

**Breaking New Ground:
Women and Farm Entry in British Columbia**

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A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Sociology and Anthropology

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts (Social and Cultural Anthropology) at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

April 2006

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ABSTRACT

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The number of people entering agriculture in Canada has been decreasing over the past few decades. Despite these trends some people are still choosing to enter the sector. Many of those entering agriculture as professional farmers are women. This thesis presents a study of those women in the process of farm entry in British Columbia, Canada. Much of the literature frames women within the sector in terms of their relationship to the male dominance of agriculture. The tendency is to focus on how farm women's activities are undervalued and how women are maintained within a lesser position of power. Although the male dominance of the sector in general is not refuted, my research shows that many of the women entering the sector do not see the world they are entering as being a male dominated framework. These women are working within a social space that does not question their legitimacy as farmers and their integration within the field. The thesis explores the emergence of this alternate social space and its co-existence with the social space present within conventional agriculture. The analysis then moves beyond gender to explore how that alternate space, and the networks within it, function to mediate the challenges the women face during farm entry. The thesis concludes with several policy implications that result from the research.

Acknowledgements:

There are several people I would like to sincerely thank for their feedback, support, and encouragement throughout my research and writing process. I would like to thank the members of my thesis committee. My supervisor, Professor Katja Neves-Graca has been incredibly supportive and has given me valuable feedback and encouragement. Every conversation I have had with Katja has inspired me by her passion and I have always left her office with a reinvigorated excitement towards my work. Thank you for your energy and wisdom. I wish to also offer a very sincere thank you to Professor Homa Hoodfar. Homa has been a great friend and source of inspiration throughout my graduate career. I have learned immensely from working with her and am very thankful for the opportunities she has given me, from which I have gained valuable knowledge and skills. Homa has always been very supportive of my research and provided encouragement and reinforcements when I needed them. Professor Bill Reimer, my third reader, is an exceptional mentor. I have had the privilege of working with and being supported by Bill and the NRE (New Rural Economy Research Group) for the past three years and have continuously been struck by the amount of dedication that Bill has towards creating an environment of support for his students. Thank you Bill for your flexibility and the long hours you have put in towards helping me work through my thesis process.

There are several other people that I would like to acknowledge. I would like to thank Professor Sally Cole and the members of my writing class. The feedback that I have received throughout the past four months has been integral to the process of getting my thoughts down on the page and formulated into the chapters which appear in this thesis.

Thank you for your support, encouragement, and constructive criticism. I would also like to thank those with whom I took classes with in my first year. You have been great friends and the amazing conversations that we have had, both in and outside of class, have inspired my desire to learn and to push the limits of my capacity. I would also like to thank all those I have worked with at the NRE. It has been a great experience and I highly value the friendships I have made there.

I also owe a sincere thank you to the women whose voices and actions are at the core of this thesis. Thank you for the generosity you have offered me throughout my time in B.C. I am exceptionally grateful for having had the privilege of spending time with you and hearing your stories. You are all a great inspiration to me.

Finally, I would like to thank my family. They are my best friends and have been there through all of the intense moments of my master's degree. They have shared my moments of exhilaration and have helped me through the times when I have felt bewildered and overwhelmed. You are incredible people, and I love you very much.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

When you see that this thesis is about women in agriculture, what comes to your mind? Allow yourself to paint a picture. What do you see? Do you see a farm? Is it a cattle ranch, a large grain farm, or perhaps an organic market garden? Where is the woman? Is she near the barn, in an old farmhouse, or out in the garden? Allow your mind to develop her character some. What role does she play in the farm? Is she a farmer, or a farmer's wife? Does she do farm chores, take care of the children, feed the animals, drive a tractor, make managerial decisions?

Perhaps we should take a step back and ask first what it is that comes to your mind when I you think of agriculture. Do you think about tractors driving across the prairies, or cattle out on the range? Do old westerns or more recent films such as *Brokeback Mountain* venture their way into your head? Or maybe you think about your grandparents' farm where you used to marvel in the extent of freedom you felt when you would go to visit them. Maybe in contrast the word agriculture makes you think of a sector in decline or maybe a sector becoming increasingly productive in its concentrated form. Maybe you focus on issues such as the BSE crisis, the avian flu, borders and politics, or youth leaving the farm to look for more economically viable options in the city.

But for now let's go back to the image on the farm itself. Picture the farmer. Who is it? Is it a man or a woman? How old is he or she? Up until this point it is probably unlikely that when you thought of a farmer it was a picture of a woman that came to your mind. You probably also did not picture farmers as young, or new to the field either. This picture would be consistent with the statistics of who is farming, breakdown of age

categories, and numbers of farms and farmers over time. It also reflects much of the research that has been done on agriculture. Much of the literature on farmers has looked at issues surrounding an aging population, a decrease in total numbers of farmers, or the difficulties of continuing to farm in an age of decline of the family farm. The tendency within the literature on women in agriculture has been to look at agriculture as a male-dominated sector, and women within it in terms of their relationship to men or that male-dominance. For the most part, the pictures that likely came to your head, and what the literature and statistics reveal, is the predominant reality of agriculture. However, just because a certain reality predominates, does not mean that it is the reality of all, or the major factors affecting all people's lives who find themselves within the parameters of whatever is being described.

This thesis in many ways is about positionality and alternate realities within dominant pictures and generalized descriptions. This thesis is about women who are farmers. It is about women getting into agriculture in a time when most people are leaving. It is about the experience of feeling satisfied with having chosen farming as a career path, and about not feeling like gender discrimination permeates one's life and farm work. It is about supportive social spaces that do not focus on gender, and it is about how the challenges present in a sector that is struggling are mediated by that same social space that makes gender not a major frame of reference. This thesis is about recognizing that positionality matters and that multiple experiences can exist within dominant frameworks. In the end, it is also about going beyond gender within a study that has women as its focus for analysis.

This thesis is also about farm entry. It therefore entails an analysis of the various challenges associated with this process. Getting into farming is not easy, especially in light of the difficulties facing the sector. Land values are high, banks are relatively unwilling to give loans to small farmers, and the profit margins in agriculture are minimal at best. Farming also necessitates a considerable amount of knowledge, infrastructure and resources. For those without a farming background it is not always obvious how to go about achieving them. For those with a farming background and who are taking over the family farm, resources are still often difficult to come by. Furthermore, many of these challenges are at times heightened because of the additional constraints associated with being a woman in the sector. This thesis, however, is about more than just the challenges; it is also about several of the unique ways in which they are being mediated. The thesis looks at the role of social interaction and networks as significant players in facilitating the farm entry process.

I begin these tasks with an exploration of the research context. I look at recent trends in agriculture in Canada and British Columbia (B.C.) and provide an overview of women in the farming sector. I then proceed to a description of my methodology in the field. In the sections *Why Women* and *Positioning Myself*, I provide an explanation for why I have chosen this topic of enquiry and why I have gone about doing the research in the way I have. The following three chapters are based on my fieldwork and elaborate on the women's lives and experiences, as well as their narratives. In chapter 4, I describe the women farmers' experiences related to gender and set the stage for an understanding of what I call the alternate social space. In chapter 5, I describe several characteristics of this alternate social space and enter into a theoretical discussion of the relationship between

the dominant and the alternate. I then proceed in chapter 6 to discuss how this alternate space has contributed to the women's lives beyond the alleviation of gender discrimination by focusing on the women's networks and how they mediate the various challenges of farm entry. In the conclusion I discuss the contributions of the thesis and discuss the implications of my research for policy.

Chapter 2: Situating the Research

The Canadian Context of Agriculture

The women whose lives inform this thesis are all entering into a sector that, for the most part, is facing serious challenges in terms of its economic viability. Nonetheless, these women are choosing to enter it. For the most part, my research shows that these women are entering the sector in innovative ways that, at the very least, make the challenges they face seem less present and overwhelming. However, before we move on to the women and their situations, we must first look back to history and then examine the current context of agriculture.

Before 1931 the majority of Canada's population lived in rural areas with many people's livelihoods depending directly on agriculture (Statistics Canada, 2001a). Since that time people have slowly been moving out of the sector, either migrating to other types of employment within rural areas or moving to cities. In 1956 those living on farms became the minority in rural Canada and their proportion has continued to decline since that time (Statistics Canada, 2001b). An examination of the changes in agriculture over this time period sheds light into why this has been occurring.

Agricultural production since post-WWII has experienced a large degree of re-organization and a shift towards increasing mechanization. This has resulted in a highly productive agriculture that has tended towards over-production and resulted in an agricultural crisis and an exodus of farmers (Jean, 1997). The agricultural sector has also integrated forms of industrial production and has gone through a process of concentration – both vertically and horizontally (Winson, 1993). For example, in 1996 36% of gross

farm receipts and almost the same share of total net revenues were generated by 3.1% of farms while 50% of all farms had net-cash income of less than \$4,200 (Wallace, 2002, p. 128). Part and parcel of this process has been a shift in power from the farmer to the agro-food corporate sector (Friedmann, 1990, 1993, 1995; Winson, 1993). Although 98% of all farms are still family-operated businesses (Canadian Federation of Agriculture 2006; Jean 1997) many of the smaller scale family farms have found it increasingly difficult to compete under these new conditions. Amongst larger industrial farms, government policies that have encouraged the changes occurring in the sector (Qualman & Wiebe, 2002), and increasing costs of production, the resulting trend has been either to grow big or get out. For many farmers the latter has been the only option. In Canada between 1996 and 2001 the total number of farmers¹ decreased by just over 10%. This equals a loss of 40,000 farmers in 5 years. (Statistics Canada, 1996, 2005).

For many who have elected to stay in the sector, the result has been the need to seek off-farm employment. Since 1990 the number of farm operators working off the farm has increased, with 45.6% of women and 44.2% of men working off the farm in 2000 (Statistics Canada, 2006a). For farm households that same year, the net farm income contributed only 18 cents for every dollar earned (Statistics Canada, 2005b).

¹ Statistics Canada defines a farmer, or farm operator, as “those persons responsible for the day-to-day management of decisions made in the operation of the census farm”. The definition of a census farm is “a farm, ranch or other agricultural operation which produces at least one of the following products intended for sale: crops, livestock, poultry, animal products, greenhouse or nursery products, Christmas trees, mushrooms, sod, honey and maple syrup products” (Statistics Canada, 2006d). In order to delimit my total area of research, I used more restricted definitions than those used by Statistics Canada. The criteria for being classified as a farm in my study are food production (ie do not include horse, sod, nursery farms etc) and eligibility for farm tax status based on British Columbia regulations – farms of 2 acres must gross at least \$2,500 followed by an incremental increase in total gross income according to farm size. Therefore, some of the farms and farm operators included in the statistics would not have been included in my study.

In light of the difficulties facing the sector, many young people that grew up on farms are leaving to find more viable economic opportunities (Gale, 1993). In his study of farmers in the US, Gale has shown that migration away from farming has led to a general decline in birth rates. These demographic changes have decreased the overall “pool” of young farmers because of a decrease in the number of youth growing up on farms. Gale concludes that even in areas where commodity prices are relatively high, demographic changes and off-farm prospects will continue to lead to a decline in farm entrants. In Canada in 1991, farmers under the age of 35 represented 19.9% of all farmers (Statistics Canada, 2006a). Just ten years later that number had dropped to 11.5% (Statistics Canada, 2006a). Coinciding with this trend is an increase in the percentage of older farmers, with the average age of farmer now at 49.9% (Statistics Canada, 2006e).

Furthermore, statistics show that younger farmers are more likely than older farmers to have a non-farm job at the same time as they work on the farm, with the proportion increasing. Between 1990 and 2000, of all farmers under the age of 35 those working off the farm went from 46% to 56%, with almost half of them working more than 40 hours per week at their off-farm jobs. (Statistics Canada, 2006c).

The effects of these changes on agricultural production and on rural areas are significant. Many of the youth who are not choosing to make a go of the family farm are instead moving away from their region. This is coinciding with a trend of an overall population decrease in rural areas. In general it is the youth who are choosing to leave for an urban life while the elderly population is opting to stay (Leblanc & Noreau, 2000, R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. 2002). Shifts in agriculture are feeding into this general trend and rural areas are feeling the decline in economic vitality; many rural areas are

finding it difficult to sustain a lively economy and social environment. The loss of farm population as well as a decrease in disposable income for those that remain has contributed to this trend; farmers have less purchasing power and ability to feed into and support the local economy.

In light of all of these changes on the ground, one must look to the broader picture to see what has influenced these shifts. For example, one connection that can be made is with changes in the international arena. The U.S. first suggested the reduction of agricultural tariffs and subsidies during the Uruguay Round (1986-1994) of the GATT (Schaeffer, 1995) and since the signing of the Agreement on Agriculture, Canada, as a member country, has agreed to “improve market access and reduce trade-distorting subsidies in agriculture” (WTO, 2006). This has resulted in Canada committing to loosening its borders to the flow of agricultural products and increasing competition for Canadian producers both inside and outside Canadian borders. Since the opening up of trade between countries, agriculture has also been a continuous point of contention. As countries from the majority world² gain influence and power in world trade talks and make headway towards a more level international trade playing field, pressure has increased to reduce our farm subsidies and protectionist policies (CBC., 2005).

The increasing permeability of the borders has also brought agriculture into the realm of international politics in ways that it had never before experienced. Issues such as dumping, concerns over food safety, and political maneuvering have taken centre stage. A good example of this is the recent dispute between the U.S. and Japan over Canadian

² The majority world is a term used to describe what is typically classified as the third world or developing world. Rather than using terminology which places the west as the center or basis for comparison, this term reflects the reality that the west is actually the minority and all other countries comprise the majority. The phrase also represents an attempt to shift the power dynamics inherent in the terminology.

cattle, Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE or mad cow disease) and beef imports. Before the early 1990s such a dispute would have had a much smaller effect than that which occurred in 2004. Between 1991 and 2001 Canadian beef exports went from approximately 100,000 to 500,000 tonnes (Agriculture & Agri-Food Canada, 2006). Canadian production went far beyond both the Canadian consumption capacity and that of the slaughtering facilities, and Canada's cattle industry became dependent on the export market. Therefore, when the U.S. and Japan closed their borders to all Canadian cattle and beef products in 2004 after a case of BSE was found in Alberta, the effect was dramatic. In 2003 Canada exported \$596,051,000 worth of cattle and calves. In 2004 they exported \$0 (British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, 2005). Having to rely on the domestic market and processing facilities alone, Canadian producers found the prices they received for their cattle were below the cost of production.

Narrowing in on Agriculture in B.C.

In many ways agriculture in B.C. reflects trends in the rest of Canada. For example many people heard about the effects of the BSE crisis on farms in Alberta, however, 30% of agricultural production in B.C. is based on cattle, which means that many farmers there also felt the impact of the closure of the borders. However, there are also ways in which the British Columbian agricultural sector is unique. In order to properly understand British Columbia as a context for the study of women in agriculture and farm entry, I now turn to a description of demographic characteristics, agricultural production, and women in agriculture.

Demographic Characteristics

In terms of demographic characteristics, many similar trends are occurring in British Columbia as in the rest of Canada. In B.C. the overall decline in number of farm operators was 8% from 1996 to 2001. This compares with the overall Canadian average of 10% and puts B.C. in second place, after Alberta, for the smallest overall decrease. British Columbia also experienced a 7.1% decrease in farms for that same period. As has occurred across the country, the number of farm operators in British Columbia in the youngest age category, 15 – 35, has decreased significantly with a loss of 36.5% from 1996-2001, and a decrease of 42.5% from 1991 to 2001. In 2001, farmers of this age group made up only 8% of all farmers while those between 35 and 55 made up 54%, and those above 55 at 38.1% (see Figure 1). As a means of comparison, in the general workforce in B.C. those under the age of the 35 make up 21.7% of all self-employed workers (Statistics Canada, 2006k).



Figure 1: Young operators continue to lose share to older operators in British Columbia. Source: Statistics Canada, 2006k.

Agricultural Production

Agricultural production in British Columbia is fairly diverse (see Figure 2). In 2001 there were 17,382 farms with gross receipts above \$2,499 per year. Of these farms, cattle ranching and farming make up the largest amount (5,295 farms or 30%), followed by other animal production (3,305 farms or 16%), fruit and tree nut farming (2,538 farms or 15%), and other crop farming (2,197 farms or 13%). Several other farm types remain significantly represented such as greenhouse, nursery and floriculture production (1,678 farms or 10%), poultry and egg production (977 farms or 6%), vegetable and melon farming (538 farms or 3%) and sheep and goat farming (461 or 3%). (Statistics Canada, 2006f).

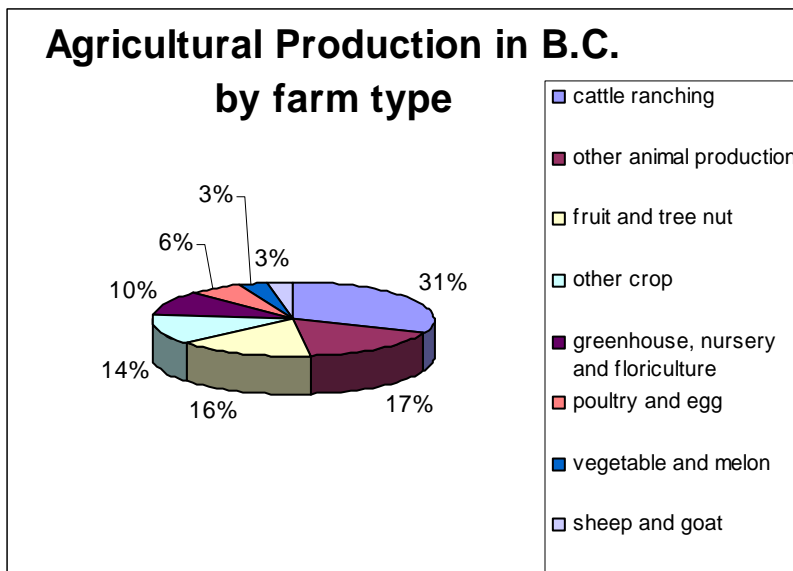


Figure 2: Agricultural Production in B.C. by Farm Type

This diversity is in part due to the wide range of agricultural zones in the province: for example, the rangelands³ and mountainous climates of the Cariboo, Bulkley-Nechako, Peace River and Kootenay regions are suitable for cattle ranching and

³ Rangeland is land suitable for livestock rearing and grazing.

other livestock farming; the dry arid conditions of the Thompson-Nicola and Okanagan regions are suitable for fruit production and rangelands; and the fertile soils of the Fraser Valley support vegetables, fruits and livestock production (see Figure 3).



Figure 3: British Columbia Regional Districts. (Source: Wikipedia, 2006)

The size of the farms range considerably by region as well. The average size of farm in the Peace River region is 1,210 acres while in the Vancouver Island-Coast and

the Lower Mainland-Southwest regions they are 54 and 45 acres respectively (Statistics Canada, 2006g). These compare to the Canadian average of 676 acres (Statistics Canada, 2006j).

