshness of the food they purchased directly from the farmer and spoke of the visual appeal of fruits and vegetables that may not be regular in shape and size, but had a flavour they preferred to those sold in supermarkets. The farmers’ market shoppers enjoyed being tactile with food and were pleased to buy vegetables that still had dirt on them, as a reminder of how their food is produced. These groups also spoke of preferring seasonal produce, not just because it tasted better, but also for the thrill of waiting in anticipation for nature’s bounty. These intrinsic and sensory assessments of food quality make important additions to a contemporary relational food culture, which are closely linked to a local food system experience.

**An emotional attachment to food**

As I pondered the deeper meaning of these food procurers’ descriptions of the sensory and aesthetic aspects of food and their obvious sense of excitement about seasonal food, I could not help but juxtapose their relationship to food with intimate human relationships. In the early phases of romantic love, every feature of the loved one, both the beautiful and the slightly imperfect ones, are noticed and admired by the other person (Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986); so too do these food procurers take particular note of the attributes of the food they grow or select. Most people will have experienced the sadness of a loved one going away for a period of time, knowing that their subsequent return creates even greater joy than if they had
never gone away (Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986). These community gardeners, CSA members and farmers’ market shoppers were prepared to be separated from some of their food for a time, acknowledging and valuing nature’s rhythms, to be rewarded many times over when the season returns, providing another layer of sensory and emotional enjoyment (Atkinson, 2012).

‘Food is not an isolated thing—a mere commodity comprised of a list of ingredients or the numbers on a nutrition facts panel’ (Kirschenmann, 2008, p. 108), but rather, food is ‘a relationship’ (Kirschenmann, 2008, p. 109) and a deeply emotional one. ‘Food is the essence of life, even the spirit of living’ (Coveney, 2014, p. 13) for these groups of food procurers.

This thesis demonstrates that an emotional attachment to food can develop within and beyond the garden gate. As I discussed earlier, the geographical and health literature describe the relational nature of ‘therapeutic landscapes’ (Gesler, 1992; Milligan et al., 2004), where people experience well-being through the physical, social and emotional interactions that take place in a garden (Conradson, 2005; Hale et al., 2011; Milligan et al., 2004). In such therapeutic landscapes, those who grow food form emotional bonds with the earth and with others (Hale et al., 2011). Those who did not grow their own food or just dabbled in growing some food, such as most of the CSA members and farmers’ market shoppers, still maintained close ties with those who grew their food. Their attachment to place showed that they, too, experienced strong, emotional connections to food. Gardens help to nurture positive aesthetic experiences of taste, smell, touch and sight (Hale et al., 2011). So, perhaps it is through some engagement with gardening that an appreciation of the aesthetic and sensory aspects of food is more likely.

The act of touching, smelling, preparing, eating and swallowing food are sensual experiences that evoke emotions in people at both the conscious and unconscious level (Lupton, 1996). Such descriptions conjure a vision of experiencing the sensual pleasures of food on a table, perhaps in the home or while eating out. However, this research reveals that emotional responses to the sensual pleasures of food starts well before it reaches the home threshold or the restaurant door; it begins in the garden, as the grower arrives on her three-wheeler bike or at the farmers’ market perimeter.

Indeed, the community gardeners’, CSA members’ and farmers’ market shoppers’ emotional attachment to food goes much further back to their previous food experiences, signifying the strong connection between the emotional dimension of food and memory (Lupton, 1996). For example, the community gardeners told stories of their fond memories of their parents’ and
grandparents’ gardens, where they were allowed to explore, share a plot, learn to grow some of their own food, and eat the delicious fruits of their labour. It was not surprising that gardening was ‘in their blood’. As the CSA members engaged with their food producer—who delivered the weekly food parcels in a brown paper bags tied up with real string—they were reminded of the way food used to be grown: organically, locally and by someone they knew, contributing to their strong emotional connections to their food, their farmer, and the town in which they lived. All of these emotional experiences that connect people, their food memories and places, add yet another dimension to a contemporary relational food culture. These emotional and place-based connections to food may help to instil in people a desire to become food citizens.

For the farmers’ market shoppers, their memories of positive experiences with food were derived from more diverse sources. Some had memories of their parents growing fresh food during their formative years; others drew on memories from their early working lives, where they encountered those who were so passionate about their food that their lunch-time repast was considered an event in the eyes of onlookers; and still others had more recent memories of trips through the French and Italian countryside, where they were impressed by unique and well-developed food cultures. Older members of the CSA, farmers’ market and fresh food market groups also held nostalgic memories of the way food used to be grown, conjuring images of wholesome, natural and tasty food. Perhaps these food procurers may have been attracted to CSA membership and attendance at the farmers’ market or the fresh food markets to recreate this aspect of their past life (Lupton, 1996), which provided them with ‘a kind of comfort’, as one participant expressed it. It is these previous positive experiences with food that combined with other positive food memories to form a contemporary relational food culture for these food procurers.

Not all memories of food were positive ones, especially for those from the fresh food market group. The median age of this group was a little older than the others at 57 years; some of the participants had experienced financial hardship in their childhood years, had been affected by wartime rations in England, or grew up in geographically isolated places, all of which limited the availability of fresh or flavoursome food. Some participants had more recent memories of poor quality food while living in England because of poverty. These negative past experiences of food have prompted them to more fully appreciate the quality of the food available at the markets.
The philosophy of taste

Moving out of the past and into the present, but without abandoning the emotional dimension of food entirely, I will explore each group’s meaning-making of food, using Spiller’s (2012) ‘philosophy of taste’. For the community garden, CSA and farmers’ market groups, eating organic or local food, knowing where it comes from, showing a preference for eating animals that had been thoughtfully reared, and eating fresh, authentic, seasonal produce that tastes ‘like it used to’ were central to their philosophies of taste and represented both ethical and traditional production and eating practices (Beagan et al., 2010; Johnston et al., 2011).

For the community gardeners and the CSA members, growing or procuring organic food was important for their families’ health and for the health of the planet, making it part of their ethical eating repertoire (Johnston et al., 2011). The emphasis for the farmers’ market group was on purchasing locally grown rather than organic food, reflecting their support for the local farmer and the region and illustrating another element of ethical food choices (Johnston et al., 2011). The ethics of eating animals that had been respectfully reared was particularly prominent amongst the community gardeners and CSA members. Some members of the community garden group took this philosophy of taste even further, suggesting that those eating meat ought to be prepared to kill it and prepare it for cooking to enable a deeper understanding of humans’ connection to, and reliance on, animals for our sustenance. The notion of fresh, authentic and seasonal produce was taken up enthusiastically by the CSA and farmers’ market groups. They were pleased to purchase food that lasted longer, and was not waxed or perfect in size and shape because they knew that it tasted as good, or better, than the equivalent purchased at a supermarket. The farmers’ market shoppers enjoyed seasonal produce partially because it reminded them of the way food used to taste, but they also understood that planning meals with seasonally available foods had benefits for the environment.

