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## **Ecological Constraints as Catalysts for Ideological Development: The Rise of Agropreneurs in the Southwestern United States**

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### **Abstract**

A new generation of self-taught farmers who embody ideological aspects of the anti-globalization and slow food movements are increasing throughout the United States. Armed with notions that integrate human rights, protection of the environment, food security, and sustainability these agropreneurs are creating agricultural opportunities from ecological constraints that would otherwise be viewed as obstacles. To understand this process we analyze interviews with farmers new to the northern New Mexican region. We found that after relocating, these transplants emerged as agropreneurs, practicing ideologies through nominal farming informed by the principles of small, local, sustainable economies which enhance individual and community quality of life.

### **Introduction**

A new generation of young people have embraced what may well be one of the most important human professions, farming, which represents the embodiment of an ideological alternative to globalization, which among many other issues condemns the current food system. The growing national movement of young small plot farmers who embrace a way of life that is part of, '...creating something real, the food people eat, at the same time healing the earth' (Weise 2009) is indicative of this ideology. For them, farming and selling their produce locally is an activity that embodies the ideology of a movement that stands in opposition to the perceived negative economic, political, social, cultural, and ecological consequences of the neoliberal globalization policies implemented since the late 1980s. This movement encompasses an array of issues from human rights to the protection of the environment, where food, its growing, processing and distribution is at the core of the response.

In the 1980s, major mergers of food processors, input suppliers, and marketers put the power of the food sector into the hands of a few transnational corporations. In the United States alone, the four largest beef corporations process 87 percent of the nation's beef, and three firms mill 80 percent of the wheat in North America (Heffernan 1997).

In addition, three companies own 53 percent of the global seed market (ETC Group 2012). Today, corporations supply almost all the needs of farmers and act as middlemen, processors, distributors, and retailers. Although there are still millions of different food producers, many agribusinesses have become vertically integrated enterprises, where the corporations own the farm themselves (Norberg-Hodge, Merrifield and Gorelick 2002).

### **The Negative Impact of the Globalized Food System**

Many argue that the corporate global food system poses major threats to the environment, food security, and the lives of small farmers and rural communities around the world (see Shiva 2005, 2002; Robbins 2003). Industrial agriculture's reliance on pesticides and herbicides is water depleting and water polluting, as crops raised with chemical farming need 5 to 10 times more water than crops raised through ecological farming (Shiva 2005). Also, in the last forty years, the amount of food that is shipped between countries has grown four times, despite the fact that global population rates have barely doubled (Halweil 2004). Overall, industrial agriculture is responsible for 25 percent of the world's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, 60 percent of its methane gas emissions, and 80 percent of its nitrous oxide emissions, which are all powerful green-house gases (Shiva 2005).

Despite increases in worldwide food production matching the growing world population, high numbers of people suffer from hunger and malnutrition. According to the *United Nations Hunger Report*, 870 million people on the planet are chronically undernourished (FAO 2012). Not just a problem of the global south, food insecurity exists in northern industrialized countries as well. In the United States, 14 percent of households lacked access to sufficient food for all household members at some point during 2012 (Coleman-Jensen, Nord and Singh 2012). Furthermore, there is often limited access to fresh, nutritious food (Rottach 1997).

In addition to the negative environmental consequences and the access problem to healthy food, large agro-businesses changed America's landscape as they seized the global food market and in turn eliminated many small farms. Although 96 percent of farms in the U.S. are still owned by families or individuals, the idyllic nineteenth century farm has vanished. Today, most cropland is constituted by at least 1,100 acres, many farms up to ten times that acreage (MacDonald, Korb and Hoppe, 2013). The consolidation of cropland has been accompanied by specialization and the use of technology. A single farmer can now operate and manage thousands of acres using high-tech equipment, pesticides, and new tillage techniques that have reduced the amount of labor used in farming. These changes have devastated rural communities due to the pollution from pesticides and herbicides and the loss of land ownership, as many small farmers were unable to compete with large industrial farms anymore. These negative impacts however, have not been passively accepted, rather many communities have responded in novel and creative ways to regain sovereignty over food production and distribution.

### **The Emergence of the Local Food Movement**

The first internationally organized movement addressing the adverse effects of the global industrialized food economy emerged with the Slow Food Movement. In 1989 an international association formed from this movement when fifteen countries signed the *Slow Food Manifesto* in Paris. The organization advocates for alternative ways to feed the planet while reconnecting the production and consumption of food, thereby preserving the tradition, cultures, and local economies through sustainable and ecologically-sound farming and dietary practices. Its leaders oppose the fast-paced, modern life style embodied in the emerging fast food culture, dictated by a capitalist global economy, in which people and communities have been robbed of self-determination and control over their well-being (Slow Food.org 2013).

