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Listening to the Voices of the Land: Stories of Prince Edward Island Organic Farmers Sowing Hope in the Struggle for Survival

By

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Abstract

Changes within agriculture towards an industrialized approach to farming have had detrimental effects on people, communities, and the environment. There is a need for methods of farming that preserve and protect the natural and social ecology. In this thesis, I explored the experiences and stories of a small group of PEI organic farmers, who have an important role in preserving the Island's natural and social ecology. Informed mainly by the narrative theory of Rappaport (1995), I conducted qualitative interviews with seven farmers, in an effort to hear their stories as organic farmers on PEI and learn from their experiences.

While there are differences across farmer's experiences and each farmer has a unique story, based on a theme analysis, major findings from the group story indicate that most participants struggle to survive as organic farmers within a corporate monoculture farming system, face challenges and lack support, which is needed from government and consumers. The findings also suggest that a smaller farming approach is beneficial. Some participants also spoke about being examples of success, how their group serves as a support system, as well as future possibilities for organic farming, which is currently in a critical period. In addition to the themes from their individual and group stories and because it is important to know how to sustain organic farming on PEI, I also discuss some of the major lessons that emerged from their stories such as the need for tangible monetary and legal support, technical and marketing assistance and information, an infrastructure, a local market, group

building and networking, dialogue amongst groups, and the importance of studying successful examples.

Following the lessons, I introduce previous literature and explain how my thesis is a contribution in bringing the stories of PEI organic farmers to the forefront and exploring the possibilities for their survival. I then discuss organic farmers' experiences of marginality, the importance of embracing small initiatives, and the potential role of organic farmers in social and environmental change. I conclude by emphasizing the critical importance of adopting organic farming within the PEI agriculture arena in efforts to preserve homes, communities, and the earth.

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Thanks to the Ontario Graduate Scholarship Committee for financial support during my studies.

Special thanks, of course, to PEI organic farmers who shared their stories with me and to whom I dedicate this thesis.

Dedication

I dedicate my thesis to the organic farmers I interviewed, whose stories are the heart of my project. They are Islanders who strive towards an ecological and just food system. In their ecological practices, organic farmers in many ways serve as guardians of the land. In their struggle to survive and gain recognition, I hope they find strength and faith in knowing that there is a growing group of people who support them, and as one farmer in my thesis remarked, somebody upstairs watching over them.

I am grateful and privileged to have heard your stories. Thank you. Best wishes to all of you. May we remain friends. I offer the following quotation in a spirit of friendship and support:

"May the road rise to meet you. May the wind be always at your back, the sun shine warm upon your face, the rain fall soft upon your fields, and until we meet again may God hold you in the hollow of His hand."

- Irish blessing

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"Agriculture is a central part of a social dilemma which involves the future of our planet. As we become more aware of our environmental problems, it is hard to believe that we will be able to continue our costly system of agriculture indefinitely without ruining both our farm families and the soil they farm. We need to keep our farmers in business earning a fair living, and we need to do it in ways that will provide real long-term benefits - by developing sustainable methods of agriculture that will rebuild and conserve the soil for generations to come. Broad objectives such as these touch on all our lives; they will bring together farmers and city people more readily than any others. And these goals remind us that the regeneration of agriculture is not a private business concern; it is a social movement of great importance, one which lies at the heart of the broader movement for planetary survival. As such, it invites us to take part not just because we all eat, but because in some sense, we are all farmers who feel a responsibility for the care and protection of the earth."

- Carole Giangrande, 1985, pp. 177-178.

I. Introduction

Preview

In the body of literature I review in this thesis, and based on the findings of my research within the upcoming participants' stories, it is evident that there are presently many serious social and ecological challenges within Canadian agriculture. In the face of these challenges, I believe there is a flicker of hope and possibility for change with the adoption of organic farming. My thesis is essentially about promoting organic farming and a change in farming practices. It is an attempt to illuminate this flicker of hope. As the organic farmer is vulnerable within the current system and because their voices have often been unheard on PEI, combined with limited support for their work, I wondered if the stories of some organic farmers might go untold. Their stories have an important place in the farming community and in Island culture and history.

Consequently, my thesis focuses on the experiences, stories, and role of a small group of PEI organic farmers, the meaning of their stories, and the larger significance of their work. For the purposes of the present research, I present a collection of six personal stories of organic farmers. I interviewed seven farmers, two of whom are a couple and constitute one story. I also present a collective story, highlighting the links between their personal stories. The participants share membership in the same group (Seaspray Farms Organic Co-operative), but they represent a diversity of communities as they live in various parts of the Island. My

research goal was not generalizability of the findings and I endeavored to appreciate and honour a small collection of farmers' stories.

In summary, there were two main objectives of my research: a) My *major and primary goal* was to understand and learn more about organic farmers' experiences, and about what it has been like as organic farmers. Informed by the ideas of Rappaport (1995) about the importance of narratives in community members' lives, I wanted to document their personal stories. I wished to provide an opportunity for farmers to simply tell their stories -- their thoughts, knowledge, insights, and experiences on the Island and within their communities, to hear their stories as a marginalized or silenced group within the agricultural industry. I believe it is valuable to provide a forum in which they may share their unique personal and group experiences, so that we might learn from their work and wisdom b) My *secondary goal* was for an action component to my research. I recognized that the farmers' stories could be powerful within their own group (Rappaport, 1995) and I also wanted to explore other possibilities and uses for the information. I wished to promote the experiences of organic farmers and I hoped the collection of stories might be used to strengthen their voices, gain support for their work, and ultimately help to sustain organic farming on the Island.

For the most part I allowed themes to emerge from the data, though on some level, my analysis was guided by a "three leaf clover," which consisted of one leaf for each of the interrelated research questions. The first leaf was related to organic farmers' general experiences and stories on PEI. The second leaf related to what they shared about their future, their experiences of survival or success, their obstacles and

what they have learned regarding how to sustain organic farming. The third leaf centered on learnings and lessons. I was interested in participants sharing what they had learned from their experiences, and I was also interested in what overall learnings and lessons could be gleaned from their experiences and stories in ensuring their survival; a more interpretative act on my part that is part of my findings section.

To aid comprehension, it is important to note that the specific organizing themes that emerged from my thesis include: the struggle to survive and experiences of marginality, the importance of hopeful examples and the role and power of citizens (farmers and others) in creating change, and finally, the importance of embracing small initiatives and small scale farming. The general conceptual framework I employ is the protection and preservation of the natural and social ecology through organic farming practices.

As my thesis was carried out in an exploratory and inductive manner, I have chosen to present it in this way. Before presenting my findings and in my introductory sections, I provide the reader with my general conceptual framework and a taste of these emergent concepts and themes that I used to frame, understand, and organize my findings. A presentation of my specific theoretical interpretations and frameworks are reserved for my discussion. In what follows, I first locate myself within the thesis and provide the reader with my personal connection to my research. Secondly, I describe some of the socio-political climate on PEI to provide a context within which to place the farmers' stories. Thirdly, I introduce the ecological model, community psychology values, and discuss the importance of organic farming. Then I discuss the methodology and research processes. Next I present the personal stories

of organic farmers as well as their collective, group story. Following the stories, I share some of the lessons that emerged across the farm families. Finally, I discuss my theoretical contribution and previous studies, the findings in relation to relevant theoretical frameworks, my role and responsibilities, limitations of my research and future directions, as well as my personal reflections.

My Location in the Research

I have lived most of my life on PEI. It is the place I have called home. During my studies at WLU, I had an opportunity to apply what I had learned to important issues and events taking place at home. When I was faced with the task of deciding upon a project topic for a community psychology and social intervention class, I recalled health concerns on PEI about chemical spraying within farming and how people within the Island environment were getting sick. I shared this idea with a friend and the research journey began. Our project marked the beginning of a long learning process that would lead to the creation of my thesis.

The seeds were planted in February, 1997 when my peers and I began a collaborative class project entitled "Working Towards Community Ownership of the Food Production System on Prince Edward Island: Planting the Seeds of Change" (Griffin, MacLeod & O'Reilly, 1997). Using the potato industry on PEI as our case study, we proposed several social intervention ideas that promoted organic farming and localized control over food production. I was impacted by what was happening on PEI in relation to farming, Islanders' struggle and commitment to change, and the strength of citizens' conviction about their livelihoods and their homes. I was also

concerned with people's relationship with the land, in particular, how the land was treated and how it had become a commodity. At that time, I wanted to learn more about the issues affecting PEI, and it was exciting to apply what I was learning to an issue "close to home," to see the examples of change occurring there.

Our project was an "awakening" to me. Even as a student studying community psychology, I did not fully have a critical consciousness of the implications of PEI farming. I wrote in our paper:

> On PEI, I live in a small rural community with a potato field approximately 15 feet from my front door. I grew up seeing the field being sprayed, yet never questioning the health implications or the PEI potato industry and its emphasis placed on potato production. In fact, I am proud of our farming heritage. We are known throughout the world for our soil and our produce. Lately, this pride has been shaken and I have begun to see the field by my house and the industry in a new light and with new eyes (p. 54).

Indeed, our group experiences and our many conversations over food led me to critically analyze many of the practices and policies the Island farming community had adopted. I was forced to see the world, in particular food production as it relates to the environment and social change, through new eyes and through a community psychology lens. I discovered that issues of food production and social change were multi-faceted and complex, and there were no simple solutions to the conflict occurring amongst stakeholder groups on PEI in relation to conventional farming and the promotion of alternatives. As a result of our class project, I became more interested in social change initiatives, organic farming being one of them, which eventually brought me down the path I ask you to walk along with me today. I did not

enter my program with the intention of studying the issues presented in my thesis, though I did have an interest in the environment.

Through my research, I have learned about the importance and challenges involved in implementing community psychology values and social intervention strategies. I have also struggled to understand the magnitude and complexity of the issues in my thesis. I still seek understanding about a respectful, effective, and ethical way to promote change, to understand the potential role of community psychology values and the implications of implementing those values within a small setting. I also wonder about what my role could be and where I might find myself one day. As I now embark on new experiences and opportunities, I am not exactly sure where they will lead me next, but I have strong roots and family that provide me with an appreciation of community and rural life. My involvement in my thesis research has certainly helped me gain a better understanding of the environment and of PEI and its people. My experiences have also allowed me to become better acquainted with these roots and to learn about issues that have now changed my outlook; an outlook that I will carry with me as I make my way throughout this world. Perhaps farming issues also became a vehicle to help me more fully understand a love of place, of nature, and what threatens its future existence. Shapiro (1995) wrote: "Each time we learn how to join together and mend our ties with our own little place called home, we link our souls with the soils that sustain us, and nurture the network that is healing the Earth" (p. 239).

In his latest book, co-authored by Holly Dressel, Suzuki (1999) wrote about the impact of human activity on the planet, revealing that natural systems are being

destroyed within a global culture. I spent many summers, especially as a child, at the beach close to my home on PEI's north shore. Over the years, more people frequent the beach, leaving more garbage and tracks through the fragile sand dunes. In 20 years, I wonder, and worry about, what visiting this beach will be like. Indeed, the concept of preserving home is prominent throughout my thesis. "It is a human need to have a connection to and pride in our respective regions (Schwetz, 1996, p. 22)." Regardless of where I work or live in the future, PEI will always be home to me. We have a beautiful, yet fragile, eco-system on PEI that needs to be preserved and protected. The Island has not been untouched by development (agricultural and otherwise), some of which does not revere the natural world and threatens to destroy the majestic ecology. Excessive development represents a form of change that can alter the places where we grew up, the places that hold our memories and spirits, the places that have shaped us. Berry (1990) argued that rural people see "...the marks and scars of an exploitive national economy" (p. 168) around them. Because PEI is small, the signs of our activity on this earth, on the Island's natural and social ecology, are not easily disguised. Kneen (1993) wrote: "Proximity makes it difficult to avoid or obscure the consequences of what we do..." (p. 178). I was, and continue to be, concerned about current practices that are destroying the land and changing these practices is necessary. As an Islander, I hope that organic farming on PEI survives, that we value their work as an important part of the fabric of Island farming culture. I believe in and respect the work of organic farmers.

I do not wish to idealize the Island way of life. Having been raised in a small place, I recognize that being small carries its own unique challenges and perhaps there

are elements to the way of life here that I have not always related to or connected with. I also still feel the desire to perhaps see or experience "other places." But I regard Prince Edward Island as a special place with hard working and caring people, where community is strong and where people are proud. Islanders have strong connections to their homes, within their communities, and to the land and water: the natural and social ecology.

A caveat is appropriate here. While I have focused my research on the experiences of organic farmers, I feel for the struggle of many conventional farmers. Some of my neighbours are conventional farmers, and I wish to also be respectful of their experiences. I am critiquing a system and a culture, and the choices and values society promotes within this system. There are no simple solutions to the challenges and problems presented in this document. I understand that all farmers are people who strive to make a living for themselves and their families. I acknowledge that there are many complex forces operating in the lives of farmers that contribute to their social, economic, and political reality. Many of the participants in this project can attest to these forces. Because some farmers use chemicals does not mean they love their homes less. As an academic writing this thesis, it might appear that I have the "answers" to complicated issues, but I write from a position of privilege. I am not a farmer and do not live their realities or face their economic and social struggles. I do not presume to fully understand their lived experiences. I hope I do not judge conventional farmers, and at the same time, I think organic farming represents a better way of life. My work is based on this assumption; a thesis debating the merits of various methods of farming is beyond the scope of my work, but in the next major

section I briefly contrast values of the conventional and organic approaches to farming.

The Socio-Political Climate on PEI: Setting the Stage

A typical crop rotation on PEI, joked a local writer, is potatoes--snow--potatoes--snow--potatoes—snow.[1]

PEI is defined by three main industries -- fishing, farming, and tourism. Because we are well known for our rich farmland, in my experience, many seem to associate PEI primarily with farming and with potatoes. I am reminded of how tourists and others often comment on the beauty of Island fields and acres of neatly lined potato drills. I, too, see the beauty in the Island landscape and have been impressed by fields of red soil as far as the eye can see. Unfortunately massive potato fields, and what they represent to many, are a source of conflict and struggle. I am sometimes torn between a pride in PEI and our farming heritage, and the awareness that our well-known potatoes are neither healthy for people nor for the environment and the Island community. I have come to understand the connection between how we grow food and such issues as the breaking down of rural communities, the depletion of soil, health problems, and poverty.

I used to look at a PEI potato and simply see a potato. Now I see it differently. A potato, likely with many applications of pesticides, represents a harsh reality for farmers who are caught within a monoculture model of farming, dependent on chemicals, and supported by a system that promotes large-scale chemical farming in the name of profit; a corporate system that threatens to destroy families, communities,

and the earth (Korten, 1996). I would not have thought that a PEI potato could represent so much. Like anything we purchase in society, knowing its roots connects us with a diversity of social issues (Czerny, Swift, & Clarke, 1994)). A potato is never *just* a potato. It comes from a province, a community, a family, a farmer, and the soil. While my thesis is not specifically about potatoes, the situation for potato farmers on PEI exemplifies the current climate and brings to light many of the challenges farmers face, particularly as industrial potato production is a key aspect to the Island farm economy. So, in some ways, my thesis *is* about potatoes--what they represent socially, economically, politically (McLaughlin, 1987), and culturally. Moreover, my thesis is about an alternative to this reality. An alternative model of agriculture and a paradigm shift are represented in the stories and voices of organic farmers.

For you, the reader, my general goal is to provide a flavor of the socio-political climate of the participants, which is part of the portrait of farmers' experiences that you will read in their personal stories. It is difficult to encapsulate, within the confines of a thesis, the many diverse perspectives and sentiments in relation to farming, as it is an important part of PEI's heritage, culture, way of life, and people's livelihoods. As Islanders might read my document, I wanted to present an accurate, thorough, and respectful piece of work. My original draft of this section was much longer and represented various examples. Regrettably, I have excluded the voices of many Islanders, and I have presented a backdrop as opposed to a comprehensive analysis of social actions and perspectives, the basis of another interesting thesis topic. My focus clears the path for the voices of the organic farmers to be heard more clearly. The stories of organic farmers are, if you will, the

lighthouse of this document; a beacon for the reader. I hope that I have allowed that light to burn brightly and guide the reader towards a collection of stories that has an important place in Island culture.

The specific purpose of this introductory section is twofold. Firstly, I wish to place the voices of the farmers and what they have to teach us within a cultural context. In this way, the reader can see that the seeds for change have been planted on PEI. And, through an appreciation of the local context within which organic farmers live and work, one can begin to understand existing obstacles as well as ascertain if there is fertile ground and possibilities for the survival of organic farming, which is a central theme within my thesis. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, through examples I wish to demonstrate that there is evidence that the current farming situation on PEI threatens the natural and social ecology and efforts must be made to preserve both.

Agriculture on PEI

Years ago on PEI there were many small mixed farms and self-sufficient communities. With changes in agriculture, there are now fewer farmers and farming is characterized by mechanization and monocultures, which has transformed PEI from a "self-sufficient agricultural province" to a state of dependence. In addition, the land resource has been depleted (McRobie, 1981, p. 169). In fact, the effects of monoculture farming and poor crop rotation have had a significant impact on Island soil, which can be clearly seen with the winter thaw when the ditches are filled with red water from topsoil that eventually make its way into the ocean[2]. "We are killing

the land in the name of profit,"[3] and there is a critical need for the adoption of alternative methods of farming. Many voices, including the farmers profiled here, tell of the eco-crisis within farming. What local Island writer Jack MacAndrew wrote in The Eastern Graphic,[4] a weekly newspaper printed in Montague, PEI, encapsulates the situation for farmers:

> The potato monoculture encouraged by government to provide huge processing plants with the raw material for "value added product," has sucked farmers and the Island's economy into a deadly maw. It forces farmers into shorter rotations on more and more acreage to produce a singular type of potato demanded by the fast food outlets of the world....Farmers claim they have no choice. The devil of economic reality in a global economy is making them do what they do...even though they'd rather be better stewards of the land....there are ways to sustain the land, if farmers can break the cycle of dependency on chemicals to raise a crop; and if they can get beyond the immediate need to pay off the banker. In the end, it just makes good economic sense; and government has got to help farmers over the hump.

Writer Jim MacNeill[5] also highlighted the reality for farmers:

> Up to five years ago, P.E.I. used to produce about 70,000 acres of potatoes. This has been increasing rapidly so that the acreage this year [1996] is something over 110,000 acres. That's a 50% increase in five years. The value of potato land has also been escalating, both rented and owner owned. This puts more pressure on farmers being forced to get every last bushel of potatoes from the available land. They till every piece of land including the traditional buffer zones that protected neighbours and water habitat....They see the pressures to produce potatoes - to mine the land for them rather than to farm it.

Farming on PEI, what it represents and the implications for change, are complex. A consensus as to the future direction of farming on PEI is yet to be reached among Island people and among farmers. Farming issues, such as the "pesticide issue" and the "farmer's right to farm," as they have often been called will surely

have a long history in the media and at kitchen tables throughout the province. We know that change must happen, but effecting change is a different story. On the surface, it might seem the debate is only about chemical farming. However, the underlying factors that define PEI's way of life are far from simple as they are connected to oppression and a lack of control over food production (Burge, 1987), a lack of alternative farming practices, and the presence of corporate power. In 1987, Burrill and McKay wrote:

> Agribusiness could triumph so swiftly and so one-sidedly in Maritime agriculture because those who might have opposed it were on small and undercapitalized farms, enjoyed few local economic alternatives to dependence on corporations, and had been unable to achieve effective political organization (p. 16).

Similarly, Giangrande (1985) argued that: "The Maritimes are no doubt the only area in Canada where corporate buyers have managed to dominate such a large part of the farm economy" (p. 127). Based on the findings of my research, as evident in the upcoming stories, the presence of corporate power on PEI in present day, and its effects, remain strong. And the livelihoods of many people depend on farming, and employment *is* survival. Regardless of people's values and hopes, at the end of the day, what puts food on the table is usually the most powerful factor in determining change. One farmer I met eloquently captured the oppressive situation for farmers when he told me that they are "under the gun," that the "potato Mafia" as he called it, has a gun to their heads.

For the purposes of this discussion, I present two case examples that relate to my overarching framework (see p.20) about the importance of preserving the natural

and social ecology: the work of environmentalists and the recent "fish kills" on PEI as a result of chemical farming. I later highlight some of the work of organic farmers and introduce the reader to the group of farmers whose stories are the basis of my project.

Environmental and Citizen Activism

The controversy surrounding monoculture farming on PEI and the excessive use of pesticides is where this research story began for me. At the time my peers and I began our project, the political climate on PEI, in relation to farming and environmental issues, was going through an interesting and controversial period. Based on the literature we reviewed,[6] I learned that over the past few years, in particular, PEI has received media attention due to the use of pesticides in farming and a monocultural farming approach. As a result of public concerns about health and environmental consequences of farming practices, a growing anti-pesticide environmental and citizen movement has challenged the farming community and government, hence, an accepted way of life and farming.

One of the most outspoken anti-pesticide activists, Sharon Labchuk, has changed the face of the issue of chemical farming through public protest. For example, in 1996/97, around the time I began researching these issues, Sharon and members of the Alternatives to Pesticides Committee (at that time, part of the Environmental Coalition of PEI) decided to take direct action against excessive pesticide farming by targeting the tourism industry and warning visitors about pesticide poisoning on PEI. She and others also demonstrated outside of a Wendy's

restaurant in an attempt to pressure the company to cease buying French fries from Irving, a corporate power in the Maritimes, until a pesticide reduction program for potato growers was in place.[7] Their efforts have not been received without criticism and have begged the question as to whether viable alternatives exist to current farming practices. Based on a review of media articles at that time, the response of government and tourism,[8] and the farming industry[9] was not favorable. Some farmers were offended by environmentalists' claims, felt attacked, defensive, or under pressure, while others suggested there was no alternative to chemical farming and farmers would not use them if they were not necessary for crop yields, and if there was a viable option.[10] Local Islanders had a diversity of opinions on the issue of pesticide use in farming and the actions of environmentalists.[11] In general, some Islanders supported change and talked about the health and environmental consequences of pesticide farming while others defended farmers and questioned activist efforts.