These findings suggest that all of these groups of food procurers make decisions about food that combine both the notions of reflexivity and habitus (Adams, 2006). The participants from all three local food system groups have experienced and valued traditional ways of growing food for its taste and healthfulness, so that choosing and consuming foods that are ‘naturally’ grown and unadulterated were made unconsciously and became part of their identity, or habitus (Adams, 2006; Beagan et al., 2010). In more recent decades, as food production has become more industrialised and distribution more complex, they have become reflexive in
their food decision-making, selecting food that has been ethically and organically produced and not travelled too far. Therefore, local food systems promote a contemporary relational food culture that combines both traditional and ethical food values.

The fresh food market environment encompasses more mixed philosophies of taste. Some shoppers pursued purchasing free-range eggs, not via the markets, but direct from a trusted egg producer. One shopper considered eating a predominantly plant-based diet for the environment and health was important, but eating organics and seasonal fruits and vegetables was not. This participant’s habitus was very much tied to frugality, but she also made reflexive decisions about some aspects of her food choices. Yet another participant spoke animatedly of enjoying seasonal produce, despite purchasing from a market that sourced both seasonal and non-seasonal food. This participant’s philosophy of taste regarding seasonal food may have developed from her involvement in backyard food production rather than from her usual place of food purchasing, which suited her other philosophies of taste, such as freshness and organics. She was certainly not involved in making political statements about ethical food consumption, so her desire for seasonal produce is tied more to her upbringing and traditions handed on from her mother. These latter two examples reveal the inconsistencies and contradictions of some people’s philosophy of taste. It also suggests that the fresh food market environment does not encourage a consistent philosophy of taste, obscuring clear pathways to food citizenship.

Some of the younger or single members of both the farmers’ market and the fresh food market groups who enjoyed hosting dinner parties had a philosophy of taste that was concerned with uniqueness. Spiller (2012) suggests that the ‘lore’ of the markets imbues ‘good’ food with taste that comes not just from its intrinsic, physical properties, but also from the meanings and understandings that surround it. At the markets these younger or single participants found purple carrots, pomegranates and other unusual foods that impressed their friends, which played a part in projecting their identity as food lovers, even connoisseurs. These consumption practices, as they preferentially shopped for unusual foods and prepared strikingly different food to everyday fare, suggests that they are in possession of ‘cultural capital’, which refers to a set of values and knowledge that belong to those of privilege and high social status (Bourdieu, 1984; Johnston et al., 2011). While these philosophies of taste may offer personal benefits for these shoppers, they are unlikely to provide pathways to food citizenship, where a focus on the collective good is required.
One older member of the fresh food market group had a philosophy of taste that related to the importance of a slowly-cooked proper meal. This woman’s meaning of a proper meal had a moral framework, as she thought that children needed to appreciate food by attuning their senses to it, allowing the smell of food cooking to stimulate their appetites. It is possible that part of her concern was that traditional home-cooked meals are being replaced with convenience foods that are reheated in the microwave and eaten hurriedly, rather than in leisurely commensality (Warde, 1999). Cooking a meal and eating together in commensality attends to higher values than the physical production of the meal (Sidenvall et al., 2000) to include a family’s emotional and social well-being (Bahr Bugge & Almas, 2006; Fischler, 2011), which are likely to be ideals held by this woman, given her role as a family doctor.

The fresh food market group’s philosophy of taste reveals many more complexities and contradictions than the others in this study. There were those in the group who talked about ethical consumption, but rarely made these choices. There were others who made some ethical food choices that suggested reflexivity, but they were not always consistent. Still others drew cultural boundaries between themselves and others on the basis of their healthy eating habits, rather than on the basis of ethical consumption practices. This group of food procurers generally had a non-reflexive habitus, which characterises simple modernity, where social identities are generally stable and embedded within traditions (Adams, 2006; Beagan et al., 2010). However, at least one member of this group also demonstrated that notions of habitus can be tempered by complex, ambiguous and contradictory reflexivity (Adams, 2006). There can be degrees of reflexivity and habitus that co-exist within people at any one time (Adams, 2006; Beagan et al., 2010). It does not appear that these fresh food markets enable a consistent, reflexive approach to food choice, which has negative consequences for finding pathways to food citizenship.

Many in the supermarket group did not expect food from the supermarket to taste as good as food purchased elsewhere. These shoppers made their own assessment that supermarket food was not as fresh or safe as food obtainable from the different markets in Canberra—especially fruit, vegetables and fish—but still bought it. There was one person who held a philosophy of taste that was more closely linked to the philosophies of taste expressed by those who procured their food through the local food systems, as she preferred unadulterated, unprocessed, whole food. Some supermarket shoppers liked to purchase free-range eggs, but they were not certain that the labelling of products as ‘free-range’ was trustworthy. In many
respects, this group’s philosophy of taste was to accept poorer quality food, or food that did not quite meet their personal philosophy of taste, for the sake of the other benefits that supermarkets offered, such as lower cost and convenience—compromises that have been reported amongst other supermarket shoppers (Dixon & Isaacs, 2013). Overall, supermarkets do not promote philosophies of taste that ensure clear pathways to food citizenship.

The performance of taste

Before leaving this discussion of taste, the way in which the farmers’ market group ‘performed’ taste requires comment. ‘Performance of taste’ has been described by Spiller (2012) in his research with farmers’ market attendees, and by Teil and Hennion (2004) in relation to their research with amateur wine and food lovers. Teil and Hennion (2004, p. 19) suggest that taste is ‘an activity and not a passive or determined state’. For example, it was the farmers’ market shoppers who were so animated and passionate about their descriptions of the food they enjoyed from the markets. One participant spoke of ‘this glowing bunch of celery that’s all sort of standing up with the green bits nice and […] bright’, while another described a time when he wanted to try a cherry tomato from one of the vendors before purchasing, saying, ‘It was just the most beautiful tomato you’ve ever tasted in your life, you know. Little cherry tomatoes and all different sizes and dings in some of them. Beautiful.’ These comments, amongst many others, demonstrate that these shoppers were indeed performers of taste.

It would also be reasonable to conclude that one member of the fresh food market group also performed taste as she enjoyed the environment of the markets, but most of her passion related to her love of seasonal food. This passion stemmed from her former experiences of food when growing up, as well as her current engagement in growing food at home. It was not derived from her usual shopping environment. It certainly appears that the farmers’ market environment offers a platform to enjoy a contemporary relational food culture through the performance of taste and is likely to engender a desire to become a food citizen.

Relational aesthetic of food

Those who procured their food through local food systems and distrusted the conventional system experienced another dimension of a contemporary relational food culture: ‘a relational aesthetic’ of food, using quality criteria based on the intrinsic qualities of food and its locally
or socially embedded character (Murdoch & Miele, 2004; Walter, 2009). This suggests that appreciating food goes far beyond any ‘aesthetic veneer’ towards an appreciation that signifies ‘traceable’ natural and social connections to food that ignites the emotions and requires immersion in food experiences (Murdoch & Miele, 2004, p. 164). This ‘relational aesthetic of food’ may in some way have been informed by participants’ philosophy of taste, or vice versa. For example, the CSA members may have developed a philosophy of taste that included concern for animal welfare, which was informed by their producer’s ethical animal raising methods. Alternatively, a participant may have had a philosophy about the ethical treatment of animals and sought a producer that met their standards of ethical production.