This empowerment has been actualized through new institutions such as Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and local farmer's markets. The idea of the CSA is to reconnect the local food production and consumption with a new kind of 'civic-minded' economic contract (Ostrom, 2007). Small farmers collect money from local members in advance, so they can cultivate their crops without economic uncertainties. In turn, members receive fresh, quality vegetables either directly from the farm or by delivery. Some have called this system, based on the mutual desire for social and environmental improvement, a 'catalyst for a new economy' (Lamb 1994).

## The New Mexico Agricultural Context

Local food sources vary according to the agricultural context of an area. In pre-industrial times local cuisines were direct outcomes of environmental conditions and in a localized food production this often remains the case. In New Mexico water resources are rather scarce and yet, agriculture has a long history in the area. Archeological evidence shows that corn, squash, and beans were cultivated throughout the Southwest between 750 BCE and AD 200 (Cordell 1997:148). Often called the three sisters, these crops were adopted by *Hispano* farmers as they settled in the area. Additionally, settlers introduced chili peppers brought from Mexico into their diet. Agriculture yielded marginal production, but coupled with a variety of strategies, quite adequately sustained the original *Hispano* population until the turn of the century (Nostrand 1992).

After WWII, an increasingly industrialized agricultural enterprise coupled with new government policies, accelerated production across the United States and cropland area increased sharply in the 1950s (USDA/ERS 2012). Despite the structural changes occurring throughout most of the country, agricultural production in New Mexico remained marginal.

Today, families and sole proprietors own up to 94.9 percent of all farms in New Mexico, but more than half of these farms are less than one hundred acres in size (USDA Census of Agriculture 2012) ([www.nass.usda.gov](http://www.nass.usda.gov)). The majority of the state's agricultural land is rangeland, occupied by cattle. Dairy products, hay, green chile, and some pecans constitute the major New Mexican agricultural commodities, concentrated mainly in the southern and eastern regions of the state (USDA/ERS 2013).

In the north-central region, at the foothills of the *Sangre de Cristo* Mountains, the landscape features typical *Hispano* villages adjacent to agricultural long lots, a distinctive feature of the area (Nostrand 1992: 217). Few of the area's inhabitants make a living solely based on agriculture, many supplement their income through livestock and alfalfa production. In fact, today the cultivation of alfalfa is deemed the most profitable of all, as this local elderly farmer explains, 'Well, when I was a little more able, I used to sell up to 100 to 150 tons of alfalfa. And that's how we made most of our income.' The traditional *Hispano* family of the southern *Sangres* generally cultivated a garden plot for their own consumption. They grew crops for subsistence, rarely producing food harvests that would yield cash profits (DeBuys 1985).

## An Ideological Transplant

The distinct history of New Mexico and the northern valleys has led to two central ethnic groups participating in local agricultural production and selling. One is the older, local *Hispano* grower who has farmed for several generations and the second is a younger white farmer who only recently moved into the area identified here on out as an *agropreneur*. The term *agropreneur* is most often used in developing countries to identify farmers with an entrepreneurial commitment to sell their crops directly in local markets (Sofian, Halim and Hamid 2011). In the U.S., *agropreneurs* represent a new generation of 'self-taught' young farmers who grow food crops on small plots of land and sell locally (Brooks 2011).

From an entrepreneurial point of view, the presence of these *agropreneurs* in San Miguel County, New Mexico is curious due to the difficulty of farming in the arid region and a relatively small population of approximately 17,000 people. Thus, it does not seem a likely choice to start a small farming business. In this study we explore the interplay of ideology and environment context in attracting and creating Southwestern non-traditional small farmers, identified as *agropreneurs*.

## Methods

Las Vegas New Mexico's population is 80% Hispanic with cultural roots that reach back to the settling of the Rio Grande basin late in the sixteenth century (Nostrand 1992). Centuries of isolation in the unique mountainous environment of northern New Mexico and interaction/collision with native pueblos and nomadic Indians of the area made cultural distinctions between the northern New Mexico Hispanic population and Hispanics in other areas of the country. The history of northern New Mexican Hispanics is well documented in the book 'The Hispano Homeland' by Richard Nostrand (1992), as one that has been distressed by intrusions of outsiders at different times in history. A more contemporary 'intruder' identified here and focused on is the *agropreneur*.

Most participants in this research were therefore not native to the area and do not represent the predominately Hispanic population of Las Vegas, New Mexico. Out of nine interviews, six involved non-native farmers and three were collected from Hispanic farmers and thus were juxtaposed to those with transplant farmers. Face to face semi-structured interviews, lasting from 45-90 minutes, were conducted on the participant's farms with the exception of one, thus encouraging trust and openness.