These examples are significant because they point to a small group who have challenged our way of thinking, stirred emotions in Island people, and they indicate that some Islanders have begun to question how we grow food. Few could disagree that the actions of this one environmental group instigated much debate. Sharon and friends have been the most vocal group on PEI against chemical farming and have raised the need for organic farming. In an article, Sharon remarked: "At this time, PEI spends next to nothing on programs to assist farmers to make the transition to organic--this is the most formidable obstacle we'll have to overcome" (p. 24).[12]

Sharon Labchuk has since formed a new group, Earth Action, and is still actively campaigning to stop pesticide use on PEI. The group members "advocate stopping the practice of large-scale, single species farming."[13] Her work, and the work of others, demonstrates the challenges involved in adopting a social change method with highly charged issues that strike at the heart of Islanders' survival. But over the years, Sharon has gained more support for her work and most importantly, she and other environmentalists have brought the negative environmental and health effects of conventional farming to the attention of Island people, and have helped lay a foundation for change. Their work is also an example of the powerful role of small groups, a theme of my thesis.

The "Fish Kills"

Last summer [1999], several "fish kills" linked to the use of chemicals in farming occurred on PEI, which were said to have been caused by a lack of buffer zones that allow farm chemicals to spill into waters.[14] French fry plants place demands on farmers to produce more potatoes, which has meant increased potato acreage and additional chemicals used to sustain them. The potato industry points to the thousands of people employed by potato production and the need for chemicals to produce a crop.[15]

In response to the fish kills, a government-appointed action committee to address agricultural run off was formed to provide recommendations (some of which drew upon the Land Use Report, August, 1997),[16] and the committee also promised action to prevent future fish kills.[17] An environmental representative who had become

part of the action committee had publicly given support to pesticide reduction and organic farming and for farmers who have chosen this route. In a newspaper article, he noted that organic farming "should be acknowledged and included as part of the farming portrait on PEI."[18]

Gary Schneider, environmentalist and writer for ECO-PEI, an environmental newsletter, wrote about the fish kills.[19] He argued: "Will it [growing season for 1999] go down in history as the summer when things finally got bad enough to force significant changes in farming practices? Or will it just be remembered as the year dead fish and other stream life ruined the Island's reputation as a clean environment?" (p. 1). He noted positive signs of changes, such as national public response to the fish kills, recognition by industries of the consequences of the Island's poor reputation in the marketplace, increased demand for organic food and the presence of certified organic food sections in grocery stores on the Island, as well as the show of support by Premier Pat Binns and former Agriculture and Forestry Minister Eric Hammill by touring organic farms. However, Schneider further wrote: "The Action Plan calls for increased support for organic food production, though it failed to attach any funding recommendations" (p. 2). Finally, the Land Use report, an important document for the Action Committee, still contained many recommendations that have not been adopted, contended Schneider. There is also still some denial about the cause of the environmental disasters and a lack of leadership to reduce potato acreage. Most importantly for the present discussion, although the action plan is educational, Schneider suggested, it lacks action. Of particular importance to my study is the recommendation that more resources be allocated to programs and services to support

organic farming. Yet, the PEI government has noted that some of the recommendations of the Action Committee have been implemented, and "work with essential partners is underway to address the others."[20]

PEI Organic Farmers

In my research, most of the farmers I met were certified organic farmers. The main association for certified organic farmers on PEI is the local chapter of the Organic Crop Improvement Association (OCIA)[21], which called on farmers, gardeners, consumers, and retailers to support, as an ad called it, in the "PEI Organic Movement Co-op."[22] Approximately sixty Islanders are members of OCIA [1998], but there are only 18 certified organic growers. Yet, the demand for organic food increases each year.[23] There are also farmers, some of whom I have met at the Charlottetown farmer's market, who call themselves organic farmers but are not certified. Certification issues were mentioned by farmers during my travels, but I have chosen not to explore these issues here. For more on the certification debate as well the adoption of national standards for organic foods, see Gagnon (1999).

Though the numbers are small, organic farmers represent an alternative method of agriculture and a movement that has the potential to grow if political and economic conditions are ripe. Long before the storm of media coverage on anti-pesticide actions, for many years, there were farmers on PEI trying to organize organic farming efforts. One group of particular importance is Seaspray Farms Organic Co-operative, an organic marketing co-operative of farmers, whose stories I documented for my thesis.

Seaspray Farms Organic Co-operative was formed in 1994. As noted in their brochure, it:

> ...is a producer co-op of certified organic family farms and their supporters on Prince Edward Island. The Co-op was formed to provide a structure for organic producers to market their produce cooperatively and to share the benefits and responsibilities of such a structure...Our produce is grown in soil kept rich with good compost and long term field rotations. We try to keep our fields covered in winter, so the soil doesn't blow away or run off. Our farming is based on renewable and human resources. We have respect for the environment and human dignity, including our children's future.

The following quotation from their brochure encapsulates their values and resonates with the community psychology values promoted throughout my thesis: "Healthy food from a healthy environment makes healthy people."

The co-op began as Abegweit Organic Co-op around 1991, endeavoring to enter into the marketplace shipping produce to Ontario. But the PVYN (a potato disease which did not allow Island farmers to ship their crops; see Phelan, 1996) crisis occurred at that time and seriously hampered their efforts. In the upcoming stories, participants allude to this experience. In the mid 1990's, they renamed the co-op "Seaspray Farms." Newspaper articles from that time provided a brief look at their history and highlighted the group's efforts to develop a line of frozen organic products, as well as their efforts at shipping organic fruit and vegetables into a number of different Canadian and US markets.[24] Since I began my research, the co-op has increased their numbers and seeks new markets.

II. Organic Farming: Preserving the Natural and Social Ecology

My thesis brings the stories of organic farmers to the forefront, those who would like to, as one organic farmer recently put it, survive on a small farm, keep communities alive, keep the family farm going, make a living, and help someone else in the process. [25]

As you will read in the upcoming stories, my thesis is largely about the survival of a group of ecological farmers and their livelihoods. On a deeper level, my work is also about the survival of the Island, our homes, and the larger "home" in which we all live -- the earth. Accordingly, I offer their stories as an example of people who are trying to make a living in greater cooperation with Mother Nature. In a personal communication with Ed Bennett, a member of my thesis committee who is active within his local Ontario organic farming community, he talked about the importance of *motherhood values* and the concept of home as linked to mothering. Indeed, we typically think of mothers as those who protect and care for us, and provide nurturing. As many feminist writers have attested, mothers traditionally were "the keepers" of home. What is interesting for the present research is the way in which the concept of mothering fits with my overarching theme. As the title of this section suggests, I write today, echoing the voices of the farmers, about the protection and preservation of the environment, Island communities, and a rural way of life,

which is the general framework within which I place farmers' stories and the significance of these stories.

In this section, I attempt to define organic farming and the use of this term in my thesis and I introduce the reader to the ecological model within community psychology. Then I discuss the state of agriculture today, current threats to the natural and social ecology, organic farming and community psychology values, and the role of organic farming in offering a new agricultural pathway.

Defining Organic Farming

Wiebe (1993) and Gagnon (1999) contended that organic farming is difficult to define. There is debate, argued Wiebe, about what organic farming is, who is an organic farmer, and to what degree one farms in this manner. Examples of adjectives to describe organic farming include ecological, holistic, alternative, natural, and sustainable (Baltaz, 1998). Gagnon (1999) discovered that, in the literature, the term organic is used inconsistently and its definition depends on the source. Generally, organic farming, like other forms of agriculture, falls on a continuum of agricultural practices. Organic farming, Gagnon explained, is part of a larger movement called alternative agriculture, which includes other forms of farming. And both organic farming and other alternative farming methods belong to the sustainable farming movement.

In my thesis, the participants typically described themselves as organic farmers and they belong to a certified organic farming organization. While I have predominantly used the term organic, I have sometimes used other terms to describe

organic farming and its implications such as "ecological," "alternative," and "sustainable." I have come to believe that organic farming represents a more ecological method of farming and an alternative to an industrialized farm model; one that offers a pathway to a sustainable future. In fact, organic farming is not simply farming without chemicals. Organic farmers have a different relationship with the natural world than their conventional counterparts and they work with and understand nature (Baltaz, 1998), which highlights their connections to the natural ecology.

Many terms can be used to describe alternatives to modernized farming and Pretty (1995) used "sustainable" for simplicity. The word "sustainable" is popular across various disciplines, and it was beyond the scope and goal of my research to present the immense literature base on sustainable farming. Wiebe (1993) wrote that comparisons are often made between organic and sustainable farming, terms that are sometimes used interchangeably. However, Gardner, Jamtgaard, and Kirschenmann (1995) noted distinctions between sustainable and organic farming. Further, Gagnon (1999) did not use alternative and sustainable to mean the same things, suggesting they reflect different mindsets.

Pretty (1995) wrote that: "...organic agriculture is generally a form of sustainable agriculture, though not all sustainable agriculture is organic (p. 9)." When I speak of organic farming as sustainable, I utilize the term in a general fashion and suggest that some of the basic principles, philosophies, and qualities of sustainable farming (e.g. Bird, Bultena, & Gardner, 1995) are consistent with those offered by organic farming. I also speak of organic farming as a method of farming that sustains the ecology. In contrast to conventional, industrial agriculture, I link sustainable

agriculture, as well as organic agriculture, with environmental justice, equity, and health, due to an emphasis on a relationship with the natural world and respect for the earth's resources. Bird et al. (1995) argued that "...sustainable farmers are more conducive to maintaining vital rural communities and environmental quality" (p.xiv), which fits with my overarching theme of preserving the natural and social ecology.

The Ecological Model

"Today we can see the beginning of a new way of thinking about the world - as sets of relationships rather than separated objects - which we call ecology (Suzuki, 1997, p.198)."

According to Levine and Perkins (1987), ecology comes from the Greek word meaning "home," which is fitting within the context of my research. Rappaport (1977) wrote that defining aspects of the community psychology perspective include cultural relativity, diversity, and ecology. The ecological perspective examines relationships and the fit between people and their social and physical environments. In other words, community psychology looks at the contexts, settings, and systems that influence people (Orford, 1992). Levine and Perkins (1987) further stressed the need to understand environmental influences, their effects on people, as well as "toxins" in settings. Understanding people's relationships within their social setting is important, but we must also understand people's connections and relationships with the natural world.

Bennett and Campbell (1996) advocated for an appreciation of the social *and* natural ecology and adoption of an eco-centric point of view in community psychology practice. An earth-centered or eco-centric worldview focuses on the

preservation of "biodiversity and ecological integrity" (Miller, 1996, p. 713). I, too, advocate for an ecological model that extends beyond the social setting and speaks to the relationships we have with the natural world, which represent our deepest connection to ecology (Suzuki, 1997). Other students in community psychology (O'Reilly, 1999; van de Hoef, 1999) have explored and wrote about maintaining the health of both the social and natural ecology and appreciating the natural world.

The Changing Face of Agriculture

"Changes in Canadian agriculture have created new external factors which weaken community spirit and work against the overall harmony of the 10,000 year-old-farming way of life" (Baltaz, 1991, p. 107).

The challenging reality for organic farmers cannot be completely separated from the reality faced by conventional farmers. Many authors (e.g., Allaby & Allen, 1974; Baltaz, 1991, 1998; Burrill & McKay, 1987; Giangrande, 1985; Gorelick, 2000; Kneen, 1993; Lind, 1995; Sim, 1988) have written about the struggles of farmers. A comprehensive discussion about the numerous factors contributing to the hardship of Canadian farmers is not possible here. Some of the aforementioned authors have written specifically about the current farming system, the plight of farmers and the financial problems they face, cheap food policies supported by government, the commodification of food, and corporations who profit from the labour of farmers. In this subsection, I wish to briefly talk about the current industrialized approach to agriculture, and most importantly, how this approach threatens the natural and social ecology, community wellness, and the health of the earth. Later, I discuss the need for a new agricultural vision and direction in the form

of organic farming, which is typically appreciative and respectful of both the natural and social ecology.

The "farm crisis," in the words of Baltaz (1991), refers to economic factors that change farming from a way of life to an industry. Indeed, as noted by a PEI farmer, farming "has changed from being a way of life to a way of making a living, and there's a big difference between the two!" (as cited in Baltaz, 1991, p. 153). According to Baltaz (1991), small self-sufficient farms have disappeared and in their place are larger specialized ones. Efficiency and productivity characterize today's farming values (Giangrande, 1985). While food and community are essential to life (Kneen, 1993), clearly some farming practices and "progress" carry social and environmental costs (Baltaz, 1998; Klinkenborg, 1995; McDermott, 1990), which I discuss in the next section. Critical aspects to farming such as community and the health and safety of human beings have not been considered in the quest for wealth (Allaby & Allen, 1974). Likewise, Suzuki (1997) wrote that the health of communities and the environment are disregarded while we base decisions on values linked to the marketplace.

Kneen (1993), in his critical analysis of the food system, wrote that: "Much of the current economic, social, and ecological distress that is being visited upon rural areas worldwide is the result of making commodity export the driving force of the economy" (p. 40). He argued that a food system based on wealth means that diversity, sustainability, and regional economics suffer. Similarly, Sim (1988) remarked that:

> In the past, farmers have been providers of life-giving nourishment for their families and nearby communities. Today, farmers produce for the "market," and food is a by-product available to those who can afford it....Today the food provided by the farmer is just another raw material out of which the industrial sector - by processing, packaging, distributing, and marketing - makes profits (p. 166).

Schumacher (1973) warned of the dangers in applying industry principles to growing food and contended that animals and land are treated as "factors of production." Industrialism has been pushed without consideration for the impact on the natural and social ecology (Bennett, 1987).

Threats to the Natural and Social Ecology

"Ecological health is essential for full community health" (Suzuki, 1997, p. 175).

The farm crisis, according to Lind (1995), is an environmental crisis. Indeed, industrial agriculture is linked to environmental problems (e.g., Bird et al., 1995; Pretty, 1995). The health of the natural ecology, as well as animals and plants, have suffered within industrial and chemical farming models (Allaby & Allen, 1974; Groh & McFadden, 1990; Reganold, Papendick, & Parr, 1992; Wookey, 1987), and these consequences have not been ignored by the "tillers of the soil" (McDermott, 1990). Many authors have written about the various ill effects of the modernization of agriculture, which are too numerous to cite here. But Pretty (1995), for instance, noted that modern agriculture has contributed to pollution, energy consumption, hazardous pesticides, soil erosion, and loss of biodiversity. Suzuki (1997) supported this assertion when he wrote: "...agriculture changed more than human life; it changed the face of the Earth, and the great harvests of today are using up the soil they depend

on" (p. 99). Likewise, Kneen (1993) warned that mixed, diverse farms are being replaced by monoculture farms, which means a loss of diversity and unhealthy food.

Community is also an integral part of farming (Baltaz, 1991). Agriculture used to be performed *by whole communities* (Allaby & Allen, 1974). However, the farm community has drastically changed. Sim (1988) wrote about the transformation of the Canadian countryside, the crisis within rural communities, and the "battered rural community" (p. 16). Sim contended that: "The restructuring of agriculture along humane ecologically sensitive lines is essential to the re-vitalization of the rural community" (p. 165). Reg Phelan (1996), one of the participants in my thesis, wrote about the effects of conventional agriculture on the Island environment and rural communities, signaling the importance of an ecological agricultural movement.

Industrial farming has contributed to employment loss, the decline of small farms and farm families, as well as the breaking down of rural communities. It has also made many farmers financially dependent and subject to corporate control. With fewer farms, power is concentrated in the hands of a small group (e.g., Baltaz, 1991, Bird et al., 1995; Giangrande, 1985; Kneen, 1993; Pretty, 1995). Farmers have been alienated from farming, nature, family, and a way of life (Baltaz, 1991; Kneen, 1993; Sim 1988).

In Lind's research (1995), farmers were concerned about the loss of community due to globalization. They pointed to the need for community and made a connection between the sustainability of farm families and the sustainability of rural communities. Farmers also linked survival of the environment to the survival of human community. Indeed, the loss of the environment and the loss of community are

intimately linked. Phelan (1996) noted that after a rainstorm on PEI, rivers run red with Island topsoil. "As the exposed and disregarded soil departs with the rains, so local knowledge and local memory move away to the cities... (Berry, 1990, p. 157)." But as Berry argued, local community, culture, and economy need to be preserved.

Organic Farming and Community Psychology

Community psychology values include health, caring and compassion, self-determination, participation, human diversity, and social justice (Prilleltensky & Nelson, 1997). The WLU community psychology program mission statement stated that community psychology "strives to improve the quality of life for all citizens in a community," and noted other values such as empowerment, community, prevention, peace, and sustainability. Organic farming epitomizes the values of community psychology as it is linked to the promotion of quality of life and health for citizens and communities. It also benefits the environment. In this way, organic farming is socially and environmentally just. In our course paper, my peers and I wrote (Griffin, MacLeod, & O'Reilly, 1997):

> Organic farming embraces a commitment to bio-diversity which nurtures, rather than destroys, the land; it is an important part of developing and sustaining a localized economy; it is a step towards allowing citizens to gain some control over community and lifestyle decisions; it de-emphasizes over-consumerism and promotes values of cooperation and respect for the land (p. 2).

Similarly, Gagnon (1999) argued that organic farming:

> ...encourages a diversity of operations and operators, which may lead to economic stability and social diversity in rural communities.... In addition, organic farms are inherently concerned with the long-term ecological sustainability of their land and the surrounding environment, so that they adopt practices which reflect this, and they

> contribute to the environmental well-being of the entire community (p. 55).

Because of its emphasis on the preservation of the natural and social ecology, organic farming also fits with the ecological model in community psychology. Allaby and Allen (1974) wrote: "Organic farming has been called ecological farming because it "...embraces the idea of working with natural processes for the long-term benefit of all living things" (p. 107). In the foreword to Wookey (1987), organic farming was cited as "safeguarding" the natural ecology. Similarly, I have come to see organic farmers as ecological guardians, as their farming practices protect the soil. Baltaz (1991) also wrote about farmers as caretakers of the soil and stewards of the environment. She argued: "Farming is a vocation of nurturing, of living in harmony with nature as much as possible" (p. 107).

van de Hoef (1999), a former student in my graduate program, explained that ecological agriculture is a model of wellness, in contrast to conventional agriculture which does not contribute to health. Organic farmers have spoken of their approach to farming as being healthy and in harmony with the earth, animals, and society, and some have shared that they farm organically for ecological or health reasons (Baltaz, 1998; Gagnon, 1999; Kramer, 1984; Wiebe, 1993). Participants in Wiebe's study (1993), for instance, felt that organic farming benefited society and the environment and was the best way to achieve principles of sustainable agriculture. Gagnon (1999) discovered that the main advantages of organic farming cited by organic farmers are that it is healthy for farmers and their families, is a sustainable method of farming, has reduced environmental impacts, addresses health concerns for consumers (and the

health of livestock or neighbours, which is linked to having a healthy community), and features high quality products, independence, low costs, and income. Baltaz (1998) discovered that farmers farmed organically for a variety of reasons such as love of creation, economics, health, family, spirituality, lifestyle, and social justice. These are motives that resonate with the values of community psychology.

Organic Farming: A New Agricultural Vision and Direction

The crisis in agriculture points to the need for new directions, "fresh new alternatives" (Sim, 1988), and a new agricultural agenda (Davies, 1992). Allaby and Allen (1974) argued: "The very existence of the organic alternative and of those who practice it provides a pool of practical experience, a new point of departure, a constant comparison, and if nothing else, a very necessary prod" (p.80).

Indeed, people are looking for wiser farming ways, and ways to connect with the environment. The "farms of tomorrow," ones that hold promise for the future, produce healthy food in a healthy environment. They also bring together farms and communities in social forms of agriculture, which are ecologically based (Groh & McFadden, 1990).

Organic Farming Through Small Steps

A guiding notion and theme throughout my thesis has been the role of small initiatives. My experiences doing my thesis research brought to light the importance of celebrating "smallness." After all, I worked with a small, organized group within a small organic farming movement in Canada's smallest province. I have come to understand the implications of organic farming within a theoretical framework that

values small endeavors (McRobie, 1981; Rosset, 1999; Schumacher, 1973; Weick, 1984). Kneen (1993) contended that: "Taking small, specific steps toward an inclusive economy of food will at the same time nurture the vision that directs those steps (p. 197). As such, I suggest that we can begin to alter the current agricultural path and start on a new path through small steps, namely by supporting organic farmers and allowing them to move from the margins. Supporting organic farming, because it is small scale, is beneficial in preserving communities and the environment, which I later discuss in section five.

III. My Research Approach

I adopted a naturalistic, qualitative approach for my thesis. A qualitative approach appealed to me because it is emergent, grounded in context, and supported by an interpretivist paradigm (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Other features of the qualitative approach that I endeavored to exemplify in my work were sensitivity to context, personal contact with participants, an inclusion of my personal insights, and design flexibility (Patton, 1990).

In general, based on my objectives to have a description and exploration of organic farmers' experiences, my theoretical framework can be linked to phenomenology, in which one is interested in the meaning of experience of a particular phenomenon for participants. A phenomenological perspective highlights the importance of using methods that "capture people's experiences of the world" (Patton, 1990, p. 71). Phenomenological inquiry employs "qualitative and naturalistic approaches to inductively and holistically understand human experience in context-specific settings" (Patton, 1990, p. 37). Because my data were interpreted, my framework can also be linked to hermeneutics, which as a theoretical approach, places more emphasis on interpretation (Patton, 1990).