Women in Agriculture: A Picture of Canada and B.C.

Across Canada, the proportion of women farm operators was 26% in 2001. The overall proportion of women farmers has remained relatively stable over the past ten years, despite a decrease in numbers of women farmers below the age of 35. In addition, the proportion of farms across Canada run exclusively by men has decreased in the past 10 years, while those run exclusively by women has increased. (Statistics Canada, 2006k). These numbers indicate an overall increase in the presence of women in agriculture.

Across the country, women in general do not seem to prefer any one particular type of farming over another, however, women running the farm exclusively on their own have more horse farms, greenhouses and goat farms (Statistics Canada, 2006l). Furthermore women represent a higher proportion (31%) on organic farms than for all farm types (26.3%) (Statistics Canada, 2006l). In terms of farm size, women that are sole operators tend to have smaller farms than those run by men, or by men and women together; 80% of farms run exclusively by women have total sales under \$50,000 versus 50% for the latter group (Statistics Canada, 2006l)

In British Columbia there are 30,320 total farm operators, 10,980 or 36% of which are women (Statistics Canada, 2006h, 2006k). This is 10% higher than the national average of 26%. Of those 10,980, 19% are running the farms by themselves while the

other 81% are farms with two or more operators, one of whom is a woman. (Statistics Canada, 2006h). B.C. is also the only province where the total number of farms run either exclusively by women, or where at least one of the operators is a woman, is more common than farms run exclusively by men (Statistics Canada, 2006l)

There are several differences between men and women farmers in B.C. that are worth mentioning. The median age of women farmers in British Columbia is slightly lower than men at 49 and 52 years respectively. For women, this has increased by 2 years since 1996, and is higher than the national average of 48 years of age. (Statistics Canada, 2006k). In terms of non-farm work, women farmers in B.C. work off the farm less than men, at 49.7% versus 54.6%, while both work off the farm more than the national averages of 45.6% and 44.2%. (Statistics Canada, 2006k).

The proportion of those farming with another operator, as well as those farming alone, tends to be higher in the same areas. The region with the highest presence of women farmers is the Vancouver Island/ Coast where 41% of the total farmers are women and 10%, or 435 farms, are run by a woman on her own. (Statistics Canada, 2006i).

In this chapter I have outlined the context within which the women I interviewed are farming. Agricultural production in Canada over the past several decades has gone through significant changes, and many smaller scale farmers have been forced to leave the sector or find off-farm work. This has been even more significant for young farmers. Many of these same trends have occurred in B.C. However, in contrast to the rest of Canada, women make up a more significant portion of farm operators. B.C. therefore is an interesting location from which to learn about women in agriculture and farm entry.

In approaching this topic, I had several questions which propelled my fieldwork. I was interested to know the types of agriculture women were entering and how they were approaching that process. I wanted to identify what the women saw as the major challenges and what factors were helping them to overcome them. I was also curious to know why they were choosing to farm, and how they perceived the process of farm entry, the challenges they were facing, and the ways in which those challenges were being mediated. I was also interested in how their gender played into the overall process and in particular the challenges that the women faced. Finally, I also wanted to locate how these processes – farm entry, the challenges, and the ways in which they were being mediated – were reflected in the women’s daily experiences. The following chapter is a description of the approach I used to research these questions in the field.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Approaching the Field

During my fieldwork I focused on both the daily practices and the women's narratives. Following the works of Bourdieu (1977), De Certeau (1988) and Jackson (1996), I felt it was important to focus on the everyday acts that make up the women's lives. De Certeau states that it is important to examine the practices themselves rather than looking to a theoretical analysis of various structural operatives which shape those practices. Meaning is to be found within the acts, or 'silent procedures' and the thoughts which construct it. De Certeau calls these acts the minor procedures or discourses that form a part of everyday practice but that do not reflect the dominant discourses of society. They do not influence society's normative institutions but yet still influence people's everyday lives.

I also draw from Jackson's (1996) emphasis on finding meaning within the experience itself rather than in the knowledge, thought process, and language behind those actions. Jackson explains how the reduction of experience to theoretical reflection only captures part of the significance of experiences. Instead he challenges anthropologists to explore meanings based within the experience itself. Although I feel that one should also pay attention to the thought processes and contextual information that coincide with daily practices, I feel that Jackson's call to focus on the experience is an important component of understanding the women's daily lives. There is a certain degree of meaning that can be best understood through observation of the experience itself, such as how the women have embodied the practice of farming, or how their body seems to adapt and respond to different kinds of work. I do not believe that this

information can be separated from the women's context, narratives and thought processes, however, it is also valuable information that has helped me more fully understand the women's experiences as farmers.

I also drew to a certain degree from my own experiences. Because of my background in farming, which I describe further in the following section *Positioning Myself*, I was able to gain insights that I might not have otherwise. Having an understanding of, to mention a few, the intensity of agricultural work, the ebbs and flows of one's bodily capacity and emotional state, and the integration of farmwork into the daily spheres of life, helped me understand what the women were going through. For example, part of my fieldwork was done during the late fall at the end of the farming season. If I had not understood from past experience what it feels like to come to the end of a season and be totally physically and emotionally exhausted from months of continual non-stop work, I might have interpreted the women as not being as passionate or as devoted to the work as they were. In other words, my experience in some ways allowed me to fill in some of the context that I could not otherwise have gained because of the limited amount of time I had to spend in the field. At the same time, I am aware that there is a fine balance between assuming too much and using my past experiences to understand my fieldwork. I have attempted to remain cognizant of this throughout my fieldwork and my analysis. I was continually asking myself questions such as whether I thought a woman was feeling a particular way because it is the way that I have felt, or because there were real indications from her that this was how she feeling.

During my fieldwork, following these minor procedures and focusing on the meaning of the experience itself, meant I was able to obtain a sense of the challenges the

women were facing on a daily level. It also allowed me insight into how they were experienced/ embodied and understood by the women. Focusing on women's daily practices allowed me to situate the larger context and challenges they faced and to identify their significance for the women on a daily basis. For example, the literature suggests that women in agriculture are working within a male dominated sector which has a significant impact on the women's lives. During my fieldwork I found that the women experienced very few instances of gender related discrimination on a daily basis. The lack of presence of gender discrimination for the women in their daily activities indicates that the male dominance of the sector is less present and plays a less significant role in the lives of the women I interviewed than for those women described in the literature on women in agriculture. This finding, which I explore further in chapter 4 and 5, highlights how focusing on the women's daily experiences sheds light onto the importance of larger issues.

Focusing on the women's daily activities also allowed me further insight into parts of their lives which are generally not reflected upon, but that are significant nonetheless. For example, it allowed me to see significance in little acts, such as positive attitudes, or the support of a grandmother – actions which were important facilitators in the journey towards negotiating the challenges the women faced, and that may not have surfaced without a focus on daily experiences and interactions.

In addition to focusing on daily practice, I also paid attention to the women's narratives. Focusing on both practice and narrative allowed me a much richer and more comprehensive understanding of the women's lives. In the case described above of male dominance and gender discrimination, for example, my observation was reinforced by the

women during our interviews. They rarely mentioned gender related challenges unless I brought them forward, and even at that point tended to emphasize the little importance they played in their lives. However, if I had only done the interviews and not focused on observing their daily practices, I would have missed the significance of how this played out in their daily activities. Similarly, if I had only focused on daily practices I would not have understood the extent to which this lack of gender discrimination was reflected in the women's lives more generally, nor how they perceived their position as women farmers.

In order to emphasize the importance of the women's narratives, I allowed much of my research to be directed by subjects brought up by the women. My fieldwork was divided into two sections, the first based on interviews and participant observation, and the second primarily on interviews. During the first stage of my fieldwork I focused on what the women identified as being important. I listened to their stories as I worked side by side with them, and during my interviews allowed the discussion to flow conversation-style. It was stemming from these conversations that I later constructed my major categories of enquiry for the second part of my research. Although I used others' research and theories in order to identify points of interest from which to begin my fieldwork, following the principles of Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), once in the field I made sure to give ample space for theory to emerge from the research itself. Therefore my major categories of analysis and the theoretical framework I used to analyze my fieldwork originated out of the women's lives, their daily practice, and what they identified as being important. I feel that as an anthropologist, I should tell the women's

stories and perspectives and not just analyze them in terms of outside theoretical frameworks.

My fieldwork would have benefited from having spent more time at each farm. Although my time spent with the women during my first stage was intensive and fairly comprehensive, my understandings would have been much more complete if I had been able to stay with them for a much longer period of time, and during different stages of the year and farming season. Nonetheless, I was able to get a sense of the women's lives and encountered many of the same stories during the second stage of my fieldwork – an indication that my fieldwork was comprehensive of at least certain aspects.

In the Field

My fieldwork entailed two stages. During the first, I spent two and a half months visiting five farms spending anywhere from a week to two weeks on each. While at these farms I worked alongside the women in their daily activities. For every farm but one⁴ I lived with the women in their homes and made my schedule coincide with theirs, waking when they awoke, working when they worked, and traveling when they traveled. This meant that I was able to observe the women within a much broader context than simply during typical 'farming' activities and obtained a sense of the context of their lives. For example, spending time with them allowed me to see how, in the peak of the farming season, there is often very little in a farmer's life that does not directly relate to farming activities.

⁴ One of the farmers did not have a permanent living space at the farm, and also requested that I only spend time with her during certain hours. Although I did spend some time with her during non-working hours, our contact was more limited than with the other farmers.

The second stage of my fieldwork was comprised of 28 interviews, 3 informal farm visits, attendance of two conferences, and a visit to a trade show. I spent a period of a month and a half on this stage of the fieldwork. The interviews were based on the significant categories identified during my first fieldwork stage (see Appendix 1: Interview Guide). For over half of these interviews I was able to spend time with the women on the farm, either working with them for the day, or as part of a personalized farm tour. I have used the data gathered during this stage of the fieldwork to complement and nuance my analysis based on the five case study farmers. This second stage of my fieldwork also provided me with valuable context for understanding the process of farming and farm entry.

The method I used for identifying the women who became the basis of my research was a semi-structured snowball sampling procedure. I contacted 12 of the 16 Ministry of Land and Agriculture offices, excluding the other four because of remoteness of the region and therefore non-inclusion in my research. I spoke most often with the agrologist⁵ for each region as s/he is the person with the most direct contact with farmers. Of the 10 offices approached, seven supplied me with names of women to contact. I also spoke with eleven farm or women related organizations and six farm associations, almost half of which supplied me with contacts (see Appendix 2: List of Associations, Organizations, and Departments Contacted).

When speaking with the agrologists and people working for the farm organizations and associations I began by explaining that I would be doing research on

⁵ An agrologist is someone with a university degree in agriculture and often works as a consultant in the agricultural sector.

women in agriculture in B.C. and farm start-up or farm transfer⁶ and that I was looking for contacts of women farmers who had recently started. For the most part the people with whom I spoke were often unsure as to when farms had started up. I therefore instead began asking them to provide contact information for any women farmers that they could think of, and told them I would follow up with the farmers themselves in order to determine whether they fit into my research criteria. In order to further elaborate on the term ‘women farmers’ I would explain that I was looking for women who identified themselves as running or managing the farm.

In order to meet the criteria for my study the women had to be actively engaged in activities that relate directly to the farm and had to self-identify as managing it – whether on her own or with someone else. The distinction is not clear-cut between these women, which I refer to as professional woman farmers or just women farmers, and farm women or farmers’ wives⁷ who contribute significantly to the farm indirectly through household activities. As much of the literature on women in agriculture points out, this latter status is an unfair description of these women since they are fundamental to the functioning of the farm (Ghorayshi 1989; Shaver 1996; Shortall 1993; Whitmore 1991). For example, a woman who takes care of the children, the cleaning, and the preparation of food and general chores during harvest season frees up the person doing the farm work so that s/he may work 12-14 hour days non-stop. Without that support, the farmer would not be able to bring in the harvest under the time constraints necessary. Along those same lines, many women have left the farm in order to gain off-farm income without which the farm would not be able to continue.

⁶ Farm transfer refers to the process of a family member taking over the farm, usually from their parents.

⁷ Note that throughout the rest of the thesis I refer to this category of women as farm women rather than farmers’ wives because I see them as having an identity beyond being someone’s wife.

However, for the purposes of my research, I draw this distinction between women farmers and farm women in order to select women that are actively engaged in farming activities directly. Selection of research participants along these lines has however, had limitations. Farming being identified as a male activity generally throughout society places constraints on women's readiness to identify as a 'farmer' and my method of gaining access to the women has also meant incorporating other people's preconceived notions of what constitutes a woman farmer. Interestingly, the women agrologists were consistently able to name more women farmers than the men I spoke with. This is likely a product of both women paying more attention to the women farmers they encounter, as well as being more predisposed to identify women as farmers as opposed to farm women.

From the list of contacts I received from the various organizations, associations and ministry offices, I set aside those that I knew did not fit into my research criteria based on the information already collected; I disregarded those who were farming for more than ten years or who were located in regions too remote to feasibly visit during my fieldwork. Of those remaining, I attempted to contact them by phone before entering the field. I began each conversation with a brief description of my research, and proceeded to gather information about their type of farm, their location, the number of years they had been in operation, if they were operating the farm alone or with someone, whether they were full or part time on the farm, and requested a brief description of their operation. I would also ask each farmer to suggest other women they knew who were farming that I could contact.

Depending on the degree to which I felt the women fit into my research criteria, I would ask them if a farm visit of either a day or a couple weeks was of interest to them. I

would also explain that I intended on exchanging my farm labour for an interview and for spending time with them during their daily activities. With the information that I gathered from the associations, organizations, ministry offices and from the farmers, I constructed a database of 87 women farmers in B.C. From that initial list I attempted to contact 49 of the women. The other 38 women I had already received enough information in order to determine that they did not fit into my research criteria. Of the 49 I attempted to contact, I was able to reach 44. Of those 44, I narrowed the list down to 35 women who fit into my research criteria. Of those 35, two declined to participate in my research.

My primary triaging criteria for selecting those 35 women was length of time farming; I selected those that had been farming for less than ten years⁸. I did not include widows in this category, except in one case where she had started up a significant portion of the operation after her husband's death. After having selected based on length of time, I then looked at whether the women identified themselves as running the operation, and if they were on the farm full or part time. In cases where the woman worked off the farm, I tried to decipher whether she was still involved in managerial decisions and if so, included her in my list. Finally their selection also depended on their willingness to participate in my research. (See Appendix 3 for a list of the farmers that participated in my research and their farm's characteristics).

From this larger list, I then selected a group of five farmers with whom I did the majority of my field work. The five main case study farms were selected because they

⁸ Although my criteria for selecting the women was based on length of time farming (less than ten years) I also added two farmers that had been farming for longer than ten years because I felt the list of those farming under ten years underrepresented certain sectors. I felt including these other types of farming were important in order to get a broader understanding of women's experiences within agriculture. I also wanted to include a longer term perspective for which to further contextualize and understand those involved in the farm entry process.

had started within the past four years. Between them each of the following categories were represented: farm transfer and start-up; alternative and conventional operations; land ownership as well as leasing arrangements; and a variety of farm types (cow-calf, sheep and vegetable). I spent between one to two weeks on each of the five farms, working alongside the women in their daily activities. I also gathered life histories and conducted semi-structured interviews which focused on the process of farm-start up or transfer. I conducted semi-structured interviews with the other 28 farmers that were not selected for the first stage of my fieldwork during the last month and a half of my research.

Finally I also participated in two conferences and visited with women from a farm women's organization who were working at a trade show. The first conference was slightly activist in nature and focused on the food system within B.C. It attracted a range of people from food security advocates (ie. advocates of access to food and poverty issues) to farmers. The second conference was put on by the B.C. Farm Women's Network, which is an association of farm women who meet annually. For the most part this is a support organization for both the women that are involved in it and for the larger farming community. Most of the women who attended this conference had been involved in agriculture for many years. Finally, the group participating in the trade show, the Cattlebelles, was similar in nature to the B.C. Farm Women's Network, although possibly more political in its activities. The Cattlebelles were cooking for the trade show as a fundraiser.

Based on my initial list of farmers which included women in all stages of farming, I found that women were more represented in alternative (see definition below) rather

than in conventional forms of agriculture. For those farming for more than 10 years, 20 or 36% were in conventional, 35 or 62% in alternative and 1 or 2% doing both conventional and alternative agriculture (see Table 1). This trend became even more apparent as I looked at those who have been involved in farm transfer or farm start-up within the past ten years. Out of 33 farmers, 5 farmers or 15% were in conventional, 27 farmers or 82% were in alternative and 1 or 3% in both conventional and alternative agriculture (see Table 1). Although my list of farmers is not necessarily representative of the larger population of women in agriculture in B.C., the findings do suggest that there is a relationship between women entering the sector and alternative agriculture.

Table 1: Recent versus More Established Women Farmers and Participation in Conventional versus Alternative Agriculture

		Alternative Agriculture		Conventional Agriculture		Both Alternative & Conventional		Total (N)
		N	%	N	%	N	%	
Length of Years Farming	More than ten years	34	63%	19	35%	1	2%	54
	Less than ten years	27	82%	5	15%	1	3%	33

The definition of alternative agriculture that I use for this research is based on two main criteria: production technique, and marketing route.⁹ To begin with, if the production technique leads the farm product to be part of a niche market, it is classified as alternative. For example, livestock are generally raised on both pasture (grass) and grain. However, some farmers do not feed grain to their animals and raise them entirely

⁹ Because I was unable to find a comprehensive definition of alternative agriculture, I have had to construct my own definition. In order to do so, I have drawn from common conceptions of alternative agriculture as based on environmental or healthier production methods (production technique) and as type of marketing.

on grass. This is known as grass-fed production and is thought to be both healthier for the consumer and the animal. Similarly some producers are employing organic production techniques which also lead to a niche market for their product. Secondly, the method through which a product is marketed is also a basis for being classified as alternative versus agriculture. The most common form of selling farm products is indirectly through wholesalers, farm marketing boards, or auctions. If alternative routes are used for marketing, such as farm gate sales, farmers' markets, or other forms of direct marketing, then the farm is defined as alternative for the purposes of this research.

Out of the 33 farmers I interviewed, eight were involved in non-alternative farming. These were comprised of cow-calf or yearling operations¹⁰, a potato farm and a layer operation¹¹. However, two of these operations were also engaged in alternative farming as another aspect of their operation. In the case of a yearling operation the farmer also grew direct marketed saskatoon berries, which she was planning to bring under organic certification. In the case of the poultry operation, the woman was operating a market garden with farm gate sales. She had also recently closed down the poultry aspect of her operation and had turned to focusing solely on the market garden. Of those involved in conventional production, one was in the process of farm transfer, two had been farming for up to five years, three had been farming between 5 to 10 years, and two for more than ten years.

