Maintaining a Way of Life: Trials and Tribulations of Farmers Market Families

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Introduction
• 2013 off farm income forecasted to account for 82% of total farm income.
• Majority of small farmers and their spouses work on and off farm.
  • Direct to consumer sales up 8% from 2007 to 2012.
  • Number of farmers markets increased from 1,755 in 1994 to 8,268 in 2012.
  • Number of CSA’s increased from 2 in 1986 to 12,617 in 2012.

Purpose
• Gain better understanding of:
  • Local food and farming systems.
  • Local farmers decisions to sell at a local level.
    • Local farm families.
• Seeks to understand:
  • Biggest challenges and rewards.
  • If farmers basic needs are met.
  • If farmers lives are bettered through farming.
  • If inequity exists between farmers and the average United States household.

Methods
• Data Collection
  ~ Structured Interview Method
  ~ One on One Interview
• Data Analysis
  ~ Constant Comparative Method
• Evaluation Criteria
  ~ Data is confirmable, dependable, transferable, and credible
  ~ Participants
  ~ Three Caucasian Farm Families
  ~ Two Hmong Farm Families

Findings
• Way of Life – Farming is a way of life and all of the farmers were influenced as children to garden and/or farm.
• Passion and Identity – Farmers continue to farm because it is not only a way of life, but also a part of their identity.
• Excess Produce – Three of five began selling produce because they had excess in their home food production.
• Relationship With Customers – The farmers reward for selling at a local level is the relationship they have with their customers.
• High Quality Produce – Growing and selling high quality produce is important to the farmers and customers.
• Large Variety of Crops – Farmers grow and sell a large variety of crops.
• Competition – One of their biggest challenges at the farmers market.
• Weather – A big challenge for the farmers.
• Off Farm Income – For the Caucasian farmers, most of their income was from off farm.
• Off Farm Jobs – Four of five farmers had off farm jobs.

Conclusions
• Farming was imprinted on the farmers at a young age and thus became a part of their identities.
• Farmers build trust with their customers by providing high, and a large variety of produce.
• The relationship with their customers is one of the things they enjoy most about selling locally.
  • In all but one family either one or both spouses worked off farm.
  • A majority of the farmers and their spouses had college degrees.

Sustainability
• Farming practices lie within managed systems.
• This study focused on part of the social system of small scale, local farming.
  • Farmers Basic Needs:
    • Basic need of food were met.
    • Social needs partially met by relationship they have with customers.
  • Lives Bettered Through Farming:
    • Emotional needs fulfilled because farming is a way of life, and part of who they are.
    • Inequities:
      • None found.

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