In addition, I also place value in knowledge and wisdom gained through lived experiences, consistent with a feminist epistemology and research paradigm (Reinharz, 1992). I appreciate the concept of voice and hearing the voices of those who live on the margins (Kirby & McKenna, 1989). I believe that knowledge is best

understood and shared through an exploration of a rich context grounded in the experiences of the local organic farmers of Prince Edward Island.

My specific framework and methodology, however, were informed by the narrative approach.

Narrative Approach and Framework

"They [stories] tell us not only who we are but who we have been and who we can be" (Rappaport, 1995, p. 796).

I was drawn to the theory and philosophy of narrative and the use and role of stories in understanding people's lives. See, for example, Connelly and Clandinin (1990), Polkinghorne (1996), Sarbin (1986), Josselson and Lieblich (1993), Lieblich and Josselson (1994), and Gluck and Patai (1991).

Through telling and writing stories, I believe, we can know people's experiences and the meaning of those experiences. There is value in the power of stories and story-telling, and this influenced my methodology. For example, David Weale, a well known Island historian and story-teller, has taken stories shared with him by Islanders and translated them into humorous and endearing musical productions about the Island way of life. In this way, he promoted Island pride and community ties. His capacity to engage and move people illustrates the role of stories in Island life and the possibilities for this medium. Stories seem to be an important part of Island culture, and as such, lay a foundation for an appropriate fit with the narrative approach. I propose that the use of stories is also effective in sharing not only a social or cultural message, but a political one. My thesis celebrates organic farmers' experiences and work, and also contains an underlying political message. In

addition, the use of narratives, which allowed me to represent context and various aspects of people's lives, was an appropriate methodology (Rosa, 1997).

From early on in the research process, I gravitated towards the concept of "voicing" experiences, although Riessman (1993) argued: "We cannot give voice, but we do hear voices that we record and interpret" (p. 8). Throughout my research, I had an interest in documenting farmers' experiences and came to view stories as an effective way in which to represent and appreciate these experiences. I define a "story" as a compilation of a person's experiences, insights, learnings, ideas and wisdom. My interest in farmers' experiences and in the concept of voice fit well within the narrative approach, and in particular, the work of Julian Rappaport (1995), a prominent community psychologist who sees the importance in narratives.

My methodological framework was informed by Rappaport (1993,1995) and his belief in the powerful effects of stories. He used the term story, a description of events over time with a beginning, a middle, and an end, in reference to an individual's story. He reserved use of the term narrative to describe a story common among a group, a community narrative. Accordingly, in my thesis, I presented participants' individual experiences as stories and their collective stories as a community narrative.

For people who do not have social or economic power (e.g., organic farmers), Rappaport contended that narratives available to them are often negative and written by others. I was drawn to the use of narratives as a means by which to advance the ideas of organic farmers and share their experiences. One of my hopes for the stories presented in this thesis is that they could serve as a resource to promote the work of

organic farmers. An empowerment agenda can be fostered through the use of narratives. He stated: "...community narratives can be a powerful force for both personal and social change, and that helping people to identify, create, and tell their own stories, individually and collectively, is an endeavor consistent with the development of empowerment" (p. 802). He further noted: "The practice implications of this approach [narrative] leads us to listen to, amplify, and give value to the stories of the people we serve" (p. 796).

Dominant cultural narratives, common stories in the mass media, for example, serve as a powerful background for other stories. As Rappaport argued, in the face of these powerful narratives, it can be difficult to find *new stories*. On PEI, with the dominant monoculture farm approach, the political and economic climate must make it difficult for the stories of organic farmers to be voiced and recognized, for novel stories advocating alternative agriculture to be heard.

The manner in which I applied Rappaport's approach was not complicated. Other than open-ended questions and a relatively informal and relaxed interview approach, I did not employ specific techniques to elicit narratives and information I could use to write a story, though I did emphasize my wish to obtain stories on several occasions. My questions (which, for the most part, were open-ended) were designed to give participants the freedom to talk about their experiences and ideas. In some cases, as an interviewer I said little and allowed the participant to direct the conversation. Other times, some participants looked to me to ask another question. Some participants spoke freely and I did not have to facilitate the interview a great deal. Like Rosa (1997), I tried not to interrupt participants or dominate the

conversation, though I often followed the interview guide and tried to address questions contained within the guide. For the most part, interviews were relaxed and participants were easy to talk with. Riessman (1993) suggested using five to seven broad questions, and if a researcher relinquishes control, almost any question can elicit a narrative. Similarly, Mishler (1986) noted that while stories are more likely in unstructured interviews, they show up in many types of interviews and eliciting stories is determined more so by the approach of the interviewer than the question form or content. I believe that I was able to obtain rich data for the stories in part due to the relationship I had established with the participants, which I discuss later in more detail.

In summary, my interviews, and the analysis and presentation of data, were guided by the notion of stories. I wanted to structure and represent farmers' "stories" and experiences in a story format. However, while I endeavored to collect stories, I do not believe I only anticipated eliciting them and perhaps envisioned the final product in a story format. Though I was not certain what "telling their story" would look like, I was interested in information that I would use to write a story, and some of my questions perhaps were not designed to elicit stories per se. Some questions were potentially better "story questions," while others required more specific answers, the sharing of ideas, experiences, and information that could be used for other purposes. Many of the data I collected or included are not specific narratives. Moreover, some participants told stories in their interviews and I have included those where appropriate, while others did not.

Phases of the Research

Entry into the Community

When I began my thesis, I wanted to gain entry into the setting by connecting with organic farmers. In an environmental newsletter, I recalled having seen a short insert on Seaspray Farms Organic Co-operative. I spoke with two members of the group in January 1998, briefly explained my research idea, and asked if I might attend their next meeting. We agreed that permission from the group was important before I attended. The following month in February, I attended my first meeting where I presented my research ideas verbally and in writing. Their response was supportive and each of them gave me their names and a contact number. I asked if I could attend the next meeting and they were welcoming. After the first meeting, I met with the group fairly regularly, often on a monthly basis that year (1998). However, in the many months following, particularly when I spent time in Ontario, I did not attend group meetings for the most part and spent most of my time focused on constructing the stories and writing. I kept in touch with participants by telephone and mail.

In the beginning, I did not know where my connection with this group might take me, and at that time I had intended to interview different groups or sub-samples of organic farmers. Indeed, throughout my thesis, I entertained the possibility of interviewing diverse groups of organic farmers I had identified (e.g. certified versus uncertified farmers, farmers who were not part of an organized group, or farmers who no longer farmed organically).

Having had the honour of spending time and developing friendships within one group, I felt I had begun to gain an understanding of their individual and group stories, and I hoped I could also provide rich data and a fairly in-depth look at their experiences. As I came to know them, and in the interest of time, I eventually decided that my sample would be based on the stories of group members. Hence, I chose a horizontal sample, as opposed to a vertical one. Numerous times throughout the process, I entertained the possibility of a case study of the co-op, as I had learned about some of their history and their unique situation as an organic marketing cooperative on PEI. Prior to the analysis of the interview data, I made the decision to limit my sample to this group, but I was unsure how much of their group experiences I would include. It was not until late in the research process and after conducting an analysis of the interview data, however, that I decided that the stories were about more than their experiences in the co-operative. Consequently, focusing solely on a co-operative, rather than farmers' general experiences, would constitute a different focus than my original research goals.

Conceptual Development and Immersion in the Setting

My experiences doing my thesis research, fittingly, constitute their own story. For the most part, my focus came about through an emergent process. Because my primary goal is to present the farmers' stories, I have chosen not to comprehensively share the evolutionary process and conceptual development of my work. In this section, I retrace only some of my journey and provide a few examples and a compass. In addition to my group project previously mentioned, it is sufficient to note

that my research ideas were influenced by my immersion in the setting, as well as readings and conversations with peers (especially my classmate, Jan O'Reilly) and others. Another influence was Ed Bennett, who has participated in small and hopeful examples of change. For example, through his work with the Old Order Amish communities, his Community Shared Agriculture (CSA) project "is an example of a hopeful project. Hopeful and sustainable in relation to the social and natural ecology in the face of global restructuring" (Bennett & Campbell, 1996, p. 3). In the beginning stages of my research, he suggested there were several possibilities within my research proposal, such as facilitating the struggle of organic farmers on PEI and having case studies of positive exemplars. He encouraged me to become connected to "hopeful examples of change" occurring on the Island through the organic farming movement. At that time, he asked a simple yet intriguing question: what does it take to facilitate and nurture organic farmers on PEI? We spoke about appreciating people's stories and using stories to generate action through a feedback loop. Over time, my original interest in stories and the experiences of organic farmers grew; the idea of small and hopeful examples of change also took on a larger significance through my involvement with the co-op and TARRP (a citizen's environmental group), which I talk more about in my discussion.

While doing my thesis, I tried to be open to farmers' experiences and to be reflexive to what I learned through the research process. I told participants that my research was exploratory and my focus was evolving as I learned about issues affecting them. I was fortunate to spend a few months attending meetings with

farmers before I submitted my proposal for ethical review to begin interviews, which provided valuable time "in the field," and in getting to know participants.

When I first began constructing my interview guide, I had numerous questions and my focus was too broad. My interview questions reflected my own interests as well as what I had learned from my experiences, conversations, readings and learnings from my time in the field. For example, some of my original question development was informed by the work of Diane Baltaz (1991, 1998). Her work (1998) was based mainly on the experiences of organic farmers and groups in Ontario, though she does briefly profile the group I worked with for my thesis. I wanted to learn from her research experiences, and in a meeting with her at her home, I asked her what question she would have asked participants. She noted that farmers' own stories sustain them, but wondered what we can do to sustain them, speaking to the role of non-farmers. I adopted her suggestion and asked participants about the role of local citizens and communities in sustaining organic farming.

As I refined my interview guide and learned more from the setting, I had fewer and more pertinent questions for the present research. However, after submitting my ethics proposal and obtaining approval to proceed, I felt a piece was missing. I discovered that some of my guide might not fully reflect what I was hearing in the field and from participants. I also found myself revisiting previous conversations and notes in my journal and I wondered how much of my focus was more a reflection of my interests than those of the participants. I originally envisioned stories of organic farmers that explored their work, experiences and connections (i.e. to the ecology) and I anticipated trying to gain support for their work through the

dissemination of their stories. But I wanted information that could potentially help the struggling farmer and contribute to their survival. In essence, I wanted to appreciate their general experiences, but I also wanted to elicit information that could teach us about sustaining their work and strengthening their voices. The issue of survival came to the forefront, and I partially revised my questions. I then added a couple of other questions that explored what they have learned as organic farmers. I felt that "learnings" would be useful within their group, and possibly within the organic movement, depending on how the information was utilized. I had wanted to allow the people I was getting to know, and the information and context I was becoming grounded in, to guide me. The final shift and modification to my guide would become the focus of my interviews.

A few specific examples help explain the process of arriving at my final interview guide. Firstly, from my field experiences, I acknowledged the political and economic reality for farmers trying to make a living. A prominent theme in my initial research, in the data, and in my field experiences particularly with the group of farmers with whom I worked was the "struggle to survive." One of my first impressions of "the struggle to survive" came about at a meeting with a group of farmers, who I did not see as wealthy agribusiness men sitting around the table, but as struggling farmers trying to farm a new way, while at the same time invent creative solutions as to how they would make an income.

Secondly, I was influenced by a conversation with a friend and community psychologist, Terry Mitchell. In telling her about my evolving focus, particularly my interest in the future for organic farming, she noted the importance in "starting with

what they know." She suggested that participants do not necessarily know about the future, and it would useful to learn about what has helped them to this point. I was then, and continue to be, interested in their thoughts on the future. But my thinking changed somewhat after this conversation. I agreed it was important to focus on what they know, which to me meant their story as well as lessons and learnings from their present experiences. I wanted them to share what they know about being organic farmers on PEI. By talking with farmers, listening to their stories, and exploring their ideas and experiences, we have an opportunity to learn about what contributes to their reality, how they have survived/succeeded, how to sustain their work, and the lessons we can learn from them.

Thirdly, as part of a process of getting to know participants, to get in touch with key informants, and find out issues important to them, I had pre-interview chats with three farmers, two of whom were part of the final sample. They shared many ideas, some of which focused on struggles and obstacles and the need for support. I also embraced opportunities to talk with farmers or visit organic farms. As part of the certification process for farmers, I was fortunate to spend a couple of days with a certification inspector in the summer of 1998 and traveled to two farms, where I learned about and saw first-hand how a certified organic farm operates. Once again I was struck by the challenges involved in "making a living" as organic farmers, in particular those who try to farm as a way of life and as sole source of income. My conversations with people during this time highlighted some important issues for me about "success stories" on PEI, the possible lack of "success stories, and what might contribute to a successful organic farming example.

Data Collection

After spending some time with participants, I began my formal data collection. When I was prepared to conduct my interviews, I called participants to inform them that I had received ethical clearance from WLU to proceed. I also told them I would send an information letter (Appendix A) that would explain what the interview would be about, as well as a tentative interview guide with some possible questions for discussion (Appendix B). I reminded participants that the questions served as a guide, and I was open to their experiences and ideas. I sent all participants the guide and information letter by mail. Shortly thereafter, I called each participant to ask if they had any questions, and to set up an interview time. Over the following week and a half in August 1998, I conducted individual in-depth interviews with seven participants. The individual interviews, combined with my notes, provided sufficient data for the basis of people's stories.

Prior to the start of the interview, participants signed a consent form (Appendix C) and I gave them a copy for their records. Most interviews lasted approximately two hours and took place at the participant's farm, and in Island tradition, most conversations were at the kitchen table. In some cases, interviews could have lasted much longer, as there were many interesting issues to explore. Following the interview, I took steps to ensure the trustworthiness of findings, to which I now turn.

Trustworthiness of Findings

Methodologically, participants were involved in member checks in which I accessed their feedback regarding their transcript and story, and my representation of their experiences (Maxwell, 1996). After I transcribed the interviews, accompanied by a cover letter explaining my request, I returned them to participants for a review of the transcript and to give them an opportunity to remove information they did not want included in their personal story. I later contacted participants to see if they had an opportunity to review their transcript and if there were any recommended changes.

In the interview, two participants expressed concerns about information they had shared and privacy issues. In the transcript review process, for one participant I carefully dealt with these issues by sending a more detailed and explicit letter explaining my request. I followed with a phone call to be sure he was comfortable with the information and that he had no questions or concerns. He suggested some information should be omitted or modified. Another participant, in the original interview, seemed cautious about having information he shared part of a public story. I gave him his transcript for review and called him to talk about his wishes and comfort level. He was comfortable with the transcript and suggested I proceed. He clarified a point that was made in an interview that I then included in his story. One participant did not have an opportunity to read his transcript and said he was comfortable with my writing the story. I assured participants that they would have an opportunity to read their written story in the future.

Based on conversations with participants prior to seeing the story, I had a general idea of their thoughts on issues of anonymity and confidentiality as a few participants had expressed their agreement in using their name and their comfort level in the information they had shared. But I was more comfortable with them seeing a written product and I planned on revisiting ethical issues with them once they had seen the written story. Using the transcript, as well as notes from my journal, I constructed the story of each participant. Issues of anonymity and confidentiality were critical in my thesis, as PEI is a small place and organic farming is a politically charged issue. A transcript review was an important step, but I understood that reading the final story creation was important and would contribute to a sound ethical process.

I wanted to be certain that participants were comfortable with their personal stories and with the group story, mainly because both were a fairly candid look at their experiences, which differed from my original goal of interviewing several groups of farmers. I consulted with both my advisor and my department's ethics and field supervisor, Paul Davock, who provided suggestions on dealing with issues of anonymity and confidentiality for individuals and the group. In addition to an individual story review for each participant, I obtained permission from group members about the use of their name in my thesis and representation of their group story. I was also concerned that participants clearly understood who might see their stories and that they would become part of a public document. While I had mentioned these issues in the past, I felt it was important to address them more formally now that they had an opportunity to review their written stories.

Ideally, I would have liked to have distributed farmers' personal stories and share the tapestry of the community narrative in person, but I was in Ontario at the time and I returned the stories to participants for review by mail. When a draft of the stories was ready, I called them to ask if they were interested in seeing their story, if they were comfortable with me sending it through the mail, and to verbally highlight the points contained in the cover letter. In this written letter to them, I asked them to consider several issues. For example, I asked them whether the story had captured what they wanted to tell me, whether it was accurate, and if they were comfortable with the information I had included and the use of their name. I noted that if they were not comfortable with the use of their name that we could discuss using a fake name, but I reminded participants that it would not likely completely conceal their identity because of the size of PEI. Also, their affiliation with the group would have made anonymity difficult. I also reminded them that their story would be part of a public document in the library that likely would be seen by people on PEI. In addition, I expressed my wish to "get the word out" about their work and asked them to consider possibilities for their stories and to whom they might wish to distribute them. I shared my hope that there would be an opportunity to further discuss possibilities for their stories under their guidance and suggestions.

I also sent each participant a copy of the community narrative for his or her feedback. I was interested not only in their impressions of the community narrative, but I wanted to be certain group members were comfortable with my using the name of their group and with my focus. I asked participants to consider these issues in reviewing the community narrative. The Chair of the group also offered to mention

the issue of group anonymity at the next meeting, though he felt members would be comfortable with my work.

After participants had an opportunity to read their stories and the community narrative, I called each of them to obtain their feedback. All participants read their story. I reviewed most of the points in the cover letter. Only four participants suggested a few minor changes. Participants seemed to like their stories and seemed comfortable with their stories being part of my thesis. They were also comfortable with the use of their name. No changes were recommended for the community narrative and participants were comfortable with the use of the group name.

In addition to member checks, my journal and immersion in the setting contributed to the trustworthiness of my data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My personal journal documented some observations as well as my insights, thoughts, feelings, and experiences. My journal was much like a diary, in which I recorded what I learned and observed from my time in meetings with my participants, people I met, and places I had visited. It also served as a record of the many influences that shaped my thesis research. In a separate scribbler, I recorded notes from my interviews with participants, a record of analytical steps, feedback from consultations, and notes about my emergent research focus. Also, my time in the field and contact with participants outside of the interview context helped shape my work and contributed to my findings. Patton (1990) noted the importance of fieldwork and "getting one's hands dirty." As evident in one participant's story, I had the opportunity to work on his farm for a few days and both literally and figuratively dirtied my hands! My time spent in the field and in meetings with participants informed my work, contributed to

my understanding of the socio-political context within which farmers live, and facilitated a process of learning about important issues for organic farmers.

My Relationship with Participants

My role in the group was informal and was not well defined. At the meetings, I spent much of my time observing, listening, and "hanging out." My attendance also allowed me to provide a progress report on my work. I felt welcome at meetings and the atmosphere was relaxed and friendly. Over time, I also felt more comfortable in approaching participants with questions, comments, or research requests. By getting to know them, I had hoped participants knew I was open for discussion and felt comfortable asking questions, or providing comments and suggestions about my research. I feel I began to establish a relationship within the group, which lays the foundation for more collaborative research endeavors. Despite the fact that much of my time was as an observer, when the opportunity presented itself, I offered my assistance. I sometimes took notes at meetings, and I also helped with the odd task. Near the end of 1998, the group applied for funding for an educational workshop. We talked about a workshop format as one possibility for their personal stories. I was part of a meeting in preparing the proposal for funding. Unfortunately, the funding request was not granted.

Although I was drawn to the idea of a participatory and collaborative research process, which is consistent with Rappaport (1995) and the use of narratives, my thesis for the most part was more a cooperative project than a truly collaborative one. The group did not function as a research advisory committee (RAC), in the sense that

they were not involved in the research decision-making process to a large extent throughout my thesis. Rather, I tried to carry out my thesis in a spirit of cooperation and friendship, and tried to make the experience comfortable for participants. I sought their participation and feedback mainly in the transcript and story-review process. They were cooperative and helpful in providing feedback and assisting with research requests. They were also supportive of my work and showed appreciation for my interest in organic farming.

In my first meeting with participants, I had expressed verbally and in writing the hope that they would be part of the research processes. On a couple of occasions, I informally shared research ideas and accessed their feedback (e.g., I asked them about other potential participants). As connecting with this group was a starting point for me, I attempted to gain entry into a setting, build relationships, and establish their level of involvement. At times, I did not feel skilled or comfortable implementing a collaborative process, and I was not always certain how much I should involve them or what was appropriate or important to ask. I was also hesitant about asking too much of the people I was only just getting to know, and I wanted to be sensitive to their experiences and unfamiliarity of a research process for most of them. I wanted to present research ideas in an accessible fashion, but the potential drawback to adopting an emergent design is that one's focus might not always be clear, which makes a feedback process challenging. Further, they are a group of busy farmers who may not have had the time or desire to be part of a small project in a collaborative capacity.

Although I had hoped the role of a RAC (if any) would become clearer over time as I came to know participants, I did not explicitly revisit the topic of

collaboration with them. In retrospect, I could have involved them in a more significant way in other stages of the research. On the other hand, even though they did not act as a RAC in a formal sense I sometimes had the impression that they were involved in the manner they wished to be, and through research requests such as transcript reviews, they had opportunities to share what the research experience was like for them as well as voice their comments or suggestions. And upon reflection, I saw the participants guiding the process in an informal manner and perhaps I did not see the research relationship operating in a completely collaborative fashion. It is possible that their role was appropriate for this novel study. A truly collaborative research project might not have been feasible in this situation due to distance, time commitments, and the need for relationship-building in the beginning stages of any research project.