¹⁰ A cow-calf operation is a farm that raises calves from birth to just under a year. The calf is then sold to a feed-lot or a yearling operation. A yearling operation is where calves are raised from one to two years of age. The yearlings are generally raised on both grain and pasture. A feedlot is where cattle are fed grain in order to bulk up the animal for slaughter.

¹¹ A layer operation is where poultry are raised for egg production. Chickens bred for egg production are called layers, whereas chickens bred for meat production are called broilers.

On the other hand, 27 of the 33 farmers were engaged in alternative farming and included: organic, grass-fed and direct marketed livestock operations; organic and/or direct marketed fruit and vegetable production; organic goat dairies; an organic vineyard; a direct marketed fruit winery; and an integrated pest management crop consulting business. Of those involved in alternative agriculture, three were at the stage of running or having run a trial farm, two were planning their farm, two were doing an apprenticeship, one was in the process of farm transfer, twelve had been farming for five years or less, seven had been farming between 6 and 10 years, and one had been farming for more than 10 years.

Why Women?

My analysis is not intended to provide a comparison across gender lines. The research that I did was with women working in agriculture. Although the men I came across during my research were present and contributed to the larger context and broader understanding that I have of the women, they were not the focus. I did not do any formal interviews with men. This does not mean that I did not have long conversations with men that lasted for several hours while working alongside them in the field, over dinner or while driving long distances. These conversations were informative and valuable but not systematic. Instead I tried to get a sense of how they related to the women, their work, their support systems, and their identity, to name just a few. I did not collect information on what types of farming men were starting, or how their strategies were similar or different from those of the women. This does not mean that I did not hear their stories and it does not mean that their voices will not be heard within my thesis. However, it

does mean that the purpose of my research was not to draw comparisons between men and women but rather to describe the lives of the women within their broader context. For example, when I say that women tended to be drawn towards alternative forms of agriculture, I do not know if this is more or less so than men. I can not say if men seemed to be drawn to alternative agriculture for similar reasons.

I discuss this here because it is at times difficult to discuss women alone. Much of the literature analyzes women in agriculture as they relate to men, or the male dominance of the sector. I also find that there is an expectation that one would draw comparisons; that my data would be of value because of its ability to make a statement about women as they compare to men, what they are doing more or less so, better or worse than, or with more or less difficulty. This is not my goal. I am simply trying to describe the women and their lives. My goal is to communicate their situations and to take the reader inside their worlds; why they are farming, the challenges they are facing, and to identify those things that facilitated, or not, making it through. These women's stories are worthy of being told, not because of how they differ from men, or how they relate to them, but because what they are doing is interesting in its own right. Their choice to become farmers and the process in which they are doing so is worth paying attention to, and has inherent value on their own.

Positioning Myself

I am an anthropologist, I am a farm worker, I am a young farmer, I am a student, I am a woman. I have done an apprenticeship into farming, and I have thought of starting my own farm. I did not grow up on a farm, but I have spent several of the past 6 years

working on organic vegetable and sheep farms. I have been actively engaged in food politics for several years, and I work in rural sociology. All of these identities and past experiences fed into my being not only passionate about my research topic, but also knowledgeable in ways that have shaped both my experience on the farms I visited during my research, and my ability to understand what the women were saying and doing. I believe my research topic is important because we need to find ways to encourage more people getting into and remaining in agriculture; our food system will be healthier and more sustainable if it is based on a larger, rather than smaller, population. Less farmers entails a shift towards less sustainable industrialized production techniques, whereas more farmers will increase the likelihood that production will incorporate a focus on people and stewardship of the land. There are people who want to farm and the drive away from agriculture is not because of a loss of interest, but rather a loss of viability due to agricultural policies and a monopoly of power by certain interests. For example, increases in power and size of the corporate agro-food sector have coincided with and fed into the concentration of agriculture and the loss of many small-scale to medium scale farms (Friedman 1990, 1993, 1995, Winson 1993). Rural areas also need stable or increasing populations in order to be economically and socially vital, and although approximately only 1 in 5 of those who live in rural areas are involved in agriculture directly (Statistics Canada, 2001b), the farming population is still significant; finding ways to encourage and sustain the viability of family farms is directly related to sustaining the vitality of rural areas.

I do not care to hide behind an attempted stance of neutrality. I entered the field in order to find out how to facilitate people entering the sector because I hope that this

knowledge will be useful for those who are working towards that aim. Furthermore I did so as an anthropologist because I believe that anthropological methods of enquiry allow one to understand people from a holistic and highly contextualized view point.

Anthropology is rigorous in its attempts to situate the people we research, and to understand the world from the perspective of those we learn from.

My position as someone who has worked in agriculture gave me several vantage points during my fieldwork. To begin with, I had a base understanding of the jargon, although more so for some types of farming than others, and in general it made conversing about farming easier. My body also knows how to work. I could therefore participate in the daily working activities in a way that was both productive for the farmer and for my experiential understanding and fieldwork. These assets were recognized at various times by the farmers who were appreciative of my contribution in lessening their overall workload. I too was appreciative of my ability to offer something in return for the generosity I was continually given during my fieldwork. In exchange for opening up their homes to me, and spending hours talking when they would no doubt have been focusing on the imminent pile of tasks they had to do, I was able to contribute something valuable in return.

I must admit however, that my passion for farming, for farm work, and farm survival, at times made it difficult for me to focus entirely on the anthropological side of the fieldwork. For example, there were several times while in the field that I was deeply motivated to go out and tackle the weeds in a particular section of the field because I knew that a couple of days of my full time hard work would make a significant difference to the viability of a particular crop. Although for the most part I resisted and offered my

help in ways that corresponded to me spending time with the woman, there were also a few times where I headed off into the field early in the morning to accomplish a particular task before the day had a chance to get moving.

Finally I also want to mention my experience of doing fieldwork in a non-traditional, ie not geographically bound, fieldsite (Marcus, 1995). What bound the 'community' in my research were the women's activities as farmers and not their interactions with one another. Although I was to find that in many ways their interactions, both direct and indirect, were significant in terms of their ability to continue farming, these relationships were diverse, non-linear, and in many ways intangible and abstract. During my fieldwork my point of entry was not from an apartment in a particular community that I could retreat to at the end of the day, but rather my car whose mobility and, yes, comforts, I came to love and appreciate. Throughout my fieldwork I traveled 13,000 kilometers and covered, except for a few remote regions, most of British Columbia. This allowed me to get a sense of the diversity of experiences and ways in which women were starting to farm that I would not otherwise have been able to achieve. I feel that it has greatly enriched my research as well as my fieldwork experience.

Chapter 4: “Do they feel like they are treated differently because they are women?” Gendered Spaces and Being a Farmer

Gender, Legitimacy, and Continuing to Farm: Michelle’s Story

Michelle¹² runs a yearling calf operation and has recently planted saskatoon berries. Her farm is relatively small, 55 acres, and has a somewhat desolate feeling. It is on the side of the highway with only a few trees on the property itself. Michelle bought the farm with her husband 13 years ago. It was a very large purchase for them, but it was a dream of both of theirs. They had met not that long before while helping out a local rancher. They had fallen madly in love and a few years later found themselves following their dreams and buying a piece of land. Neither had much experience with farming and the land that they could afford did not have a house on it and had very little infrastructure. They moved out a trailer to live in, built a hayshed and started running 26 cow-calf pairs. 5 years ago her husband died of a heart attack at 56 and she has decided since then to keep running the farm on her own. Two years ago she expanded the operation by putting in a half acre of saskatoon berries.

Michelle remembers even when her husband was alive people in the area didn’t really accept her. She felt it took a long time for local women to warm up to her, and that generally people seemed to find it strange that she was out there working alongside the men. But that is who she is. She doesn’t particularly like being in the kitchen and likes the manual labour parts of farming, as well as the diversity of work. She describes herself as a “jack of all trades of sorts” and can remember that as a child she was always trying to work alongside her father, trying to hammer as well as he did. She even took a training course to become a mechanic at one point when she was younger. Still people in the area

¹² All names used in the thesis are pseudonyms.

just don't seem to think it possible for her to farm on her own. "One farm lady said to me, 'I can see how you can do most jobs but fixing machinery is something you can't do.' But some women around here work quite well on machinery and have families and have a job." She also remembers one time when some neighbours came by to help her and her husband build the roof of the hayshed.

I cooked up a big meal the day before so we could feed each other and all the men showed up too. And I was the only woman, and one guy said, 'You work and also cook too.' And I said, 'Just don't tell anyone.' Later some of the wives showed up and they would hardly touch the meal I had cooked. Sometimes it feels very sexist."

Once her husband died, the feeling that it was not acceptable to be a woman farming was compounded.

After Chris died, his best friend who we had been helping out with his ranch – we had been riding range for him and helping with his cows – he said, "I am taking these cows up to my place." Right after Chris died. And I said, "You will not." It was just kind of assumed that... You don't know what people thought. It was hard to convince people. I remember saying, "Nothing is going to change around here." And of course things have changed. At that point I was convinced that I had help from people but... Yeah, it is odd what people do. Sometimes I think that people are just trying to do bad, or be mean spirited. I don't think they meant to be mean spirited about it, but when shocking things happen, they just don't think half the time.... Sometimes it is just wonderful, very helpful, other times (laughing) there are some people who are not very encouraging and I don't know why. You just have to learn to not take it hard, but I still feel like I am kind of... if I was one of the boys I would be, there would be more info and comraderie. But since I am a woman it is a little more standoffish.

Michelle does keep farming however, because she knows she can do it, and because she really loves what she does. It is hard to find good, gratifying work. After her husband died she "was racing up and down the valley where I taught school... at sawmills for people wanting to get grade 12 for the school district in Kimberley". Before she started farming she had waited tables and delivered honey for her sister while she

lived in the area. However, farming is really what she wants to be doing. When I ask her if she ever still thinks of doing something else she says maybe one day, but, in drawing a comparison to my research, states that she more or less thinks of the saskatoons as her master's degree, and she really just wants to face the challenge and see where it will go.

She also does have support. It was a friend of hers who had originally encouraged her to get into saskatoon berries. They were traveling to visit her home in Saskatchewan when she suggested it.

[During the drive] I kept saying I don't know what I can do with the farm and she took me to a couple of saskatoon farms, one in Saskatoon and one south of Calgary. She said to me, "Why don't you try that?" It was especially the one south of Calgary, closer to home here, and that just really struck a note. I said to myself, "That is exactly what I want to do." The man [at the farm] had a video about his place and about planting saskatoons. I bought it and watched it and went to the place again and asked about prices. He was very encouraging. I went up to the cashier and asked, "If there was only one person on the farm how many would you put in? 1000 for an acre or 500?" The cashier said about 500. So I went home and ordered them. People thought I was crazy. I still needed to check out markets, but I knew that I wanted to do U-Pick and that I liked working with plants and I liked gardens, so I thought, "What the heck, I'll try it."

She has also received support in terms of information and encouragement from other sources. She says that for the most part, she has relied on literature and interactions from the farm she bought her plants from for information regarding her saskatoon berries. However, last year she attended a conference for berry farmers in Edmonton. She learned a lot during the conference and also met some "really neat ladies" one night at a cocktail party for berry producers who she found to be very encouraging.

Michelle's support system has influenced her choice to continue farming. The initial encouragement from her friend, the information and resources she received from the farm she bought her seedlings from, and the "neat ladies" who she met at the

conference, have all helped ease any hesitation she has had towards expanding her operation. Therefore, even though she feels constrained by the highly gendered space that surrounds her, social spaces also exist where this is not the case. It is interesting to note that those areas of Michelle's life where she feels she is supported are related to her saskatoon berries, an alternative agricultural endeavour, whereas those aspects of her life where she feels discriminated against for being a woman are related to the conventional type of farming community that surrounds her. I explore this relationship further in the following chapter.

Despite the encouragement and support, Michelle still feels like her gender makes it difficult for her to continue farming; she feels her ability to farm is frequently questioned by those around her. She is determined and perseverant, but the lack of acceptance by those around her in the local community is a significant aspect of her daily life and makes what she does challenging. In many ways Michelle's story fits into the framework of what I describe in the following chapter as the dominant social space of agriculture, which is also described in much of the literature on women in agriculture; as shown by the examples above, there are several ways in which she is working within a male-dominated sector which questions her legitimacy as a farmer.

Throughout my fieldwork however, this aspect of Michelle's life was more of an exception for the women I interviewed than the rule. This is not to say that women in Michelle's situation do not exist, as quite clearly they do. Her situation, however, was not common amongst the women I met. I therefore turn, for the remainder of this chapter, to a further exploration of the role that gender plays in the lives of the women I interviewed.

“I definitely don’t feel disadvantaged because I’m a woman”

During my interviews I asked the women several questions about their gender in the context of agriculture. These included whether they felt that there was a difference in attitude towards them, if there were any challenges that they faced that were particular to them, and if they ever had felt that farming was not an option for them simply because they were women. The women fairly consistently responded that they did not feel they were treated differently. Any challenges they could think of that were related to gender had to do with limitations such as physical ability, access to certain types of knowledge, such as mechanical, or to challenges related to being a mother. However, the women did not feel that these challenges dominated their experience as farmers, but rather were simply some of the many challenges that they came up against while farming. In general once the women had realized that they wanted to farm, they felt this decision was respected, their role as farmers accepted by those around them, and that gender was not a major issue. A few examples demonstrate how the women’s situations reflect this reality.

The story of a young woman named Katrina provides a good illustration. She responded in the following way to the question of whether she felt that there were any challenges that were particular to her because she was a woman.

In agriculture specifically, [pause] I guess I would say that, [pause] I would say one thing is the physical aspect. I think it is the lifting thing. Mark [her partner] laid all the paper mulch because the rolls are too heavy for me. I can’t remember how heavy they are but I can’t actually lift them. I am trying to figure out how to get around some of that because I want to learn how to do those things like lay the mulch but some things I just have to let go of. I think that there are some things I am just not going to be able to do physically.

In my experience more generally though, I think women are well respected in the farming industry. But I haven’t been hugely exposed to anything outside of this little microcosm of Willow Grove... As far as my communication, I feel like I

have been respected and it feels good as far as that. I don't feel like I have any negative experiences with that at all.

An elaboration of her situation helps to bring out the assertion she emphasizes in the last part of her response. The little microcosm of Willow Grove that Katrina is referring to is an alternative religious organization that leases its farmland to local farmers. The lease has been held for the past 8 years by Tom, the person who encouraged her, via her best friend and now business and life partner, to start farming. There is a sublease from Tom and they share the land with him, Katrina's sister Tanya, and her partner Trevor. Her microcosm however, extends further than this. It includes most of the other organic farmers in the area. It also incorporates a whole infrastructure of financial, physical, and marketing support that the farmers at Willow Grove receive from Tom's wife's business. It is an organic vegetable wholesaler who buys from local farmers and sells primarily to Vancouver based markets. Tom and his wife decided that they wanted to help young farmers get started, so Tom offers the land and technical advice, and the wholesale business fronts capital and advances on sales in exchange for informal exclusivity contracts for produce being sold off the farm. For the farmers this insures both an easy market for their products and cash flow during the early months of the season when no income is generated.

Tom had known Mark in the past when he worked as a produce buyer for a local food box delivery program. Tom knew that Mark was interested in starting his own farm, and he was one of the first people that Tom contacted in order to set his project in motion. Meanwhile, Mark and Katrina were best friends and had a community garden plot together, as well as maintained a rooftop garden for a wealthy urban dweller with a strong desire to have gardens around him but no desire to garden himself. Once the

option of farming became available to Mark, it was not long afterwards that Katrina was also involved.

From the beginning it had been set-up with each group operating their own business. Each one was separate from Tom's operations, but because he was also working in the fields, the others could work closely with him in order to learn. Shortly after the first season began however, Tom was needed increasingly by the wholesale business. "Tom started stepping back in August. It was getting to the harvest part of the season and he went from 5 days to 2-3 days. In the fall he went back to two and then virtually nothing. He was focusing a lot more on [the wholesale business], which was an interesting process for me and Mark, communicating with Tom by cell and telephone."

Their actual farming experience ended up being fairly different from the initial envisioning of the project with many associated challenges along the way. However, the challenges that Katrina faced were shared between her and Mark and were not related to gender. For example, in their first year, the farm was less productive than initially predicted and at the end of the season the actual sales did not balance out with the amount of advances received, leaving Katrina and Mark in debt. In that first year she and Mark, as well as the others on the farm, also had to deal with the challenge of learning on their own, and improving the productivity of the farm. If ever she felt during her first two years that it might be difficult to continue being a farmer, it did not have to do with her being a woman. She emphasized that she never felt like farming was not an option to her because of her gender, and that despite the various challenges she faced, she had felt supported throughout. "Yes most people have [been supportive of me starting farming]. I can't really think of any situation where people haven't been supportive".

Another young woman named Brianna who is getting into farming through an apprenticeship program also felt that she was strongly supported in the farming community. When I asked her about farming being an option to her as a woman she replied “I don’t think that really crossed my mind once I was in Victoria and got into the community. I know a traditional farmer would be a man for sure. So I don’t know if that was part of me not thinking about farming as a career way back when. But no, not since I have found myself in this community.” As we talked about this further, she said that she felt there was no difference in attitude towards her because she was a woman. She felt this was largely because the community of farmers she was referring to was mostly comprised of women.

Becky: Do you think with any of the other people, in terms of you getting into farming, that there is a difference in attitude towards you because you are a woman?

Brianna: “It seems like on this island there are a lot of women farmers and I feel like I fit in pretty well... I definitely don’t feel disadvantaged because of it. I have never seen discrimination against males though. In my first year here we were like where are all the boy farmers? There are definitely strong women here.”

Brianna did mention that she suspected her discomfort with machinery was likely related to her gender. However, in her case the fact that her mentor was a woman also contributed to her desire to learn machinery and mechanics. For example, when I asked about challenges related to her gender she replied, “Ummmm. Hum. I guess, maybe around machinery. I don’t know if that is a general woman thing. I have trouble getting my head around that stuff. It is nice that Mary [the farmer she is apprenticing with] is here to teach me to use the tractor, but maybe if it was a male farmer, maybe I wouldn’t be as positive.”

Carolyn, one of the organic farmers down the road from Katrina, who has been farming for close to ten years on leased land from a land trust cooperative, also mentioned the large presence of women farmers. When I asked her about whether she had ever felt farming was not an option to her because she was a woman, she replied “Now it seems more and more farmers are women. More and more farm families have external income, so men work and woman will farm. I certainly see a lot of it in organics. And I guess that is more the world I am in. Young Jon [an apprentice on the farm] said most of the farmers he has worked for have been women. And I thought wow what a change in a short amount of time, but he worked for organic farmers and I worked for conventional farmers.”

Carolyn also traced her comfort with farming to several other factors, one of which was how she was raised, and the presence of large numbers of women in her cohort at the agricultural college. “I grew up in a family that never said girls do this and boys do that. I was always a bit of a tomboy. And when I was a kid riding horses I always got dirty and that was ok. I don’t think I had an upbringing that directed boys in one direction and others in another. And when in university there weren’t more boys than girls.”