The grounded theory method with the use of the constant comparative strategy (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) offered the most appropriate analytical tool to code transcribed interviews into themes from which categories developed (Charmaz 2006). The schema developed puts the semi-arid regional environment at the root of the theory (see Figure 1).

### **Ideology and the Environment**

The ecological theory developed from this research integrates nature, culture, and ideology and thus goes beyond traditional deterministic explanations of environment and society (Harris 1974). It contends that the natural environment helps explain participants' lifestyle choices and puts the natural environment as a motivator for action. Their ideological conception of the natural environment is embodied rather than treated as an abstraction.

The harsh, semi-arid land which yields marginal agricultural production, compared to states like those in the Midwest, is juxtaposed to the perceived pristine landscape of undeveloped lands, traditional architecture, and cultural charm that has long attracted tourists to what some call 'idyllic lifestyle relocators' (Suter-Van Leer, Osborn and Barr Communications 2007). Some of these lifestyle relocators, i.e. transplants, put their ideology into practice, as they start growing their own produce and eventually selling it at the local farmer's market. With little competition from large-scale organic farmers and native farmers, transplants see opportunity. Thus, contemporary conditions partially engendered by environmental constraints become a catalyst for *agropreneurial* practices in the Southwest.

### **New Mexico Attracts Ideological Transplants**

As one of the oldest settled places in the United States, the rich cultural history of Native American and Hispanic culture and natural scenic beauty makes New Mexico a haven for tourism and artists who have settled in New Mexico and made places like Taos and Santa Fe their homes. The cultural character, the affordable living, the dry and sunny climate, and the attractive landscape have brought diverse people to the area. Some are younger transplants, who bring with them the ideology of the broader anti-globalization movement. This movement rejects consumerism, corporate capitalist control, and stands for democratic participation, human rights, a sustainable relationship to the environment, as well as organizational diversity, and the insistence to put this discourse into practice (Buttel 2003). The recent influx of these transplants has not escaped the attention of *Hispano* farmers, as one remarks about the newcomers:

'Yeah, there is some new people... from another state.... And then I guess in their life they went traveling. And traveling the USA, which is kind of amazing to me and then they wind up in New Mexico. And they found this little community next to mine... and purchased the land.'

None of the participants identified as transplants stated that moving to NM was motivated by aspirations to farm, rather their social networks connected them to the region. However, once in New Mexico they seem inspired or as is often claimed 'enchanted' by the land, as this *agropreneur* described,

I am a sculpturer... my sculpture brought me to New Mexico. So I had no intention of doing this at all, but changes in my life occurred... my painting professor called, I was on the east coast. He called me up and said, you should come out here, there is this place that's available that has your name written all over it. I thought he was nuts.... I figured I come out and visit. So I came out and visited him and he drove me to the farm over there.... I got out of the car and my foot hit the ground and that was it. That's how I got into it. In ten seconds, ten seconds I said I'm gonna buy this place. Such spontaneous decisions can be attributed to the captivating landscape with remote and idyllic ambience that resonates with the transplants' ideology.

## **Embodied Ideology & Environmental Constraints: The Rise of Agropreneurial Interest**

As the interviews reveal, NM transplants do not move to the area with the intention to farm but are attracted to a certain way of life. All participants moved from crowded cities and had the ability to purchase small acre plots. Guided by their ideology of a sustainable and satisfying livelihood, they began growing food for personal consumption. The new lifestyle is expressed in one statement as simply, ‘we started just growing things.’ In response to the question regarding farming as a profession, ‘No, that was not part of the plan, we were planning to maybe homestead in a way, be able to be more self-supportive, not really farming for a living.’ Farming for a living would make more sense in an area with less obstacles to growing crops, as this participant spoke of his own intention and what he perceived of others’, ‘I don’t think they come here for farming. I didn’t come here for farming.... But I think they fall in love with the area and they wanna be farmers so they try to do it here.’

For the New Mexico transplants interviewed, the *agropreneurial* interest came *after* moving to the area and is rooted in an anti-globalization ideology. Previous research demonstrates that many new small farmers in New Mexico begin farming out of a desire for social change, utilizing alternative farming practices and actively building a sustainable food system (Stanford 2006). Once they discovered their ability to grow food for their own consumption, they considered growing for the local market, thus fulfilling desires for independence, individual sustainable farming, and economic sustainability for the local community. The ideological principals of *localism*, involving local decision-making processes and production of local goods using local resources, contests capitalist commodity production that destroys natural resources which many argue, brought on the current ecological crisis (Shiva 2005). The hobby grower transitions into the *agropreneur*, a local actor in the creation of a sustainable local food system. All of the *agropreneurs* interviewed maintain the goal to support themselves through farming, despite a short growing season making this difficult and other sources of income necessary. Only one farming couple interviewed revealed that their farm yielded sufficient income to sustain them.