My Family's Experiences with "Small is Powerful"

" Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has. " [26]

-Margaret Mead

My decision to focus on the topic of organic farming not only brought me closer to PEI and our farming heritage, but it brought me closer to my family. When I began my research on organic farming, my father became interested in the issues I was studying. I believe he was becoming an environmentalist. His growing interest in organic farming, and its environmental aspects, would lay the foundation for a life-changing event that occurred in our community months later. Shortly after collecting my data, a crisis in my community captured the attention of my family. In September

1998 the PEI government announced that my community, Tracadie Cross, would be the new site for a massive landfill to be located in a pristine and environmentally sensitive area on hundreds of acres of beautiful Island forest. The community was not consulted and some members felt outraged and powerless in the beginning. But the government underestimated the power of community spirit and the energy of citizens to fight to protect their homes. Local citizens were galvanized to action and came together to save the community and the environment, an excellent example of community mobilization and activism. It is an inspirational story that could serve as the basis of another thesis project. Through the courage and perseverance of community members, in October 1999, the community received word that no facility would be located in Tracadie Cross. In fact, recently, the community was informed that the proposed site would be protected.

When I began my research, I did not know that I would have such direct experience with small and hopeful examples of change, a prominent notion throughout my project. In addition to working with organic farmers, I had an opportunity to experience the power of citizen activism within my community. For the first few months, I was an active member of the citizen's group, Tracadie Area Residents for Resource Protection (TARRP). My parents remained active throughout the entire process and have become activists through their involvement. Both my family and my community have been transformed by their involvement in TARRP. We have now experienced first-hand what it means to fight to protect home. The proposed landfill site was to be located approximately one kilometre from my home. Tracadie Bay, situated along the north shore of PEI and directly behind my home,

would have been affected by any contamination from the site. An environmental issue does not usually get much closer than this. David Suzuki (1997) wrote: "We know very well what matters most to us: the people we love, the place where we live. 'Home is where the heart is' embodies the felt truth" (p. 205).

My experiences with TARRP are germane not only to my personal research story, but are linked to theoretical concerns raised in my discussion regarding the importance of "small" and the role and power of citizens in preserving the natural and social ecology. I have had the privilege of witnessing community psychology theory in action; two groups of people, dedicated to PEI, work towards change. Whether it is the small group of organic farmers with whom I worked or the citizens of Tracadie Cross, small groups of people, in a sense, can "change the world" and forge a path towards personal and social transformation (Rosa, 1997).

Creation of the Stories: Weaving of Words and Wisdom

Through stories, I wished to paint a portrait, if you will, of each participant. As with any portrait, I wanted to include the background and setting. In Rosa's (1997) thesis, she constructed a composite story of each person and set the stage for the reader by providing a socio-political context and history. In addition to my presentation of the context in the introduction, a discussion of context is inherent in many of the stories.

In the construction of each story, I became a creator and endeavored to pull together threads of people's experiences and ideas to create this portrait. I wanted to provide some insight into their experiences and to translate their stories. I had hoped

writing stories would allow me to show the uniqueness and importance of each person's experiences and the meaning participants attached to their experiences.

Description and quotations are key elements within qualitative research, which allow readers to "enter into" the thoughts and situation of participants (Patton, 1990). Within each story, through quotations in particular, I wanted the voice and personality of the person represented. I also wanted to tell a descriptive story and for the reader, where possible, to get to know the participant. However, while I wanted to present a descriptive account of their experiences, I also selected and organized data, which requires interpretation on my part (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Qualitative researchers typically differ regarding the degree of description or interpretation they adopt in their analyses (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Wolcott, 1990). As will be discussed, I conducted a theme analysis. Patton (1990) argued that the discovery of themes is a creative process and requires decisions on the part of the researcher as to what is significant and meaningful within the data. Similarly, Riessman (1993) contended that interpretation is inevitable because narratives are representations and "we create and recreate voices over and over again during the research process. Nowhere is this more evident than in studies of personal narratives" (p. 16). Hopefully, I have achieved an appropriate balance between description and interpretation as I wished to maintain the integrity of the conversations.

I do not claim to be objective, and I wanted to "own" my location in this research project in my introduction. I have also included an incorporation of some of my own impressions and experiences in my thesis and in the stories themselves. My insights undoubtedly informed the direction and shape of the research, and the

experiences of the participants are filtered through my voice, mind, and soul. While I have imposed a framework, I endeavored to have the data speak on their own, to tell their own story as much as possible (Patton, 1990). I hope I have tuned in to the melody of the data, been faithful to what I heard in translating the interviews, and allowed the voices and the music of the participants to be heard.

Analysis of Interviews

Riessman (1993) noted that there is no one method of narrative analysis. Based on her discussion, however, I did not employ a narrative analysis. For example, I did not analyze by the manner of speaking, by narrative instances within the data, nor did all of my stories - and instances within these stories - have a distinct beginning, middle, and an end. I did not analyze for themes within narrative instances in the data. Rather, I analyzed the content of the data, the themes in the data as a whole, which defined the story and frame that were then used to construct the larger story presented here. While I use the term "story" throughout my paper, my final product is a representation of many experiences, ideas and some narratives. I did not adopt a specific definition for a theme. Basically, grouping data by themes was the manner in which I made sense of the information and worked with it in a manageable way. A theme referred to a collection of common ideas; a category or section that contained similar ideas.

The first step in data analysis was the transcription of the interviews. I tape-recorded each interview, and I typically listened to each interview twice. The first transcription was much "rougher" than the second transcription, as I typed the

dialogue as best I could, knowing I would return to the tape a second time for more exact wording. The second transcription was more precise and I tried to reproduce the interview verbatim.

The first story I attempted to analyze was perhaps the most difficult and complex. I initially organized this story without following a specific set of procedures. I hoped a pattern of story-telling would emerge. I divided the data and organized this story by my three-leaf clover (see pg. 2), noting page numbers and quotations that related to each part of the clover. I constructed a draft of this first story, but I was not confident in the draft I produced and was not sure I adequately addressed the key elements of the story. I decided to put this one aside. And sometime thereafter, I began my analysis and story construction with two shorter and more manageable transcripts. On some level, my clover guided my analysis in the remaining stories, but the themes that emerged were the basis of the organization and presentation of the story. I approached these stories with a set of steps, discussed below.

I thought it would be ideal to keep the transcripts "whole." My original intention was not to "break up" the transcript, nor did I want to adopt a technical coding procedure. In essence, I wanted to write a story. But I had to find a manageable way to work with the data and I wanted to be sure I thoroughly presented the relevant data. I decided to organize and analyze the data by major themes. Combined with some field information, my knowledge of the participants, and my own impressions, I felt I could organize stories by themes and hopefully maintain the authenticity of the story, with both an appreciation of the context and of the

participants. I use direct quotations abundantly within the stories, because I wanted to base them primarily in the words and ideas of the participants. When I did not quote directly, the ideas presented are often loosely paraphrased. I believe much of my role in the analysis of the data was organizational, by organizing the transcript into themes that I identified.

From the interview data, as well as from my field notes, I was sometimes able to also provide the reader with an introductory history of the participant and his or her work. For Reg Phelan's story, for example, in the interview he provided rich information about his history within farming. I feel this is an important part of his story and allows one to appreciate his history. Where possible, I incorporated this information. In addition to the interview data, I scanned my notes and personal journals for relevant information about each participant I wished to include in each story.

Following each interview, I made a one-page "summary sheet" that noted such things as the interview time and date, length, initial impressions, some preliminary thoughts, highlights, etc. When I had more time, I wrote about my experience in more detail. I reviewed both sets of notes as I constructed each story. Once I was sure I had all of my data, my notes were in order, and I filled in any missing parts (Patton, 1990), I proceeded with the analysis and construction of stories.

For my analysis, I adopted some of the analytical steps I utilized as part of my undergraduate thesis research, provided to me by a qualitative research methods professor and community psychologist. I did not employ a specific analytical technique. Patton (1990) argued that: "Inductive analysis begins with specific

observations and builds towards general patterns" (p. 44). A theme analysis grouped data by themes and categories evident throughout the transcript, which I then used for story construction. In general, I coded each transcript twice, whereby I noted ideas, phrases, and summary points in the margins. Sometimes my marginal notes consisted of exact wording by the participant, parts of a phrase, or an encapsulation of what a participant was saying.

On separate sheets, I then wrote a few paragraphs about what I thought "the data were saying" in general. Next, I wrote key words, phrases, and marginal notes from the transcript on separate sheets. Based on this information, I noted potential themes that I thought were in the data. As I wrote the stories, I modified some themes (i.e. collapsed into a larger theme), but they typically remained the same.

I revisited the original coded transcript and/or the sheets containing the key words, noting which theme a phrase or keyword word related to, which served as a guide as I sat with a cut and paste copy of the transcript. With the coded original copy, the cut/paste copy, and the keywords, I went through and cut out quotations, excerpts, or "bibbits" (sections of data), as Kirby and McKenna (1989) call them, and placed these bibbits in piles. For example, with one interview, I had three main theme piles. Each pile contained bibbits from the transcript relating to that theme.

I then sat at my computer and "plugged in" the bibbits under the appropriate theme. More specifically, I took each bibbit and under that theme category, either put in the direct quotation or a loose paraphrase of that idea. Cutting and sorting helped me organize and thoroughly capture all of the relevant points.

After all the bibbits were placed in each section, I had the task of organizing them into paragraphs, adding some text around them, paraphrasing some, reorganizing, and deleting repetitive points. Through the process of editing, themes and sections merged together more clearly. Some quotations related to more than one theme and, in some cases, there was overlap. Sometimes I included a bibbit idea under more than one theme category but through a writing process, these ideas came together or were moved. Reorganizing sections and quotations brought the pieces together and hopefully maintained integrity of the whole story.

Finally, it is important to note that were analytical variations within stories, that depended, for instance, on the length of the interview or the order of analysis. In one case, for example, I did not write key words on separate sheets but worked directly from the transcript, noting ideas and marking quotations on the original coded transcript. For the shortest interview, I did not divide it into bibbits and the specific themes emerged from the organization of the quotations and ideas from the coded transcript. I worked directly from the transcript in that case.

When I first began constructing stories, based on a suggestion by Wolcott (1990), I placed a marking in parenthesis if an idea referred to my own. In the end, this was uncommon and, in some cases, I edited out that comment or synthesized it with the others. Other than reflections from my journal or notes, for the most part, information came directly from the transcript. Although some of my ideas and thoughts are part of the stories, I endeavored for the stories to be re-creations of the transcript. I rearranged ideas, experiences, and narratives, and I tried to weave themes together and create a story. The story text is based on the words and ideas of

participants and some ideas are, as noted previously, close to their exact words. Through an editing and writing process, I sometimes added my own framework and the degree of paraphrasing varies somewhat from story to story, but for the most part, I tried to keep ideas in their words as much as possible, to remain true to my goal of having the stories grounded in the data. I endeavored to reserve some of my own commentary on the data for later sections. My explanations, the meaning I attach to farmers' experiences, and the implications of the themes are hopefully more evident in my discussion, where they are discussed in greater depth and tied to relevant literature.

IV. My Findings

"Story telling is the most ancient form of education. It is about the remembering, making, and sharing of images that bind together time, nature, and a people. Stories, like the sacred plants, are medicine and food... from the Earth. They remind us that we do not stand alone (Halifax, 1993, p. 103)."

I am fortunate to have met people who so kindly shared their wisdom and life experiences. It is my hope that these six stories do justice to the experiences of the organic farmers and that others learn from them. In the stories that follow, I have sometimes woven some of my own impressions and insights, which are set in italics.

In this section, I present the individual stories of the farmers, which are organized by themes that emerged *within* each story. Following this, I present a community narrative, which contains common themes *across* the stories. Then, I outline some the major lessons from the stories and farm families.

A note to the reader is important in relation to one of my major findings. Throughout the stories, participants frequently mention the need for support. To be more specific, their reference to support typically included financial, legal, technical, and/or institutional support. On occasion, participants referred to a lack of social support. It was awkward to qualify this word each time I used it within text. Further, participants did not consistently specify the form of support to which they referred (although many times this is apparent within the context of the story), and as an interviewer, I did not always seek clarification. I talk more specifically and tangibly about forms of support in the upcoming lessons section.

Personal Stories

Story of Reg Phelan

Many months ago, I attempted to connect with farmers who might be interested in participating in my research project, and Reg happened to be the first organic farmer I contacted. As he is a member of Seaspray Farms Organic Co-operative, I first had an opportunity to talk with Reg at length at a meeting with the co-op in the winter of 1998. I recorded my impressions: *...he seems to have explored the issues I have been thinking about. He has such a knowledge base in relation to Islanders and the land--the title of his thesis* [his 1996 Masters thesis entitled "Islanders and the Land"]. *He brings both experience and research and personal insight.* I also wrote: *He knows the communities, the people, and the way of life. He speaks of a history and a heritage that no doubt informs his farming and his lifestyle.*

I have had an opportunity to talk with Reg on other occasions, in addition to our formal interview. For instance, I attended a workshop, co-presented by Reg, at an organic conference in Charlottetown in 1998. After that first meeting, when my ideas about organic farming were just being formed, I noted in my journal: *Though I did not fully understand the "how to" of organic farming, I found myself starting to see how the practices are so respectful and connected to the earth. They really do treat the land as a system--trying to work with it and understand it.*

To learn more about issues facing organic farmers, to refine my focus, and prepare for my formal interview, I had pre-interview visits with farmers, one of whom

was Reg. I was struck by his insight about many issues. We talked about marketing as a significant obstacle for organic farmers and the importance of consumer education. I wrote in my journal: *He must really struggle to gain acceptance and to make a living. I know that many farmers do in a way. It is not an easy life but the organic farmer has a double task.*

My recorded interview with Reg was my first. We talked for a couple of hours on a rainy day in August. After the interview, I recorded some of my initial thoughts, noting that: *Reg's natural ability to tell stories and his interest in doing so were apparent.* He shared his experiences and involvement in several political arenas. I further noted: *It seems fitting, knowing his brief history that he would be involved with a movement that lives on the margins here.* I felt that Reg brought uniqueness to the co-operative because of his many life experiences, and involvement in social causes. An important point, regarding social change, surfaced in the interview and I wrote about it in my notes: *One of the big things that stood out for me was his hope and faith that things can happen--that if the will of the people is there, it* [referring to change] *can happen. A very interesting statement in relation to community psychology because it* [his statement] *points to "people power" in the face of strong environmental/social obstacles. Not to say that he didn't recognize the importance of government/community support...only that he still has hope and I suspect this drives and fuels his commitment.*

Since that initial phone call many months ago, I have attended several meetings with Reg and he has been helpful throughout my thesis, sharing information and providing contacts and resources. My understanding of organic farming and its

social and political underpinnings has been broadened through our conversations. His experiences with political activism and his knowledge base of land issues, from both a community and academic perspective, have provided a rich and unique contribution to this project. He is an active promoter of organic farming. Throughout his story, his vision and hope of an Island where land and community are honored and preserved are evident.

Here is Reg's story.

Theme 1: Reg's History and His Political and Social Connections

Reg Phelan currently owns and operates an organic farm on PEI. Raised on a farm in rural PEI as the eldest son, he worked on the family farm and had a lot of responsibility. These early influences remained strong throughout his life. He noted: "...I think I always kinda had an experience or an interest in farming..." Reg had even considered going to agricultural college. His decision not to go could have been fate, as he did not then receive "...the indoctrination of all the modern day agricultural stuff..." His involvement in farming, however, later included an interest in the political aspects of farming. His interest in farming was marked by a growing awareness of the changes occurring in agriculture on PEI. As people struggled to make a living and hold onto their farms, he became socially conscious of how they were moving away from their farms and their communities.

His involvement in politics began in the early seventies. He temporarily left the farm and attended university where he became active in both university and agricultural politics. Upon finishing his undergraduate degree, Reg decided to return to farming. His interest and involvement in agricultural politics came at a time when,

as he described, there "...was pretty much a crisis in rural PEI..." The move towards a monopoly on farming was apparent and some farms were bought by more powerful forces. Many people, struggling to make a living at farming, were "selling out." Later, through some organizational efforts, Reg witnessed farmers in response to their situation, mobilize, and voice their protest in ways the government had not previously seen. At that time, Reg told me, Island farms were not massive operations and did not rely as heavily upon chemical use as they do today. Some farms were sustainable, he shared, and there were not as many problems in existence that are evident today in monocultural operations.

The changing direction of farming on PEI towards a corporate driven and monoculture approach and its effects on Island farmers and communities were prominent themes throughout my talk with Reg. As noted, his genuine concern about this trend has shaped his consciousness and his academic work. His interest in land issues, and in hearing stories from his grandfather growing up, later inspired him to pursue his Masters degree, which is a testament to his interest in land and people's connection to it. His early influences carry a political overtone and with his exposure to citizen activism, combined with his concern for land and community, it is no wonder he decided to adopt an organic or ecological approach to farming.

Reg's story as an organic farmer for the most part began in the early 70's. He attempted to interest others in organics and he was also interested in starting a co-operative. But the first seeds for his move into organic production were planted when he tried growing wheat for a Halifax market. This first experience with organic production was short lived, as the market at that time was not ripe for organics. Most

of the farm at that time, he shared, was organic. He was not exposed to a great deal of chemical use growing up, therefore, farming, as he knew it, did not consist of a strong orientation towards chemicals.

Over the following years, Reg worked off the farm for income. Though he did not believe in conventional farming or see much of a future in it, he still got involved in farming again. His complete transition to organics did not happen suddenly, as over the years he had had meetings and people had expressed interest in organics. He wanted to keep "...the farm base here..." In 1990, he became a certified organic grower.

Reg's long and rich farming history, as well as his involvement in politics no doubt shaped his reasons to become a certified organic farmer. He talked about his reasons for farming organically, and emphasized how multinationals were controlling land and promoting industrial agriculture. He saw the pressures on farms and farm families, the effects on community and the land, and he did not see a future in conventional agriculture. "I think the only real alternative then would have been to go on a much more ecological approach to agriculture..."

Reg noted the importance of understanding one's land and the encouragement one gets "...building the land up..." Farming is a way of life that resonates with his value system and his connections to home and community. He talked briefly about the attachments one has growing up in an Island community. In his lifetime, he had worked in other places but still had that "...attraction to come back..." Reg told me that he enjoys organic farming, and would always farm organically or seek alternative employment. Sometimes finding other means of employment is difficult, and Reg

shared that the search is made more difficult by his political history in a small area. I am sure that other Islanders might attest to the fact that the political climate on PEI is such that speaking against the grain can sometimes affect your livelihood and opportunities.

Theme 2: The Corporate Value System in Island Life and Monoculture Agriculture

There are real threats to the success of organic farming on PEI and we talked about how the politics of growing food as a business hinder a community based, ecological approach to agriculture. Perhaps the most prominent theme centered on how the current monocultural approach to farming threatens the small farmer. Reg criticized the "bigger is better" approach Island farming has adopted. With increased potato production, he shared, producers look to acquire land and people compete for a land base. Reg, among others, believes PEI cannot sustain this type of production.

Multinational presence is a powerful force operating in the lives of farmers. Reg contended: "They're [farmers] pretty well run by them [multinationals] and many of them saying they [farmers] wish they never got into that situation, but they figure there's no way of getting out of it, so their lifestyle is pretty well controlled to quite an extent..." He further added that with people looking everywhere for more land:

> ...they can offer a price, some people are in difficulty financially, if they can offer big rent, the land kinda goes in that direction and so, the base is lost and people get out of production and it's much more difficult for people to get back in and get started doing things.

I learned that a changing farm culture also means a changing value system and relationship amongst farmers. Reg argued: "...at one time there was a fair bit of respect even within the farming community. If you had a piece of land and were

growing on it, and renting it or something like that, the others wouldn't try to compete or push to get that piece of land..." With increased potato production, "The whole ethics... of concern among farmers kinda went by the board, and so the bigger guys came in and start paying bigger prices for land rent, and they didn't care who they got it from, you know."

Reg noted the importance of having a community and the positive support of people. He talked about how some people move into an area, pay a lot of money for land, and have a "straight business concept" of farming. Moreover, "...they don't mind firing their weight around but they have no contacts in the community or know other people here." He explained that the Provincial Department of Agriculture, for instance, promotes farming as a business. Reg sees farming as a way of life and he spoke about how, in the past, families and communities were involved in farming, people did not expand their land greatly, and one could make a decent living at farming. With the push for more potatoes, however, farming as a way of life has changed. Land has been abused and the current situation: "...breaks old traditions that had been here for years in terms of respect each had for the other ..." I suggest, further to Reg's comments, that the current farming system disrupts a relationship that has existed between farmers for years, a relationship based on fairness, justice, respect, and community spirit.

At one time, there was not competition for land like there is today. Reg talked about how the price of land makes it difficult for a person to pursue agriculture. He spoke from personal experience when he shared that the transition from conventional

to organic production involves risk and can be difficult. Many people, he noted, are not in a position to make the transition or do not believe it is feasible or possible.

Theme 3: The Struggles of Organic Farmers

Trying to Make a Living

A powerful and saddening theme in the interviews and in my field experiences is the farmers' struggle to survive. There is not much economic security in farming. Farmers' economic struggle is illustrated by their need for off-farm income sources to sustain themselves, and Reg commented: "...a lot of times...people are subsidizing the food, they're growing the food for other people..." According to Reg, in the past there has not been an organic market on PEI, and with low conventional prices it was hard to make a living. He added: "Well, it's pretty difficult just to do with organic agriculture alone."

As a farmer, Reg faces financial pressures and little job security. To meet basic needs, he must seek other means to support himself, such as contract work. He always looks for ways to supplement the farm income, such as selling products from the farm. Both the farm and his contract work suffer, as there is not enough time to make both efficient, Reg explained. In his words, "...it's been a difficult struggle for a number of years for people to make what they would consider a decent living at it."

Without a big pension or much security in farming, should one experience a few disasters Reg noted, equity on the farm can quickly erode. Even though Reg enjoys organic farming, he told me that his experiences would have been better had there been more financial security.