Another aspect related to gender that stood out for farmers who were also mothers, was the difficulty of taking care of their children while farming at the same time. However, again, for the women this was a challenge, but was not a factor that made other people, or themselves, question their ability to farm more generally because they were women. For example, Ashley, a woman that has been farming organic vegetables for five years on southern Vancouver Island, has two young children under the age of

three. She is surrounded by a strong network of women farmers, some of whom she has entered into partnership with. When I asked her if there were any challenges that she felt were particular to her because she was a woman, she responded, “Not really, no. Because I am a mother yes, but just because I am a woman, no.” Later in the interview when I asked about general challenges she said, “And then now increasingly a big challenge is balancing time with the kids and getting work done outside.” However, for her being a farmer is also an important part of her choice in how to raise a child.

I knew I wanted to have kids and I wanted to do something that would allow me to work at home; to have a career but do it with my children and not have to leave them for 40 hours a week. I wanted to do something that would be healthy and educational for my children that would give them productive work that they could participate in, proactive work that the family could do together. And so that some of their play would give them more of a sense of meaning than playing and watching Cinderella videos would. I know my eldest son enjoys productive work and gets a sense of fulfillment in working with us, at least some of the time.

Each of these women is farming within a social space where the networks that surround them are supportive and gender issues are minimized rather than predominant. Farming is still a gendered space, which is particularly evident for many of the women during tasks such as fixing machinery, carrying heavy loads, or balancing children with farm work. However, gender does not characterize the dominant framework within which they exist. Instead, they mentioned being surrounded by a supportive atmosphere that either encouraged or did not question their desire and ability to farm.

In contrast, the literature on women in agriculture – described in more detail in the following chapter – focuses on women’s situation in relation to men and resulting power differentials and unequal treatment. It suggests that these experiences are a central aspect of the lives of the women who are involved in agriculture. Although I am not denying that these circumstances do exist, I am arguing that for most of the women I

interviewed during my fieldwork, they are only a minor aspect of their lives and their farming operations; for the most part, the women I interviewed exist within an alternate social space of acceptance in terms of gender. The lack of forms of discrimination based on gender on a day-to-day basis suggests that they are not living in a sector that is predominately male-dominated. Meanwhile those women who are living in what I refer to as the dominant social space – a space where gender discrimination and non-acceptance of women as farmers is common – the alternate social space also exists to varying degrees¹³. In other words, for women like Michelle – whose story I introduced in the first part of this chapter – her gender makes it difficult for her to be accepted as a farmer by those in their local community. However, at the same time, there are also people whom she interacts with that help to create a sense of being within the alternate social space.

This chapter has introduced the varying degrees to which gender has an impact on the women's day-to-day lives as farmers. I have also introduced what I refer to as the alternate and the dominant social space which reflects the differences in those experiences. In the next chapter I turn to a further elaboration of these social spaces, exploring how they impact the women's lives, how they have come about, and the relationship between them.

¹³ I have chosen to use the label of alternate and dominant because it reflects the generally perceived reality of agriculture as male dominated and women farmers existing on the fringe. However, it is important to note that these labels are based on positionality and for the women I am describing, the alternate space predominates, and the dominant space is the alternate.

Chapter 5: The Emergence and Co-Existence of Social Spaces

I think to myself, 'How crazy am I?' But then I think if I wasn't doing this, I would be doing something else. And I am pretty lucky. I get to do the work I love, I get to breathe clean air, I get to eat good fresh veggies everyday. It's a good life. I'm happy.

– Cary, organic vegetable farmer

And it is fun too. Wow! Who thought a career could be fun!

– Brianna, organic vegetable farm apprentice

The Satisfaction of Being a Farmer

Many of the women farmers with whom I spoke are living within a space where their actions as farmers are accepted by both themselves and those around them. I found that many of the women were confident in their choice of career, and although facing many of the difficulties that are part and parcel of the work which they had chosen, they embraced it, and felt satisfied with where they were at. Throughout my fieldwork I observed this in the women's behavior. It was present in the way they approached a day's work. I saw it in a woman who sat on the porch of her barn, breathing a deep breath of fresh air as she finished her coffee and worked on the day's list of things to do. I saw it in the determination that made another rise at 5 am to finish the accounting before her family pulled her away for breakfast and the sun and work drew her outside. I saw it in the facility with which knowing fingers rapidly yet meticulously stripped the leaves off of hundreds of collard plants that were being devastated by aphids in an attempt to give the plants a new life. I also saw it in the ease with which another worked for hours building a fence line up through the unpredictable and hairy terrain of a woodlot, weaving extremely heavy page-wire fencing through the trees following sheep movement patterns that she alone knew by heart. And I could see it in the way some women drew customers into

their market stall by their sheer exuberance and passion both for their products and for selling the fruits of their labour.

I also heard satisfaction in their voices. At the end of every interview I asked the women why they had chosen to farm. Many of the women had indeed answered this question in many ways throughout our conversation, but I always preferred to come back to it again at the end, in part because their answers inspired me, and in part because they generally loved to tell me what they loved about farming. There were many reasons cited by the women for why they found the work satisfying. For some of them it had to do with being their own boss and being in control of their labour. Others liked the challenges - both physical and intellectual – associated with the work. Others mentioned the satisfaction of raising a healthy family on the farm or supporting the community through the contribution of healthy food to the food system. For others still, it was a general feeling of integrity, beauty, and fulfillment. For most of the women, all of these reasons were intertwined. Following are a few examples of the women’s responses to why they like farming.

It’s what I hoped it would be. It’s mentally challenging, physically challenging, and really exciting to see a crop doing well. It is exciting to be surrounded by life, to see things grow; every time a crop germinates it is exciting. I really like eating my own food...and that feeling of growing food that you sell. It feels like a tangibly good thing. It is not complicated. I like it because it is aesthetically beautiful, going out and hoeing a bed in the morning when the light is still golden and there is dew on things. And to breath clean air. Yeah. That is it. And I really like to be able to work with my son. And be a stay-at-home mom that has other work to do – although sometimes he drives me crazy! – *Ashley, organic vegetable farmer*

I love it because it is physical. I love it because it builds community. I love it because I can sit out in the garden alone and work for hours, and it is meditative and calming and it feels good. And I can do it fast. I can challenge myself to move faster. It is always challenging. There is also an intellectual piece to it. A planning piece and I like to plan things. – *Lana, organic vegetable farmer*

Fresh air. Natural light. Physical work. Right livelihood. Good. I feel like I have integrity in what I do. – *Fionna, organic vegetable farmer*

I like the ‘down to earthness’ about being part of the food supply. I love knowing where my food comes from, and having other people able to know that too. On the farming side, I love the animals. I just think being around them is what I really like about it. – *Emily, organic goat dairy farmer and cheese maker*

Why? Because I like what I do. It wasn’t a matter of wanting to take over the farm, but that I wanted to continue on something that had been started by my family. I know how my parents feel about this place, and I feel very much the same. It is very much who we are. This is my home. – *Lesley, cow-calf rancher*

I have been able to raise a healthy stoic child out of it all...the physical wear and tear [on the body], you would have that in a sawmill, so in the end being close to home and having a healthy family, and a child that is hardly ever sick... and he knows how to grow. There is a success there. – *Nadine, organic vegetable farmer*

This gratification that many of the women mentioned when speaking about farming has roots in the unique lived experience and personality of each farmer. However, it is also related to something larger than a personal sense of acceptance and satisfaction. Throughout my fieldwork my attention was frequently drawn to the relationship between the attitudes and actions mentioned above, and the larger social context which contributes to it. Part of feeling an acceptance and valuation of one’s work is also perceiving that one’s work is accepted and valued by those that surround you. The people, both men and women, who surround the women, tend to not be preoccupied with gender differences and role expectations, but rather accept that women can be farmers just as legitimately as men can. This collective approval influences both the thoughts and actions of the women at the individual level. I now turn to an exploration of how the interactions and social relations that surround the women contribute both to the embodied practices of being a farmer and to the articulation of satisfaction they engender.

Practice Theory, Social Interactions and the Construction of a Social Space of Acceptance

In order to explore the relation between the social and the individual, I begin with an explanation of the relationship between social structures and action as it is elaborated in practice theory, particularly in Bourdieu's (1977) and Ortner's (1996) work. According to Bourdieu, in order to understand what makes the women's thoughts and actions possible, one must look into the underlying social structures that give rise to them. For Bourdieu these underlying organizing principles are called the *habitus*, and they inform most thoughts and actions. He explains that people have certain dispositions because of these social structures, which are both institutions and cultural codes; the social structures and the 'customary rules' that stem from them are preserved through group memory and within the practices which "enable[e] agents to generate an infinity of practices" (p. 16) otherwise known as daily actions, thoughts and experiences. This process however, is unconscious on the part of the individual because the social structures are implicit, and the individual simply brings them forth; the social structures, and their rules, are deemed to be necessary and true without reflection upon them. This process results in a *doxic* (ie. taken for granted) experience which Bourdieu defines as a "primary experience of the social world", an experience that is unreflective of all the underlying circumstances that make it possible. It is an unquestioning, uncritical, unreflective experience that people have with their familiar environments. Furthermore, the process through which these social structures give rise to everyday practice also reinforces the *habitus*.

Ortner (1996) builds upon Bourdieu's work. She explains the relationship between underlying social structures and everyday practice by describing it as a 'serious

game'. The underlying structures provide the rules of the game within which the individual plays out the game of life. For her the game is "culturally organized and constructed, in terms of defining categories of actors, rules and goals" which is also within the realm of the "social, consisting of webs of relationship and interaction between multiple, shiftingly interrelated subject positions, none of which can be extracted as autonomous "agents"" (1996, p. 12). Ortner adds the aspect of 'serious' to the 'game' in order to emphasize "that power and inequality pervade the games of life in multiple ways, and that, while there may be playfulness and pleasure in the process, the stakes of these games are very high" (1996, p.12). Although Ortner sees this process – the playing of the game – as a way of describing a theory of practice, she differentiates her work from Bourdieu's by emphasizing the role of agency in the process. For Ortner, Bourdieu's explanation of the individual transforming the *habitus* into practice lacks agency or intention on the part of the individual. Instead Ortner feels that "actors play with skill, intention, wit, knowledge, intelligence" (p.12), even though they are still acting within the constraints of the 'rules'. Therefore practice theory, especially within Ortner's framework, shows how action is 'made' by social structures, while at the same time the individual also 'makes', and possibly changes, those very structures. In other words, she emphasizes how the *habitus* is constructed and transformed through action.

Both Bourdieu (1977) and Ortner (1996) bring out the importance of social interactions in this process. For Bourdieu, the interaction between two individuals is where the underlying and unconscious processes become more explicit, albeit for Bourdieu this is important because it provides the anthropologist with a window into the

habitus of his/her research participants¹⁴. Ortner emphasizes that the game itself is necessarily a social experience, always located within social relationships and interactions. It is from this perspective that I wish to return to the women and what influences their thoughts and actions. As outlined in the practice theories described here, the interaction between the women and those around them is an important part of the process of applying underlying social structures to everyday practice. If we then return to Ortner's emphasis on the construction of the underlying rules of the game through action, or in this case, interaction, we are in a position to analyze how interaction constitutes an integral part of the process of constructing the rules of the game for the women.

To this I would like to add Jackson's (1996) emphasis on subjectivity as intersubjectivity in his work on phenomenology. He states that the self is always the result of recognition of oneself as part of a collectivity and "meaning lies in relationships as they are lived and not simply in the structural and systematic properties that analysis may reveal them to have" (1996, p. 26). He discusses this in terms of an attempt to convince anthropologists to move away from a preoccupation with underlying structures, and to pay attention instead to that which is 'reality' for those we study. In other words, meaning is felt in terms of the empirical, and so the empirical should be what anthropologists focus on rather than explaining what underlies or gives rise to it. I am not convinced that we should not seek to understand what produces meaning, and focusing on the experience and the point of interaction does not imply that the researcher is gaining access to an objective phenomenon because all analysis is subjective.

Nonetheless, I find Jackson's call to pay attention to the where meaning lies, especially as

¹⁴For Bourdieu the explicitness of the underlying structures is significant because of the general difficulties that social scientists have in gaining access to those underlying structures. This is because s/he is outside the *habitus* and because those within are not aware of it and thus unable to explain it.

it is located in the experience of interaction between the individual and the collective to be a useful focal point for analysis.

Therefore, for the women, it is, at least in part, through their interactions with their networks that the expression of underlying structures and rules takes place and that the meaning of this process is expressed and felt. The underlying structures set the scene for their actions, their legitimization and valuation, as well as for the reformulation of those structural parameters to reflect that reality. Finally not only are those underlying social structures reinforced and recreated, but interaction is also a location of identity formation for the women. The end result is a social space in which the women are both embodying the practice of farming, as well as articulating a sense of belonging and satisfaction. This social space, which is based of the underlying *habitus* and social structures, as well as reflected in the practice of the women, is what I refer to as the alternate social space.

Two Social Spaces

The experience of the women described in the first section of this chapter, and the alternate social space and the underlying social structures that give rise to it, contrast with the experiences within the social space described in the literature on women in agriculture. Much of this literature focuses on the male dominance of the sector and its relationship to women's lesser positions of power (Liepens 1998; Shortall 1999; Whatmore 1991), the undervaluing of their work (Ghorayshi 1989; Reimer 1986; Shaver 1996; Shortall 1993; Whatmore 1991), and the difficulty of gaining acceptance in their role as farmers (Leckie 1998; Pini 2005; Nieman 1996; Shortall 1992). These are all

characteristic of what I refer to as the dominant social space. In the preceding chapter I explored how the women I interviewed did not feel, for the most part, that they were living within this social space. There were times at which their gender made it difficult for them to carry out their daily tasks, such as balancing the role of being a mother with farming activities, or challenges related to their physical strength. However, these experiences did not lead to them feeling that their ability to farm was in question because they were women.

It is the relationship between these two social spaces that I now expand upon. In order to do this, I begin with a further description of the dominant social space. From there I attempt to explain the existence and emergence of these two social spaces in terms of a Foucauldian theoretical framework. However, this analytical perspective does not adequately explain the relationship between these two spaces. Rather than arising out of a reaction to, or building upon, the dominant framework, the alternate social space has instead emerged largely out of an autonomous arena of social interactions. I discuss several aspects of this autonomous emergence in the section *Autonomous Emergence and Co-Existence* and then develop a more relevant explanatory framework in the last section.

The Dominant Social Space

The literature (see above) on women in agriculture has tended to describe women in relation to men and the male dominance of the sector. Agriculture is typically seen as a male activity both within the sector and for society at large which corresponds to dominant gender role expectations. For example, Liepens (1998) argues that gender is

socially constructed within agriculture and identifies both media and organizations as actors involved in the reproduction of that social construction through the use of particular discourses. She states “that discourses of masculinity and femininity are employed in political and popular circles to produce gendered meanings about farmers, farm practices, and industry politics” (1998, p. 372). These discourses “support unequal economic and power relations” which, in turn, create certain ‘truths’ and ‘knowledges’ about the masculinity of farming. Leckie (1998) and Shortall (1992) also document a plethora of social structures and organizations that tend to transfer and reproduce the gendered relations within agriculture. Leckie states that this discourse “affects the social realities of farming women” (1998, p. 298) and Shortall shows various ways in which men are afforded more power than women within farming culture.

A considerable amount of the literature documents the effects of these unequal power relations. Several researchers have shown that much of women’s work and overall contribution to the success of the farm is generally invisible and undervalued (Ghorayshi 1989; Reimer 1986; Shaver 1996; Shortall 1993; Whatmore 1991). They show that the constructed boundaries of farming as a male activity and women as caregivers are difficult to move beyond, even when they are not a reflection of the actual workload. As such, women tend to have little to no legitimate claim to decision-making where the farm is concerned. Furthermore these gender roles tend to be reinforced by the women to some extent through their own understandings of ‘farm work’ (Reimer 1986; Shortall 1992).

In her study of gender and power relations in Ireland, Shortall (1992) gives an example of the entrenchment of these gendered categories and how they lead to women not being accepted as legitimate farmers. As an example, she describes a situation in

which a woman was ostracized by other women in her community when she decided to run the farm on her own. Leckie (2002) also documents how women farm operators come up against issues of legitimacy when trying to access agricultural information, often through channels that male farmers take for granted. These barriers include: “the legitimacy of women in a nontraditional occupation, the legitimacy of the types of questions often asked by women in trying to develop their occupation skills, the legitimacy of women asking those questions in the first place, and the legitimacy of the presence of women in the kinds of public places where agricultural information is routinely exchanged” (2002, p. 304).

Finally, some researchers have also explored inequalities and their effects on access to decision-making and control in agricultural organizations (Pini 2005; Nieman 1996). They find that women are either often denied or find it difficult to gain access to certain positions, or end up duplicating their roles as caregivers and homemakers within the institutions.

This social context within which women are maintained in lesser positions of power, experience inequalities and are not seen as having the legitimate claim to the role of farmer are key characteristics of what I refer to as the dominant social space of agriculture. Several researchers have chosen to employ a Foucauldian theoretical framework in order to explain this subordinated position of women within agriculture (Liepens 1998; Shortall 1992, 1999) as well as to discuss how social constructions of gender within the sector are being challenged and redefined (Mackenzie, 1996). I therefore now explore how this type of analysis would explain the relationship between the dominant and the alternate social spaces that I encountered in my fieldwork.

A Foucauldian Explanation

A Foucauldian perspective would explain this relationship in terms of discourse, power and knowledge. According to Foucault, discourses are bodies of knowledge that reflect how we see and understand the world. Power circulates among statements and discourses, which consequently affect the formation of knowledge, and what is accepted as true (Foucault, 1986). However, it is never one discourse but rather the integration of overlapping and embedded discourses working in fluid combination, and their resulting material arrangements – all of which form a discursive formation – that create those truths (Foucault, 1972). The dominant social environment in agriculture is therefore a product of the resulting discursive formation.

In Power/Knowledge, Foucault (1980) clarifies this process by discussing it in terms of the ways in which the effects of power within those discourses create “discursive regimes” and “regimes of truth”. A discursive regime is the manifestation of the accumulative ways in which the effects of power affect the various discourses as a whole. Out of that regime comes a “regime of truth” which is the result of the rules governing the ensemble of discourses that can be accepted, and function, as true. Therefore in a situation of competition between various discourses, it is the more powerful discourses that take center stage, deciding which ‘truths’ predominate and consequently which ‘reality’ prevails. In this case, these truths inform whether or not a woman is seen as being legitimately able to manage her farm. Finally, the manifestation of the most powerful discourses also serves to reinforce that power. However, Foucault (1986) also argues that power never originates from just one source and therefore is never

unidirectional nor unilateral. Within the discursive formation the more powerful discourses are not unaffected by the other discourses that nonetheless prevail.