Each of the groups from the local food systems understood the relational aesthetics of food differently. For the community gardeners, their desire for close connections to the earth, the soil and others, was patent. As Wayne said, ‘Producing some of the food you eat […] strikes me as connecting you to the many humans who have done so since farming began.’ So, not only was the activity of gardening precious for this man, but the meaning of the food produced by his own hands connected him to all our ancestors. For others in this group, growing food allowed them to develop inter-generational connections to their parents and grandparents who came before; to family, friends and fellow gardeners in the present; and into the future with their children and grandchildren. They wanted to pass on the skills of gardening to the next generation so that this knowledge was not lost, but also to extend to them a love of healthy, pure food. This community garden space was the epitome of a locally and socially embedded food system (Hinrichs, 2000; Kirwan, 2004; Sage, 2003). These inter-connections between people and place also included dimensions of time, as people expressed the depth and breadth of their relationship to food as being enriched by generations past, present and future. Humans are, indeed, temporal beings (Adam, 1995).

For the CSA group, the locally and socially embedded features of their food system were embodied in their farmer, who produced food in their small country town using methods that reminded them of the way food used to be grown. Not only did they feel privileged to receive their weekly parcel of food—delivered in person by their grower on her three-wheeler bike—they also took ‘ownership’ of this food grown by Briony, in a more responsible way than food they purchased from the supermarket. This demonstrates that socialisation through cultural influences does affect behaviour, as Granovetter (2011) suggests. Living in a small town and being involved in a small CSA enterprise, where the producer is a friend and neighbour, it is
not surprising that cultural norms would prompt a greater sense of guilt if Briony’s food is wasted than food produced by an anonymous and distant farmer. However, these CSA members did not feel coerced into this behaviour and viewed their new-found ‘ownership’ of food very positively, indicating a way in which personal agency can reconstruct societal norms about food waste. This desire to know the origins of their food and those who grew it is an essential feature of their relational aesthetic of food (Walter, 2009).

The farmer’s market group expressed value in the relational aesthetics of food in different ways too. For example, being able to talk to farmers directly and discuss their production methods, to form relationships with them and attempt to understand the challenges they faced, had an impact on their enjoyment of food. One member of this group, who had lived in Canberra for many years, was extremely proud of his hometown and the extraordinary variety and quality of the food it produced. He described it as a ‘genuine’ farmers’ market, not ‘a trendy once a month thing that you have in Sydney or Melbourne’. He happily sourced specialised products from local producers that may have had imperfections, but tasted better, as they were not bred for long distance transport. As Holloway and Kneafsey (2000) maintain, customers at farmers’ markets purchase more than just food; they also embrace a lifestyle that upholds an ethic of community and care. In some instances, the emotional bonds with the producers appeared to be so strong that the financial transaction that took place was almost an aside. As one participant said, ‘You can have relationships with them […] and you feel a loyalty to them … They’ve given you their food; they’ve given you advice.’ It is through these direct relationships with the farmers that trust develops over time, so that the advice given is believed. The ‘gift’ of food, this personalised exchange, signals the relations of regard between producer and customer and the socially embedded nature of this farmers’ market space (Kirwan, 2004; Offer, 1997; Sage, 2003).

These strong emotional bonds with the farmers also ignited significant memories of other past experiences with food that strongly influenced some members’ relationship to food, illustrating the dimension of time in the relational aesthetics of food for this group. People’s memories of life-changing encounters with others who are passionate about their food—whether it be at a grandparent’s allotment, a former worksite or a food market on foreign shores—shows that memories transcend people’s present location to past socio-cultural and geographical locations (Adam, 1995). Members of this group learnt much about the joys of food through these past experiences, just as they continue to embrace the rich experiences of
food at the markets in the present. Their relationships to people and places from their past have become part of their identity as farmers’ market and food enthusiasts.

As mentioned earlier, the fresh food market group held philosophies of taste, such as eating fresh, unique, seasonal food that had animal welfare and both individual and planetary health in mind. Nonetheless, this did not mean that they valued a relational aesthetic of food, which requires a greater emotional connection with the people that grew it or the place in which it was produced (Walter, 2009). There was an exception, as one member of the group grew her own food, so connections to the earth and the rhythms of the seasons were part of her assessment of food quality.

Amongst the supermarket group there were some individuals who expressed some interesting and strong views about their relational aesthetics of food. Clive, for example, said that he felt more available to the food that was produced by someone he knew, rather than the food from the supermarket. He also thought that producing food in his own backyard, sometimes with his son, was a social process and the relationship with the earth and with others with whom he swapped food was more meaningful to him. However, for most of the supermarket group, feeling connected to those who grew their food or where it was grown was of little consequence. Some tried to source Australian produce, but they did not express what this meant about their experience and meaning-making of food. Ultimately, the inter-connections between people, place and time, integral to a relational aesthetic of food and a contemporary relational food culture, are experienced by those who procure their food through the three local food systems in this thesis, not by those who frequent the fresh food markets or the supermarkets.

**Cooking, commensality and conviviality**

The pleasure derived from cooking food for self and others was universal across all groups. The pleasures of cooking, and the way that this pleasure was expressed, differed between the groups. Within the community garden group, much of their pleasure from cooking was inspired by their produce, as they enthused about processing it when there was a ‘glut’ at the height of the season. Even at the start of the focus group discussion, it was difficult to move away from exchanging ideas on the best ways to deal with tomatoes, as they no longer had freezer space to cope with it all. Meredith in particular, who had a husband with an Italian background, loved to join family days of making salamis and pancetta, just like the
participants from Counihan’s (2004) study of her relatives in Tuscany. The women in this group also spoke of searching the internet for new recipes to make meals that best utilised the food they grew. The family conversations about the pleasures of food and cooking from scratch, often with grandchildren, is reminiscent of the way in which Italian families socialise their children into the pleasures of food (Ochs, Pontecorvo, & Fasulo, 1996). As Walter (2009, p.1) suggests, passing on the pleasures of cooking from scratch to family members is also tied to the relational aesthetics of food that ‘infuse food with the terroir of home’.

Members of the CSA group really enjoyed planning and preparing meals for themselves and others. They rejected the notion that food should be eaten quickly, as though it had a purely physiological role. Instead, commensality and conviviality were considered very important aspects of eating; so the relational aesthetic of food extends beyond their connections to the producer and to where food is grown, to include the people with whom they eat it (Walter, 2009). Other groups of food procurers were not quite so articulate in explaining the importance of partaking of food in a leisurely fashion, but commensality and conviviality were prominent in their discussions. Members of the farmers’ market group enjoyed the ritual of shared family meals with everyone bringing their specialty dish, or gathering friends around a wood-fired pizza oven for a casual meal. Then there were those who enjoyed throwing more extravagant dinner parties, while others liked to share a meal with a partner who relished being the recipient of experimental cooking. In the fresh food market narrative, similar stories were told of enjoying family meals and having dinner parties with friends, while in the supermarket narrative, one young mother gave an account of the pleasure she derived from cooking and sharing a meal with her husband after the children were put to bed. In each of these circumstances, bringing people together around food produced bonding and even intimacy (Fischler, 2011).