A Lack of Support

In the past, Reg commented that he did not always receive support for his work as people did not have a good understanding of organics and conventional growers thought food could not be grown organically. They had been reliant on chemicals, had become disconnected from natural approaches, and felt farming organically was not possible. In essence, "...they [conventional farmers] didn't think there was any other way of doing it..."

In general, Reg stated that he has been received well by others, as some consumers do not like sprays and some farmers do not want to eat their own food! Yet, he might also be seen as the farmer who could potentially damage another's crop or spread disease. On one occasion, I recall Reg telling me about his experience of trying to talk to a farmer about chemical spraying (that could drift onto Reg's land) and the reception was less than favorable. But I believe he has been able to maintain rapport and relationships with people through his connections in the community.

Unfortunately, support from government has not been readily available, despite the fact that some people in government have some sympathy or understanding for what they are doing. They have received some support from other groups, but these groups Reg told me are also often limited in what they can do.

Further, some supermarkets have not always supported organic farming, as they and conventional growers have seen organic growers as a threat. Now that bigger chains see that things are changing, Reg told me, they are more interested in organics.

Experiences in Seaspray Farms Organic Co-operative

The historical beginning of Seaspray Farms Organic Co-operative was marked by what has come to be known as the PVYN scare that occurred on PEI in the early 1990's (see Phelan, 1996, for more discussion). From what I have learned from talking with farmers, PVYN was a disease in potatoes, which has also been referred to as a paper disease. Reg asserted that it was "never really proven."

As a result, farmers could not ship potatoes off Island. The experience of dealing with the aftermath of the PVYN scare had a significant impact on the success and survival of the co-operative. Reg explained that government compensation was granted on an acreage basis, and because organic growers were quite small in acreage, they did not receive much compensation. Reg recounted the experience:

> ...we ended up after without any compensation for it, because of the way the politics ended out...I think some of the worst I've ever seen in terms of intimidation and approaches to farmers on the Island, forcing people to sign up for the compensation package that was presented on PVYN. I've never seen it so tough before...the bigger guys...if they ended up with a compensation package so much an acre, to us that meant nothing in terms of organic production....we were smaller acreage, we had an awful lot more damage.

Because the compensation package was contingent upon all farmers signing the agreement, Reg further explained, organic growers who were resistant to the agreement were pressured by some larger growers. Though it was fought in court, the compensation Reg received for his small acreage at that time paid his legal fees. And for a couple of years, farmers could not ship their produce. So, from the beginning, the newly formed co-op and its members faced hardship. As Reg remarked, "...that

was quite a blow to us then in terms of organic production. We were pretty near put out of business from that one issue..."

Later on, members attempted to revive the co-op and received some community support to help them get started. At this time, there were approximately 6 to 8 farm families involved in the group. The co-op began to branch out and target some markets off Island, where the organic market seemed to be growing. Reg began processing vegetables for markets in Ontario. He, and other members of the co-operative, took on the roles of producer and marketer. Reg talked about the challenges in assuming several roles: "...you didn't have your processor or infrastructure there, so it was a big undertaking for us in terms of processing and transportation..."

However, as a vulnerable group within the farming industry, the co-op's struggles did not end with the PVYN scare. The other major obstacle they faced was in their dealings with out of province companies that did not pay them for their produce. Reg contended: "...that whole process has been harmful in the last couple of years to us..."

Reg talked more about the initiatives of the co-op: "We've taken some big steps and some of those haven't worked out for particular reasons....It makes you a bit hesitant to take steps again... because it takes a lot of energy and a lot of time involved in putting stuff like this together." Indeed, much of their energies have focused on problems in marketing, and Reg commented, "...there's only so much energy you have in order to be able to do things." Their negative experiences, in particular their experience of shipping produce that has not been used well by brokers,

has been frustrating for them. Reg remarked: "It's discouraging...getting ripped by those kinds of deals...you need support for somebody to deal with that."

Though the co-op has faced adversity, Reg discussed the advantages of being part of a group, such as having contact with other farmers, a support system, and working together in a noncompetitive environment where they share the market. He feels there is success in having the same committed group of people work together for several years. He spoke to the co-op's accomplishments noting that over time they have had a "decent amount of promotion," attended trade shows, had booths at fairs, and made contacts to supply markets.

Theme 4: The Need for Support from Government, Citizens, and Organizations

Organic farmers simply cannot sustain their endeavors without a support structure in place. The struggles of the co-operative are compounded by the fact that they do not get much support from government departments. Reg suggested they have had success in having a product available on the market, but sustaining that requires much effort. A financial support system, in particular, is necessary. The experiences of the co-op might have been different with government support to help them financially during times of crisis, and legal support might have helped in other situations.

Reg argued that operating without the involvement of multinationals is an advantage, as it gives one the opportunity to set up different and more sustainable distribution systems that benefit everyone. But support is important, and government could promote an alternative marketing system and encourage a marketing cooperative. Reg advocates for a more supportive marketing system, and would like

assistance in the Maritimes for this type of endeavor, which would also serve as local market.

The awareness and support of consumers are also needed. Reg noted: "...if they want food they are gonna have to take some responsibility too..." Consumers can have an effect on whether initiatives survive. He suggested that a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) project, for example, has had difficulty surviving on PEI in the past for a number of reasons, mainly that it needs the support of many people to purchase products.

Support, a critical component in survival, is emphasized in Reg's words:

> ...we do have the experience gained from working with each other and working with the co-op over the years. I think we can produce quite a volume of product. We have shown that we can produce it on a consistent basis too. But if the support was there at the other levels, I think organic farming could have an awful lot more people involved in it on PEI...

Reg's message is simple: he hopes for a support system for an alternative type of agriculture, and hopes this will occur before it is too late.

Theme 5: Survival, Success, and the Future for Organic Farming

Succeeding as Organic Farmers

I was interested in learning about the ways in which we might sustain organic farming on PEI. There are impediments to success, as I have outlined, but there are also factors that have contributed to the survival of organic farmers. Regarding organic farming, Reg said: "My idea was that's where the future would be..." In

talking about the future, and when asked if there was hope for organic farmers, Reg remarked: "...it's pretty cloudy out there at present."

I briefly explored Reg's perceptions of success. On success, Reg remarked: "...the successes...to be able to have the same group of people working together for a number of years..." He added: "...the type of people and their commitment to organic farming and agriculture and wanting to see that happen, and even though they don't, if financially they haven't seen a success for themselves in a short while they continue to do it and continue to work at it..." The farmers continue farming organically, Reg told me, because they feel it is the right direction, and most would not want to return to conventional agriculture.

I also explored some of the major lessons Reg has learned in relation to what contributes to a successful organic farming story. His response is sobering: "I don't know if you ever make it..." As was discussed earlier, he always looks for other means of survival. He noted as well: "...most farms and other operations are probably in that situation too...if all the bills are not paid you don't think you're making it..."

On a collective level, the co-op has survived because of its members. Reg highlighted this point when he said they have survived: "...mostly on the desire and the people who want to continue organic farming and see a support system out there to do it, that way we can help support each other hopefully to stay at it and that encouragement to do it..." When asked if organic farming on the Island is surviving, he said: "I think it is surviving because of the people involved in it and their will to stay at it. In a normal situation, most people would say they're crazy to do it possibly."

Being a successful example, and showing there is an alternative, are important. In creating change, Reg added: "I think one of the best examples of anybody that's trying to work in [the] environment is to see somebody that's actually doing something about it..." For people to consider organic farming: "...you gotta have people in support that will be able to say, well this can happen and people are making, attempting to make a living this way, and we can grow crops feasible like this." Reg illustrated the need for being an example for others to model. In our interview, Reg told me that a friend was interested in organics and he invited him to the farm to show how he worked the fields, sharing his knowledge as an organic farmer.

"Field Experiences"

I had an opportunity to learn about and experience organic farming first-hand when I spent a couple of days working on Reg's farm. In addition to the findings presented, my experiences "in the field" impacted my research perspective and are part of my personal thesis story. I had visited a couple of organic farms previously, but had never worked on a farm. It was hard work, but the days passed quickly and it was refreshing to be outdoors. I experienced a taste of what my mother and grandmother experienced on their farm, although they planted and picked potatoes by hand! Reg showed me several aspects of the farm and I saw how much work was involved with organic production. Even though I was raised in a rural community close to potato fields, much about farming is new to me. The potatoes we planted in long drills that stretched across the field, embedded by the Island's rich red soil, were impressive. Through my experiences, my topic felt more real. While I do not want to

trivialize the stressful reality of farming, and the need to produce a crop, one might also suggest that there is something peaceful about farming. I also gained an appreciation for how farming is a hard way to make a living. Indeed, farmers work very hard so that we may have food on our table.

The Need for Social and Environmental Change

Reg recognized that organic farming is in a critical period. I was struck, though, by his sense of faith and hope in people, in communities, and in the potential for social change. He mentioned that there are supportive people who need to be brought together in a sustainable fashion. He talked about the importance of maintaining community, the need for organic farmers to build links and understanding within communities and amongst people, and to look for avenues for support. A running theme in our talk was Reg's wish to explore and build upon community-based ideas.

If change is to occur, Reg discussed, there will need to be a change in political will, and pressure must be placed on government. He believes that PEI's climate could be supportive to change, as over the years, PEI has been open to smaller types of development. He suggested that many groups could come together, organic farmers being one of them, to move in a new direction, towards a "smaller is beautiful," ecological approach.

Most importantly, Reg has faith in what I call "people power," which is the support, activism, and voice of local citizens in creating change. While government cooperation is needed, Islanders can effect change within the farming community.

When I asked Reg how we could return to a farm culture based on respect and a value system of days past, he noted the need for a change in political forces. There will:

> ...need to be a political force in it also, because who wants to live in a potato field these days, with all the sprays. And people are questioning now, they want to live in a rural community, but are they willing then to put up with what's happening now in terms of agriculture...so it's not just the people who own the land and have the practices that need to be deciding what's happening. I think other people in the community...they're gonna have to organize and have some sort of a say...

The possibilities for change exist on PEI, though it is not an easy road. Reg commented:

> I think there could be a fair bit of political pressure put on and things could change here, but it had to be done before things get too bad in terms of a land base and other stuff....I think there is the base for it, and that's where I have the confidence that things might change eventually over a period of time.

Possibilities for the Future

Reg believes there are smaller farmers willing to move in the organic farming direction, but some are overwhelmed with pressures and not able to explore new opportunities. Some conventional farmers, in difficult financial positions, he noted:

> ... are willing to do it, and would really like to continue farming, and if they can see a possible way of doing it organically and if to get a decent return on it, a lot of others are willing to move at it....it has to be happening, I think, in the period of time where the interest won't be lost or if you lose that interest and they're forced to divest of all their machinery and land.

With a window of opportunity, and a bridge, I suggest there is the potential for farmers to make the transition to organic production.

As some organic farmers have found themselves within a critical period, Reg explained that he hopes current contracts will sustain them. "But we need some other work on some other crops that are companion crops too that will show us some support....we need support, it's crucial now...to be able to sustain the people that are there now and get encouragement for others to do it."

Organic farmers, like Reg, possess a wealth of knowledge from which we can learn. They can be our teachers should we choose to alter the direction of farming on PEI. Reg noted that the younger generations are more open to the ecological approach, which suggests hope for a new generation of farmers who might be open to exploring alternatives. Reg's advice for someone who wanted to start organic farming: "I'd wanna be somewhat realistic with them in terms of some of the problems, but I think there are opportunities there if we can work these out."

Story of John Hardy

John is an organic farmer who is part of a farming community with a strong orientation towards conventional agriculture. One beautiful summer morning in August, 1998 I traveled to the western end of the Island, approximately a 2 hour drive from my home in eastern PEI, to interview John about his experiences as an organic farmer. We had an opportunity to talk for about an hour and a half at his kitchen table.

Like the others, I had met John through his involvement with Seaspray Farms Organic Co-operative. John lives the farthest away from the other organic farmers in the group, and I could appreciate the distance he travels to meet with them on a regular basis.

On PEI, one does not have to travel far from any point to discover farms dotting the countryside. John's farm, like many others, was situated amongst other farms. His neighbor is his father, whom he had farmed with for years, and who I had an opportunity to meet briefly. After our interview, John showed me some aspects of the farm, including his operation to make roasted soybeans. We also visited his potato fields, where I saw fields with rich soil and a healthy crop, as well as one that had not survived an aphid infestation.

I identified several themes from my conversation with John. I believe it is important to begin with a brief look at John's perception of the socio-political climate on PEI. Next, and in the subsequent sections, you will read about John's personal experiences, thoughts, feelings, and opinions as an organic farmer.

Theme 1: The Current Monoculture Farming Climate on PEI

An important theme in John's story, which is intimately linked to the others, centers on the current farming climate on PEI, and our strong emphasis on a potato monoculture. John made reference to the fact that all farmers face pressures and most "push the limits" for their land to yield increasing volumes of crops. PEI is, as he noted, a "potato growing province" and much money comes from that source. While some farmers, he told me, are supported by corporations, other smaller farmers must exist on their own. If they experience a loss, they use their assets to cover this loss. However, as he further shared, one can only use their assets for so long, and without a profit a farmer will go out of business.

When John was showing me his farm, we drove by another farmer's field that showed evidence of the infamous potato disease known as blight. I asked what a farmer does in this situation, when their crop (and their income) is destroyed. I was told that most farmers do not use crop insurance, rather, they "dip into" their assets.

The economic reality for Island farmers is a difficult one. John noted, some farms are "...just operating from year to year in most cases." Farmers compete for land and this "...pushes the smaller farmers out..." and "...puts you into a position that you can't do what you want because you're limited with your resources."

PEI's reputation as the potato province has not been without its consequences, particularly for the environment. John spoke to the environmental consequences, such as the well known salmon kills discovered in his area, said to have been linked to run

off from pesticide use. Indeed, soil on PEI I was told, is "geared to grow with chemicals."

However, John was empathic to the experiences of conventional growers, as he too feels the pressures one must face as a farmer. He did not demonize the conventional grower, but conveyed to me how the system forced farmers into "mining the soil" to make a profit. Indeed, in his own words, "...they're not being mean people...they're just trying to make a living."

"Just trying to make a living" was an important theme throughout my conversation with John, and through my interactions with him outside of the interview context. This leads me to the next part of John's story, his personal journey and his struggle in trying to make a living.

Theme 2: "Just Trying to Make a Living"

"Right now, I feel if this year is a make or break year probably for both of us [reference to a farmer he knows] . *If we're going to continue in what we're trying to do, because you can only go so far in what you're trying to do."*

The struggle to survive is a common theme across many of the organic farmers' stories. John's personal experiences as an organic grower highlight the theme of the "struggle to survive" as well. As John described, " it's a battle."

His farm is approximately 200 acres, land rented and owned, which is considered a small farm on PEI. And as John told me, he likes that his farm is small and had hoped small farming would do well here once it got going. John tells us in his own words how he began organic farming:

> ...how we got started was we were trying to use what we had on our farm to grow our product and the same time, do a better job of the

> soil....we grew a lot of corn and we did grow potatoes the traditional way and a lot of the soil was getting killed off and we couldn't grow anything...But they told us to, we'll try to use a different herbicide or pesticide next year and would perk that soil right up...all it was doing was costing us more money and a little more to do, to grow the crop. I said, well, this is not what we really want to do. First of all we tried just a large garden and got a half decent response and then we said well, if we can do it there, why can't we do it with the other crops...soil knows what's been in it the year before...it takes awhile to come off chemical use.

Making the switch to organic production can take a couple of years, and during that time, he noted, one can experience a loss in crop growth. John suggested that some people would like to switch to organic farming but they are reluctant because it might put them out of business to make the transition.

In the past, John had dairy on his farm but is currently trying to make his living from organic production, soybeans and potatoes in particular. When he sold his dairy, he noted:

> ...we did eliminate a lot of debt and help support what we're trying to do, but we can only do that for so long. And then it's deciding time, decide if you want to keep going that direction or not. It's not because you don't want to it's just, because you gotta do what you gotta do.

John had witnessed the "bigger is better" trend occurring within agriculture, and had hoped to become part of a niche market for organic farming. He believed he could grow less, grow it well, and still make a living. While he believes this is still possible, organic farming is currently on a "pivotal point." Success, he contends, is monetary success, and there are a couple of farmers who are "...sticking our necks out to see if we can make that success or not." John has been farming for ten years and

most money, he shared, has not been from organic growing. Sadly, they have not had monetary success:

> ...our successes that we've had from it is mostly from other means financially...when they run out...we'll have to stop...even though I don't have to make that much money, I still have to make enough to...to make the system work, just like any business.... Once you don't have a turnover, if you have assets, you usually dip into them...you can't live on assets.

Indeed, economics will dictate the future of the organic movement on PEI. Though John is trying to make a living with his soybeans and potatoes, should this not be feasible, he told me that he would not return to chemical farming. Rather, he would rent his land, where he could make a "half-decent living" and seek employment off the farm. He hopes there would be something available for him should he ever have to exercise this option. Farming, however, has been his way of life and is all he has ever known.

Though John is committed to his organic initiatives and likes what he is doing in farming, he noted that " You can only be an idealist for so long... the banker comes knocking on the door and you become a realist." To an outsider who might examine what he is trying to accomplish, he explained, one might think "...that guy is crazy." He further noted that a person with a business perspective would not see organic farming as a good business idea.

Further, and as will be discussed in the final part of John's story, it is important that organic farmers are a successful example to others. They need to succeed in their endeavors, as John argued, or others will not look to them. He noted that he and another farmer have put a lot of money into trying to grow organic; they

were the only two farmers to "...gage organic farming successes..." This year (1998) is a critical year if they are going to continue farming organically in the future. John contended: "It's a critical period although...a lot of problems have been solved so far, we still have quite a few to go and hopefully we'll be able to make a living at it. We're not quite sure."

What is significant about John's experiences is that he is trying to make a sole living as an organic farmer, as opposed to seeking off farm employment to supplement his income. But at this point, he is not sure whether organic farming will be a part-time of full-time job for him. He suggested that organic farming will be a good alternative if it allows people to make a living. If they cannot support themselves, it might completely disappear.

Being On His Own

Organic farmers, with no or very little government or organizational support, are truly on their own when they encounter difficulties in farming. In John's experience and involvement in traditional farming organizations, he saw money allocated for traditional farming but not for the organic industry, "...because they figured we were taking a step back all years..." I would suggest that his observation is significant in that it speaks to a political climate on PEI in which organic farmers struggle to sustain themselves and must constantly seek support. John spoke to this: "So, it's in one way, we don't like to have our hand out for money or anything but unless we can solve all the different problems with organic growing, different problems, you have to have money to support what you're trying to do."

To add to the challenges involved in organic farming, John and other farmers have encountered problems with dealers who have not paid them for their products. In essence, I argue they are caught in a situation where they endeavor to build a foundation for organic farming with little support, while at the same time, this foundation is shaken.

In addition to the monetary struggles they face, there are other factors that threaten their survival. Organic farmers must not only grow their own food, there are responsible for marketing it as well. Growing food, John suggested, is only half the battle as "we could end up having a good year at growing and have a dismal year at trying to sell it..."

Unlike the conventional grower who seek a chemical in the event of a problem in the field, certified organic growers follow regulations and are limited in what they may utilize. "Every year, we ...think we're doing good then we run into a problem...if we can't solve it right away with the limited resources we got, we can lose that crop, that asset we're planning on to keep us running for the next year..."

His membership in the co-op helps as members rely on each other for information regarding what works in the fields. Last year, John had blight in his potato crops under control, but unexpectedly was faced with an aphid infestation in another field. He noted that they discover solutions on their own and are faced with the unknown and unexpected. In addition to serving as an information source, a co-operative group creates a noncompetitive environment. Without it, John contended, organic farming might be a cutthroat situation, reminiscent of the regular market.

As for the future of Seaspray Farms Organic Co-operative, we discussed his thoughts on this topic briefly. The co-op, he believes, will still exist in the future, though he is uncertain how many members will be willing to grow "...substantial amount of produce for organic consumption." He noted: "...it may be around but maybe in a different, maybe not as much there for consumers to buy from..." We did not talk at length about the future of the co-operative. Offering predictions for the future for himself and for the co-op is likely difficult considering the challenges he currently faces. It is apparent from his story that he is, after all, striving for today's survival.

Relationship With Others

The economic struggle to make a living is coupled with the social reality of being an organic farmer in a small place. John shared with me his experiences of isolation and ostracism, as he is the situated in an area of the Island where he is fairly segregated from other organic farmers. As an organic farmer in Alberton, "...you're gonna be isolated just because of that and when you're doing something that flies in the face of what they're doing, that's even worse." Though not all farmers respond in a hostile fashion, John noted that people get upset when they hear about eliminating sprays because farming --and their reliance on chemicals-- is their income. Further,

> ...when you consider that agriculture on the Island has been promoted mostly by chemically based companies for the last 25-30 years and that's all they are used to and you say, well, we're gonna take that away from you, and try to grow a crop without it. They're gonna get quite cross. But at the same time, if we can find a way of getting around that problem that they're facing and be able to do it naturally and everybody's the better for it in the end....

In addition to the contentious nature of the pesticide issue and the relationship between organic and conventional growers, organic farmers like John must also contend with misperceptions about the quality of organic products. Some individuals, dealers included, believe organic has a "bad name." For example, some buyers and farmers believe his potatoes are inferior quality and that he is "promoting disease." John suggested: "...they have a preconceived idea of what we're trying to do."

John's struggle to survive is linked to the lack of support for organic farming, a critical issue that emerged from our discussion. The next section explores the issue of support and its role in the survival of organic farming on PEI.