Within this theoretical framework the relationship between the dominant and the alternate spaces, and the women's experiences within them, is the result of shifting effects of power. The women's actions and the discourses behind them are challenging the dominant discursive formations and are creating new realities that allow certain 'knowledges' and 'truths' to exist. As discursive formations are continually in a process of renegotiation and flux, they are simply redefined to incorporate the women's realities within the dominant social space. Mackenzie (1996) describes this process as the result of active resistance of the original dominant discourses in her research of farm women in Ontario. She states that new discourses, which she also refers to as 'reverse discourses', are created through organized resistance which "assault hierarchical relations of power pervasive in agricultural practice. [The farm women's organization's various actions] have brought power relations in Canadian society sharply into focus and provide a means by which a dominant discourse which labels farm women as wives may be altered" (p. 25-26). She argues that this "new discourse draws on specific sites of power/knowledge and localized forms of struggle and resistance" (p. 26). If one were to take this argument one step further, you could hypothesize that the more the women live out examples that counter the dominant discourses, new ones are created which construct new regimes of truth and eventually facilitate future 'deviations' to occur.

However, during my research this theoretical framework did not seem to reflect the reality of the women I worked with. The alternate social space did not seem to be in competition with the dominant, but rather to have arisen autonomously from it and to co-

exist with it. Instead a theoretical framework that explains the women's reality needs to look at multiplicity, complexity and yet co-existence rather than competition, resistance and integration. In an attempt to move towards this goal, I begin by a description of the co-existence of the alternate with the dominant social space which I encountered in the field.

Autonomous Emergence and Co-Existence

Part of the reason for the difference between the two social spaces is that they primarily constitute autonomous spheres of interaction. Since these two spheres of interaction originate from a different set of networks, they are predominantly not in competition. One of the major reasons for the existence of these autonomous spheres is that they tend to correspond with the autonomous systems and institutions that exist within the different economic niches of alternative and conventional agriculture. During my field research, 25 (or 80%) of the women I interviewed were involved in alternative agriculture. Contrasting their experiences to those of the women in conventional agriculture described in the literature above, reveals that the institutions and types of interactions within alternative and conventional agriculture correspond to the distinction between the alternate and dominant social spaces.

It should be noted however, that the alternate social space is not exclusive to alternative agriculture. My analysis of the two social spaces also holds true for some of the interactions – between farmers, and between farmers and the community – amongst women involved in conventional agriculture. However, the major difference is that there is a much larger presence of interactions characteristic of the alternate social space –

interactions that are supportive and do not lead to a questioning of ability or legitimacy based on gender – within alternative agriculture. In contrast the interactions present within the systems and institutions of conventional agriculture are generally characteristic of the types of interactions that lead to the emergence of the dominant social space. Therefore, when interactions characteristic of the alternate social space occur, they are more of an exception to the types of interactions typically present within conventional agriculture. In other words, this suggests that there is a culture within alternative agriculture that is in many ways autonomous from that found in conventional agriculture, where women tend to be treated as equals and are accepted as farmers, and where the male-dominance of conventional agriculture does not exist. The end result is that the alternate space predominates within alternative agriculture, and the dominant space predominates within conventional agriculture.

One explanation for the extent to which these two spaces are autonomous and co-exist is that the systems and institutions of alternative agriculture are distinct from those of conventional agriculture. I now turn to an exploration of the autonomy of these institutions, and return to the fluidity between conventional and alternative agriculture later in this section as well as in the next chapter. In order to demonstrate the extent to which this autonomy and co-existence exists, I look at the difference between the two marketing systems, the lack of interaction between organic and non-organic farmers, the creation of direct marketing systems, and the process of reinforcement of the alternate space within alternative agriculture.

One area where the distinction between the two types of agriculture is apparent is in the marketing of farm products. Many of the women I interviewed were involved in

direct marketing. This necessarily entails a different set of institutions and interactions than the traditional forms of selling of farm products. For example, those in cow-calf and yearling cattle operations in the conventional system take their cattle to auction. However, those involved in direct marketing go through different channels. The women take their animals to local slaughtering facilities and then sell their produce directly from the farm, through a farmers' market, or in one case, through her own feed store. In some cases those in the conventional stream take their animals directly to slaughtering facilities rather than to an auction. Generally speaking however, even these practices differ between the two streams since those involved in direct marketing need to receive their own animals back and require particular custom cuts. Both of these are services that larger scale abattoirs¹⁵ usually frequented by conventional producers generally do not offer.

For those in alternative types of vegetable and fruit production, marketing also differs. For those selling direct, this again means off-farm sales, or farmer's markets. Some of them also sell to restaurants or health food stores, to whom they deliver the products directly. In the conventional system, fruits and vegetables go through packing houses, wholesalers and food terminals. There is some mimicking of this system in the organic sector, such as wholesalers and food box programs, but they are still separate institutions that deal only in organics. They also tend to be smaller in scale. These autonomous sets of institutions entail social interactions that are likely to be quite different from those that occur within conventional systems.

Another area where the distinction between the two systems is strikingly apparent is between organic and non-organic farmers. In general, organic farmers tend to have

¹⁵ An abattoir is a livestock slaughtering facility.

strong networks. They know most of the other organic farmers in the region, but seldom know the conventional farmers that surround them. For example, Sabrina lives on southern Vancouver Island where there is a strong network of organic farmers. Her response to my question as to whether she knew many other farmers in the area was as follows:

I know most of the other organic farmers. The organic farming community is relatively small in general. It is a good size in this area, but you get to know everybody relatively quickly and everybody knows what you are doing before you even tell them what you are growing. I know some people more than others just because of proximity or because you are dealing with them more. But there are lots of meetings and things that we have gone to and you meet people that way, organic farmers meetings and workshops and things like that. There is a lot of networking and listserves, so even if you haven't met somebody you have already talked to them.

I haven't met too many conventional farmers in the area. The paths just don't seem to cross that much. I guess that the agricultural conferences and things often draw a certain type of people more. I think the marketing and all the aspects of it are quite different in a way. So I haven't met a lot of conventional farmers, some have stopped by but not very many.

Another woman who lives down the road from Sabrina also felt the same way.

Becky: Do you know many of the other farmers in the area? Are there other kinds of farmers in this area?

Fionna: There are lots of non-organic farmers in this area. I know them by sight, and they might know me. I know my neighbour. There is just not a lot of cross over and we are all running around. I see them on the road driving around, doing deliveries, going to the feed store and the hardware store, and we are passing each other and you know they are farmers and they know you are a farmer, maybe, but you just don't interact.

I also received a similar response from a young woman farming vegetables organically in the Fraser Valley.

Becky: Do you know many of the other farmers in the area?

Katrina: Yep, I know some. I know quite a few of them at least to recognize and say hello. But as far as actually knowing them, well I don't know many just yet. I don't know my neighbour farmers at all – they are tulip farmers on both sides.

When I asked her what her interaction with other farmers was like, she said it was “Positive. Always good.” and then listed off at least five organic farmers in the area with whom she had a very good – almost a mentorship type – relationship. However, she then returned to the subject of conventional farmers and said “I haven't really met any conventional people except at the market where I go and get eggs.”

This autonomous system of institutions and interactions reflects a pattern of co-existence on a practical level rather than through competition and integration. This is not to say that they are not related, and at times do work in competition and affect one another. However, what tends to predominate in the women's lives is the autonomy of the spaces, rather than these moments of interaction. Therefore, within this context it is the autonomy and co-existence which should be emphasized, rather than the competition and integration.

One of the reasons behind this autonomy and co-existence is that the systems and institutions, such as those found in direct marketing and organics, have emerged from a space that is distinct from the conventional system. The emergence of the network of organic farmers on southern Vancouver Island is a good example to demonstrate this point. Most of the women who began the networks decided in the late 1980s to go from producing vegetables for themselves to selling their produce (Fraser, Johnson & Martin-Wood, 1995). They decided to create an organic farmers' market in Victoria as a venue for those sales. Two of the women also created a wholesale company to sell organic produce in the area. Many took on apprentices and strengthened their relationships

amongst one another through informal sharing of information and support groups. The creation of this system had little to do with differentiating itself from the conventional system, but rather was created because of a particular set of needs identified by the women.

The same can also be said for the emergence of direct marketing systems. Many of them have emerged from a need for a market for those already producing alternative products. Although I can only speculate that in the past this system was derived for similar reasons, many of the women that I spoke with who do direct marketing, do so because they feel it is important to have a first hand connection with the consumer and because they enjoy that interaction. Although in part this can be construed as a reaction to the lack of interaction in the conventional system, I think this line of reasoning tends to overshadow what is actually of importance to the women – the creation of a system which reflects their needs and values. Following are some examples of responses to the question “why direct marketing?”

Because of the establishment of relationship. When I am growing specifically for the restaurants, there is a kind of integrity that goes into the work that you do. As you look at the land and you decide what you are going to grow there, you put a certain kind of energy into growing the food for them.

I have sold wholesale to a box program and I used to have my own box program. I find selling wholesale, for my particular size of farm, isn't economical. It is easier, you don't have to make the direct contact, but I get a hit off of the direct sale and making that contact and actually being on the front lines of the marketing context. For me that is the part that fulfills me. So to sell wholesale to a grocery store, they [the consumer] might know that it is grown from my farm or in some cases fresh in B.C. I could choose to mono-crop, but that is not what fulfills me. It is the contact with these people that want interesting crops or heirloom varieties... It is a more detailed approach. – *Nadine, organic vegetable grower*

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I direct market everything... come out to the farm and see it, this is how it was raised. Do you remember it [the meat] when you grew up, well this is what that tasted like, versus what you get in the store. – *Carla, grass fed livestock*

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Well. It's just simpler [having an on-farm store]. We are on a busy road, and people can drive in very easily. They knew this farm before. It had been farmed organically for years before we moved here. It is just easier with a child to be able to be here and just re-stocking as necessary and to not have to pack it all up and haul it downtown and stand behind a table. Here we have a system where people can put the money in if I am not here. They holler if they need anything and I think people like the trust factor with that as well. The people that do come regularly, they know that they can just come and pay next week. It just feels good to be doing it, and that people can come into the farm. Sometimes it is strange to have people wandering all over your farm. I could probably try and sell everything to the restaurants and it might be simpler, but it balances out. – *Sabrina, organic vegetable farmer*

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Because with a small amount of product you can't make the money you need to be sustainable the other way. I actually did sell some of my carrots this year to the Husky gas station with a big produce section. So I sold what carrots I couldn't sell to [my regular customers]. I could have been selling them for a buck fifty to regular customers, but I sold them for a buck to [the Husky gas station]. I wouldn't have been able to get rid of them on time. That is the only way I would go second hand and not direct to the consumer. But otherwise, that doesn't inspire me because I can't have contact with those people. They don't know who I am and how I grow things and that's important to me. – *Mackenzie, vegetable farmer*

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Becky: Would you go the wholesale route, or stay direct marketing?

Brianna: I would stay direct marketing. I don't think I would ever want to have a mono-crop. A lot of one thing for wholesaling doesn't excite me much. I like variety. It is just simpler too. Like the farmer to consumer relationship. It is nice to know that that person is going to eat your food.

Becky: Part of direct marketing is that it is more work, is it worth it?

Brianna: I think so, yeah. If they have an understanding of the farm it helps them to pay a higher price, if they become somebody you know. There is a lot of room for education as well. – *Brianna, 2nd year apprentice, organic vegetable farming*

These autonomous social spaces are also reinforced by participation of the women within them. As mentioned by both Sabrina and Katrina in the above section on organic farmers, they have very strong relationships with the other organic farmers as well as frequent interaction with them. As Sabrina mentions she is involved in a lot of “farmers meetings and workshops” and “a lot of networking and listserves” for organics. I found participation in these types of activities to be very common among the women, especially in the organic community. Many of the farmers volunteer in organizations taking on roles such as being a director for the board of farmers’ markets, volunteering for organic producers’ associations, or organizing conferences. Participation is also high for other types of alternative agriculture with some women being very involved in multiple areas. For example, one goat dairy farmer is involved in the B.C. goat breeders association, the Canadian goat society, represents the B.C. goat milk producers association on the Canadian national goat federation, is vice president of the national federation and is the chair for the national identification committee. When I asked her how long ago she had started to get involved she replied,

I was in agricultural college and somebody took me to a meeting and I have not backed down since. In fact I have always been involved. And the good part about it is that you make friends. Especially in the States, I have a lot of good friends, and locally too. The dairy people are wonderful people, for the most part.

Although not all women are as involved as this goat farmer, many others are involved in many ways. For instance, a sheep farmer was president of the B.C. sheep federation for 3 years, she sits on an agro-forestry¹⁶ committee and does other general volunteering in the community. Another example is the saskatoon berry farmer who is

¹⁶ Agro-forestry is a land management approach that integrates both agricultural and forestry practices.

involved in organizing a conference on direct marketing. The participation by the women in these systems of institutions and interactions reinforces both their existence and their presence for the women. They also create new sets of relationships which enhance previous ones and enlarge the systems as a whole.

The separation between these two systems tends to correspond to the division of alternative and conventional agriculture. However, as mentioned above, there are also instances in conventional agriculture where interactions reflect the alternate space. For example, Sarah is a conventional cow-calf rancher. Just down the road from her is another woman running a similar, although much larger, operation. Although Sarah's neighbour's husband used to be a farmer, he is now retired and she runs the entire ranch on her own. Sarah gets inspiration from seeing how capably her neighbour manages her ranch and also calls her up for advice from time to time. Although this relationship is taking place entirely within the realm of conventional agriculture, it is characteristic of the types of relations that build the alternate social space. It has led Sarah to feel more comfortable as a woman farmer because of the presence of another woman like her nearby, and has contributed to a feeling of acceptance of her activities. Sarah contrasted her neighbour at one point to her aunt who lives in Saskatchewan. Her aunt lives on a farm but does not participate in farm work to the same extent that Sarah does. She is worried that once she has more kids and they can take over some of the farm work, she will be relegated to the space of the house and the ongoing work which exists within it. Sarah however, is not a fan of housework and much prefers to be outside farming. Her neighbour has given her inspiration that this will continue to be a possibility for her.

However, although Sarah's experience does occur amongst conventional women farmers, I found that within alternative agriculture these types of interactions were more common and supported by the systems, institutions and culture that form the basis of alternative agriculture. I found that, in general, alternative agriculture led to a more conducive environment for women to feel accepted as farmers. These factors also tell us something about why there are more women getting into alternative types of agriculture rather than into conventional agriculture. Research, mostly originating in Europe, has identified this trend as well as some of the reasons that have contributed to it, such as an attraction by women to the holistic nature of organic farming and the accompanying lifestyle (Pederson & Kjaergard 2004; Schmidt 1994). I hypothesize that the openness of alternative agriculture towards women is an additional reason why women are drawn to it and although further research is needed to explore this argument more thoroughly, I suggest that my findings can contribute significantly to the body of research being done in this area.

Towards a Theory of Emergence and Co-Existence of Social Spaces

As opposed to a Foucauldian perspective of eventual integration between competing discourses within a discursive regime, I find that drawing from practice theory and building on the analytical concepts of autonomous emergence and co-existence better reflects the relationship between the dominant and the alternate social space and therefore also the reality of the women whom I interviewed. As I have described above, practice theory explains how the particular social space in which the women feel accepted as farmers is created by underlying social structures, how those social structures are

reinforced and re-created to further reflect that reality, and how social interaction is the location where the reinforcing of these processes occur.

However, this theoretical framework could still also reflect many of the aspects of Foucault's theory such as competition, resistance, and integration. For example, the alternate social space could be seen as a particular way in which the underlying social structures of the dominant framework were being interpreted – or from Bourdieu's perspective, generated – by the women and therefore expressed in practice. The dominant underlying social structures would then also be shifting as a result of that practice and reformulated. However, as I have described above, many of the institutions and social interactions which reflect this alternate social space have both emerged out of, and exist within, a context that is autonomous from the dominant one. Therefore I argue that these underlying social structures have also emerged and exist autonomously from those that make up the dominant social space. I am not arguing that they exist within a vacuum with no interaction and influence on each other. Instead, I see them as two spheres which overlap and interact in many ways. What is important is that although their interaction at times reflects reaction and resistance from one to the other, their primary form of interaction is rooted in underlying social structures which have originated and continue to evolve largely independently.

As we have now explored the origins of the alternate and its relationship to the dominant social space, I now turn to an exploration of how this alternate space goes beyond gender to facilitate the women's lives in many other ways. Although the focus on gender and an exploration between the two social spaces is important in order to understand and therefore be able to work towards alleviating forms of discrimination that

exist, I also feel that attention must be paid to those areas of the women's lives which are relatively free of the dominance of gender discrimination and examine how those spaces affect their lives and operations in other ways. This allows the anthropologist to go beyond an analysis of gender and to focus on and understand many of the other aspects of the women's lives that are important. In doing so it ensures that the research does not focus too narrowly on areas of prior analytical interest but rather reflects the reality 'on the ground' and incorporates a broader and more contextualized understanding of the women's lives. In the following chapter I examine how those same aspects of this social space that alleviate a focus on gender also provide support in other ways. I discuss the origins of much of this support – the women's networks – and explore how they function to mediate the various challenges that the women face during their process of farm entry.

Chapter 6: From Idea to Success: The Role of Networks and Support

There are many ways in which the women I spoke with negotiate the various challenges associated with farm entry. Women farmers have adopted multiple strategies that range from the implementation of more efficient management practices and going after niche markets, to practicing yoga and using music and movies as escape and regeneration mechanisms. There are also many outside factors that play a part in mediating or facilitating the challenges for the women such as subsidies from off-farm income¹⁷ or loans and organizations that create apprenticeship programs. In addition, the development and maintenance of networks were one of the most important aids to the women in mediating the challenges of farming. Social interactions were a significant part in the creation of the alternate social space described in the preceding chapters. In this chapter I look at how those social interactions and the resulting alternate social space have had an impact on the other areas of the women's lives. Specifically I look to some of the major challenges that the women face in farm entry – getting started and gaining access to knowledge – and examine how the networks that surround the women have resulted in support. I begin with an exploration of the networks themselves, followed by an examination of how they work as support mechanisms for the women farmers.

I have identified three types of networks based on three categories of social relations, which are also in this case three main sources of support. These are between the family and the farmer, the farmer and the farmer, and the community and the farmer. The

¹⁷ Several of the women's husbands worked off farm jobs which either subsidized the farm by paying for household related expenses, or by putting money directly into the farming operation. For example, one husband held a management position on another farm and paid for the house mortgage and bills. Another husband was working off the farm as a machinist in order to build the farm up to the point where it had enough infrastructure to become self-sustaining, at which point he was planning on working on the farm full-time.

types of networks within each of these categories, however, are very diverse. In the case of family relations they can be as direct and tangible as parents that live and work on the farm, to as intangible as the legacy that one's grandmother left behind who, by virtue of her being a strong women farmer, paved the way for women to be accepted as farmers in a particular community. The networks based on farmer-to-farmer relations also vary a great deal. They can be, for example, relations with a farmer down the road that one might meet every couple of days, or farmers whom one met for only a few hours at a conference, or a farmer whom one has communicated with by email through a listserv. The networks become even more diverse in the category of community relations. Here they range from the people who buy the women's products, to the owner of a local abattoir, to resources put on the internet and authors of books on management practices.