## **Natural, Historical, and Cultural Environment Creates Opportunity**

As the transplants put their ideology into practice through cultivating their own food, they see further opportunity to sell their produce at the local farmer’s market. This opportunity is grounded in the natural, historical, and cultural environment of the region. The geographical isolation, rugged mountains, and inability to produce significant amounts of marketable goods, made New Mexico economically insignificant to the Spanish authorities and therefore not worthy of any major development (DeBuys 1985). Up until the second half of the eighteenth century, villagers of northern New Mexico survived by subsistence agriculture in land-grant communities that engaged in cooperative grazing and irrigation activities, which were ecologically suited to the marginal agro-pastoral possibilities of the semi-arid lands (Nostrand 1992; Shadow and Rodriguez 1997). After New Mexico’s annexation as a U.S. territory, the cultural domination of Anglos and the new capitalist economy dispossessed many *Hispano* families, which led to the deterioration of the economic viability of the villages (Forrest 1989). Consequently, temporary and permanent out-migration increased among villagers who searched for wage labor to receive the necessary cash required by the new economy. This partial exodus and the unpredictable mountainous area which frequently suffers from insufficient water, making crop production difficult, left the farmlands only marginally productive (DeBuys 1985).

The limited agricultural development and constrained industrialization in the north of the state left tourism and federal government spending as the main drivers of the economy (Tax Foundation 2007). In San Miguel County for example, the government employs almost 40% of the working force while only 1% of the population is still engaged in agriculture (Mitchell 2010). The few *Hispanos* still engaged in farming produce hay and cattle along with some traditionally cultivated vegetables, partially supplementing income while maintaining a connection to the land. This limited variety of produce supplied by the *Hispano* farmer is seen as an opportunity for the *agropreneur*, as this participant reasons, ‘there is a pretty open market in the semi-arid land... it hasn’t been traditionally a lot of gardeners and a lot of market farmers... and I’m talking about local production of mixed vegetables, you know market gardeners selling their food locally.’

The limited variety is echoed in the following statements by several respondents: ‘everybody knows what’s there, it’s just gonna be corn, squash, beans, zucchini, onions, and cucumbers and that’s it’ and, ‘you know our market is really bad about that cucumbers, squash, mainly cucumbers and squash, everybody brings truckloads of them.’ The *agropreneurs* recognize opportunity in the saturation of heritage produce, (‘standard Latin fair’ as one respondent calls it). This sense of opportunity is expressed by one respondent who declares, ‘we’re not gonna outcompete people on cucumbers and squash.’ For the *agropreneurs* offering something other than the local heritage crops and the conventional supermarket produce, can be a vital strategy as this *agropreneur* discusses the process of choosing what to grow:

Trying to pick the unusual varieties or number of different varieties of those popular things. So all the tomatoes we grow are heirlooms...and to have something different from other people at the market...that gives us a big edge...we have been very creative with what we pick and why we pick it. We grow very seasonally and we grow, multiple varieties and different, different things that haven’t been brought to the market before. The local farmer’s market offers low competition and an opportunity to fill a market niche, with new and ‘exotic’ vegetables that are neither part of the traditional farmer’s repertoire nor found at the local grocery store.

### **Challenges of the Natural environment re-enforces transplant ideology**

The harsh New Mexico agricultural environment stands in opposition to the attractiveness of its seemingly unspoiled landscape. Environmental factors that restrict farming, such as water, the short growing season, and extreme temperature fluctuation are due to the geographical position of the area. One *Hispano* farmer responded that, ‘In this region here it’s the sheer location of where we are at, the amount of water’, regarding what can and will be grown. New Mexico has had several droughts in the past and is currently experiencing one of the worst droughts in over a hundred years. The region lies in the central part of New Mexico where the Rocky Mountains extend into the state from Colorado whereby farming happens at rather high elevations, between 6,000 to 8,000 feet. Simultaneously, the latitude parallels that of northern Africa and an intense sun can raise temperatures to almost 100° Fahrenheit and drop them to as low as the 40° when the sun sets. Late frosts in the spring and early frosts in the fall make it difficult to grow certain crops outside a greenhouse environment, and row covers in the form of shade cloths are often necessary to protect plants from the intense radiation of the sun and frequent hail. Additionally, the soil in northern New Mexico often must be enhanced with organic matter, essential for retaining moisture and supplying nutrients to insure quality growth and production (Flynn 2012). The harsh environment is challenging as one *agropreneur* explains:

It’s very harsh here growing. But if you understand the soil and what has to be added to it and you know, an acre of New Mexican soil here, caliche, can take 20 tons of organic material to get it to a loam state. And that’s ideally what you would wanna grow in. We don’t get anywhere near that here, but we give the plants every time the amount of nutrients that they need, so that we can grow and we’re making biodynamic soil. So we’re building soil and we’re constantly adding really good soil to these things and we, we’ve come up with a strategy together and it’s not a matter of spreading it everywhere until we can, which we’re starting to do now. But we would dig wells and fill it with the amount that we need so we could get the crop that we wanted. So I mean basically when you understand it, it’s that and figuring out how to deliver for water on a regular basis.