Theme 3: The Need for Support

One of the most prevalent and important themes in my conversation with John centered on the need for support for the organic movement to survive and move forward on PEI. In general, it was apparent that he and other organic growers do not receive much support for their work and this situation leaves them vulnerable. Organic farming by nature, and particularly within a potato monoculture such as PEI, is as John suggested, "ground breaking." He noted: "...anything we try, we eat the losses, because there's nobody there to support us..." He further contended:

> ...as a whole we haven't had much response from government saying, well, we want to support a project in growing organic potatoes or soybeans...in the last 15-20 years, there's been quite a bit of support for the traditional farmer...hopefully maybe down the road we'll get support from them.

Support "down the road" is critical to his and other organic farmers' survival. In fact, it seems reasonable to suggest, in light of John's experiences and insights shared through his story, that he and others *must* receive financial, legal, technical,

and marketing support in the near future if they are to remain in existence. He suggested that he does not need a great deal of support, simply enough to cover some losses and to aid farmers, I would add, if and when they should find themselves in a precarious financial situation. Some support "...would help prolong what we're trying to do and find different ways to deal with things that comes up every year..." One of his suggestions is to keep records of problems they might encounter on an annual basis (i.e. in growing) as a resource for farmers; an "information bank" to access.

In discussing the importance of support, John also mentioned that farmers need assistance in making the transition from conventional to organic production. Because of current pressures in farming to utilize all of one's land, it is not economically feasible for some farmers to leave land dormant over a period of time until it is suitable to grow organic crops, John explained. John believes there should be an avenue for farmers to make the transition, such as organic organizations supporting "transitional food." When questioned, he suggested that farmers would be willing to try organic farming, but they need "to meet in the middle," and both government and organic establishments need to offer support by allowing farmers to have a transitional field and sell it as such. Although not sold as organic, having transitional food would allow farmers to receive more money for their product. Because there is currently a lot of food "on the line," John suggested that organic organizations do not want to support transitional food, which in his opinion, makes it challenging for a farmer to make the switch and still make a living.

Although John's work clearly has an investment in ecology and an understanding and appreciation of the environment, in the interview he told me that

he does not consider himself an environmentalist in the activist sense. He is an environmentalist, by the nature of his work, but does not picket or lobby, and is not "vocal." He is a quiet example of change. He feels he mainly receives support from environmentalists through "mouth support," not through the purchase of his products. And the latter is critical for organic farmers' survival. Organic farmers need more than just the acceptance or approval of what they are doing, they need strong consumer support. In this way, John argued, they might have a chance at making a living. Organic farming is currently at a stage where consumers can be impactful. John spoke strongly to the fact that either consumers will agree to pay more for organic produce and will be "subsidizing" the organic farmer for some time, or there will have to be government intervention to support initial losses faced with organic endeavors. Simply stated, "ideas have to change." The survival of organic farming is linked to a change in opinion, what I would call a *new consciousness*. John contended:

> Opinions have to change in order for organic growing to become an industry on the Island. It has to change. If it remains pretty much the same way, I can't see it going too much farther than just a hobby for most farmers...the things we're doing now is ground breaking which is just breaking the way, and if our resources, once they dry up...I can't see it going on...

I would like to end this section with another quotation from John that I felt captured the essence of his thoughts and feelings regarding the importance and necessity of support for his and the movement's survival. The message of this section can be summarized in John's words:

> We have to not only support ourselves, I have to support the farm. I have to support equipment, cost of just being, existing, and unless either consumers decide they want to pay the extra money and support

> organic farming or government says maybe this is a better way of doing things and help promote the industry, the organic growing industry, then it will survive, but unless one of those two things happen...organic farming...it could become a fad and it would be sad if it was a fad because we enjoy what we're trying to do even though we take a lot of losses....the amount of losses we take in organic farming is incredible.

One of the most important insights John shared focused on the need for organic farmers to be successful examples to others. The following and final section is linked closely to the previous section on his struggle to survive.

Theme 4: The Future of Organic Farming and Successful Examples

"We're on the forefront and if we don't succeed with what we're trying to do the people that are looking...that would like to get into it aren't going to get into it, because...bankers aren't going to give them the money to try these projects. And, if they have no previous successes on what they're trying to do, you can't go ahead with it..."

Our discussion regarding John's experiences making a living is linked to his contention that he and other organic farmers be a successful example for others to follow. He and others are attempting to make organic farming a successful venture. While we did not explore at length his definitions of success, he noted that he does feel successful in being able to farm organically. On the other hand, success as noted previously, is measured by monetary success. I suggest being a successful and hopeful example is an honorable goal, but is difficult to achieve in the face of economic stress and pressures. He shared: "...we haven't really had that much money off of organic farming. I mean success we feel is the success of being able to do it, that it can be done. But monetary success, we haven't had that." Achieving monetary success is important for their survival and also for their credibility as farmers. John

explained: "...we have to show a bit of profit or we are going to lose our credibility although we may gain some in growing but we may lose some in the marketing. We're not quite sure but hopefully we'll be able to do good in both."

He expressed concern about becoming a group of people who do not move forward, who do not become a successful example: "...farmers that are in it now have to show besides success in growing,...we have to show success in selling and monetary return for what we're trying to do or it's just not gonna survive as an industry." According to John, the future for organic farmers lies with the small farmer: "...I can't see organic farming going too much farther with the traditional farmer right now. It would have to be with the smaller farmer that have the land that hasn't been in potato growth or chemically used in the past few years." There are small farmers, John noted, who would like to make a living at farming, but volume is a key factor in their survival. Two hundred acres, for example, will not give a farmer the volume to survive as a traditional farmer in a potato province like PEI. To survive, and succeed, volume of product is required. Organic farming, John suggested, is a good alternative assuming it is economical. For the organic industry as well, there need to be more growers to supply the volume so they can access markets.

Organic farmers on PEI serve, in a way, as forerunners for others who might wish to try alternative agriculture. John remarked:

> But until we get a few good years behind us, we can't really promote organic to other farmers because they'll say--look at that guy and he's not you know doing that well-- but if he turns around and he's doing not too bad, I'll think they'll be more people trying... the organic route.

John was very respectful to other farmers, both conventional and organic. He does not believe in alienating other people within his community or people with whom you wish conduct business. As opposed to telling people not to use chemicals, he believes that being an example is the most effective route:

> ...the voice that would be heard the most is success in growing and selling, that would be a better voice than saying you know you shouldn't be using chemicals and all these different things. If that voice can get out, I think we're in for a fairly nice change in the attitude and probably quite a few growers that would switch over. But until that happens, I don't think I want any other kind of voice speaking for me.

His final comment, in particular, challenged my assumptions about the issue of "giving voice." I assumed that organic farmers, who I viewed as a marginalized group, wished to have their voices heard as loudly as possible, particularly through my thesis research. While there are farmers who readily adopt this approach, John truly felt that the best voice for him was to be a successful example, as opposed to an activist approach or vocally speaking out against chemical farming. Obviously, as John's story is included in this collection of stories, he approved of the way in which it was represented and agreed to have it as part of my thesis document. However, clearly his experience of voice is affected by his social location. His comment is of critical importance for community psychologists who enter settings with the belief that "giving voice" means the same thing to everyone, regardless of the climate. Also, it is important not to assume that all groups want their voices heard in the same way. John was hesitant, as he did not want to criticize people around him. He must continue to live and work in his community. He serves, in a way, as a silent example of change. In John's case, silence, in a sense, allows him to continue working along

side his neighbors and this likely contributes to his survival. While it might not challenge the socio-political climate in a direct way, it allows him to make a living through an alternative method of agriculture. Yet simply by choosing organic farming, by being an organic farmer on PEI, he is challenging the power structures and the way farming has been done and is effecting social and environmental change. I talk more about the role of organic farmers in my discussion.

Story of Gerrit Loo

I met Gerrit at my first meeting with the co-op in early 1998, where he showed those in attendance a new potato variety he and his son were developing. This was the first time I would see or hear about one of his many creations. How he shared with the group and what others said to him made me think that, in some ways, he was seen as the "wise owl" of the group. Indeed, he seemed to be an incredible source of knowledge and lived experience, and the older member of the group who represents a generation of farmers many have forgotten in the face of a changing farm culture.

Gerrit has lived an extraordinary life. A reporter once documented his second world war experiences, and he was kind enough to share those written stories with me in the time I have spent getting to know him. Before Gerrit immigrated to PEI, he grew up in Wageningen, Holland on a farm with his family. The details of his life in Wageningen and all that his family endured are too many to report here, and constitute another chapter in his life story. However, as I read and heard about Gerrit's life, my impression has been that his experiences must have taught him much about the importance of family, sharing, strength in the face of adversity, compassion, gratitude, and an appreciation for life. I recall reading in Gerrit's war story, for example, about a family who had been begging for food from door to door, and his mother gave them a loaf of bread and their week's ration of milk. Sharing these tales with me allowed me to appreciate his history; which also helped me understand his way of life and values as an organic farmer.

A warm summer morning, I travelled to Gerrit's home in Springfield to hear his story as an organic farmer. I wrote about some of my impressions of the interview: *I arrived at 9:00 a.m. and traveled down the dirt driveway to an old farmhouse...There were chickens, turkeys, etc. running freely all over the yard. Two cats sat perched on the window sill and a... farm dog greeted me at the door.* I found that: *His home had such character and you could tell an incredible history....I was introduced to several family members....I was struck then, as I was throughout the interview how involved... members of the family were. It was a house full of knowledge and commitment to such a wonderful lifestyle.*

Before we started the interview, we actually spent some time talking about Gerrit when he lived in Holland as a child. I added: *He also shared with me how he had traveled to different parts of the world and how he had been in the war. Our discussion around his life story took place before and after the formal interview.*

As I talked with him, I found myself thinking that I was really getting a person's story. That he sat before me with years of experience, and knowledge and such a gentle wisdom about him. I also wrote: *His experiences of coming here and making a life for himself are so interwoven with his life as an organic farmer. It is all he has ever known. He is so unique in that he's part of a generation where chemicals were not the norm. He represents a piece of history that some are trying to reclaim. We really should be documenting all of his knowledge.* Further to my journal entry, I believe his "soil story" and his knowledge base, should be preserved as much as his "social story" like the one I have presented. Government and others, who will hopefully one day turn to organic farming, will have lost an incredible source of

information, should this not be kept. I talk more about the importance of preserving past knowledge in my discussion.

Our talk lasted approximately two hours. Gerrit sat in an armchair across from me and in his soft voice, slowly recounted his life experiences. Gerrit has a wonderful sense of humor, and at one point during my visit brought in a baby "critter," and jokingly told me it was an ostrich. It was, in fact, a young turkey!

Several things impacted me from my time with the Loo family. Prior to interviewing Gerrit I spent some time chatting with his daughter, Margie, enjoying a cup of chamomile tea, and hearing about her own ventures developing various products. She, too, was very knowledgeable, and I could learn a great deal from the family. Many members of the family were involved with the farm. I had an opportunity to also meet Gerrit's wife, his sons, and his grandchildren, as well as his loyal dog Princess who sat with us for the duration of the interview. His family was kind and they invited me to stay for lunch. Interviewing Gerrit and meeting his family was a memorable and meaningful experience. Being in their home, I felt I had spent a good a part of my day with a family who has a connection to family, food, the land and animals. I wrote in my notes that farming was such a family affair to them: *...the family...all seemed to be carrying on with a piece of the farm heritage. Gerrit's knowledge will not be lost. It will live on in his children, who have had experiences so different from my own, in terms of being raised on the farm.*

Here is Gerrit's story.

Theme 1: His Farming Approach

In my opinion, Gerrit's approach to farming incorporated a strong community and family value base, a commitment to diversity and self-sustainability, which are linked to their survival and quality of life as organic farmers. Gerrit talked about his early roots:

> ...I came from...Holland in 1951, and I bought this farm...in 1952, and we raised a family here and we kept a herd of milkcows and we gradually paid for the farm and paid for equipment and our children got their education but we never had much chance of saving much money, but everything was paid for.

The Loo farm is about 250 acres, of which 90 acres is woodland. They have a diverse farm, with about 80-100 head of cattle, ducks, geese, and they used to have pigs. Most of the land is certified organic, except for a couple of fields. Previously they had rented land for potatoes and those fields are "...slowly coming back in production..."

Family

From my experience interviewing and getting to know Gerrit and the time I spent with his family, what strikes me the most about his story is his approach to farming. Not only does it exemplify the values of organic farming of diversity and the ethical treatment of animals and the soil, as mentioned previously, his family is an important part of the organic operation. In my travels over the past couple of years, I also had an opportunity to meet his other daughter and her family, who were kind, helpful, and shared their ideas. Though this story focuses on Gerrit's life and experiences as an organic farmer, it is impossible to write about his story without

mentioning the involvement of his family members, his sons and daughters for example, who have carried on the farm tradition.

Gerrit has a long history of farming, with strong family ties. He told me that most of his experiences in farming have been favorable and satisfying, and he has been involved in growing new varieties of potatoes. He and his twin brother, who sadly passed away, had been working with potatoes for over 20 years, "... trying to develop potatoes that doesn't need to be sprayed." When I was writing my thesis, I came across an article in ECO Farm and Garden (Winter, 1999, Vol. 2), featuring Gerrit and his brother Evert. This article provides a good description of their work and experiences marketing a blight resistant potato they have developed called "Island Sunshine," as well as their latest development, "Island Sunset."

Diversity

In my opinion, the Loo family members are pioneers. I believe, based on my observations and what Gerrit has shared, that their approach to farming is experimental and embraces both creativity and ingenuity. They are part of a rich and diverse farm environment. Gerrit mentioned that they are one of the first people growing organic vegetables, and they hope to eventually have their entire operation organic. They grow many different kinds of organic vegetables and fruit, and they are working on selling a variety of products.

Organic farming, Gerrit shared, is a full-time job and entails complete involvement. But, "It's very rewarding and it is interesting work....I'd far sooner have a diversity of crops and livestock and vegetables..." In addition to a diverse farm, organic farming, as the name suggests, means his family is not exposed to chemicals.

Gerrit noted that his family is "...fairly healthy, but then they of course, we never had contaminated food very much." Indeed, as he told me, his farm has had limited chemical use throughout the years. Gerrit shared his experiences with chemicals:

> ...we never used very many chemicals on this farm and for the last 50 years there hasn't been, and there wasn't much used before then...and the farm I grew up on in Holland, it had been farmed for 2000 years. It was farmed by the Romans...before our family got it, and many generations before that, and it was all done organically of course.

Growing organically is a different, and challenging, approach to farming, as one must find other means than chemical spraying. Gerrit suggested, it can be an "uphill battle."

Family and Community Value Base

As I read through my talk with Gerrit, I felt that he had a different vision of farming, community, and family, than what we typically promote in today's culture, particularly with the emphasis on monoculture. As an organic farmer, he has not fallen into the monoculture trend. Gerrit noted that land is more available than it was when he came to Canada, and spoke about farmers who "...sell out to potato growers and retire..." and over time the community changes (i.e. farm families dwindle). Over the years, he noted, his family has made a living (though it has not always been easy) and they kept a mixed farm, which he believes is very important. He contended: "... we gradually built up over the years... a sad part to this, seemed to be that the trend is toward bigger and bigger all the time. We were never much interested in that. We stay the same as what we are."

Growing organically for Gerrit also involves a value system that is not based on big profit, as "...money never came into our picture very big, not as long as we

have enough to live on we never worried about having big bank accounts." In describing what his journey has been like, he noted that "...the rewards for a farm are not big enough." People expect to pay little for food, placing more value and spending more money on material possessions. In Europe, Gerrit argued:

> ...people...never questioned the price of vegetables and the farmer made a far better living than they do here....people today are more forced to get bigger and bigger because the margin is getting smaller and smaller all the time. If you make half a cent on a pound of potatoes, you have to grow a good few pounds to live off that. If you make a quarter of a cent, you have to double that amount. And by doubling that amount, you have to have double your equipment, and if you get double the equipment then you're still not making anymore. So, it's a never ending battle.

Self-Sustainability

One of the most important parts to Gerrit's story, which I suggest is linked to his survival as an organic farmer, is that he and his family farm are self-sufficient. By doing things themselves they can survive with less money:

> Well, I think what helped us quite a bit is that we don't have any big overhead. We don't go looking for new machinery too often and we do nearly all the work, mechanical or carpenter work, ourselves and so, we don't need contractors to build buildings, so this is big save. And we do all the work ourselves. We don't have to hire anybody.

Indeed, doing as much as possible themselves, is very important. For example, they get seaweeds from the shore for the fields, they do their own plowing and harvesting, and have most of their own equipment. They can even build with their own wood from the woodlot. Moreover, they sell a lot of their products locally at the markets, which helps the local economy, and is good advertisement for them. Though they do not make a lot of money at the markets, they make important contacts and

now have inquires from others about their produce. They are a good example of self-sustainability. In his own words: "...we're pretty well independent...But we've been at it for quite a few years...you can't do this overnight." His latter comment speaks to the importance of organic farming, and all that it involves, as a process. Clearly, it has taken many years for them to acquire the things they have, but the importance of striving for self-sustainability cannot be underestimated, and I would suggest, particularly as farmers become increasingly dependent on the system. The Loo farm family has not had government support. Gerrit said: "...we've always paid our own way."

The ingredients and lessons for survival and success as an organic farmer on PEI is a critical component of this research project. When asked what makes a success story or what 'makes it work' based on what he's gone through, Gerrit told me that he would advise people who are interested in organics to make a gradual transition-- in essence, he noted, begin small, get the land under control, and then expand. And, when growing vegetables, a market is required. The challenges organic farmers face in accessing a market is included in the next section, to which I shall now turn.

Theme 2: A Hopeful Attitude Towards the Future; Survival and Success

"...one of my biggest drawbacks is my age. I'd love to be around another 20 years, and see how this turns out."

Gerrit and I talked about the future, and about the survival of his farm as well as Seaspray Farms Organic Co-operative. He has been a member of the co-op for several years, and it was apparent in my interview with him that believes in a future for organic farming. He also believes in the future of the co-op. Gerrit asserted: "So I

think there's quite a bit of work to be done on it but... I think the prospects are good. There's more demand for it, for organic vegetables."

There are, however, impediments to survival and obstacles that makes it challenging. Gerrit talked about the challenges they experience in having a steady year round supply, as well as the challenges in securing a market without competing against one another. They need "to hang onto the market and to have a year round supply which means very much to have a year round income too." It is of critical importance that there are more members producing and supplying markets, as well as a need to compete in the regular market.

The organic farmers with whom I worked live in various parts of the Island. Gerrit noted that a big obstacle is the distance between them as it is hard to coordinate their efforts. He suggested that they need a central building, but currently, they do not have enough volume to justify its existence. He added: "There's our biggest problem, is to get big enough volume to pay us to have somebody on a regular basis to contact the stores and keep them supplied."

For the Loo family, in the past, they had not had enough supply for the farmer's market, but with an added greenhouse, they hope to extend the length of their food and have a greater supply. Gerrit explained: "So everything seems to be tied into having a year round, steady supply of vegetables or whatever we sell..."

Having the supply and the market are key components for survival. Gerrit noted that people need to be made aware of organics, and farmers need to ensure organic products are available. People "... want a steady supply of everything and if

they don't get it, they're gonna go and get it from somewhere where they can, or don't bother with it at all."

Gerrit has a hopeful attitude. He believes in many ideas and possibilities for the future, as he told me: "...I think the opportunities are endless. You can practically start any kind of a venture and it would be new to the Island." He also believes organics will grow in the future. He does not know exactly where to go from here, but undoubtedly looks towards the future. Perhaps, they will build more buildings and grow more potatoes. He suggested that they can sell their produce, but the question centres on whether they will grow more. There is a trade-off involved in some ways. For example, should they plow more land, they cannot have as many cattle. From year to year, their farm lives seem uncertain and open to change. In discussing next steps for organic farming, Gerrit commented: "Well, we are more or less just feeling our way....I'd like to see more farmers interested in it."

Unfortunately, the smaller farmer is threatened by government's monocultural approach to farming, and when asked his thoughts on what I could do with my research, Gerrit said that organic farmers need promotion and, "...I think that there's still an awful lot of people that can be persuaded to change over pretty quick if it can be bought on a regular basis and has good quality."

The role of government and citizens, and the lack of support-- as we have seen in other stories -- plays a role in the survival of Gerrit's farm and the farms of organic farmers. The next section looks more closely at the political climate and his experiences in this arena.

I will end with Gerrit's words, which speak eloquently to the theme of this section: "Well, I think we are still in the learning process, and I think it's an ongoing thing...we'll be always look forward to next year and that is really the whole purpose in life, that you look ahead what you're gonna be doing the next year."

Theme 3: The Politics of Organic Farming and the Need for Government and Consumer Support

"...we have to look toward acceptance by the people to be willing to pay a little bit extra for the better, we think superior, vegetables."

Consumers

The role of communities and citizens is a question I explored in my conversations with farmers. Gerrit elaborated on his comment from the previous section:

> ...I think there's gonna be, before too long, a shake up where people are gonna come up and say, well, this is what the spraying is doing to people. So far people know they're doing them harm...as long as people don't see they don't get directly sick from it...So I think that unless there is something that is really going to shake it up, it's going to be a slow process. But we are gaining.

The yields in organic farming, Gerrit commented, are not as big as in conventional growing. Therefore, having support of consumers is necessary. But consumers are often unaware, of what they are eating. Chemicals, he told me, are used as a preventative measure, and the average potato is sprayed about 16 times. Gerrit shared his views on the use of chemicals:

> ...I have no doubt about all the harm it [chemicals] is doing to the environment. Hopefully we are gonna help out a few people with growing organic. But it is sad you know the chemicals that are used in growing carrots, and onions, and all these other vegetables. It's

> terrible. It really is, it's sad to see that this stuff is sold in the stores to people and people don't know what they are eating...

However, he further noted that some people complain if they find a worm in their broccoli, for example. The bug, he remarked, is much safer than the pesticide!