For the fresh food market group there was a range of pleasures in cooking that participants enjoyed for themselves, but also wanted to pass on to others. One had discovered the wonders of beautiful food and relished cooking different cuisines from the Mediterranean and Asia, so cooking and passing on information about where to source good food was an important aspect of her identity (Fischler, 1988). Others enjoyed passing on cooking skills to their children, while the younger member of the group liked to join forces with friends to experiment with cooking. These women’s stories, combined with the voices of many other women, confirm that preparing meals is not always domestic drudgery. Rather, cooking meals are a gift to
others (Moisio et al., 2004; Sidenvall et al., 2000) and a creative activity from which women can derive great pleasure and satisfaction for themselves and others (Lupton, 2000).

Some members of the supermarket group also enjoyed cooking, but it was generally confined to specific situations, such as weekends or holiday periods. It was on these occasions, rather than on a daily basis, that cooking traditional or special meals was considered pleasurable. So commensality and conviviality did not emerge as an important feature of food appreciation for this group of food procurers to the same extent as it did for the other groups.

Home cooking can form part of a relational aesthetic of food—which is concerned with co-operation, commitment and care in people’s domestic spheres—but speed has no place in such an assessment of quality (Walter, 2009). It requires a commitment of time, which is mostly provided by women (De Vault, 1991; Lupton, 1996) and is frequently taken for granted (Walter, 2009). In this thesis, the community gardeners who spoke of enjoying all aspects of food production, processing and cooking were generally women who were homemakers, part-time workers or retired, and may or may not have had children still living at home. It could be argued that this group of food procurers simply had more time to devote to food-related activities than others, which assumes that any discretionary time would be spent on domestic food activities, particularly cooking.

Alternatively, the evidence from this thesis shows that these community gardeners and their families highly valued this way of spending their time and made conscious decisions to do so. At the other end of the spectrum, there were those in the supermarket group, which included a high proportion of participants who worked full-time and/or lived with partners and children, who railed against cooking complex meals during the week because of the time investment required. Certainly, other studies indicate that many people either do not like investing time in cooking, especially if they feel time-pressured (Daniels et al., 2012; Warde, 1999) or work encroaches unreasonably on the time people can devote to food preparation (Devine, Connors, Sobal, & Bisogni, 2003), both of which were expressed by members of the supermarket group. If a ‘relational ethic of home’ is to be fully integrated into a relational aesthetic of food, then gender needs to be taken into account, whereby the time that women devote to cooking is considered worthwhile for a household (Walter, 2009 p. 14) and for society more broadly.
Each of the local food systems enabled people to experience food in very deep, multidimensional ways, which combined to reveal a contemporary relational food culture. It is the local food systems that are both locally and socially embedded that allow people to develop a relational aesthetic of food, where both the intrinsic and extrinsic qualities of food are essential in the assessment of food quality. People’s positive perceptions of temporality and social time, as they reflect on past experiences with food and spend time over preparing and consuming food—which was experienced especially by those in the local food systems—also play a critical role in people’s contemporary relational food culture.

**Pathways to food citizenship**

**Active participation in the food system and commitment to food citizenship**

The complex and variable ways in which people in these five different groups of food procurers made meaning of food provide important clues for understanding their level of engagement with food citizenship. A starting point for understanding the connections between meaning-making of food and food citizenship is the relational aesthetic of food (Murdoch & Miele, 2004; Walter, 2009). Those people who appreciated food for its sensory attributes and its local and social embeddedness had a deeply emotional attachment to food, which was developed through their meaningful connections to earth, nature and others who grew food before them, with them or for them. They enjoyed a ‘contemporary relational food culture,’ which combined their attachment to traditional ways of growing, processing and preparing food, with conscious ethical food behaviours that were good for the health of their families and the planet. Their food decisions that moved beyond self-interest to the collective good were not viewed as a sacrifice, but rather, as an alternative way of being (Atkinson, 2012; Hassanein, 2008; Kriflik, 2006), requiring time, effort and commitment. Their deep, emotional and relational connections to food enabled them to more consistently engage in food behaviours that support the development of democratic, socially and economically just, and environmentally sustainable food systems (Wilkins, 2005).

In this thesis, the community gardeners, farmers’ market and CSA members who valued a relational aesthetic of food, exhibited behaviours that Wilkins (2005) calls for in developing food citizenship. They either produced their own food close to home, or purchased from a local farmer. In the case of the farmers’ market shoppers, not all of the producers were local in the true sense, but they were people that the shoppers got to know, and so became part of
their local community. The shoppers valued buying from someone they knew and wanted to support them socially and economically, which is a key component of an equitable and fair food system. These three groups of food procurers appreciated eating seasonal food for its superior taste, but they also understood that it was unreasonable from an environmental perspective to expect to be able to purchase non-seasonal food year round.

Some behaviours from these three groups showed that they were committed to avoiding food waste, being aware that it was disrespectful to those who grew it, and a waste of resources that the planet could not withstand. The community gardeners, for example, utilised all their produce by learning to process their food for use at other times of the year; the CSA members used up all the food produced by their farmer, and the farmers’ market shoppers tried to plan their meals around the food they purchased rather than source food to fulfil the requirements of a recipe or satisfy their whims. In all three groups, the food procurers engaged in ethical consumption practices as they made food choices that respected animal welfare. All of these practices required effort and forethought in planning meals and growing and processing food.

The fresh food market and supermarket shoppers did not experience a relational aesthetic of food to the same degree as the local food system procurers. Their meaning-making of food did not include thick descriptions of the sensory qualities of food, nor did it extend to where or by whom their food was grown, unless they were shoppers who grew some of their own food or had prior experience of farmers’ markets. They were less concerned with food seasonality, the impact of food production, and distribution on the environment or supporting local farmers, and they made food choices accordingly. There were some who made choices to purchase free-range eggs, while others avoided buying too much meat or imported seafood, being aware of the negative impacts of these choices on the environment, so they did behave as food citizens in some respects. However, their ethical consumption practices did not extend to buying locally or buying organics.

When it came to discussion of the plight of farmers, many in these two groups of food procurers were aware that they deserved greater moral and economic support, but they generally failed to actively seek ways to improve their situation. The supermarket shoppers particularly did not consider themselves legitimate players in the food system, explaining that factors out of their control, often a lack of time, prevented them from taking action and following through with ethical food choices. These two groups of shoppers appear to have made rational or intellectual decisions to sometimes engage in behaviours suggestive of food
citizenship, but they did not become fully immersed in a relational aesthetic of food, which may have facilitated more consistent and far-reaching behaviours aligned to food citizenship.

The analysis thus far fails to take full account of the sometimes subtle, but important differences between each of the food procurement groups in relation to their level of engagement in food citizenship. Some of the groups of food procurers not only valued a relational aesthetic of food, but they also actively rejected the food offered by the supermarkets. The community gardeners, particularly, were ‘secessionists’ (Kloppenburg et al., 1996) who avoided the dominant food system and relied on self-sufficiency or, if necessary, supported the local organic food store or the farmers’ market. They were unwavering in their commitment to the principles and values underpinning food citizenship and would not eat food that was sprayed with pesticides, grown in poly-tunnels or packaged in plastic. Instead, they actively participated in the chosen food system by growing their own organic food, learning to save and share seeds, and passing on their skills and knowledge of gardening and food processing to others.