There is no lack of awareness regarding local difficulties as compared to farming elsewhere: ‘Oh, yeah like back east you just throw a seed in the ground, they sprout’ or ‘I’m from the Midwest where there would be great farming.’ But it begs the question ‘Why here?’ Why relocate and turn to farming in a region where cultivation is so demanding and unpredictable? The answer may lie in the notion of challenge, the aesthetics of hard work, identified here as *the intensity of practice*. Growing in northern New Mexico as stated by the *agropreneurs* is experienced as ‘challenging’ or ‘really hard’ and sometimes has to ‘beat all the odds.’ One farming couple told a story of a devastating monsoon rain that broke their irrigation ditch located above their fields, ‘and we dug everything out and stood it all up and Sheila couldn’t move for three days. I mean you know, just psychologically, because it was so devastating... and we got the crop to come back.’ The difficulties the environment poses elicits an *intensity of practice*, reinforcing the notion of *hard work and pay off*, principals similar to simple living and quality of life that are consistent with the slow food movement.

Quality of life also includes the consciousness of the exploitative nature of neo-liberal policies embedded within globalization (Pollan 2006). This is expressed in one *agropreneur's* refusal to take advantage of unpaid labor from youth organizations, which encourage young people to travel and experience farm life in exchange for room and board:

You know, if you get paid ten dollars an hour and you know how hard you worked for ten dollars an hour, you really understand more what it's like to be a farmer. ...Plus it is like slave labor to make these kids work that hard. I couldn't do it. I mean it would be really hard for me to push them and make them work as hard as they need to.

The intensive labor necessary to run small farms it is valued, as it stands in opposition to the highly efficient industrialized agricultural production that eliminates much manual labor, practices criticized not only for their detrimental impacts on the environment but the displacement of people from the process. The traditional local farmer confirms the hard work that it takes to run a farm. This local, one respondent who also raises some livestock, points out that growing food crops is especially labor intensive and the economic incentive he can offer to workers is not sufficient to hire labor for this type of work:

You got to have your own labor. You can't hire people to do all the stuff you have to do. Especially in the gardening deal there is so much work involved there. It's gotta be a family thing you know. You can spend a lot more than you're making in a hurry, when you're hiring people. And the way wages have gotten up. And the worst part is, you can't find, you pay \$10 an hour, and you can't find anybody to do it, the type of work you need done.

The *hard work* that goes into growing on small plots is part of the *agropreneurs'* ideology in which the notion of 'easy' is closely tied to environmental and community destruction and feeds the convenient lifestyle of modern America. To bring this point home, one *agropreneur*, observed at the LVFM, goes as far as to advertise his disdain for 'efficient' or mechanized agricultural machinery as he puts a billboard next to his stand that shows a crossed out tractor. With the *intensity of practice* comes also deep personal fulfillment, 'but then there is also the sense of accomplishment, when you've gone through all that torture and you really have something beautiful.'

The transplants who become *agropreneurs* subscribe to a particular ideology that may be placed under the larger umbrella of the anti-globalization movement. The term anti-globalization is in itself a misnomer, since nationalism or protectionism are not advocated by these groups, and they support global human rights issues, as well as the ties between various peoples and cultures (Stiglitz and Charlton 2005). The movement developed in the light of the perceived negative effects of globalization and is in line with what eco-feminist, Vandana Shiva calls 'earth democracy,' which is rooted in the protection of ecological processes that maintain fundamental human rights such as the right to health, water and food, and the right to dignified and sustainable livelihoods (Shiva 2005). Those in the movement see the development of local, environmentally sustainable economies that are not exploitative of the natural environment, as essential to achieve these goals. Trying to put this ideology into practice, but struggling with the reality of it, is reflected in this *agropreneur's* response as he is asked about the difficulties he is faced with on his farm:

Yeah, water and you know our dependence on fuel, which is totally something that I'm opposed to and that I can't seem to get away from... we pay a lot of money in fuel, so it's an economic and environmental issue. Also, the plastic in the row cover and the drip tape support chemical industries.... I mean it's just the alternatives aren't there, for one thing. There is biodegradable row covers out there, they are very expensive and most farmers can't afford them you know...they are trying to break away from bad technology, but it's too expensive for them or they're not available. Anybody who is environmentally, who tries to be environmentally friendly, deals with this you know.