Government

Undoubtedly, government's support of monoculture and factory farming affects the health of citizens. A particular case in point is that Gerrit would like to have organic beef but feels it will be difficult as many of the small butcher shops are being closed because "The government doesn't want them anymore." In our conversation, Gerrit spoke about our unsafe food system, what is done to an animal for sale, and how consumers are unaware of what is done to meat. On the other hand, I observed, and through talking with Gerrit, that animals on his farm are treated well, are rarely sick, and are not subject to factory farming conditions.

Gerrit was not hopeful about the position of government in farming. He shared his thoughts:

> Well, I think that the government on PEI today are pretty well all for the big people, big organizations can get any amount of money but they don't do much help to the small people. If you can tell them you employ people, you can pretty well get, but for research, there's not much money spent, not nearly enough as far as I can see....I don't know how long the small farmer can stay in business. We'd be OK because we don't have great big bills. People that have young families, far more expenses, it's going to be harder and harder. Of course, that's why the small farmers are quitting one after another. Drive a big truck or whatever, get off of the farm.

Gerrit has had other experiences with government. He and his family, as alluded to previously, have had the unique experience of crop breeding and

introducing change to the Island potato community. In our interview, Gerrit and I did not talk about his experiences with government and other bureaucratic bodies at length, though he did mention that there was a lot of "red tape" involved in getting a new potato registered. In research and time, it cost them approximately $10,000. Gerrit remarked: "it's pretty hard to do anything like this on your own."

The word 'blight' (a disease that affects potatoes) is a nasty word on PEI, especially for farmers. A few years ago, what has come to be known as the PVYN scare, had a significant impact on Island farmers, which other farmers in this thesis have spoken about. Though Gerrit mentioned that it turned out to be a "false alarm," Gerrit's farm was looked at carefully.

My understanding is that the word blight can have a serious effect on a farmer's relationship with others in his or her community. Gerrit told me that they have not had complaints from neighbors, but that is likely due to the fact that they do not have blight. When asked if they are seen as "culprits" if there is blight, he said they might be blamed for spreading it. Further, he noted, that they need to be "double careful" with potatoes to ensure they do not have blight, and to deal with should they get it.

I questioned Gerrit about his experiences with the "powers that be," suggesting that organic farming is political by nature and is quite different than what we are accustomed to on PEI with a conventional approach to farming. Gerrit sometimes has "...the idea that people are looking down on you pretty well because you know you get somebody that grows potatoes and that's all they do..." Indeed, his

farm operation, and what it entails, is much different than the farmer who grows only potatoes and who has adopted a monoculture, conventional approach to farming.

Story of Alfred Fyfe

Alfred was one of the first organic farmers with whom I spoke when I began my research, and several of the monthly meetings for the co-op took place at his kitchen table at his farm in Stanley Bridge, PEI.

As noted in my previous section, to help shape my ideas and inform my knowledge base, I had pre-interview talks with some farmers. My father (who had become interested in organic farming issues) and I visited Alfred's farm early in the Spring, 1998. We talked about several issues, particularly about the role and influence of corporate power. I noted in my journal at that time: *I feel that I am really learning about how complicated and circular the system is, that so many things and people are interconnected...that the hold of corporate power finds its way into every aspect of Island life.* When I reflected upon our conversation, the values he promoted, and the work he was doing, I also wrote: *They* [the farmers] *are living the values we talk about in our program.* I thought about how organic farmers were, in fact, community psychologists in a true sense.

Our more formal interview took place on a Saturday morning at Alfred's farm at the kitchen table, and lasted about two hours. Afterwards, over lunch, we shared some organic potatoes and continued our conversation. Alfred spoke calmly and would pause and carefully answer each question or share his thoughts. He was willing to share information, and I felt it had been a good interview. Alfred is knowledgeable and told of places he had gone and people who had impacted his life. He has many

ideas and a social consciousness, and from what I gathered in our talk, the tasks of living occupied much of his time. In my notes from that interview, I wrote: *He spoke of it* [organic farming] *in terms of implications and of personal meanings in his own life. He believed in it, though, it didn't always pay the bills*. He also seemed to have a sense of gratitude and appreciation for what he has, as he had visited places where he saw incredible poverty.

In our talk, Alfred shared how the organic farming journey began for him. About 1987, he and his family were having a difficult time financially, and having "weed problems" on the farm. He had tried to grow grain using fertilizers but he could not kill weeds with chemical sprays. At that time, he was invited to attend an organic conference in NB, where he was interested in organics as a way to save money and in the opportunities it presented.

Then, as Alfred put it, "something interesting happened." A couple of years later, finances grew tighter and they could not afford some things for the farm. However, the next year was a better year for them on the farm. His philosophy, and his theories, began to change.

In 1988, they reduced fertilizer to about half the previous year, and the transition continued into the next year. Alfred's involvement in Seaspray Farms Organic Co-operative started around 1993. Unfortunately, the PVYN (potato disease) scare occurred at that time, which halted the efforts of the co-op. On a trip together in 1993, members of the co-op had an opportunity to talk more about the coop and around 1995, it "got revitalized again."

Four major themes from my conversation with Alfred are discussed below.

Theme 1: Corporate Control and an Unjust Value System

A major theme in my conversation with Alfred, as well as throughout the time getting to know him, centered on the presence of corporate power in Island life and the oppression of Island people, which threaten community, people, land and survival.

Indeed, Alfred's reasons for farming organically stem from his opposition to corporate control and dependence. He shared that: "...the philosophy of farming organically kinda sticks with me cause I'm rebellious enough, I hate supporting all this hierarchy in terms of finance and buying new machinery. That's, that's kinda a vicious circle too." He further noted, in response to why he farms organically, that: "...just the philosophy of not having to buy products that makes a farm dependent..."

According to Alfred, the situation for Island farmers may be likened to the situation faced by other oppressed peoples, namely the coalminers of Cape Breton. He spoke well to his feelings:

> You go through a lot of emotions in agriculture, in organic agriculture....one of the greatest emotions I think I've come across is just simply how the financial world has, has actually raped agriculture in terms of say fertilizers and chemicals... All you have to do is look at potatoes. Potato grower right now is just like the miners in Cape Breton years ago....all these guys are working for the company store you know.

One often hears the phrase that we are "mining the land" on PEI, a phrase that conjures up images of the example Alfred raised. Alfred noted the coalminer's example a few times in our many conversations. After our pre-interview visit, I wrote in my journal: *He told me about going to the NS Coalminer's museum and seeing how*

the store was even owned by the company. We talked about how Irving [a powerful corporation in the Maritimes] *had just bought Island Fertilizers. Truly a cycle...a comparable example too."* Many Island farmers make little off of their products and labour. Alfred commented: "...the value add [referring to potatoes] doesn't do anything for the PEI farmer. It does everything for Irving. They take a six cent pound potato and turn it into a 50 cent pound potato." He further remarked: "...not only do they make money on potatoes but they make money off fuel, trucking, and chemicals, and now they have fertilizer plants. You know, it's a vicious circle." Using Alfred's example, Irving is arguably like the company store. I have heard that many Islanders (conventional farmers in particular) work for the Irving Corporation, either directly or indirectly, because their presence is so prominent on PEI.

Alfred shared that a seed potato grower can sell all of a seed crop locally on PEI. Processing growers, on the other hand, "...are falling right into the trap of shipping everything away." Alfred contended: "...Brewster Kneen called it 'distancing.' It's taking the food from here and transporting it a 1000 miles and selling it, taking something from and transport it back here."

Consumers do not have an awareness of where their food is coming from. Alfred said: "...I don't think consumers have any concept of it. They just want food, and they want cheap food and they want it now and they don't care who it hurts to get it that way." He also spoke about how the poor are affected: " And what's really sad is none of this highly processed food does anything for poor people....it makes poor people strive to have this high value food, stuff they can't afford to have you know."

The ownership and control of people obviously extends to include ownership of the land. Alfred remarked that, "All the good land is owned by, by corporate interest." He cited local examples of how corporations are taking over Island land and farms. He told me about families who had been struggling financially, and then suddenly were growing processing potatoes, buying new machinery and land. He explained: "...they got pretty near back to the wall, and then all of a sudden, they're riding easy, and they became processing growers all of a sudden..." Alfred's examples illustrate how Island farmers in need are vulnerable to corporate take over, which ultimately pushes them further into a dependent position. But this is a universal phenomenon, as Alfred shared other examples of people who have been displaced and who no longer control their lands or have access to land.

He spoke to the fact that ownership of land has changed over time, and people have become possessive:

> And the land was all available for everybody in the old days....the fact that if you wanted to farm, it's almost prohibitive today for you to try and get the money and set up farming. It's just almost a nightmare....someone makes more money off of the borrowed money than you can make working all your life.

Alfred seemed disillusioned by the current situation and argued: "And, I think a major portion of our problems is that we forgot how to support ourselves. We've become so dependent on government and banks." Moreover, "... I think we got a lot to learn in terms of being in community. We've lost a lot of it because we've all become dependent."

After a conversation with Alfred one day at the farm, I also wrote in my journal: *A man once said to Alfred that supermarkets were the worst thing to ever*

happen. He [Alfred] *said that he was so busy farming all his life he never really knew what that meant....until one day he walked down an aisle at a grocery store and all he saw was Kraft and Kellog's.* He further explained to me that this reality became visible to him while he was in Guatemala where he saw that modern supermarkets and products were the wedge in the door to take away the local economy. I believe Alfred has a different vision of community and farming that emphasizes a local economy, self-sustainability, and a freedom from corporate rule. He made reference to a community in Portugal where "...they make as much go around their own community as they can and anything that's excess goes out. Where our philosophy is different. We're trying to ship everything we produce away..."

Theme 2: Need for Support and Experiences of Survival as an Organic Farmer

Across stories, a common sentiment amongst organic farmers was a lack of support from government and others. On different occasions, individually and as part of a group, Alfred experienced a lack of support for his work and initiatives. He shared with me his individual struggles and frustrating experiences with bureaucracy and dealing with an organization he feels was unsupportive of him in a time of financial need.

Alfred was fortunate to have inherited his farm. He told me: "I got a farm given to me basically, as a, as a gift, because I'm a fourth generation farmer. But I just know the struggle that it is for a young person to try and get their feet established on a farm, unless, unless you're given the land." Financially, things have not been easy for Alfred. He has struggled to make a living on the farm and struggled to farm organically. Most of their produce is sold conventionally. As he told me one day at

the farm, he works to feed the kids and pay the light bill. He simply could not afford to continue farming conventionally.

When I asked Alfred how he had survived without being "an Irving," so to speak, he remarked: "...we just struggle on..." In 1994, when they sold their dairy herd, his farm went through changes. He further noted: "I should explain we haven't made a living organically. We only got a few dollars out of organics. Basically up until 1994, we were dairy farmers."

He also shared struggles he and members of the co-op have faced. For instance, they were trying to market experimental produce and they could not get support. And when they found themselves in financial trouble and approached government, support was not forthcoming. Alfred noted: "...they [government] put up all sorts of roadblocks. They wouldn't give us any support." Though government has been supportive in some small ways he mentioned, they have not been supportive in significant matters. Interestingly, in the face of hardship, they did receive some support from another source in the community. A major lesson in all of this can be summarized in his own words: "Well, I guess it's strange where your help comes from."

For someone trying to start organic farming, Alfred contended: "It would be far more difficult organically because there's not much support of any kind in terms of government or financial support for organic farming." Even a banker once told them that they would not get much support if they were not Irvings. Alfred explained: "If you're not an Irving, you don't do a hell of a lot for them unless you, unless you got a bucket full of money of your own that you're gonna put into something, then they'll

probably give you some, some support". He chuckled when he added: "They'll give you some menial support perhaps but nothing that's gonna get you to be a millionaire over night."

For Alfred and many others like him I am sure, it is challenging to accomplish things both on the farm, as well in the co-op, "... because of the time problem, kids and farming and money." He told me: "We're so busy farming...often times, our failure is not because we don't want to do something, it's because we get tied up doing what we have to do rather than what we want to do." Time and resources do not afford him the opportunity to explore or entertain emerging ideas. Reality is that with scarce resources and little or no support, his focus is on meeting day to day demands and he continues with what he needs to do for survival. He remarked:"...I wish I knew as much as some of the guys know that are good at it."

Although organic farming has not been an easy road for Alfred, he believes in the possibilities for alternatives. We did not talk specifically about next steps for his own farm, though he shared ideas with me about things he might like to pursue. However, he feels there is insufficient support for some people to pursue entrepreneurial ideas. Alfred argued that there should be incentives for people who are already treating the land in a good way: "There's no reason why there shouldn't be support for me as well as there is for a potato farmer." In essence, he feels the support system currently in place is unfair, and supports are not "done correctly."

Fortunately, being a member of the co-op has been a support system. He noted a couple of farmers who "...give you enough inspiration to carry on in life when you're having struggles." He once remarked in a meeting that they offer each other

support, share information, and they do not compete with each other. When he first became involved with the co-op, he learned that they shared similar struggles. He referred to his experience in the co-op as a "learning experience." He is currently President of Seaspray Farms, and though he does not know for sure where to go from here, he offered several ideas for what is needed as organic farmers.

Theme 3: Survival and A New Value System

"My father used to make a comment that I know more now than I can afford to do."
Alfred Fyfe

As a result of some negative experiences trying to sell and market their produce and dealing with many levels of bureaucracy, the co-operative has struggled financially in the past and has faced hardship. Alfred suggested that the future for the coop will depend upon what happens with their current situation and how their difficulties are resolved. Their future will also depend upon how they market their produce.

In the meantime, as they continue to work through their struggles and persevere, he suggested some ingredients important for survival. Firstly, they need to support each other through the purchase of products. Though he buys some produce from his fellow members, he would like to do so more often. In addition to the need for support within their own group, they also need support outside of the group: "Even the people that are somewhat supportive of Seaspray farms, don't buy a whole lot from us because they still go to the supermarket."

Secondly, he talked about the importance of direct marketing. Alfred believes in supporting and promoting the local economy. In the past, he wanted to supply the

local Farmer's Market with his produce but has found it difficult with the demands of life and work, as alluded to the previous section. He believes that there is promise for an organic market and points to the many tourists, who visit PEI every summer, as a potential market. He stated there is an interest in organic products on the part of consumers, but price will play a role. He believes that they need to market more directly rather than through "the chain" as larger stores "...mark it up so far than the actual price, what the consumer will pay for it." And, consumers want quality products. He suggested the need for quality control:

> People are gonna pay premium price, they want a premium product...you can't ship an inferior product on the specialty market. Most organic produce is 15% higher than the conventional price. If you're gonna demand that kind of extra money then you have to have a superb product.

He remarked on the struggle to achieve a quality product when some farmers have little to work with: "People working with, trying to make the most out of the little bit they have."

Unfortunately, Alfred contended: "...the market share hasn't grown like we thought it might." One of the things (at least within the co-operative system on PEI) that they need is demand from individual stores for organic produce, which in turn will influence the larger stores to supply organic products.

Support, as I presented in the last section, is critical. When asked about the possible role of government and what forms of support they could offer in addition to monetary support, he responded that they need the assistance of someone with a business background to spend some time and do management work with them. The assistance of someone to "... pick up where we fail..." He added: "I think this is the

kind of thing we need to have, instead of hanging somebody like Seaspray farms out on their own trying to make this stuff work..." Marketing, he once told me, was the biggest issue facing them.

Regarding the topic of support, an important point raised in our interview, which could serve as the basis for another thesis, made reference to the role of environmental activists. His sentiments echo those made by some other farmers. Alfred explained simply: "...you know it's great to get headlines but sometimes you just gotta do what's gotta be done and that's support the people who are doing it." It was Alfred's contention that a useful and appreciated form of support could come from buying organic products.

However, as Alfred once told me, "Islanders are slow to change." I suggest that social change is an inherently slow process, and education is needed to facilitate this process. I would like to end this section with an anecdote, shared by Alfred, which highlighted for me the need for a change in mind-set and the need for more education. He recounted being with someone one day and upon seeing dandelions, he commented on the "pretty flowers." At first, Alfred's response was that they were *only* dandelions, but then noted that they not *only* are dandelions, they are Spring's first flower.

I recall when I was young, although he liked them, my father gave me one penny for every dandelion I picked off the lawn. We had a big lawn! My experience reminds me of how we view dandelions, of how we view nature. For some people, dandelions are ugly. They are weeds. Alfred noted: "But everybody seems to have to want to kill dandelions". He later added that not everyone wants to kill them, but we

do get "obsessed with perfection." What we value -- what we see as beautiful and sacred or as unworthy and disposable -- is critical for the future of our planet. Perception and connection are at the core of our struggle to promote awareness and education about the environment. Alfred's comment reminded me of the importance of how we see things. And how we see things will determine the future, not only for organic farmers, but for the earth. For instance, I no longer look at potato fields the same way. While I feel I have much to learn about ecology and the natural world, my eyes have been opened to new things. As a result of my experiences, other things can become dandelions to me and to others. I think that our best hope for the planet lies in seeing the dandelion as a flower. I talk more about a critical consciousness in my discussion.

Theme 4: The Future for Organic Farmers

Alfred shared that he was satisfied as an organic farmer on PEI. At the same time, he told me about a woman who had shared her experiences growing up in a time when organic farming was all she knew. He said: "...I think it's unfortunate that the generation from her time to my time, we've lost so much." From my talk with Alfred, in particular, I theorized that perhaps the role of organic farmers is to be guardians of the land, if you will. Perhaps, they are even reclaimers and guardians of knowledge from the past. Alfred mentioned: "...us so called organic farmers are trying to recapture what they did for ten thousand years....it's difficult to get all that information."

Alfred shared some inspirational thoughts on the possible future of organic farming. One comment in particular impacted me. A friend of his had once said that

he did not know if he would like to be around in 100 years, but would like to be around in 200 years. We both found it to be an interesting remark. He did not ask his friend what he meant by the comment. Perhaps it speaks to a path we are on and to a possible future for organic farming. Perhaps, I believe, it meant that it will take society many years to get back to "older ways."

Alfred talked about a farmer, with whom he had travelled abroad, who picked up seeds on their trip:

> [He] was doing this because he'd come from the generation where they kept their seeds from year to year. I'm one of, what you'd wanna call a modern generation farmer. I run over to Vessey's [Island seed supplier] and get the seeds I want. And Vessey's, God love them, we need them, but we've lost something where we don't keep our own seeds. And that's one of the parts of being dependent...

In some parts of the world, Alfred shared, people rebel against control. He contended: "...we don't do enough of that here. We allow people to take away our independence, that's one of the things that's happening with our bigger dairy herds, you see we're losing all our cross section, there's probably only two or three Jersey herds on the Island left." In essence, as Alfred later explained, industrial agriculture makes genetic diversity smaller. Alfred spoke to the consequences of these actions: "I think it is unfortunate for mankind [sic] that we, that the whole thing is so concentrated on big business..."

So I asked Alfred, how do we nurture the organic movement here or how do we keep it alive? He responded: "I guess it gets back to what I was trying to talk about earlier. Building a community, educating people." We talked about how the community is changing, how small schools and churches are shut down. I believe that

his value system is closely linked to farming as a way of life, not just as a way to make money. Community, the preservation of community and the voice of its people, seem to be part of his way of life and his vision.

Sadly, perhaps it is possible that things might get worse before they get better; Alfred made reference once again to his friend's comment: "...being around 200 years time is maybe we'll get back to some of those things, but what we're doing right now is something we're gonna go through." He expressed a key point pertaining to our future, and to what we need to learn as a society:

> Sometimes we're placed on purpose and I think that maybe there will always be somebody placed on earth to take, to have a place. For example, in England I think it's legislated that the outside of your fields, you can't spray the outside round. It has to be left to let the weeds grow and let the bugs survive. Maybe in 5000 years, we'll do that here. You know, when they learn that they can't, you can't kill everything.

The following verbatim dialogue took place near the end of our interview together, which I feel is also a good ending to his story:

> Alfred: Well, I think there'll always be organic farming, I think it will always no doubt be a struggle.
>
> Kara: Yeah
>
> Alfred: I can't comment much beyond that.... one stage in the movie [refers to the movie "Baby's Day Out"] the lady, the young woman, makes the comment that there's somebody upstairs watching over the little people, and I think sometimes there's somebody upstairs watching over a lot of things besides the little people. That's my faith anyway.
>
> Kara: Nice way of putting it. Yeah. Well, sometimes I think of the organic farmers here as more like guardians of the land. You know maybe that you have been, you've found your way to do this and you're

> here now to start something, to be the true guardians of the land in terms of taking us somewhere.
>
> Alfred: Well, I guess maybe it's some of the seeds for the next generation.

I wrote in my notes, after the interview with Alfred, and further to his insights: *Wonder if they are here, organic farmers that is, to bring us to a new path....Organic farmers are a sign of hope. They are a guide for a future and a link to the past.*

Story of Allister and Margaret Veinot

I came to know Allister through his involvement with Seaspray Farms Organic Co-operative. For our interview, I was fortunate to have his partner, Margaret, join us. It was the first time I met Margaret. Our conversation lasted a couple of hours at their kitchen table at their farm. It was interesting to interview a farm couple, as they offered a unique perspective about their organic operation and experiences. They had strong opinions and it was a dynamic dialogue. Both were easy to talk with, and both spoke well about their experiences and learnings.

In my notes, which contained some of my impressions of the interview, I wrote that they would be good teachers and resource people for others to learn about organic farming. I sensed they had learned from their experiences. They had advice, ideas, and concrete information they were willing to share, and seemed to be an example of success with their organic endeavors.

Theme 1: Planting the Seeds for Organic Production

Margaret has long been involved with farming and came from a farming background. She also attended agriculture college. She was farming her parent's farm in PEI when she met Allister. Farming at that time was not going well for her. She commented: "I was going backwards real fast doing it that way." She was not making money and told me that the hardest bills to pay were the chemical and fertilizer bills. They lived in Alberta for eight months and then moved back to PEI. When they moved to PEI, they started their organic farm from scratch, if you will. Ten years

ago, they told me, they had a baby, a pick up truck, and the possessions they could fit in their truck! They began their farm with almost nothing. Allister remarked: "It was a bare farm, it was an empty house, empty barn, no machinery." At that time, they did not even have the money to put a down payment on their farm.