**Relational reflexivity**

It was the community gardeners who enacted ‘relational reflexivity’, which requires people to consciously disconnect from the ‘aesthetic veneer’ of supermarket food, allowing for a re-evaluation of food quality (Murdoch & Miele, 2004). Once this re-evaluation has occurred, then a re-connection with food in new ways follows, signifying a deep immersion in the natural, social and cultural relations of food (Murdoch & Miele, 2004). To achieve this full immersion in a ‘contemporary relational food culture’ requires active participation in the food system; it cannot be achieved by being a bystander. The community gardeners devoted much of their social time to growing, processing and preparing their food, which helps to foster a more consistent commitment to food citizenship.

In comparison, the CSA members and farmers’ market shoppers were more ‘successionists’, as they made incremental steps away from the dominant food system (Kloppenburg et al., 1996) but still showed that they engaged in ‘relational reflexivity’. For example, they mostly avoided buying imported food, or at least ‘drew the line’ at buying food from China; they preferred organic food, but this was not essential for some; they liked vegetables that still had dirt on them; and they chose fruit that was unwaxed and irregular in size and shape, unlike supermarket food. Yet, they did not completely disconnect from the dominant food system.
and become fully immersed in the relational aesthetics of food that was so much a feature of their experiences of the local food system.

Within the CSA group, there were two people—both full-time workers, living with their partners but without children at home—who had a sound grasp of the importance of a sustainable food system from a social, economic and environmental perspective. They abhorred many features of the current dominant food system, and they were emotionally bound to their friend and farmer, Briony. Yet, when they became busy with work or other aspects of their life, they had food delivered by one of the large supermarket chains. They were both aware of the inconsistencies in their behaviour and were disappointed that the practicalities of life interfered so vehemently with their principled food choices. Some in the farmers’ market group also confessed to buying from the supermarket at times for the sake of convenience, but generally, they revealed a firm commitment to purchasing at the farmers’ market.

The difference between these two groups is again the commitment of their social time to food procurement. The CSA members never participated in any farming activities with their producer and only had to either collect their parcel of food or have it delivered, so there was little time cost to their involvement with the CSA. Such enterprises do have the potential to encourage greater participation through making involvement in farm activities a requirement, which may engender a greater commitment to food citizenship.

The farmers’ market group, on the other hand, devoted much of their Saturday morning to buying their food at the markets, developing relationships and learning from the farmers they encountered. While not at the same level of active participation as the community gardeners, there was still a deep immersion in their food procurement experiences through this time commitment.

The fresh food market group did not engage completely in relational reflexivity, which usually comes from an engagement with food environments that are socially and locally embedded (Murdoch & Miele, 2004). This does not mean that members of this group did not enjoy or become immersed in the experience of shopping at their local fresh food market. They also used much of their social time on weekends to engage with different vendors. However, they did not disconnect from the ‘aesthetic veneer’ of the food available through the
dominant food system and then re-engage in new ways that fully embraced the relational aesthetics of food.

Some had grown up in families with connections to farming, or had grown and processed their own food and even continued to do so. These historical connections influenced their enjoyment of food, but it was not sufficient to become food citizens; that is, to take action to support the development of more sustainable food systems. Others were socially conscious shoppers, who selected some food on the basis of benefit for the environment, but not in all ways at their disposal, highlighting the contradictions in their food choices. They enjoyed their chosen food system of the fresh food markets and devoted social time to food procurement, but much of their enjoyment came from spending time with family and friends, rather than developing close relationships with those who provided their food. This group’s relationship to food remained more at the personal enjoyment and benefit level, rather than embracing a collective view that requires a commitment to making food choices that profit others and the planet (Atkinson, 2012).

As a whole, the supermarket group of shoppers were far more concerned with their domestic world of food and cooking than the public world of food provision (Cook et al., 1998). They were ambivalent about the need to select food based on its origins, and preferred to make food choices without the burden of responsibility regarding effects on the wider food system (Cook et al., 1998). This did not mean they were unaware of the shortfalls of the dominant food system, but they rarely made decisions to improve it, revealing that they were ‘passive consumers’ (Hassanein, 2003, 2008). The ethical food choices they had made, such as purchasing ‘free range’ eggs, was a relatively easy choice for them as they were available through the supermarket, but at least they were required to make conscious decisions. There were some members of the group, especially those who had experienced other food systems, who did engage at some level with ‘relational reflexivity’, recognising that the quality of the food available outside the supermarket was superior, not just for its intrinsic qualities, but also for its extrinsic ones. They were either unable or unprepared to allocate the social time needed to become further immersed in the ‘relational aesthetics of food’.

The continuum of engagement with food citizenship

‘A moveable feast: Towards a better understanding of the pathways to food citizenship’ explores people’s level of engagement in their usual food procurement environment and
examine what this revealed about relationships to food and pathways to food citizenship. This research found that people’s meaning-making of food can be very complex, and at times contradictory, both within and across the different food procurement groups. The narratives revealed that those food procurement groups that actively participated in their chosen food system and enjoyed a ‘contemporary relational food culture’, which embraced a ‘relational aesthetics of food’ and fostered ‘relational reflexivity’, were the groups that more consistently and enthusiastically enacted food citizenship.

This thesis shows that there is a continuum of engagement with food-related behaviours that support the development of democratic and sustainable food systems from the community gardeners at one end to the supermarket shoppers at the other (figure 15). It was the community gardeners who were immersed in the ‘relational aesthetics of food’ and engaged in ‘relational reflexivity’ to the point of rejecting supermarket food. Instead, they relied on their own organic food production or, if necessary, a local food store, or the farmers’ market. They shared their seeds, produce and gardening skills amongst family and friends, further cementing their status as food citizens. Their active participation in food production, processing and preparation was directed towards the health and well-being of the individual, the family, society and the planet. This group of food procurers did not view their involvement in food-related activities as a burdensome time commitment, but rather as a pleasurable use of their social time.

The CSA and farmers’ market groups similarly valued a ‘contemporary relational food culture’ and disconnected from mainstream assessments of food quality and re-connected in new ways. However, when clock time imposed itself, these values and principles about food were shelved. Wilkins (2005) suggests that practising food citizenship first requires becoming aware of the implications of our food choices within the food system and then taking action. These groups of food procurers were well aware of the implications of their food choices and usually proved to be food citizens, as they took action by selecting organics, seasonal, local and ethically produced food from their farmer or farmers. The two CSA members who did stray from their principles and commitment to food citizenship were acutely aware of their contradictory behaviour.

A significant difference between the behaviours of these two groups of food procurers is in their use of social time for food-related activities. The farmers’ market shoppers became absorbed in their Saturday morning shopping expeditions and enjoyed developing
relationships with the farmers, which helped to establish empathy and a desire to support a socially and economically just, sustainable food system. The CSA members, on the other hand, merely observed the hard work and dedication of their farmer, but did not actually make any contribution to necessary farming activities, such as planting or harvesting crops. Perhaps if this group of food procurers had more actively participated in the CSA and had willingly shared some of their social time with the farmer, they may have behaved as food citizens more consistently.