All the *agropreneurs* refrain from using any kind of pesticides or synthetic fertilizer although not all believe that it is necessary to be 'certified organic,' since they can directly communicate with the consumer as reflected in this statement:

Basically, my view point is on our scale, what certified organic says to our consumer is the government is behind this guy....And I feel like with us, being face to face with customers every week it's not necessary for us to have the government to certify that we are organic because we can say to anybody and we do, come out to our farm, visit see what we do, see the bug damage in the vegetables.

Pointing to the corporate production of organic produce this *agropreneur* believes that organic is not necessarily as sound as growing local, as he states:

I think too, that the new organic standards are set up for agro-business corrupted by agro-business and now the word organic doesn't mean much because there are huge organic farms in California and the consumers thinks that organic is everything, is sustainable and economic and environmentally friendly and that's why the focus now is going to local.

Another *agropreneur* who was asked about growing organic produce felt that the nutritional value is by far more enhanced with biodynamic growing rather than organic, as he reasons:

It's a nice label, but it doesn't mean anything, unless, I mean there are a lot of people out there growing organically, they are not using any pesticides they are not putting anything on. So organic is a big catch all thing for just not using chemicals, which is great, that's good that's part of it, but biodynamic is far more encompassing to the, I mean, you know it encompasses all of it how to get a really good vegetable with the maximum of nutrition and no chemicals.

Another component of the small farmers' ideology is anti-materialism and the achievement of a quality of life that yields happiness and well-being not through monetary wealth but through an economic activity that is personally meaningful and is part of a socially sustainable lifestyle (Schor 2010). All *agropreneurs* struggle to make a living through farming and as mentioned previously, only few can actually live exclusively from farming. Referring to the economic viability of farming this participant responds, 'I'm surviving I'm not getting rich.' But speaking to the satisfaction derived from the activity of farming this female *agropreneur* explains, 'Well if you stop liking gardening, if you stop loving and forget remembering why you got into it and stop being amazed by things growing and loving it, then forget it, because it's not worth it.' For this farmer, quality of life is achieved by keeping the size of the farming enterprise at a satisfactory level as he argues, 'I definitely don't wanna be too big, where I'm having to be on a tractor all day, every day, for instance you know.'

### **Intellectual Knowledge vs. Cultural Pathway**

The *agropreneurs* interviewed, don't come from farming traditions, rather they acquired farming knowledge mainly from books as one respondent states, 'Well, I read probably about twenty books on farming, gardening, sustainability, you know, the sustainable permaculture.' Some seek to learn from already established transplants who farm in the area as demonstrated in this statement, 'they actually employ people who are interested in farming... which is pretty much the best way for it to happen.' Others take a purely intellectual approach as this *agropreneur* did:

I mean, I took a couple of seminars. I did a lot of reading and I really got into, what are the basic things that you need to grow? You need water, you need soil, and you need the proper nutrients for every variety that you're growing and once you understand that, that's what you're gonna do.

This path stands in stark opposition to that of traditional farming. Farmers in general have cultural experiential knowledge, handed down through generations, like the local *Hispano* farmers who for two centuries, until the arrival of Anglos in the late eighteen hundreds, farmed and raised livestock (DeBuys 1985). They laid intricate irrigation systems called *acequias* and effectively used the environment for their independence and survival during a period of historical isolation (Nostrand 1992).

Satisfaction is also derived from the direct interaction at the farmer's market with other farmers and customers, as these responses indicate, 'The customers and the farmers. And that's far and away the biggest benefit of the market, because it's not that convenient.'



## Discussion and Conclusion

The inductive process of grounded theory produced an ecological theory, framed in the natural environment of northern New Mexico. The use of a grounded, theoretical approach enabled an explanation and understanding about the motivations and actions of *southwest agropreneurs*. The research revealed that the *agropreneurs'* actions are intertwined with the New Mexico natural, cultural, and historical environment. The natural environment forms the basis for the attraction of the transplant to New Mexico and ideological commitments further give rise to the desire to farm, an opportunity that leads transplants to become *agropreneurs*. The natural environment's influence on the *agropreneurs* is twofold, as it becomes an external but also internal motivator. The historically scarce agricultural production in northern New Mexico, conditioned by environment and cultural isolation, determined the amount and type of crops cultivated. In this sense the environment conditioned the diet of the local population, as *Hispano* farmers grew what environmentally was most suitable for their own sustenance and kept local farmers economically marginal. The culturally determined produce made available by local *Hispano* grower presents an economic opportunity for the transplants to fill a market niche with non-traditional produce. At the same time this makes them a transformative social force in the process of building a local food system. Given that the transplants' motivation to farm is ideologically embodied, the environment is not only external to the *agropreneurs* but also internalized, as it incorporates the idea of 'environmentalism', reflecting the larger counter-globalization movement's ideology of sustainability. As the transplants start to grow food for self-consumption, the same ideology eventually drives them to grow for market, which again reflects the idea of economic sustainability for themselves and the local community and they become active participants in shaping the local food system.