Social Network Analysis

Work on social ties and networks can be traced back to early sociologists and anthropologist such as Durkheim's (1951) work on the relationship between weakened social ties, unclear social roles and norms, and suicide, Radcliffe-Brown's (1940) work on social networks as social structures, and Mauss' (1966) work on reciprocity within social ties and maintenance of relationships. Since then much work in anthropology on social networks has tended towards structural analyses of kinship ties, genealogies, and political conflict and factionalism (Barnes 1954, 1969; Foster & Seidman 1981; Fortes 1967, 1962; Gulliver 1977; Mitchell 1969; Salisbury & Silverman 1977; Schweizer & White 1997). Although many of the anthropologists have both drawn from and contributed to social network analysis, it is to the work of those who are more focused on

the categorical analysis of networks in social network analysis that I turn to in order to help illustrate the degree of variation among types of networks (Granovetter 1973, 1982; Marsden & Lin 1982; Mitchell 1969; Wasserman & Faust 1994). Epidemiologists and health scientists have also expanded upon the role of networks providing social support, particularly as they pertain to crises and times of illness (Bowling 1991; Gottlieb 1981; Hall & Wellman 1985; Jacobson 1987; Vaux 1988). A considerable amount of the work in these two areas focuses on categorization and measurement techniques. An initial exploration of these categories is useful in order to explore the networks' nature and variability. In order to do this, I draw upon the categories developed and used by Vaux.

Vaux (1988) describes networks in terms of four major characteristics: structural, composition, features of networks and other. Within the structural features are size and density. Composition is made up of proportion of types of relations and homogeneity. Features of networks include frequency of contact, geographic proximity, durability, and intensity of relationships. Finally the other category is made up of context of exchanges, degree of reciprocity and multiplexity (the number of relationships between different networks). I found that the networks in my research varied by each of these different categories, which I will explore through examples. However, before I do so, I also discuss the ways in which social capital theory can be used to describe the networks of women farmers in B.C.

Social Capital

Theorists of social capital have also examined networks in order to explain how they achieve productive ends rather than focusing on a description of the networks

themselves. In social capital analysis, networks are generally seen as the structural aspects of social capital (Baum & Zirsch 2003) and they have been examined in terms of types of relations (Tiepoh & Reimer 2004; Reimer, Lyons, Ferguson & Polanco 2006), characteristics and measurements (Flora, Flora & Fey 2004; Stone 2001), as well as functions (Baum & Ziersch 2003; Flora *et al* 2004; Granovetter 1973, 1982; Harper 2001; Lin 2001; Woolcock 2001). Social capital is about using networks in order to achieve a particular goal or end. This has been variously described as “mutual benefit” (Putnam, 1993), “the backing of collectively-owned capital” or credit (Bourdieu 1986, p. 248-249) and an “asset...that can be called upon in times of crises, enjoyed for its own sake, and/or leveraged for material gain” (Woolcock 2001, p.12). All of these definitions imply some form of intentional or productive use of the networks by the individuals within it.

The networks found during my field research did not lend themselves well to a social capital analysis, largely because they often lacked an explicit focus on being productive – an aspect which is central to the concept of social capital. Rather than being based on an active intention towards a goal, support originated organically from the networks without consciously working towards that end. The empirical evidence found during my research indicates that the support, although in many ways taken for granted by the women because they were unconscious of the process through which it originated, is productive for the women. However, it is not necessarily an active goal, rather, it is more of a by-product.

Therefore, the conceptual framework which I employ to discuss these networks diverges from that of social capital, particularly in terms of describing how the process of going from network to end result – in the case of my research, support – is attained.

However, although I differentiate my analysis from the theoretical framework of social capital, I find that some of the ways social capital theorists describe networks, as well as the mechanisms through which the networks function, offer useful tools to describe the networks of the farmers I interviewed. In particular the distinctions between bonding, bridging, and linking are very useful in informing how the networks result in varying forms of support. Bonding refers to connections between similar groups of people who are often related in terms of class, gender, ethnicity, or kinship. These groups of people tend to have strong relationships and ties (Baum & Ziersch 2003; Flora *et al* 2004; Harper 2001; Woolcock 2001). These networks tend to be exclusive to members inside of the group, reinforce the network through time, and are based on emotional connections. Family networks for the women tend to fall into this category, although farmer-to-farmer relations can also reflect some of these characteristics.

Bridging social capital on the other hand is based on connections between diverse groups and tends to be more inclusive (Flora *et al* 2004; Harper 2001; Woolcock 2001). These networks are related to what Granovetter (1973, 1982) has described as weaker ties which he states are important in “getting ahead” because the connections are made beyond one’s regular circles. Linking social capital is similar to bridging except that it incorporates a vertical rather than horizontal connection which often implies linking between two groups in different positions of power (Baum & Ziersch 2003; Woolcock, 2001).

A Description of the Networks

A few examples follow to illustrate how these categories described above are reflected in the networks of the women farmers. On Vancouver Island there is a strong network of organic vegetable farmers, many of whom happen to be women. The size of the network is probably upward of 40 members if you include those on the fringe, and the density – although it decreases some as the geographical distance grows from the centre – is fairly strong; each member knows each other and in many cases are close friends. In terms of composition, the network is made up entirely of farmers and the group is fairly homogenous since they are mostly white middle class educated women and men who have an interest in ecology and environmentalism. Few of them grew up on a farm, however. They range in age from apprentices in their early 20s to second generation farmers in their 30s and those who first established the network and taught the second generation how to farm.

The frequency of contact is fairly regular. There are monthly information sessions for the apprentices at rotating farms. Most of the farmers sell to three of the women who also run a wholesaling company and many of the farmers come into contact weekly during the farming season at the Moss street market – the organic farmers' market in Victoria. In terms of geography they are all located in the lower southern part of the island within no more than two hours of Victoria. The network is quite durable since it began with the establishment of five farms in the late 1980s and has continued to grow ever since. The intensity of the relationships is fairly strong as is the degree of reciprocity and multiplexity. These relations include both bonding and bridging interactions.

The farmer-to-farmer network varies from those in the family-to-farmer category. In one case two sisters in their late 20s are farming on the same rented land in the Fraser Valley. They each have their own separate operations, with one sister farming with her partner, and the other sharing some crops with her partner and managing some on her own. The rest of their siblings and their parents are living in Ontario. Their parents try to keep informed about how things are going on their daughters' farms. Their mother is supportive and encouraging of what they are doing. The father is also supportive but worries about the viability of farming and is concerned that his daughters' financial well-being may be jeopardized. Apart from frequent phone contact and showing interest, the parents are not involved in the farm, in part due to the fact that they are four provinces away. The size of this network is small and the density, based on communal ties, is fairly strong. The composition is entirely of family members, and they are homogenous except for age and gender. The frequency of contact varies with geographic proximity from the intense relationship of the two sisters, to telephone conversations between them and their parents, to the even less frequent contact between themselves and their siblings. The durability of the network is likely to be life-long, the degree of reciprocity is high and it is a bonding type of interconnection.

For contrast, I describe the family-to-farmer network of a sheep farmer that differs in a few substantial ways. This second example shows how similar types of networks – in this case family to farmer networks – can differ fairly substantially. This second family network has resulted in much larger degrees of support for the farmer. She and her family – husband and 10 year old daughter – live on the family farm property, although across the road on an adjacent section to that occupied by her parents and her

sister's family. She has incorporated the farming business, which consists of 100 head of sheep. Although she and her husband own the farming business, they rent from her parents several hundred acres of pasture, around 1000 acres of rangeland which they use for agro-forestry practices, and the farm infrastructure. Both her parents and her sister are involved in the farm. Her mother helps out with the work on a daily basis, providing what assistance she can. Her father has never been very active in the daily farming activities, but participates in farming related tasks such as the yearly dedication to removal of a particular weed in a section of the woodlot, or welcoming people as they come onto to the farm to buy lamb. Her brother, who lives nearby, also indirectly participates in the farm since he manages all of the woodlots as part of his forestry business. The size of the network is fairly small, and the density strong. The composition is of family members who comprise a fairly homogenous group. However, in contrast to the two sisters' network described above, the frequency of contact is high and consistent, the geographic proximity is very close, and the intensity within all of the relationships is strong. The durability of the relationship is again likely to be life-long, the degree of reciprocity is quite high, and it is a bonding type of relation.

Another type of network – between farmer and community at large – varies considerably from those above. The following example is based on a network between farmers and farming related media – in this case a publication called the Stockman Grass Farmer Journal. Several farmers referred to the Grass Farmer Journal as an essential asset to their farming operations. This journal has been published in Massachusetts since 1947 and is “devoted solely to the art and science of making a profit from grassland agriculture” (The Stockman Grass Farmer, 2006). The size of the network is fairly

expansive as it consists of the farmer and the journal's contributors – which frequently include submissions from its subscribers. The density is very low since each member has little to no interaction with each other. The composition is diverse and heterogeneous including farmers, researchers and consumers from various parts of the world. The journal comes out once a month and so contact is regular and fairly frequent. However, its 11,000 subscribers are spread out across all of North, Central, and South America as well as Europe and New Zealand. The farmers who read the journal strongly valued it and had subscribed for some time, indicating both durability and quality of the relationship, although of an unconventional kind. Finally, there are some limited opportunities for exchange, since the journal publishes letters and questions originating from its subscribers. It represents a fairly strong presence of bridging social capital since it connects the farmers to information they would not be able to gain access to in their communities. This is particularly so because grass-fed livestock production is still uncommon with few producers in any particular region. It also represents some forms of linking social capital since information relating to government and industry programs and actions is disseminated through the journal.

Networks and Support

These examples provide a glimpse of the differing characteristics of the networks for the women I interviewed. From these diverse networks stem diverse forms of support for the women as they face the challenges of farm entry. The literature on support as it relates to networks often focuses on times of crises (Gottlieb 1981; see Jacobson 1987, p. 44 for a list of references; Lin, Dean, & Ensel 1986). Vaux (1988) takes a wider

perspective in suggesting that support can be found both in events that “stand out dramatically from everyday life... and those that blend into everyday life” (p.28), but he is still doing so from the analytical lens of epidemiology and psychological development. I take a much broader view of support. For the women I interviewed support comes in many forms. Sometimes it is related to particular difficult events, however, it can also be in the form of the transfer of knowledge which occurs slowly over time, a positive attitude transferred from one farmer to another, or the support of a consumer who is willing to pay more for a particular product.

Furthermore, much of the literature on social support focuses on a particular individual and their support networks. They focus narrowly on those networks from which an individual draws support (Jacobson 1987; Vaux 1988). Some authors state that networks fluctuate between support networks and networks in the more general sense as they move between being active and non-active, particularly over time and as the need for them arises. I however, hesitate to use the term support networks at all. As mentioned above in the section on social capital, I found that the networks were not focused on being productive and in this case explicitly supportive. Instead the networks result in support in a plethora of both intentional and unintentional ways. Perhaps one reason for the more narrow view of networks in the literature is because of a tendency to focus on support in times of crises rather than the challenges of the everyday. With a focus on particular events, the emphasis tends towards how the individual actively ‘draws support’. In contrast, in many cases during my research I found that support originated from the networks the farmers were already involved in rather than the farmer actively turning to them for support. Thus focus is shifted from the individual and the networks

that are formed around her, to broader networks within which the individual is found. Although many of these differences are slight and based, at least in part, on semantics, they are necessary in order to avoid portraying too narrow a view of the networks and how they transformed into a source of support for the women.

The differentiation between activity and function that is found in some of the literature on social support is also useful (Vaux 1988). I focus on the latter category in my discussion. Several authors also look at a typology of support as a tool for analysis and in doing so they break it into several categories¹⁸ (Barrera & Ainlay 1983; Mitchell & Trinkett 1980; Vaux 1988). However, I diverge from this tendency to categorize forms of support and, following Avenarius' (2002) approach, find that broader categories capture more easily the diversity of support the women receive. I have therefore chosen two broad categories of distinction – affective and practical/material support. Affective support refers to the intangible forms of support such as emotional backing, encouragement or inspiration while practical/material support refers to more tangible effects such as helping with financial resources, volunteering time or labour, or consumers paying a higher price for their food.

Using the women's stories, I now explore how the networks mediated the challenges the women faced. Although forms of support occurred in many different situations and contexts, I focus my attention on two main areas or challenges for the women in order to illustrate this process. The first is getting started and building up the

¹⁸ For example, Mitchell and Trinkett identify emotional support, task-oriented assistance, evaluations and a shared world view, and access to diverse information and social contacts. Vaux (1988) breaks support down into supportive acts which includes the following categories: material aid, behavioral assistance, intimate interaction, guidance, feedback; and supportive behavior which include: emotional, feedback, advice/guidance, practical, financial, material, and socializing.

business, and the second is gaining access to information. Elizabeth's narrative is an exploration of the former.

Getting Started: Elizabeth's Story

Everyone in our family learned to appreciate farming. There is not one of us that have grown to resent it. We have always been taught really good values. We have all been given the opportunity to have a management experience where most people don't get that. On the farm everybody needs to help out or otherwise it isn't going to run. I can look back and be really appreciative. We can say [to our younger siblings], 'You know what, take this opportunity and work your heart out and do it, because you are not going to get this opportunity to learn these kind of values again.' You learn them when you are a child. If you learn to be lazy when you are a child you go out into the world and you are a bare minimum employee.

I never thought I would be a farmer though. I knew I would help my parents out and things like that but basically that was expected of me. But to have my own farm? That was not a dream of mine, no.

But then later on I decided when I was living back at my parent's place that because of lifestyle... Being on the farm and seeing how my kids were... then I wanted to farm. Compared to when I lived in the city with them, and then compared to the 6 months I spent on my parent's farm and the changes in them... In that sense it was ideally where I would like to be with them, or at least being in a position where I made my own hours and being with them when I wanted to. Which in a sense with a bar¹⁹ I could spend all day with them, and if I needed to be there at night then I could, or Sean and I could alternate nights. But it is even more flexible with a farm because it isn't an adult environment. We can take them to the markets and they are pretty kid friendly.

Well what we did to start our farm was... We were looking at farms, and orchards. We had looked at a few in Chilliwack but then we were like, 'We don't want to stay in Chilliwack' and we had our minds set on moving to the Okanagan. Very soon after we started looking at orchards we knew we would never be able to afford one because they were too expensive. Banks would never agree to give us a loan for \$600,000 or \$500,000, and that was the price of them. So then we started looking at bars as well as orchards.

They [the orchards] were mostly like 10 or 15 acres. We talked about it and said that would be too much for us to start with because we would have to learn

¹⁹ When Elizabeth and Sean first set out to start up their own business, they had background in both farming and food and beverage/bar and grill management. They were therefore considering both the option of opening a bar and starting an orchard.

everything. And then the orchards we were looking at weren't diverse enough for what we wanted to do. We knew we wanted to do fresh market²⁰, and we knew we didn't want to have a thousand Gala [apple] trees. We knew there was no way we would go through all those apples at market. The orchards had one kind of peaches, one kind of apricot, and two kinds of apples. So they had diversity but they didn't. With a peach crop, from the time you start picking until that variety is finished is a week, it is maybe a week and a half. And so, if you have 500 trees with the same kind of peach, and they all have to be off the tree in a week and a half – that is a lot of picking. Whereas right now we have 30 trees of one variety, and we sell them as fast as we can pick them. Clearly we were going to put it into organics. Being able to actually find an organic orchard that was for sale in our price range was just [impossible].

We had given up. And we would have been able to get a loan to look for a bar for 5, 6 or \$700,000 easily because they [the banks] know that bars make money. They are much more willing to give a loan on that than give a loan on a farm, even though it is a business, an established business. And bars have better books than farms.

So then, Sean was working one night and this couple came in and said, 'We know you. You work in White Rock.' And he said 'uh, no I work here like 24 hours a day.' And they specified 'The Farmers' market'. And he said 'Oh no, I just help my girlfriend out, she sells for her mom.' They replied, 'Oh, well we sell at the market. We sell our mom's stuff there. We sell apples and tomatoes and stuff from her farm. It is up in Vickston.' And he told them 'Elizabeth and I were looking to buy an orchard, but we aren't able to afford it.' And they said, 'Oh, well our mom's place is up for sale.'

Basically it was everything we were looking for, and it was certified organic on top of that. It was totally within our price range – with what we felt we could support a mortgage from off the farm. And they said, 'Well she really wants to sell it. Her husband just died of a staff infection and she needs to sell it. She doesn't want to be there anymore.'

So basically her son had moved out there and was helping her with the farm, with most of the work and stuff like that. But he didn't want to take it over, he was a musician, and he didn't have the money to buy the place either. So we said, 'It sounds so perfect we have to go and take a look at it. Maybe we can fit it into our budget, or who knows, maybe we can get a loan for that much.' That was on a Saturday night, I had the market on Sunday, and then on Monday we went up there. The owner totally wanted us to come up, just come and take a look. She spent 5 hours showing us around this 5 acre piece of land, and showing us everything as if we were taking it over tomorrow.

²⁰ A fresh market is any place where you sell your produce directly to the consumer. In Elizabeth's case she is referring to selling at farmers' markets.

And we went inside and we said that what she was asking for we basically couldn't afford, and this is what we can afford and she was like, 'Oh, I would take that if you offered that.' So we were kind of overwhelmed. It was almost \$50,000 less than she had originally asked for the place, or \$25,000, I don't know but it was quite a bit less. Just putting a number out there was kind of like... We weren't really expecting her to take it. Basically, she wanted us to have it. I told her what my background in organics was, and we wanted to keep it organic and she totally wanted us to have it. It was just kind of meant to be. We paid around \$177,000 I think, it was around that anyway.

After we had gone and talked to her, we went out for dinner and talked about writing up an offer. That is when I said to Sean, 'You know I think this place is great, and we can totally be sustainable on this piece of land, and these are what my ideas are, and this is what I think from an agricultural standpoint. But at the same time I am not going to be happy doing it if you don't want to do it. So basically if you would be happier running a bar, than I would be happy running a bar also.' At that time I was very flexible in what I was going to do. I just didn't want to be working for somebody else; I wanted to have my own business. And so at that point I basically said to him that it was his decision because I was easy either way. If he was going to make the decision just to make me happy, then I wasn't going to be happy.

Sean and I have always communicated very well. Our relationship was more of a friendship than a relationship. Before we started dating we were very good friends and we talked all the time when it didn't matter to me what he wanted to do because it wasn't going to influence me. Before we had even started dating we had talked about buying a bar together.