Possibly an often overlooked aspect of social justice in the current literature on socially sustainable food systems is support for farmers. It may be that the Australian food system is unique, given the concentration of the supermarket sector (Andree, Dibden, Higgins, & Cocklin, 2010). In this thesis, all food procurement groups raised the issue of the plight of farmers in Australia, as participants acknowledged the power of the supermarket duopoly, but it was the farmers’ market group who most actively sought to recalibrate the power imbalances by purchasing directly from them.

Further along this continuum, moving towards the fresh food market group, the complexity and contradictions of food choice becomes even more apparent. At this juncture it becomes clear that the pathways to food citizenship are neither direct nor smooth. This group of shoppers still valued fresh food and the experience of the market, but did not appreciate the ‘relational aesthetics of food’ to the same extent as the local food system groups. These shoppers did not make-meansing of food through intimate connections to those who grew their food or the place in which it was grown. Nor did they engage fully in ‘relational reflexivity’, which requires a re-evaluation of the food obtained through the dominant food system. This slightly older, well-educated group of professionals did adhere to some practices that put them on a path to food citizenship, but their convictions were inconsistent and often contradictory. They may have eaten less meat, avoided imported fish and seafood or bought free-range eggs, but chose not to pay a premium for organic food or attend the farmers’ market, where they could buy local, seasonal produce. However, time did not prevent them from being more devoted food citizens. They very happily spent their social time on food shopping and other food-related activities, and they did partially participate in their food system, but their participation did not involve a deep immersion in their food environment that comes with close connections to those who produce or at least sell their food. They were loyal to the markets as a whole, but not to particular vendors within them. A limitation for this group in
behaving more as food citizens is likely to be their non-reflexive habitus coupled with their ambiguous and sometimes contradictory reflexive food decisions. Their focus on personal food priorities rather than ones that benefit the collective may also have contributed to an inconsistent engagement with food citizenship.

The supermarket shoppers were positioned at the other end of this continuum from the community gardeners, but this did not mean that all members of the group totally lacked food behaviours that would classify them as food citizens. Some members of this group grew some of their own food, while others had used the farmers’ markets in the past. There were others, too, who bought free-range eggs to support the ethical treatment of animals. However, this group did not experience a ‘relational aesthetic of food’, nor did they participate in ‘relational reflexivity’. They were able to assess supermarket food as being inferior to other food, but they did not completely disconnect from the aesthetic veneer of the supermarket food or re-connect with food in new ways. Linear time overwhelmingly prevented most of them from spending more of their social time on food-related activities. There were many people who were busy with full-time work and families, but this was not a homogenous group in that respect. There were still those who were money- and time-rich, who could have spent more time over shopping and cooking and had the resources to contribute to more sustainable food systems, but chose not to do so. This group’s disconnection from those who grew their food and where it was grown disempowered them from making food choices that would support more democratic, socially and economically just, and environmentally sustainable food systems.

The findings from each of these groups of food procurers shows that many people have good intentions about their food choices and have an awareness of the inadequacies of the current dominant food system. However, there are considerable barriers for many to become food citizens. Firstly, the dominant food system itself—which supplies a huge array of food, but little in the way of affordable, sustainable food products—does not make it easy to practise food citizenship (Seyfang, 2005; Wilkins, 2005). Government food and agricultural policies that support the production of cheap food commodities at the expense of the environment and human health is another barrier to exercising food citizenship (Wilkins, 2005). Consumers also draw multi-layered meanings from the marketplace that go well beyond just provisioning, to include self-expression, self-esteem or a need for belongingness, which may be counter to the principles of food citizenship (Seyfang, 2005). Further, expecting
individuals to be responsible for solving major national and global issues through their purchasing decisions, without the efforts of institutions such as government and business, is also too heavy a burden for some (Seyfang, 2005).
Figure 15: The continuum of engagement with food citizenship across five food procurement environments
Chapter 10: A moveable feast: Where to from here?

This thesis has uncovered several important factors that influence people’s relationship to food across different food procurement environments and provided a better understanding of the pathways to food citizenship. It has shown that local food systems create opportunities for people to experience multi-dimensional relationships to food and develop an orientation towards the collective good through their food choices. The community gardeners, and the farmers’ market shoppers to a lesser extent, demonstrated a more committed engagement with food citizenship than the other groups by actively participating in their local food system.

However, there are other food-related behaviours that impact on the sustainability of a food system that were rarely addressed by these groups of shoppers, which still need to be researched to have a more complete picture of pathways to food citizenship. For example, matters such as the amount of meat people eat and the mode of transport people use to procure their food and their frequency of shopping require further investigation. There were few people in this research who came from different ethnic or lower socio-economic status groups, so obtaining further insights into their particular perspectives is necessary. Following up with people who did not wish to participate in the focus groups, but who may volunteer for in-depth interviews, is another important source of data that could be pursued. Investigations into whether the findings contained in this thesis extend to other people in the ACT and beyond, needs further testing through quantitative methods.

At the beginning of this thesis, I expressed my frustration that people had become disconnected with the food system, and that the nutrition and dietetics’ profession had become far too concerned about the nutrient composition of food and the dietary profiles of individuals. Instead, I wanted my profession to focus more on people’s engagement with food and collective eating patterns. I wondered what benefits might flow for individual, community and planetary health if people valued food more highly.

This thesis has addressed my concerns in part. It has provided a clearer understanding of the way in which some groups of food procurers value a contemporary relational food culture, engage in relational reflexivity, and actively participate in their food system to become food citizens. It has shown that local food systems have an important role in connecting people to the farmers who grow their food, to others and to the earth, which together help build community. Such food systems have proved to be more socially profitable than others. Knowing that participants from all food procurement groups showed concern for the
Australian farmer, provides a leverage point on which to promote local food systems. However, this thesis still raises the question as to whether these same groups of food procurers have healthier eating patterns and better diet-related health outcomes than those who source their food from conventional grocery stores and supermarkets, especially in the Canberra and Australian context. Do those who experience deep multi-dimensional ways of making-meaning of food and behave as food citizens also avoid over-consumption? This question will be a matter for further research.

There needs to be further exploration of the reasons some sustainable food behaviours appeared to be easier for people to adhere to than others, in particular food procurement environments. For example, selecting free-range eggs appeared to be an easy decision for most consumers, but the idea of procuring seasonal or organic produce was far more problematic. This thesis revealed several possible factors influencing these decisions, but there may be other factors that are yet unknown. For example, learning more about the role that media and marketing campaigns play in influencing people’s sustainable food choices would also be useful to better understand pathways to food citizenship. A clear understanding of the effects of importing and exporting to and from developing countries is another important area for further research.

Many participants in this thesis used a variety of food procurement environments, although one more so than the others. Future research could also examine the way in which a variety of food procurement environments can be used to meet people’s social, aesthetic and ethical food goals.