The local food movement is gaining momentum. Recent developments in consumer demand demonstrated that smaller farms are favored due to an increased interest in local food production (Low and Vogel 2011). In fact, the number of small farms in the USDA statistics increased sharply from 2001 to 2011, with an increase of 100,000 small farms ranging in the size from 1 to 49 acres (MacDonald, Korb and Hoppe 2013). Many of these emerging small crop farms reflect the farming opportunities and lifestyle choices made by people who are happy with modest crop or livestock production. It is credible to assume that most of these small farmers do not come from farming traditions, just as the participants in this research. These new farmers cultivate small plots with alternative farming practices using knowledge gained from formal processes rather than experiential knowledge, generationally handed down. As the findings in this research confirm these new *agropreneurs* do not shy away from labor intensive farming as it ties into their conviction that the efficiency of the modern industrialized agriculture, coupled with a capitalist system of distribution denies fresh quality food to millions of people, is destructive to the environment, and takes away control and independence from communities all over the world.

In general, farmers and consumers who promote farmer's markets hold an ideology of sustainable agriculture because it promotes environmental social justice that addresses environmental concerns caused by the current food system and social injustices promoted by corporate agribusiness. Because these concerns are at the forefront of the movement, the *local* benefits of sustainable agriculture are often overlooked. Such as how local food systems create community and how they may enhance quality of life for the community through access to fresh and nutritious food. Also, past research demonstrated the ability to consume fresh sustainably grown food in some communities is often a privilege of the white middleclass (Pilgeram 2012; Slocum 2006). The findings in this research indicated that this awareness exists among the *agropreneurs*.

Nevertheless, what is surprising is the enthusiasm these *agropreneurs* bring to the table as they encounter many environmental and economic difficulties while farming in the area. While the research identified that the natural and historical environment played a significant role in the motivation for transplants to farm, the larger social and environmental concerns and the desire in what one young farmer expressed as 'creating something real' is an undercurrent motivation to farming. These *agropreneurs* clearly do not aim for material wealth, but seek satisfaction in their work as it connects them directly to nature and society in a rudimentary way. Future researchers concerned with the local food movement should investigate the deeper motivations that drive people to the practice of farming and how it unfolds. A limitation of this study is that the sample population was rather small, a result however, of the small population in the respective town.

A larger sample from other similar regions could reveal more about motivations to farm by people who do not have agricultural roots. Many argue that the current food system is unsustainable and therefore it may be important to conduct more research on these *agropreneurs*, who could become important contributors to the agricultural sector. Could the ideological tenets underlying the motivations of these *agropreneurs* also contribute to the next generation of farmers?

This research was set in a rural environment, which played a significant role in the analysis of the participants' responses. Future research could focus on the experiences and perspectives of *agropreneurs* operating on the outskirts of urban environments and what motivates them to grow for their markets. Will environmental changes connected to climate change and entrenched neo-liberal trade policies encourage more people to grow food for local markets? As one might think, an unpredictable and harsh environment like northern New Mexico should discourage people to farm, but this research has shown the contrary for some. The natural attraction to the semi-arid environment and the ideology of sustainability may be a stronger motivator to go back and work the land, as their intention is not to exploit its fertility but to make it fertile and create something real, with their own labor.

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Tables:

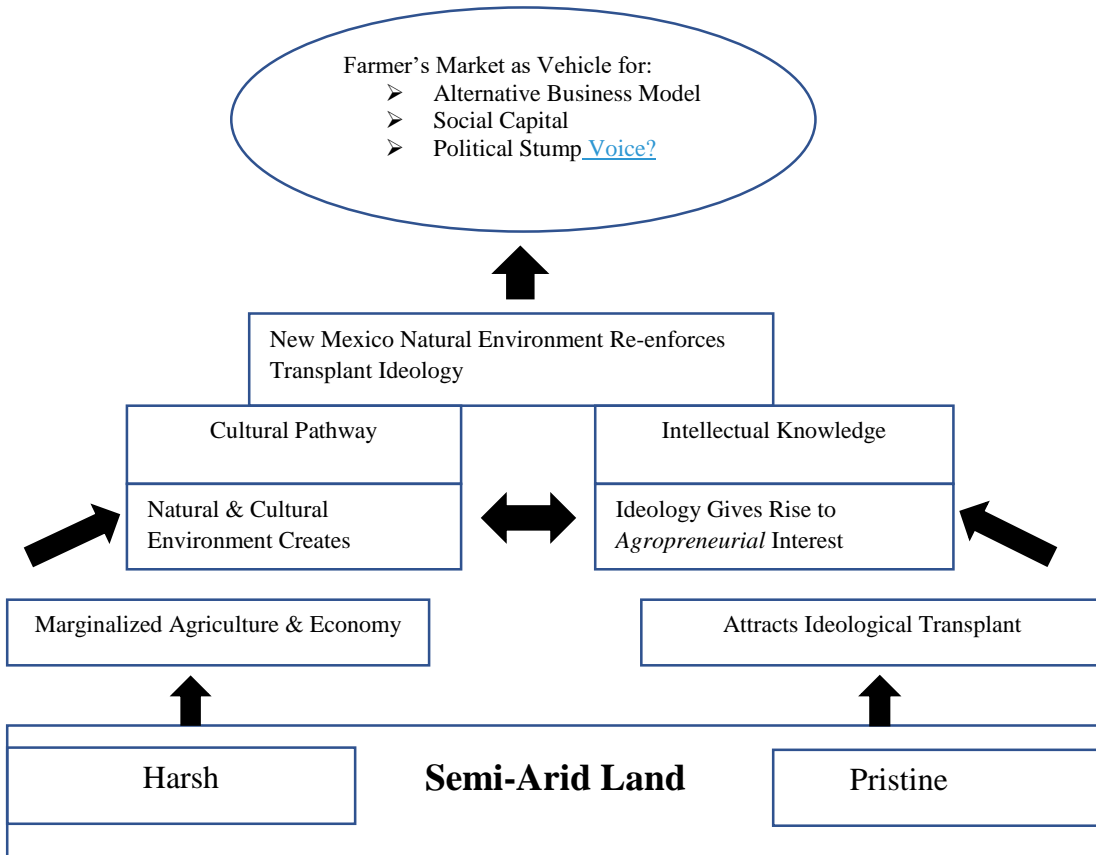


Figure 1.1. Theoretical Framework

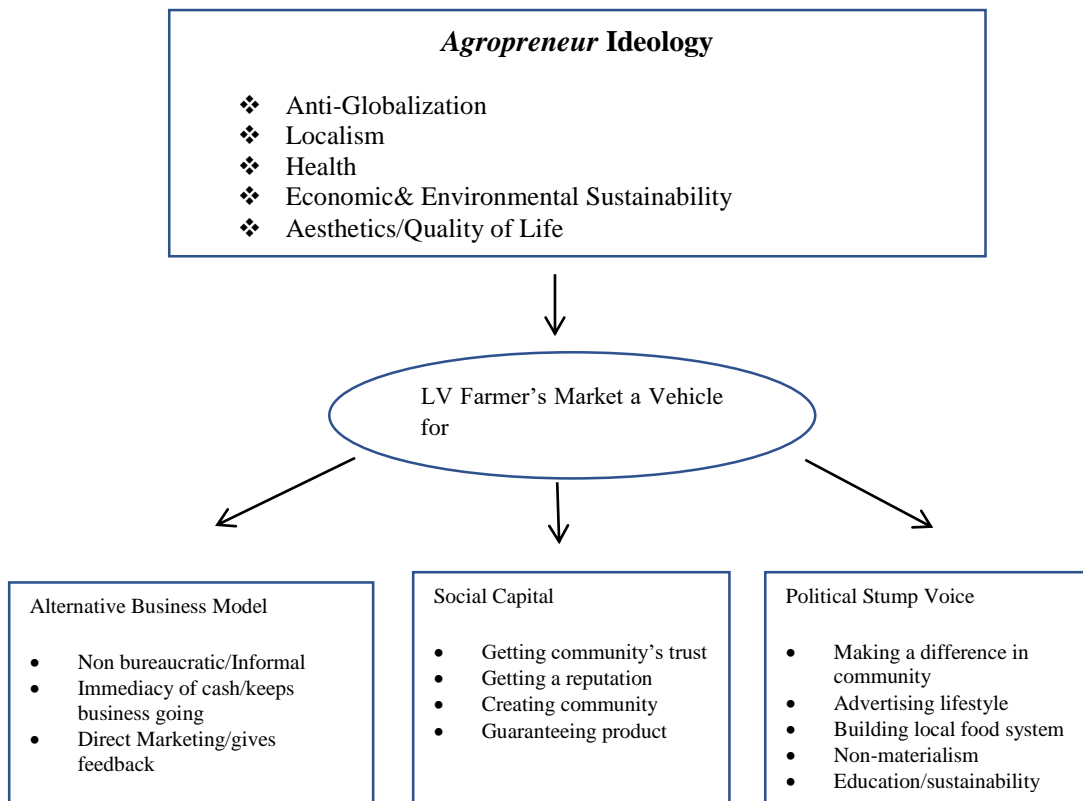


Figure 1.2 Diagram *Agropreneur* Ideology and the Role of the Farmer's Market