What influenced his decision to farm was, I think, after spending time on my parent's farm and seeing the farming and the work behind it but also seeing the marketing; he saw the whole picture. We had friends that were working leaving at 5am and not getting home until 6pm and they didn't know their kids. When she went back to work and would work a graveyard shift, he would call and say he can't go out because he was babysitting. And Sean was saying, 'How can you babysit your own kids?' And basically what it came down to is that most men do babysit, because you can babysit your own kids when you don't even know who your own kids are and your kids don't know who you are! It is like you are a stranger to them. Sean didn't want to bring kids into the world and let somebody else raise them. So I think that was a big impact on him. 'If we can make this work then I can be at home and raise my kids, and my kids will know me just as much as they will know you.' I think that was one of the big factors.

Everything almost went too smoothly. I think at that point, when I had made him make the decision whether he wanted to do it or not, we were determined to do it, no matter what obstacles came in our way.

Sean was working as a food and beverage manager at a hotel, and so we used that as an income that was going to pay the mortgage kind of thing. And the banks don't really care about if you are going to quit that job. They want to know what is happening right now and what you are doing. His job was in Chilliwack and we would be living up in Cawston and he wasn't going to commute 3 hours to go to work because then he would be spending it all on gas (laughing). So then we sold his portion of the house to his brother. The other option was that they were just going to sell the house and then he would take half and his brother would take the other half, but there wasn't enough time. And what it came down to was we got less for the house than if we would have sold it because basically his brother bought it, but when push came to shove, we needed the money for the bank so we ended up taking less for it from his brother. And then I had money that I had saved up from working in Vancouver and so essentially we had money saved up and were able to put 25% down.

But banks don't like to give mortgages to farms, and when it came down to it they wanted us to sell Sean's truck that he had, his Durango, cause he had a loan on it. And so we ended up borrowing money from my parents to pay off the loan, and then traded it in for a truck for the farm. My parents lent us \$25,000. They were really hesitant about lending us the money in the sense that Sean and I weren't married and I guess they just weren't too sure about things. 'We will lend you this money and then you buy this farm and then things don't work out and we don't get paid back because Sean is a jerk and you are sitting there with two kids owing us this money that you don't have.' So it was really difficult for them to lend us the money.

Once we had the farm, we knew to be sustainable we had to move pretty much all our stuff through the markets – at top dollar – rather than through a packing house or a wholesaler. I had been around my parent's farm long enough to know that it isn't just the wholesalers that cut the farmers' throats; it is the farmers that cut each other's throats. My parents grew zucchini for all the warehouses for years and years. So they always bought it from my mom as soon as she had it. And then a few other growers started growing zucchinis and they totally undercut my mom to the extent where it wasn't even worthwhile for my parents to pick it almost. Even now, they are getting so little for a box of zucchini. And it is not like you are paying less for it in the store. It is just the wholesaler is making more money. And basically it comes down to the farmer coming in and saying, 'I will give it to you at this price. Oh, you get it for this price. Well I will sell it to you at this price.' You know the farmers are just cutting their own throats. So I wasn't ready to play that game. And it happens with the stores, they play the mind games too.

Basically what we said was, 'We know we can get into the White Rock market and then we will try to get into these markets because that is where we want to be.' We were determined to sell everything at fresh market. I had worked for my parents for a year, and I knew what they made and that we – with the size of our farm – if we made even a half of that we could keep it sustainable. Plus we could

expand and rent land from several of the farmers around us because everyone in town here is pretty much organic. This year we are renting an acre of cherries that we got to bring into third year transitional²¹. We also rent land from our neighbour Jim; he has been certified organic for 12 years now. He has Gala trees on his property, but we just did peaches from him this year because he wanted too much money for the whole property. This year he decided to pull out his apple trees. He had pulled out most of them and had one row left to go, so we said, 'If you are going to pull them out, then we will dig them and try planting them and see how they take off.' We didn't really have anything to lose because if you are buying a tree you are paying \$20 bucks a tree and we got 100 trees for the time it took us to dig them.

Now in the last two years we have gotten a lot bigger. I know that in the first year and the second year we doubled and the third year we doubled the second year. And this year there is no way we could have doubled last year. But at the same time, what we do know is there is no way we would be able to do it by ourselves.

In our second year we had a girl and she came and WWOOFed²² with us. We weren't registered [as WWOOF hosts] but we had met her at a market, and she was actually volunteering at my mom's stand and so she came to our farm for a couple weeks and then we paid her to stay an extra two weeks. Last year we paid WWOOFers to stay, one just for August and one for August and September. This year we have only had one day since February without a WWOOFer and are now paying Alicia and Kurt – who have been here for a couple months each – a thousand dollars each to stay for September.

But basically in the first three years we have been able to save and start putting money aside to build our house, which we got started on this summer.

Elizabeth's story highlights both the difficulties of finding land and getting started, as well as the ways in which she and her husband got past the hump of starting their business and achieving success. Her narrative also introduces us to several ways in which the networks that surround her have helped her be successful.

²¹ Third year transitional refers to the year before organic certification. Usually there is a three year transition period before one can get certification. However, the first two years can be waived if the land has been left fallow or you can prove that it has been in de facto organic certification for more than three years.

²² WWOOF refers to Willing Workers on Organic Farms. They are volunteers who work on organic farms in exchange for food and board.

Her family relations provide examples of both affective and practical/material support. In growing up on her farm, her family taught her both the value of working hard and of farming. She has 11 siblings and all of them have an appreciation of food production and the business she is now running. At several times during my fieldwork her family showed support for Elizabeth. As she also goes to many of the same markets as her mother, she frequently gets to visit with both her mother and her brothers and sisters, many of whom are still involved in their parent's farm and are frequently helping out at the markets. Elizabeth is very comfortable at the markets, in part because she grew up with them and because she is a natural marketer, but also in part because she is continually surrounded by a supportive social group, many of whom are her family.

Her family also lent her financial support. In starting the farm her parents were obviously supportive enough to lend her \$25,000, despite being unsure about her relationship with Sean at the time. This personal loan made it possible for Elizabeth and Sean to receive the mortgage.

Since acquiring the farm they have worked very hard and very long hours to get it up to the success point which she expresses in terms of being "able to save and start putting money aside to build our house". Their ability to do so is significant as most farms do not make money in their first couple of years. In addition, their farm has not only made money but has also allowed them to pay off several of their debts including the \$25,000 owed to her parents. In order to achieve this success both she and Sean have put in a phenomenal amount of work. This has also been accompanied by a large amount of practical and material support from their families.

Her brothers and sisters offer support by helping out at their market stands from time to time. One of her younger brothers, who is in university and lives in downtown Vancouver, also provides her with a place to stay when she is in town for the mid-week markets. For example, one evening Elizabeth and her two youngest children – aged 9 months and 3 years – a WWOOFer and I slept on his and his roommates’ couches and floors.

Elizabeth and her husband also obtain support from his side of the family. As they attend six markets every week, Elizabeth is in Vancouver four and half days per week. Elizabeth comes in without her husband during the week and spends Wednesday night either at her brother’s in town or drives the two hour trek out to her mother-in-law’s. Even when she doesn’t spend the night at Sean’s mom’s, she will stop in as she passes by in order to provide a break for her children. Over the weekend Elizabeth, Sean and their four children stay at his mother’s place Friday and Saturday night. During each of these visits at least one WWOOFer will come along to help out at the markets, who Sean’s mother also accommodates. They also use part of her garage as storage for many of their supplies and dried goods for the market. In addition, his mother will also come to help out with the children and tend the stall at the markets on her days off. Without this help, in particular without a place to stay in the Vancouver area, it would be financially prohibitively for Elizabeth to come in to the markets as often as she does, because the cost of accommodation would be too high and the five hour drive one-way would be too long to do twice a day, four days a week.

In terms of farmer-to-farmer relations, Elizabeth and Sean are very lucky to be surrounded by other similar types of farms in their area. This has both an affective and

practical/material benefit to them. Their organic production is very acceptable and commonplace in the area which creates a comfortable and accepting atmosphere. Elizabeth also has a network of other farmers with whom she interacts at the farmers' markets every week. For example, at one market I noticed she was often joking and chatting with the sheep farmers at the next stall and had frequent friendly visits from other farmers. One of them, a woman who runs a 40 acre organic vegetable farm in the Fraser Valley, came over and started chatting with Elizabeth about her family. She asked questions about Elizabeth's sister who is farming in Saskatchewan and about the age of her youngest brother. The woman then proceeded to get into a conversation with the sheep farmers about how their farm was one of the first she ever spent time on. These conversations indicate a tightly knit community. Elizabeth comes across as being comfortable and confident at the markets. She is both good at marketing and interacting with the customers, and seems to generally enjoy herself. This indicates both aspects of her personality, as well as the effects of being in such a strong community of farmers and family.

Her farmer-to-farmer networks also provide practical and material support. They are able to rent land from the neighbours in order to expand their operation. They have received materials for expanding from the farmers nearby such as the apple trees they got from their neighbour. I would also classify the deal she was given by the woman who sold her the property as being a form of support. The woman wanted to sell her farm, but she also was excited to sell it to a young couple that would keep it under organic certification and continue with her farming practices. Because of this, she did not act in terms of profit maximizing, but rather gave them a significant reduction on the price of

the farm. This made it possible for Elizabeth and Sean to purchase the land and get started. Furthermore, without their networks at the market, which in this case is based on a particularly 'weak tie' between the previous owners' daughter and Sean (Granovetter, 1973), they never would have found out about the property to begin with.

Finally, there are also several instances of community-to-farmer support which have helped Elizabeth and Sean get their operation off the ground and build towards success. In terms of affective support, the most significant is probably the moral backing that she gets from the consumers who buy her produce at the farmers' markets. Each week they help her sustain her farm by paying a premium for the fruit and vegetables they buy. At the same time their choice to buy Elizabeth's produce helps her financially and, given their choice to come back week after week, lets Elizabeth know that she is producing a good product and that her work is valued. Some of her customers are even more explicit than speaking through actions, and will often let her know how appreciated she is. Comments such as "Great veggies, they are my favorite" and "Keep up the great work" are common.

Elizabeth also has several volunteers that help out at the market. These volunteers come to help Elizabeth because they believe in what she is doing. They believe in "buying local", or organic, and supporting local farmers. As I stood around the markets observing everyone's interactions, I could almost reach and take hold of this moral support, it was so obviously present. Elizabeth recognizes and appreciates their contribution by providing them with vegetables to take home after the market, or in some instances compensating them for their transportation costs to come and help her out.

The customers and volunteers also help to create the positive atmosphere at the market for Elizabeth. One morning as we were heading into Vancouver for a market, Elizabeth was expressively excited about going to the market that day. She was telling me stories about the previous weeks' market and laughing almost convulsively. She was recounting how they had had a long line of customers and Kara, the volunteer, had made everyone break out laughing by showing them all the tomato of the week – a tomato that happened to have an appendage sticking out of it – which began a whole series of jokes and kept everyone laughing until they moved through the line.

Elizabeth and her husband were nominated for the Outstanding Young Farmers Award for the region of British Columbia/Yukon. The award is meant to recognize farmers that are outstanding in their field and those that win the regional award then go on to compete at the national level. Their accountant had nominated them, impressed by their ability to be sustainable on their farm in their first year. After several months of intense scrutiny, the award committee selected them as one of the top three finalists. Although they did not win the award, they were still recognized formally as being outstanding young farmers and her family was invited, all expenses paid, to a ceremony in Abbotsford that celebrated them and the other finalists.

The community has also provided much practical and material support. As mentioned above, the markets have allowed Elizabeth's farm to get 'top dollar' for her produce. As Elizabeth explains in her narrative, this has made a significant difference for the viability of her farm. Furthermore the amount of work that the volunteers and WWOOFers contribute at the markets make a significant difference for the amount of produce that Elizabeth can sell. For example, one afternoon at a market, one WWOOFer

was off playing with the two youngest children, one volunteer was restocking the vegetables, another two were behind the cash register, and I was out in front of the stall convincing people to sample “the best apples in the world!” Elizabeth was freed up to move amongst the customers answering questions and do general marketing. With all of this support, the markets are no doubt much more successful than they would have been if it were just Elizabeth.

Back at the farm the WWOOFers also contribute greatly in reducing the workload. As Elizabeth says, her farm has increased significantly each year, and that “...at the same time, what we do know is there is no way we would be able to do it by ourselves.” She also mentions that they have only had one day since February, 2005, (our conversation took place in late September, 2005), where they did not have a WWOOFer staying with them. During the two week period I spent with Elizabeth, there were a total of five WWOOFers who were helping them. One was there for two weeks and left a few days before I did, while two others arrived near the end of my stay and were planning to remain for a month. Meanwhile, two of the other WWOOFers had recently become employees of the farm after having already spent just under two months as volunteers. As Elizabeth mentions in her narrative, they have hired volunteers several times over the past few years to stay on as staff. This helps them find suitable labour, which is not always easy to find in the farming sector. It also means that they can hire when it is necessary as well as hire employees that are already trained and dedicated to the farm.

Elizabeth’s story shows many examples in which the people around her have helped her and her family get her operation off the ground. These networks have ranged from family connections to consumers to volunteers and have all varied considerably in

the type of network they represent. Some of them have been intentional and explicit in their support, such as her family or the customers that tell her she is doing a great job, while others have provided support unintentionally such as the organic farmers in her town from whom they lease land. However, what they all have had in common is playing an integral role in Elizabeth's farms' path to success.

Elizabeth's story exemplifies the extent to which her networks have provided support in getting her farm up and running. However, it is only one example of the ways in which networks provide support for women farmers as they dealt with the everyday challenges encountered on a farm. Access to knowledge was also a major hurdle for many of the women as they started their farms. The support that has helped the women deal with this challenge has come from a diversity of sources. The following story about Sarah, a cattle rancher, and the route to diagnosis of a cow that had become sick, shows another example of how networks have resulted in support, in this case knowledge and advice.

A Sick Cow, Diagnosis and Access to Knowledge: Sarah's Story

Sarah is a cattle rancher in Northern British Columbia. She and her husband Hans moved up to the farm a year and a half ago and were nearing the end of their second season when I came to stay with them. They have 588 acres of deeded land and almost 900 acres of grazing lease on crown land. They have built their herd to almost 50 cattle but have plans of reaching the 200 mark within the next few years. Until that point, Sarah is at home running the day to day operations and looking after their son, who was 13 months old when I visited, with Hans working off the farm as a machinist.

One evening I was working on my fieldnotes in the spare room, when Sarah came to tell me that one of her cows had just collapsed in the field. She had been out taking a stroll and checking on the cows when one of them had just collapsed right there beside her. She was astonished that it had happened when she was right there and couldn't help but wonder how many other times it had happened. They had first noticed the cow had breathing problems in the spring but had never had any trouble with her so hadn't worried about it too much. Now she wondered what the breathing problem could have been a sign of back then. While out in the field she had called to her husband to bring down the medication, but by the time he got down there, the cow was back up on her feet and Sarah couldn't get close enough. That night, as she was putting her son to bed, she read through her reference book Healthy Livestock trying to identify the cow's illness. Based on what she could tell from the book it was possibly pneumonia, but it was hard to tell with out checking over the cow further. That entailed getting her in the squeeze²³, which is not an easy task. They decided instead to go back out to the field and try to give her a shot of penicillin. Sarah put on her fullpiece suit, loaded up the syringe and headed out into the field. When we got down there the cow was once again standing up and wouldn't let Sarah or her husband get close to her. Somewhat discouraged, we headed back inside and Sarah went online to read about other ranchers' experiences and advice on a U.S. chat site. She also went onto a site for veterinarians. Sarah said it was hard to read and she didn't understand all the jargon, but every once in a while she has found useful information on it. Before going to bed she and her husband went over their options one more time. They could kill the cow for meat, but would only get ground beef from

²³ A squeeze is a device used to hold cattle steady in order to be able to get close to and work on them.

her. They could sell her at an auction but would likely only get \$200. They could treat her, but then if she died they wouldn't be able to eat the meat. If she died however, they could call the inspector from the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands who pays \$200 to the farmer for being able to check the brain for BSE. Or they could call the vet and get her checked out. If they called the vet they would at least know what was wrong, but it would cost a lot of money and might not be worth it since the cow had probably been sick for a while now. It was definitely unclear to them what they should do.

The next morning Sarah went out early to check on the cow and was surprised to find that both she and her calf were up in the corral. All the cows came up once a day to get salt and water, but it was funny that they were up there on their own. Sarah closed her into a corral so she couldn't go back out to the field and came in to make some phone calls. The first person she called was Jody, the farmer down the road. Jody told her to bring the cow into the Squeeze and check for several signs of different illnesses. She told her how to check for hardware²⁴ disease, what a fever would indicate, and a few other tips. They also used the opportunity to talk about whether or not to sell calves into the Alberta auction this year, and whether Sarah was interested in buying some of Jody's replacement heifers.

Sarah also called the butcher to see if he was available over the next few days. He would frequently come out to people's ranches to butcher animals for their own personal consumption. He was also known as somewhat of an expert in animal health and would

²⁴ Cattle will sometimes swallow pieces of metal that are near their feed or in the pasture. When this occurs the cow will sometimes be fed a magnet which attracts the pieces of metal into one location in her rumen and stops the metal from moving through her body causing damage.

be able to check the animal over before butchering her. This way he could let Sarah know if he thought she only had a minor illness that could be treated.

After that Sarah called the vet. They had to set a date over the next few weeks to have the vet come and do pregnancy checks, so Sarah thought that perhaps they could set a date sooner rather than later, and the vet could check the sick cow while she was already at the farm. The vet gave her a bit of advice, but was unable to come over the next few days. Instead she suggested Sarah bring the cow into town to get checked out.

Sarah decided that she would try and diagnose the cow that evening by bringing her into the Squeeze. When Hans came home, Sarah put together a list of things to check based on suggestions from the book and from the conversation she had with Jody. After discussing the game plan, we went to the corral and Sarah guided the cow into the Squeeze. Hans checked her pulse and temperature. The thermometer was in Celsius and the book quoted temperatures in Fahrenheit, so Sarah marked it down and called her father afterwards to find out the conversion. Sarah listened to the rumen, as Jody had suggested, and pushed up where the cows' heart was. The cow groaned loudly. This was exactly what Jody had said would happen if the cow had hardware disease. They decided they would give the cow penicillin and then buy a magnet to treat the hardware disease after Hans came home from work the next day.

Nonetheless the following day Sarah called the vet again to discuss the symptoms and figure out what she should get her husband to pick up from the co-op on his way home from work. That evening we brought the cow back into the Squeeze and Sarah and Hans managed to get her to swallow the magnet. The next day the cow seemed to be

feeling better and she didn't have any other problems during the rest of my stay at the farm.