The findings in this thesis in relation to CSA enterprises need to be considered carefully in an international context. In the main, CSAs in Australia are more closely aligned to box schemes. The original model of CSA, which involves risk-sharing and at least some degree of member involvement in farm activities (Oberholtzer, 2004), has not got traction in Australia. The reasons for this lack of development of CSAs in the Australian context is largely unknown (Lea et al., 2006), but needs further research. It is difficult to unravel whether the failure of CSA enterprises to grow in size and number in Australia has to do with a reluctance to share the financial burden with the farmer, a lack of desire or ability to be involved in farm activities or whether the Australian consumer rejects seasonality. Findings from qualitative research found that a potential barrier to the success of CSAs in Australia is that the consumer wants to be able to source food all year, as they are accustomed to doing through supermarkets (Lea et al., 2006). Alternatively, there may be people who would like to share
the risk with farmers through traditional CSAs and eat seasonally, but are not aware of their existence. The ones that do exist in Australia are insufficiently promoted (Lea et al., 2006).

Robert Pekin of Food Connect, Brisbane, has suggested that there may be two key reasons why Australians do not wish to commit to upfront payment for their food. Firstly, the power of the supermarket duopoly in Australia, which pushes prices down, make CSA prices uncompetitive. Secondly, Australia’s food supply is safe, so there is no external driver to know where food is grown and by whom (personal communication 14th August 2014). Kate Beveridge, Purple Pear Farm, concurred with these views (personal communication, 1st September 2014).

**Strengths of this thesis**

Examining people’s meaning-making of food and their engagement with food citizenship according to their choice of food system, rather than through demographics, was novel and useful in generating a better understanding of possible pathways to food citizenship. The relative importance of the ‘relational aesthetics of food’, ‘relational reflexivity’, social time, and active participation in a chosen food system for people’s meaning-making of food and engagement with food citizenship has been revealed. This thesis draws on a richness of research material that was gathered through narrative inquiry methodology, using focus groups, which retained the context of people’s lives in all its complexity, inconsistencies and contradictions.

**Limitations of this thesis**

This research used a qualitative research methodology and a settings approach in the ACT, a place of high socio-economic status, so the findings generated within this community may be very different to those found elsewhere; therefore, generalisations are not possible. However, even within this environment, there was a wide range of views expressed in relation to the research question. This research does not include many people on very low incomes or those who are very privileged, nor did it include youth or the very elderly and, as such, can only be viewed as a snapshot. The research did not address all aspects of a just and sustainable food system, which may have included exploring factors that enable more equitable access to healthy food for all. Instead, it focused on peoples’ meaning-making of food, their level of participation in their chosen food system, and what these matters meant about their engagement with food citizenship.
The focus group method also has its limitations in uncovering all possible viewpoints (Stewart et al., 2007). As with all ethical research, focus groups rely on voluntary participation (Hennick, 2014) and they do not appeal to all potential participants. This self-selection in focus groups involves the risk that not all unique viewpoints and insights into the research question are revealed. As such, the findings of this thesis must be interpreted cautiously.

**Implications for policy and practice**

The thesis raises important questions about the way in which food procurers can be enabled to engage more fully in food citizenship. One of the main barriers to supermarket shoppers from engaging in a contemporary relational food culture and behaving as food citizens was time. Some participants indicated that they would prefer to purchase their food through local food systems, and indeed, some had done so. Many enjoyed cooking more elaborate meals when circumstances allowed. However, it was their lifestyle—which often involved work and other family commitments—that prevented them from following through with their preferences.

People need to find ways to balance their paid work with other family responsibilities. Those who are money- and time-poor particularly require support in being able to devote meaningful time to food-related activities, but how this will be achieved needs further attention. Other researchers have called for a reassessment of modern societies’ work-life balance to enable people to devote more time to social reproduction, which may help to create a healthier society (Szabo, 2011) and a more desirable and sustainable future (Costanza et al., 2012).

In this thesis, the food procurers who derived so much pleasure from food-related activities like food production, processing, shopping, cooking and consuming food, were also more dedicated to sustainable food behaviours—but often, they had more time available to devote to these matters. Increasing people’s access to more flexible and less demanding work schedules (Szabo, 2011), specifically shorter work hours (Costanza et al., 2012), could be taken up by policy makers to enable more people to re-connect with their food and potentially reduce over-consumption (Costanza et al., 2012). These policies may have other benefits, such as reducing work stress and increasing people’s sense of well-being (Golden & Wiens-Tuers, 2006).

Other policies that promote the inclusion of community gardens, farmers’ markets and CSAs in local government areas, making them more accessible to people, would also help people to
enact food citizenship more completely. If farmers’ markets were open on weekdays and had extended operating hours, then people may be enabled to engage more deeply in a contemporary relational food culture and behave as food citizens. Accessibility from other perspectives also needs to be considered. Australian society is very much dependent on the car (Coveney & Dwyer, 2009), so people without a car may be excluded from the benefits of farmers’ markets, depending on their location. Availability of regular and comfortable public transport may offer improved access to farmers’ markets for those who do not have private transport. Affordability of local food systems also needs to be addressed more closely, especially in the Australian context, where there is currently little data. A preliminary study showed that there were no significant differences in the cost of fruit and vegetables at farmers’ markets compared to supermarkets in Queensland (Millichamp & Gallegos, 2012), but these studies need to be replicated in the Canberra environment and other parts of Australia to assess their affordability for all citizens. Potentially, farmers’ markets may be perceived as being more expensive, but this may not be a reality. Further research is required to understand more of people’s perceptions about the cost of food at farmers’ markets.

The community gardeners and farmers’ market shoppers, particularly, encouraged children to be involved in growing food or at least to learn more about how food is grown. There is great potential to expand kitchen-garden projects in both primary and secondary schools to enable children to learn more about growing and preparing food. Such programs may have the capacity to extend knowledge and skills of food production and preparation to their families, which may also promote food citizenship.

There may be an educative role that the fresh food markets and supermarkets can harness by selling imperfect fruit and vegetables. Across all food procurement groups there was an awareness that the modern food system promoted fruit and vegetables that are uniform in both size and shape, to appeal to the consumer, even though such characteristics do not alter the taste. These changes in supply could help to support farmers and reduce waste on farms.

The findings in this thesis have the potential to inform practice across a range of disciplines, including human geography, anthropology, sociology, urban planning, community development and public health nutrition. Public health nutritionists who uphold the principles of the New Nutrition Science—which integrates the biological, social and environmental sciences—are well placed to help people re-connect with food in multi-dimensional ways that can benefit individual and planetary health. These health professionals who work closely with individuals, groups and communities and understand the socio-demographic constraints on
people’s lives, can also consider applying Warde’s (2005) theory of practice to help people change their food procurement and preparation practices that lead to food citizenship. On a practical level, they can support people to grow some of their own food, either in their backyards or in community gardens, and link people to CSAs and local farmers’ markets. Public health nutritionists can take also a lead role in forming partnerships with other disciplines, community members and local government to develop food policy councils that empower communities to meaningfully and actively participate in decisions about the types of food systems they would prefer (Hassanein, 2003, 2008).