This story exemplifies particularly well how farmer-to-farmer and community-to-farmer networks help with access to knowledge. Sarah and her husband had some ideas of how to deal with the cow on their own, however, by contacting Jody, the farmer down the road, people in their community such as the vet and the butcher, and through accessing information in books and on the internet, they were able to come to a much more informed decision on how to treat the cow. In terms of affective support, Sarah was much more confident throughout the process of diagnosis, as well as in their final decision because she had the opportunity to discuss what was happening with several other informed people. The knowledge that she gained through these interactions made her feel more confident in her ability to deal with the process. From the conversation she had with the farmer down the road, to the book which she frequently referred to in order to make sure she was doing things properly while the cow was in the Squeeze, Sarah was able to come to a confident decision on how to treat the cow. The knowledge gained also obviously had a practical/material effect as it gave Sarah and her husband the tools necessary to proceed and to come to a diagnosis.

The two stories of Elizabeth and Sarah demonstrate how networks, based on social interaction, have provided the women with support that has helped them deal with various challenges. Although I have only highlighted those associated with getting started and with gaining access to knowledge, there were many other ways in which these networks supported the women. These include helping to take care of children and

balancing family and farm work, leasing and access to land, reducing overall workloads, financial difficulties, and other general farming related challenges.

In addition to demonstrating how networks result in support, these examples have shown how the networks and social interaction that surround the women have done much more than just create a social space where gender is not a major frame of reference. What these examples have shown is that this alternate social space has gone beyond gender to create a supportive and encouraging space that has helped the women deal with many of the other challenges that are present within agriculture and the farm entry process.

Furthermore, Sarah's story has also highlighted how the alternate social space can exist within forms of conventional agriculture. In chapter 5, I used Sarah's relationship with her neighbour as an example of how interactions can occur within conventional streams of agriculture and showed how their relationship led Sarah to feel both accepted as a woman farmer and encouraged to continue pursuing farming as a career. The example described above in which Sarah's networks have resulted in her gaining access to knowledge and thus better able to deal with the diagnosis and care of her cow, shows how those networks have also provided support for her beyond alleviating constraints based on gender.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Summary of the Thesis

There have been several questions which have driven my research. I wanted to know how the process of farm entry worked, how women perceived the process, what kinds of agriculture women were entering, and the major challenges that the women were facing. I was also interested to know how both the processes and the challenges were being mediated. One of my underlying goals in asking these questions was to suggest ways to better facilitate the process of farm entry by women in the future.

There has been a continual and significant decrease in numbers of people involved in agricultural production over the past few decades. However, there are still people who want to farm. There are also consumers who want to support farmers, particularly those involved in smaller scale family farms, whether for environmental reasons, due to local versus global ideologies, or because of concerns about the origin of their food and how it is produced. In order to find ways to facilitate the process of encouraging more people – in this case women – getting into farming, I turned my research lens to those involved in the process. I felt that the best way to learn about the challenges and how they could be mediated was to look at what women entering agriculture were doing, and to figure out what lessons could be learned from understanding their experiences.

Before entering the field I had an idea of several of the challenges I was likely to encounter. The literature on women in agriculture particularly emphasizes the difficulties women face because of the male-dominance of the sector. I therefore made sure to include this as one of my areas of focus once in the field. However, when I got there, I

found there were a few key differences between what the literature suggested I would find, and what I encountered. Chapter 4 and 5 are dedicated to exploring and explaining those differences. To begin with, I found that gender does not seem to be a major issue for the women in their daily activities, or a factor that brings into question their legitimacy and ability as farmers, despite the fact that women are a minority in the farming sector. Chapter 4 shows that some women feel that there are constraints related to their gender. Some women feel that it permeates their daily activities in ways that makes them feel like their ability to be a farmer is questioned by those around them. Somewhat in contrast however, most women identify challenges in their daily activities that are related to gender – such as the added responsibilities associated with being a mother, or lack of physical strength – however, they do not feel that these challenges lead to other people not accepting them as farmers.

In chapter 5, I explored potential reasons for the differences between these two experiences. On the one hand there are women who feel like their gender makes it difficult to farm. On the other hand there are women who feel both accepted and encouraged as farmers. I found during my research that these differences in experience largely had to do with the types of social interactions in which the women were engaged. I also found that these social interactions are indicative of a particular social space – one where the women feel constrained because of their gender, and the other where they feel accepted. I used the terms alternative social space versus dominant social space to describe these two spaces and explored some of the contributing factors into their creation and reinforcement.

One of the major findings during my research was that the alternate social space seemed to exist independently from the dominant one. This was counter to what I had expected. I went into my fieldwork with an expectation that spaces of acceptance of women as farmers would be challenging the dominant space and creating spaces of acceptance within it. Although I found that the two spaces do at times merge, for the most part the two are autonomous in terms of how those interactions play out in the women's lives. Where the interactions occur, for example, are at the level of competition between organic and conventional markets, or land use policies that lead towards concentration of farmland versus encouraging the existence of smaller farms. On a day-to-day level however, many of the types of interactions are largely autonomous. I found that this was largely related to the differences between the systems and institutions of alternative versus conventional agriculture. These two types of agriculture tend to have their own autonomous systems and institutions, from market mechanisms to social spheres of interaction, and those within alternative agriculture tend to coincide with the alternate social space and conventional agriculture tend to coincide with the dominant social space. Furthermore many aspects of alternative agriculture have developed and continue to exist autonomously, therefore leading to the alternate social space emerging autonomously from the dominant one.

The relation between alternative agriculture and this alternative space of acceptance of women as farmers also coincides with the suggestion that more women appear to be getting into alternative agriculture than conventional. Although more research needs to be done in order to confirm such a trend, the findings in my research

suggest that the presence of this alternate social space is in part what is drawing women towards alternative agriculture.

I also found, however, that this relationship between alternative agriculture and the alternate social space is not exclusive. In other words there are women within conventional agriculture that also felt accepted and encouraged as farmers. I have attempted to document this in parts of chapter 5 and chapter 6, in order to show that the alternate social space does indeed exist at times in conventional agriculture. However, further research is needed in order to better understand this relationship.

Finally I also found that this alternate social space does much more than simply alleviate challenges related to gender. Researchers looking at women in agriculture have shown how women experience life within a traditionally male dominated sector. The work has paralleled the broader movement to recognize women's work in the home and to show how that work has much too often been undervalued. Research on women in agriculture has also documented various forms of discrimination that women are facing, the repercussions that this has had on their lives, and how women's organizing has challenged and ultimately changed forms of subordination.

However, I also feel that this aspect of feminists' work, with its tendency to focus on inequalities, subordination and marginality, at times overshadows other aspects of women's lives that are equally important to examine and perhaps, also of more importance to the women themselves. I feel that an important part of feminist research is simply the task of researching women, which at times necessitates a focus on inequalities as they are related to gender, but at times will also take us much further than this delimited area of inquiry. Women's lives are full of a richness and diversity of

experiences, and research needs to reflect that. Because women's lives are not all about their gender, neither should our research be. Researchers of women need to also turn to those areas where gender is not a major factor impinging on women's work and daily experiences.

In chapter 6 I therefore went beyond gender and looked at ways in which the social interactions within the alternate social space also lead to forms of support that help to mediate the other challenges that are significant in the farm entry process. I identified three types of networks which seemed to best represent the social interactions that surround the women. These are family-to-farmer, farmer-to-farmer, and community-to-farmer networks. One of my major findings is that these networks result in significant forms of support for the women. However, I also found that this support is not necessarily always explicitly sought after or offered. Instead the support often simply results from the networks, and the social interactions which comprise them.

Research Implications: Going from Ethnography to Policy

In concluding this thesis, I now must ask what the implications are of what I have learned. In terms of moving from my research findings to policy, there are several key conclusions which can be reached. Women in the process of farm entry face considerable challenges. Some of these are related to their gender, such as facing discrimination or lacking particular forms of knowledge that are generally passed on through male social relations. Others are related to the more generalized difficulties of getting into farming, such as high land values coupled with the apprehensiveness of banks towards giving agricultural loans. My research has indicated that many of the women find themselves in

a social space in which there are various forms of support, both affective and material/practical that have helped them deal with these challenges. Therefore, from a policy perspective, in order to try and mediate these various challenges for women in the future, it makes sense to identify those aspects which are characteristic of the alternate social space and to work towards improving support services within them.

Since the systems and institutions within alternative agriculture coincide to a large extent with this social space, policies should find ways to support those forms of agriculture. I have identified five main areas in which this could be done. First, policies should focus on supporting direct marketing infrastructure, such as farmers' markets, farm gate sales, or programs such as Community Supported Agriculture²⁵. Farmer – chef partnerships could also be encouraged.

Second, supporting the sale of local products would also help to encourage alternative agriculture. This could be done by building local marketing infrastructure and promoting policies that support local farmers. Policies should be oriented towards import substitution wherever possible.

Encouraging of alternative production techniques would also make a significant impact. This can be done through information and training programs, grants for entering into niche markets and promoting certification for alternative farming methods such as organics.

Fourth, supporting local smaller scale farming is also important. Putting limits on land values and discouraging residential development on agricultural land is necessary as many smaller farmers are competing for the same lands as peri-urban dwellers. In B.C.,

²⁵ Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is where the consumer pays in advance for produce which is supplied weekly throughout the farming season.

more stringent efforts could be put into place to protect the Agricultural Land Reserve²⁶.

Farmers could also be recognized for the many social and environmental benefits of farming. Many argue that society needs to find ways to fairly compensate farmers for their environmental services and stewardship, for the valuable food they produce, and the community enhancement they provide.

Finally, encouraging the public to support all of the suggested areas for policy development is vital to their success. The public should be encouraged to buy direct, buy local, purchase alternative products and to support small scale agriculture.

My research also indicates that the networks that surround the women play a very important role in mediating the challenges faced during farm entry. Therefore policies should be oriented towards supporting those networks. It should be remembered however, that providing support was frequently not the *raison d'être* of those networks, nor was support explicitly sought. Therefore a narrow focus on enhancing only those areas of the networks where support originates may not have the desired effects; not supporting the development of the networks holistically may undermine their ability to result in support. Policies that could enhance support through the women's networks are as follows.

First, recognition of the role that informal networks play in the process of gaining access to resources is important. For example, taxation policy could acknowledge that money is often lent through informal networks. These loans often make a significant difference for the women. However, it should also be remembered that these informal

²⁶ The Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) in B.C. was a designation of farm land put in place in order to protect that land for agricultural use. However, in recent years, several municipalities have decided to swap ALR land within their jurisdiction for land in areas that are in less demand for residential and industrial development.

loans are often more flexible than formal loans. Therefore, allowances should be made for the differences between the nature of informal and formal debt when, for example, approaching a bank for a mortgage. As the informal loans are often more flexible than a car loan, for example, they should not be given equal weight by banks when examining overall credit ratings and debt payments. Other forms of material support are also frequently received through informal networks. For example, farmers and others with farm land will often rent land to those who do not have access to it. Offering of second hand goods to those just getting started is also fairly common. Mechanisms through which these exchanges occur could be further developed and supported.

Opportunities for social exchanges between farmers will also result in further support for the women. For example, considerable knowledge is exchanged between farmers. This is particularly the case for those involved in alternative agriculture since they frequently represent the primary ways through which knowledge is gained. Training programs such as farmer mentors, apprenticeships, as well as other general opportunities for exchange, such as farmer collaborations, farm visits, and farming events and organizations should also be encouraged.

Finally farmer – community relations could also be enhanced to both the benefit of the farmer and the community. For example, local municipalities could increase their profile by highlighting a particular type of farming in their area and increase tourism to their district through farm tours and farmers' markets. This relationship would contribute towards local development and the farmer, by being promoted as a local asset, would benefit from an increase in farm sales.

Putting policies in place that will help to facilitate the process of farm entry for women is important. This thesis has documented several of the challenges that the women face as well as how they are being mediated by several of the components of the alternate social space, and more specifically, by the women's networks. Without these the women's experiences in farm entry would be considerably different. Implementing policies that would further encourage them will make a significant difference to the lives of the women I interviewed for this thesis, as well as for those who, in the future, will be choosing to embark on the journey towards running their own farm.

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Appendix 1: Interview Guide

Description of farm:

- 1) What kind of farm, size of farm, etc.
- 2) Where sell product to?
- 3) What is process, production to leaves the farm.
- 4) Work with other farms or on own?

Background:

- 5) What was it like when you were growing up? (General, where, what parents do, etc)
- 6) Farming background:
 - a) Farming experience?
 - b) Did you work a lot on the farm?
 - c) Manage things on farm?
 - d) Like the work?
- 7) Non-farm background:
 - a) Like to work outside?
 - b) Like to do labour, heavy work etc?
 - c) Like animals/growing things/ managing/ etc?
 - d) Ever work on other's farms?
- 8) Did you ever think you would be a farmer in general?
 - a) Why or why not?
- 9) When realize would farm?
 - a) Why/process
- 10) What other experience do you have that led you to farming, and/or that has helped you to farm?
 - a) Work experiences?
 - b) Working on others farms?
 - c) Particular life events?
- 11) What other types of work have you done?
- 12) Do you like working with equipment etc?
 - a) Did you used to do this lots when you were a kid?
- 13) Do you still have ideas of doing other things as career other than farming?
 - a) What are they,
 - b) why farming now instead of other things?
- 14) Do you waiver as to whether farming is really what you want to do?

Farm Start-UP:

- 15) When you were first thinking about starting, what did you do, who did you talk to, what was the thing that got you into it?
 - a) Who were the first people that talked about farming with?
 - b) Who were the first farmers that you got to know?
 - c) Who were the other resources that you had at the very beginning?
 - d) Are all of these people still your networks?

- 16) How did you decide what type of farming to get into?
 - a) What is it about this type that attracted you to it?
 - b) Did you ever think of doing another kind?
 - c) Would you do what you are doing slightly differently in the future?
 - d) What is restricting you from doing those changes now?

- 17) When you were first beginning, how and from who/where did you learn?
 - a) Management, books, employees, fieldwork, animals, what other parts?
 - b) Experience?
 - c) Learning from other farmers?
 - i) Give advice?

- 18) Tell me about the process of starting up.
 - a) How did you find the land?
 - b) How did you decide where?
 - c) How much did you have to invest in order to get started?
 - d) How did you make the money in order to invest into it? How long did it take?
 - e) Did you know that you wanted to farm when you first started saving money/ becoming financially stable enough to do it?

- 19) Have you had to take out loans?
 - a) For what? House, machinery, buildings, seeds, etc.
 - b) Have they been difficult to get? Tell me about the process – how did you go about getting them?

- 20) Is the farm financially sustainable yet?
 - a) How long do you expect before it will be financially sustainable?
 - b) Did you personally subsidize the farm over the first few years? In what ways? How so?

- 21) [For those in couple], who's idea was it first to start farming? Who was it at the beginning that was the driving force behind getting started?
 - a) Is that different now?
 - b) Where does your drive come from?

Direct Marketers:

- 22) Why direct marketing? Why did you choose to go that route?
- a) Does it affect the viability of the farm?
 - b) Do you think it has made farming easier or harder for you?

Organic/alternative:

- 23) Have you always been inclined towards sustainability/ alternatives etc?
- 24) Are there other factors that have influenced you to start this kind (alternative, organic, etc) of farming?
- 25) [For Organic] Have you considered farming organically without being certified? Why certification?

Other questions:

- 26) How do you learn about farming in general?
- a) Experience/ read books/ internet/
 - i) What are the main books and mags you read?
 - b) If have a question about how to do something what do you do?
 - c) Was it ever a part of your formal education?
- 27) Do you envision the farm being different in the long term than it is now?
- a) Paint me a picture of what the farm will be like in 10 years? What do you do on it, what is your role?
 - b) If diff, why? What is behind the changes?
- 28) What is the division of labour like on the farm?
- a) Who does what?
 - b) What parts you do?
 - i) Why?
 - c) Are their parts that you prefer to do?
 - d) Parts that you are more or less comfortable doing?
 - e) What are your favorite tasks? Least favorite?
- 29) Do you know many of the other farmers in the area?
- 30) What is your interaction with other farmers like?
- a) Give me an example of kinds of conversations with other farmers. What would you be talking to them about?
 - b) Has it been easy or difficult to talk to other farmers about farming?
 - c) Supportive of you starting up?
 - d) Do they offer you advice?

- e) Do you think there would be a difference in attitude towards you if you were a guy taking over instead of a girl?
 - i) If yes, how so?
- 31) Do you think there are any challenges that you have faced that are particular to you because you are a woman?
- a) Did you ever feel like you weren't sure if farming was an option to you because you were a girl?
 - b) Are your parents supportive?
 - i) How?
 - c) Have you found other people in your life to be supportive?
 - d) What about interactions with feed/grain suppliers/ buyers, distributors, etc. Do you feel like they treat you any differently because you are a woman?
- 32) What about support in general
- a) Did your parents want you to be a farmer?
 - b) Do your friends or family help out with the farm? Do they help you out more generally?
 - c) Would the farm be a different farm without that?
 - i) How, why?
- 33) Who are your networks. Who are the people you talk about farming with?
- a) How do you know them?
 - b) Do you have a strong network outside of the farming community?
- 34) Do you go to any association meetings, belong to groups, etc.
- a) Which ones.
 - b) How come?
 - i) Like, learn, predisposed, etc.
 - c) What are your favorite and least favorite parts to being involved in these?
- 35) Why do you want to take over the farm?
- 36) Can you think of any examples or stories of challenges that you have faced since you started taking over the farm?
- a) Challenges in general?
 - b) Challenges specific to yourself?
 - c) What about challenges you face now?
- 37) What do you like about farming?

Appendix 2: List of Associations, Organizations, and Departments contacted

Ministry of Agriculture and Lands Offices	Responded (Y/N)	Gave contacts (Y/N)
Fraser Valley East	Yes	Yes
Central Fraser Valley	Yes	Yes
Kamloops	No	
Kelowna	Yes	No
Creston	Yes	Yes
Prince George	Yes	No
Smithers	Yes	Yes
Cranbrook	Yes	Yes
Vernon	Yes	Yes
Oliver	Yes	Yes
Organizations		
Farm Women's Bureau of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada	Yes	No
Women of the National Farmers' Union	Yes	No
Women and Agriculture Trust Fund	Yes	Yes
Integrated Pest Management Business	Yes	Yes
Life Cycles/ Groundworks (agriculture mentorship program)	Yes	Yes
Investment Agriculture Foundation of British Columbia and the Women in Agriculture Trust Fund	Yes	No
B.C. Farm Women's Network	Yes	Yes
B.C. Women's Institute	No	
B.C. Agriculture Council	Yes	No
Cattlebelles	Yes	Yes
B.C. Livestock Coop	Yes	Yes
Farm Associations		
Kootenay Livestock Association	Yes	Yes
Certified Organic Association of B.C.	Yes	Yes
B.C. Cattleman's Association	Yes	No
B.C. Fruit Growers Association	Yes	No
Comox Valley Farmer's Institute	No	
B.C. Greenhouse Grower's Association	Yes	No