Public health nutritionists can also be part of a transformative food movement that can help people reassess the importance of food in their lives. Food is so much more than nutrients, as this research so compellingly shows. Food is a relationship—a relationship with the soil, to people in our past, present and future. It is through developing these joyful and satisfying relationships with food that occupies meaningful time in people’s lives that individuals, families and communities can enact food citizenship.
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Appendices

Appendix I: Recruitment methods

Flyers were produced that were appropriate for the different food systems that could be distributed by hand or through email systems that included my contact details for interested people to contact me. At each face-to-face recruitment venue, information sheets were distributed. Name, contact details and preference for day or evening focus group attendance, was recorded.

Recruitment methods for alternative food system focus groups

- The President of the Canberra Organic Growers’ Society (COGS) was contacted by telephone, who invited me to a meeting of the group, to recruit community gardeners. Both verbal and written information was given about the project to those present. A recruitment sheet was distributed for those interested in attending a focus group. The President also distributed a flyer and an information sheet regarding the project through the COGS membership email system to recruit more people. Interested people contacted me either by telephone or email. Those who agreed to participate also extended an invitation to others whom they thought might be interested.

- The two existing CSA enterprises in the Canberra region were contacted by telephone. One was not supportive of my recruiting his customers and was unwilling to contact them on my behalf. The other producer contacted each of her five customers via email, attaching a flyer and the information sheet regarding my research.

- The Capital Region Farmers’ Market in Canberra is organised by a Rotary group. The President of Hall Rotary was telephoned for permission to recruit farmers’ market shoppers on a Saturday morning as customers shopped.

Recruitment methods for supermarket focus groups

- A flyer was posted on the website www.gumtree.com.au, a site for buying and selling items, but also for community notices.

- A media release was sent from the media office at University of Canberra. I was subsequently interviewed by ABC radio station.
• An email with attached flyer and information sheet regarding my research was sent to two local construction companies known to me, asking the directors of the company to distribute the email to their staff.

• An email with attached flyer and information sheet was sent through the University of Canberra chat forum. Later, when difficulties with recruitment surfaced, an email to all University of Canberra staff was sent via the office of the Dean of the Faculty of Health.

• An email with attached flyer and information sheet was sent to Canberra Senior Citizens for distribution to members.

• A notice was added to three school newsletters, two primary schools and one high school on the north side of Canberra, with the aim of recruiting parents to the supermarket focus groups.

• A flyer was distributed via a letterbox drop by a colleague at Kangara Waters, a retirement village in north-west Canberra.

• Permission was sought from the managers of three supermarkets, on the north side of Canberra, to allow me to intercept shoppers outside supermarkets.

• Word-of-mouth was used through Sing Australia, of which I am a member. I also used word-of-mouth through family and friends.

**Recruitment methods for fresh food market focus groups**

The final group of focus groups were with those who shop regularly at the Belconnen and Fyshwick markets. To recruit to these two groups, the following methods were used:

• Permission was sought from the manager of the Belconnen Fresh Food Markets to allow me to intercept shoppers outside the shops.

• An email with attached flyer and information sheet was sent through the University of Canberra chat forum.

• Word-of-mouth through Sing Australia and friends.
Appendix II: Methods for conducting focus groups

I began the series of focus groups with those using the alternative food systems; the community gardeners followed by members of the CSA and finally, the farmers’ market shoppers. It was not until after I had analysed the research material from these three food procurement environments that I moved on to the focus groups with the supermarket and fresh food market shoppers. I was interested in immersing myself in the stories of those who had chosen to procure their food outside the hegemonic food system, before embarking on material gathering with those purchasing food from within this system.

The focus groups held at the University of Canberra took place in a small meeting room to accommodate up to ten people, with a table in the centre. Participants were seated around the table, enabling everyone to see each other and allowing me to form part of the group. The CSA focus group was held in a medium-sized multi-purpose room, in the community centre, which had no suitable table, so the group formed a small circle with their chairs. As each participant entered the room, they were given an information sheet, even if they had received one via email. Before beginning the discussions, the purpose of the focus groups was briefly explained, the methodology used, the expectations I had regarding their involvement in the research and their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

The focus groups varied in length, from 30 minutes in one of the smaller groups up to one hour and 20 minutes in one of the larger groups. Each focus group was recorded on an audio digital recorder (Sony MP3), which was placed on the table or on a chair in the centre of the group, to ensure all voices were detected. As the facilitator, I also wrote notes as the focus group unfolded, which I typed up immediately after the focus group. This was helpful when I returned to the transcripts to confirm who was responsible for certain comments, if there was confusion. These notes were also useful when reflecting on the key moments of each focus group and my initial reactions, which assisted in the analytical phase of the project.

Some difficulties occurred in the transcription process for one of the earlier focus groups. In one farmers’ market focus group with all women, voices were hard to distinguish, so transcripts were returned to participants to clarify what was said and who made particular contributions to the conversation. In all subsequent focus groups, each participant was asked to say their name and offer some brief details about themselves, to help the transcriber identify the different voices. I listened to the recordings of each focus group, as I read the
transcripts, to complete as many gaps in the transcript as possible and to check for quality. There were occasions when laughter or other noises prevented the transcriber from hearing some parts of a conversation, so the transcript and recording was returned to the appropriate participants for clarification.
Appendix III: Focus group questions

1. What are your motivations for using a community garden/CSA enterprise/farmers’ market/fresh food market/supermarket as your primary place of food procurement?

2. What is your experience of social interactions when you procure/purchase your food?

3. What is your experience of community when shopping for (procuring) food?

4. What is your understanding of ‘appreciation of food’?

Additional question:

5. How do you understand a ‘socially’ sustainable food system? (Explanation of a food system is given)

Probing questions – examples

Community gardeners

1. Can you tell me more about social interactions at the garden? Is that something important to you?
2. Tell me more about your desire for self-sufficiency
3. Are you concerned about food safety issues?
4. You have mentioned your children and grandchildren – do you see benefit in family exposure to the garden?

CSA members

1. How would you describe your participation in the food system? How much involvement do you want in the food system?
2. How important is your relationship to the farmer?
3. How would you describe your level of trust in the current food system?

Farmers’ market shoppers

1. You have spoken of the people with whom you build relationships at the markets, so how important and how strong are these relationships? Can you elaborate further?
2. Elsewhere farmers’ markets have sometimes been classified as exclusive. Is it your view that farmers’ markets are becoming exclusive? Is it accessible to all income groups?

3. Some have mentioned that supermarket food looks too perfect, which you now dislike. Can you tell me more about your shift in thinking about food quality? Did this come from your exposure to the farmers’ markets?

Belconnen/Fyshwick market shoppers

1. Tell me more about your social interactions while shopping
2. Can you tell me a little more about your passion for food?
3. Tell me more of your thinking about enjoying mostly a plant-based diet.

Supermarket shoppers

1. Why do you want to get the shopping done as quickly as possible?
2. So, do you do that? Do you think about who might have grown the food?
3. You think about who has cooked your food, because of the effort they have gone to.
   Why do you think you are conscious of that?
4. What do we take for granted (in relation to food)?
5. Tell me what you mean by ‘real’ food?