Prior to purchasing the property they currently farm, Allister and Margaret had decided to adopt an organic approach to agriculture. They believed: "... there has to be a better way." Their decision to go organic was motivated by economic reasons. Margaret explained: "...well, if we didn't have to come up with 10, 15, 20 thousand dollars to pay for fertilizer and chemicals to grow a crop, well, we wouldn't have to get that much more for the crop or have that big a yield to pay for it ..." Allister added:

> We didn't, couldn't imagine why somebody would farm and spend so much money on inputs when they, you know, all they had to do was be diversified and have cattle, and ...treat their soil as good as they could. And we found, we've had tremendous disasters, and we've had... some pretty good outcomes and it hasn't put us in the hole...

Although they have not made a lot of money farming organically, Allister noted they would not farm any other way.

Their first experience with organic farming was definitely a learning experience. They rented five acres of land and hoped to grow vegetables, but "...we had no idea what we were doing at all." As a result, they encountered weed problems, and after that "disaster" as they described it, that winter they decided to do some research on organic farming and find people who were growing organically. In 1987, they bought the farm they are still farming today. Margaret shared:

> ...we got this place, we knew how it had been farmed, and it wasn't farmed really intensively with chemicals in the past, and we decided we would move here and we would start right out without using synthetic pesticides. So we were gonna start cold turkey from square one with the organic...

Allister told me that they now have their own farm equipment, but in the beginning, they relied on the help and support of a neighbor to share his equipment. He commented on the "tremendous good luck" they have had with the support offered by their smaller farm neighbors. The support they received gave them a "tremendous boost" and they continued onward and started to pick up niche markets for vegetables.

Theme 2: Their Organic Approach to Agriculture

"...we just decided that's the way [organic farming] *cause we couldn't imagine why anybody would pay the dollars they do to farm when you can generate you know, your own fertility."*

When we first began our interview, I asked Margaret and Allister to share what is has been like for them as organic farmers. Margaret responded: "It's been one long learning process..." I believe this statement encapsulates their experiences as organic farmers. As they shared, there is no recipe in organic farming. In conventional farming, on the other hand, one can use certain applications and a crop is almost guaranteed. Allister noted that they have 100 clear acres with several fields that are completely different from one another. Margaret further noted that organic farming is not consistent: "Because any one year, something that worked well the last two or three years, all of a sudden just doesn't work."

For example, they shared with me the challenges in growing onions and the experience of losing a crop. Margaret pointed out the importance of diversification when she said:

> ...if all we did was grow onions, we'd be in real trouble, but we don't just grow onions. We grow onions and potatoes, and we keep chickens, and we have some beef cattle. And we grow grain, we diversify you know quite a bit, and that's a hard thing I think too for other farmers to accept, they see it as going way back to the old days.

A conventional farmer, Allister explained, produces bigger yields but organic farmers receive more for their product. Conventional farmers, however, will not have the same weed problems and will probably always have a yield. For Allister and Margaret, they might lose one in four crops. Organic farming is risky and for this reason, she explained, they are diversified. So, should they lose a crop, it is not necessarily a major loss in the long term.

Allister explained that the risk factor determines the higher price for organic food. Also, according to Allister, "...price is driven by demand because there isn't the volumes to... equalize the demands of production, but once that does happen, the food stuff will be cheaper." Margaret explained that: "We charge what we feel we have to have so that we can do this."

They have steady customers for their onions, Margaret shared, who say they enjoy the flavor. Margaret further remarked: "We sell our product and we make a living." She told me that some people who use chemicals buy their organic products, "because they like the taste better or because they support what we're doing and they wish they could do it themselves..." Allister and Margaret have tried to grow different crops and Allister said that they are not afraid to spend money for trial crops. They

also tried to grow soybeans and were faced with a weed disaster. As certified organic farmers who follow OCIA (The Organic Crop Improvement Association) regulations, Margaret explained that they cannot use a chemical to kill weeds: "You make a mistake and then it gives you more problems of a different sort down the road, and then you have to figure out "how am I going to fight this problem," because you can't just go and get another chemical that's gonna do it and that's probably one of the hardest things."

Despite the challenges involved in organic farming, Allister said that they would not farm any other way. Allister did not grow up on a farm, but like myself, grew up in a farming community. The knowledge both he and Margaret have to offer is great. He was asked by someone in the past if organic farming was "a philosophy." He responded that: "farming is a way of life." It is, he suggested, in your blood.

I shall now turn to a discussion of how they have survived and succeeded as organic farmers.

Theme 3: Making It Work as Organic Farmers

Both Margaret and Allister are employed off the farm. Allister works part-time and Margaret works full-time ten months of the year. And of course, they still run their farm. Allister noted that there are not many conventional farms where one person does not work off the farm for income.

I asked them what they thought made for a successful organic farm example on PEI. Allister responded: "...I think we're successful at what we're doing..." He explained that "disasters" can happen to anyone, but he believes they are successful. He enjoys farming. But he argued that there is not much money in farming; those who

make money, they both told me, are those who buy from the farm and the machinery dealers who sell to the farms. Allister talked about measuring success by what I will call perseverance. When Allister and Margaret began organic farming, they told me they knew nothing about it, but as Margaret said, they did not give up.

As will be discussed later, there is often little support for organic farming. I asked them how the organic farmer will survive without support. Margaret said: "Well, like we always do! We do our thing..." Although they are members of the co-op, Allister shared that they have generated all of their sales on their own. They have shipped produce through the co-op and remain a member because they wish to support its efforts.

I was impressed by their business orientation and philosophy. They told me that "no order is too small." They added: "...unless it's too large but we will not refuse an order." Allister remarked that although some might not find it worthwhile to drive to town for a small order because of the cost to get there, the returns will be great. And there must be truth in what he says, as he told me: "We can't produce enough to fill our markets..." Allister told me that he has no problem selling their produce to a local store, and he seems to work with demands of the market. If consumers find prices too high, he commented, he will not sell their produce or lower the prices.

They also spoke at length about the importance of having quality produce. Allister said he will not sell inferior food. He elaborated on the importance of this philosophy:

> Consumers don't want to see that [inferior food] you know. I mean they probably understand that it's not gonna be as polished or as shiny like a tomato that you would buy at _____ [PEI store] or something...the organic industry has to...change their image of putting inferior food on the market. If it don't look good, don't sell it....it's just not worth it, it will haunt you forever, and it'll destroy an industry for ya or other people...

To maintain quality control, Allister and Margaret market all of their produce under their own name. Quality and presentation are clearly very important to the Veinot's. I experienced this first hand, when, after the interview, I purchased some free range eggs. As I did not place an order beforehand, Allister did not have time to prepare the eggs for sale. He was concerned about the presentation and wanted to be sure I understood how he usually sells their product. He was professional and I knew I was getting a quality product. Allister believes in treating the customer well. He remarked: "Treat them like they're doing you a favor by buying it and it comes back."

Theme 4: Perceptions of Organic Farming and the Need for Education

Allister and Margaret made several references to people's perceptions of organic farming. Allister said that, although it has not been said to them directly, "In our neighbor's eyes, we're not successful." People drive by, Margaret contended, and they see "broken down buildings." But as Allister explained, they have not had the cash flow to renovate their buildings. Margaret explained that they might have a field full of weeds but people have no knowledge of what they are doing with that particular field, "...they see some grain heads there and they see the weeds and they don't ask what we're doing to combat the problem. They don't ask how did it get so bad because the other fields weren't like that, like they just see what's in front of them at the moment..." People assume organic farming is not working for them.

However, it is important to remember that financially they started with nothing, and over the years, have built their farm from the ground up.

Allister echoed her sentiments. He shared: "...our fields may not be... as clean as our neighbor's field that go in and...spray herbicides... the organic matter is gonna be gone there too eventually..." He further noted that even though their yields are not as high, "dollar for dollar" they are doing better than a chemical grower.

Still, a common sentiment seems to be that organic farming is not possible, Margaret explained. She has heard statements such as "oh well, if we all go to organic farming, the world is gonna starve," an erroneous statement in her opinion. She said that people do not consider today's technology. Today they have the capability of doing better than in years past.

Organic farmers receive their fair share of criticism. When Allister and Margaret experimented with growing soybeans, as previously discussed, they had a lot of weeds. Margaret told me: "...we had people come in the yard just shaking their head cause the field was yellow with mustard. 'Oh look at that' and 'oh I can tell we're on an organic farm' you know those kinds of comments..." She added: "They accept us for the way we are but...they always get those little "ha ha" in...not being mean or anything about it."

Asking questions about organic farming is more difficult that one might think. They told me about individuals who had tried to grow an organic crop and were not successful in this endeavor. Apparently, they never tried again. I inquired as to why they would not ask for help. Margaret suggested that perhaps they are too proud, or

they might be labeled as "interested in organic," which used to be she said, "a real us or them" idea. Or, as Allister put it, one could be seen as "backward."

From my interview with Allister and Margaret, it is clear that education about organic farming is needed. Margaret contended: "people have no idea what farming organically is."

Theme 5: The Environmental Movement and the Role of Organic Farming

Because they farm organically, Margaret mentioned that some people adopt an extremist viewpoint and say such things as, "you're organic farmers and you put your product in a plastic bag." Margaret does not identify with being an environmentalist. She explained her position: "...I'm not an environmentalist. I'm concerned about the environment, but I'm not gonna go and well throw out my TV and...I like to eat French Fries occasionally too..."

Allister shared his views as well and suggested that when farming organically, one does not have to "go back" rather "...we're just adapting what used to be in today's society. And with the technology that's available to all of us...we're just putting it to the best use."

I asked them about the possible role for local citizens and communities on PEI to help the organic farming movement. They talked the role and efforts of environmentalists. Allister contended that environmentalists could support organic farming, and while some have their own property for growing, as a whole he believes they do not consume their organic products.

Margaret talked about the infamous pesticide debate, and the "mud slinging" that take place between environmentalists and the potato industry regarding pesticide

use. She argued: "...environmentalists saying ' well you don't need to do it like that, you can do it organically'...and the potato industry sitting on the other side of the fence saying, no it can't be done. That's where one of these 'we'll all starve if we grow organically' statements came from."

In reference to the pesticide debate, Margaret made an important point for consideration. She noted that while "mud slinging" was taking place, the organic industry was not consulted. She argued: "We were basically in the middle and the two groups were fighting over how farming should be done and neither group had anything to do with the organic industry."

Allister noted that the potato industry regards environmental groups and organic groups in the same way. He emphasized their reasons for farming organically:

> ... we're doing it because we feel that it is crazy to be spending all this money for inputs when you can generate all these inputs yourself. And...the environmentalists have a different agenda than what the farmer has. You know, like our agenda isn't basically to go out and tell other industries how to run their business, although we would like for them to research or to ask us questions how we're doing it, and, yet it hasn't happened a lot.

Allister does not believe that some environmental activist efforts have been effective. He believes there has been too much of a focus on pesticides, and there is a need to develop "something different" for farmers.

Based on these comments and insights, it is reasonable to suggest that, as organic farmers, they wish to have their voices heard, and they wish to be part of a process for change. Allister and Margaret are willing to share the lessons of what works and what has not worked for them. A critical next step could be to consult with

organic farmers to acquire their knowledge and learn more about farming experiences. My thesis documented farmers' social stories but their "soil stories," as noted in Gerrit Loo's story, is also an important legacy, and I suggest, could be part of an information database for those who wish to adopt organic farming.

Theme 6: Experiences with Government

As organic farmers, as we have seen, Allister and Margaret are willing to experiment with crops and to learn. Unfortunately, there is little support to do this. For conventional farmers, Allister told me, they can approach the Department of Agriculture to conduct research and set up plots. "But the organic industry can't do that, they will not do that for us," Allister contended. Margaret added that government is affiliated with chemical companies.

Support in other forms has not been in abundance. At a PEI organic farming conference, they told me there was not a lot of public support on the part of government. Financial support has also been a challenge to receive. Margaret shared that organic farmers have become more aggressive for funds. In the past when they were turned down, they would not protest. But as Margaret explained, "...we've sat on the sidelines long enough" and would like what is offered to everybody else.

They fought hard to obtain government funds for the group of farmers to which they belong. Margaret commented that the Federation of Agriculture gave money to commodity groups, and since they were a group, they felt entitled to some funds. She added: "We're farmers, we're a group, why are you excluding us..."

Allister further noted: "We had to work damn hard [to get money]...Now we have to keep building on that, there's lots, there's money there it's just you have to

develop it." As we will see in the next section, the funds they received were used for educational purposes.

Organic farmers want fair treatment. In talking about the direction of farming on PEI and how the government prefers corporate farming, Allister commented that government can change that image. Margaret's response highlighted the need for equal treatment for all farmers. She said:

> I don't know if it is fair to say that it's just the government, because I think, we all have minds and we can think for ourselves, and the government doesn't owe me a living. All I expect from the government is--treat me the same as you treat everybody else, but that's not what happens. And they treat certain...sectors better than they treat others because they see this as being more progressive...we fall through the cracks all the time.

Because they are diversified as organic farmers, they cannot be slotted into one commodity group. Margaret told me about an experience where they did not receive a government compensation package that was given to commodity groups. I suggest that this is further evidence of government's reward system for a "bigger is better" approach to farming.

Margaret shared another interesting story. Several years ago, there was a sustainable agriculture section of government set up to help farmers become more self-sufficient. It was not designed to explore organic farming. She elaborated:

> But somewhere along the line, some of the individuals that were in that section weren't blind to looking at organic, let's put it that way. And the rest of government freaked and said, 'Oh my God, they're gonna go organic, there's no place for us cause...we recommend chemicals' -- basically that was the feeling they had.

She added: "So there was a real 'us- and- them' kind of an attitude as a result."

Margaret believes that groups feel threatened by organic farming, especially when organic farmers can get more money for their products. Allister added that he felt past efforts to promote organic farming were the wrong approach and moved too quickly.

Theme 7: Learning from Positive Examples

I have mentioned numerous times throughout my thesis, the importance of examples to learn from and to model. It was apparent in our interview that both Margaret and Allister were willing to share their ideas with others. Margaret told me: "...we've always had basically an open door policy. You want to come out and see what we're doing, we'll show you the successes, we'll show you the disasters." She further explained:

> Not that we go to our neighbor and say do it this way or anything like that, but if anybody...ever comes here and says 'oh gee you know I want to do this or I want to do that.' We've put people into our business basically. We've told people how to do what we're doing and giving them our market in a sense...

Allister noted they do not hide anything and believes "there's room for everybody." He would like to see more organic farming on PEI and more organic products consumed.

Allister talked more about their approach: "...we don't go out and bad mouth our neighbor. They do what they do because that's what they want to do, and if they see what I'm doing as a threat to them, that's too bad, but if they see it as maybe, there's...a change for them, then I'm happy."

Success for them involves being able to share what they have learned. Margaret remarked: "I think we're gonna be truly successful, this is my feeling, truly successful when other farmers feel they can ask us questions and ask how we did it. It's...started to happen but, it didn't go far enough."

In an example alluded to in an earlier section, Margaret shared that she and Allister tried to grow a new crop and it worked well for them. Another individual made the same attempt, but did not ask for their advice or input. Margaret remarked: "...I was happy that they tried to copy something we had done, but it was a complete disaster, because they didn't feel confident enough or whatever to come and ask us just what we did we do and what did we think you know they should be avoiding..."

Allister and Margaret referred earlier to the fact that the organic industry has not been consulted in past projects by some groups. When I asked Allister what he would want to tell people if they asked about organic farming, he said: "Well I would tell them...to look at their book... look at their bottom line... in their bank accounts." Margaret then shared:

> ...the biggest thing we tell people is that you don't have to be organic. You don't have to be certified organic. Be honest about what you're growing...there are so many things that we do that make common sense, that they could do that would help their farming operations. They would reduce their pesticide use, their bottom line would be better. They would help the environment, they don't have to go totally organic but above all, be honest...

Margaret offered more advice on organic farming: "Well if you want to farm organically...you can't be scared of what other people are gonna think." Allister added: "You gotta be honest when you do it, you can't cheat....You can't do it

halfway. There is no way to do halfway. You have to do it the right way...I mean you fool with nature, nature's gonna get ya." He advocated for the use of today's technology to make organic farming work.

Margaret and Allister offered some concrete advice and information about organic farming that could benefit those who are considering the organic approach. I asked them to share lessons they feel would be useful to pass on from their experiences, and what they have learned that might be important for someone who wishes to start organic farming. Allister offered this advice: "Do it slow and start small." He also said:

> ...you'll end up with too many disasters if...you take, and we call it sick soil, if you take conventionally cropped property and then bang, that's it, you're gonna do it without any chemicals or any fertilizers...The land will just have too much withdrawal and you'll end up with too many disasters. In our situation, we started small, although we have 100 acres, we only use small portions of it and we brought it into the organic system...It's just not possible to do it that fast. There's a program you have to follow, you have to have a soil-building program ...

Margaret said, "...to be prepared to take your losses too." She also focused on perseverance when she noted: "You could fold and go out and spray it and save your crop, but you're defeating the purpose of what you're trying to do in the long run..." Allister told me: "... you gotta work at it...you gotta know your land, you gotta know your fields...you have to know the composite of your soil..."

Further, Margaret talked about her frustration with farmers who use the term organic, but whose practices are not. Consumers, of course, have no knowledge of organic and do not know what they are purchasing. I suggest lack of education about

organic farming is a significant obstacle for certified organic farmers to build credibility.

Allister and Margaret possess a great of knowledge about organic farming. Their willingness to educate is an important theme of their story. With the funds their certified organic group received, demonstration plots have been set up to teach people, so farmers can see how organic farming works. Margaret pointed out that demonstration plots will be part of a neutral environment for people to learn more about organic without being stigmatized or labeled.

One of the last questions I asked participants was what they would like for me to do with the information from our interview. Allister responded that he would like to see it in the hands of agriculture. He would like to have some good information passed on to them and to have different universities do research projects on production methods possibly. In essence, he was interested in projects that will benefit the organic industry. Allister noted that projects such as these would benefit everyone, and he was concerned how corporations are taking control of land, which might be a "...real disaster someday when people forget how to farm..."

The "farm crisis" is the subject of the next and final section.

Theme 8: The Current Direction of Farming and the Farming Reality for Conventional Growers

It is impossible to talk about organic farming and its future without understanding the political and economic reality of farming for all farmers on PEI. I suggest this reality is what keeps some farmers from ever entertaining the possibly of an organic approach to agriculture. In our interview, we talked about the fact that

conventional farmers are "stuck" or are "...in a system where they can't quit." Margaret said that a person could not adopt organic farming and still grow 500 acres of potatoes. Sadly, no financial support is available for farmers to try organic farming. She added: "...they need money for the years when they're doing it and they're not gonna get the income that they're used to, they need something that's gonna pay them for that." There is insufficient support to help them get off chemical dependency, and according to Margaret, big business does not want this to occur. As we have seen in other stories, Margaret's ideas lend more weight to the argument that a support system for farmers to make the transition from chemical to organic farming is essential.

They both spoke to the fact that conventional farmers make little money from their products. They shared that farmers have been trained to grow more, to be more efficient, and to use more chemicals. The result is a surplus of produce and wholesalers give them very little for what they have grown. Allister told me that in the '70's, 50 pound bags of potatoes were eight or nine dollars, which now sell for approximately five or six dollars. At the same time, farmer's expenses (i.e. inputs) are higher. Margaret remarked: "They're [conventional farmers] not farming anymore for themselves. They're...on a treadmill, and there's no end to it, it's just a belt going round and round." Allister agreed, noting that farmers have become dependent and the current approach to farming is a way of life for them. He argued that farmers need to become more diversified, as there exists the potential for a crop disaster.

Some "family farms" on PEI are like corporate operations, they shared. Allister made reference to a changing Island farm culture, even within his own area. Land and farms are owned by others, and people do not live in the community. He commented: "Well, it's a direction that government wants it to go, because they'd much sooner have corporate- type farms out there than to have 25 little farms screaming "help me." They'd rather deal with one corporate identity..."

Story of John MacLauchlan

I first met John on a cold day in February, 1997 at the Farmer's Market many months prior to starting my thesis when I bought some produce from him. I chatted with him briefly and discovered that his farm was not far from my family home. I did not realize then that John would eventually be one of the participants in my thesis! As a researcher, I met John at the same time I met the other organic farmers profiled. John ventured out on his own and left Seaspray Farms Organic Co-operative a few months after I began my project. Although I did not see him as regularly as the others, I was fortunate to have his story included in this collection of stories. Our interview took place for a couple of hours in August, 1998. After the interview, I wrote some of my impressions, notably that John is a young farmer, with a young family, trying to make a living. He seemed practical and realistic, and was honest about the struggles he faced as an organic farmer. The following is John's story.

Theme 1: The Reality of Trying to Make a Living

The first topic John and I talked about in our interview was how he had been received by others. He remarked:

> ...you certainly get that polite amusement feeling from a lot of farmers... "I suppose you grow three or four potato plants and you've got half a dozen chickens"...you'll get some others that are quite interested...you're getting both sides, but mainly, over half the people just go "well, you're just another farmer basically" but there's probably 20% on either end that think it's different and another 20% that think it's just OK for the hippies, sort of thing. But not really suitable for, to sustain a family...

He shared that he had been treated better by nonfarmers, as they think "oh wow, no chemicals." However farmers, he said, have a better understanding of the reality of farming and the extra work that organic production entails.

John's Approach to Agriculture

Farmers have different reasons for farming organically. John told me that he does not have the risk of handling chemicals. In addition to the expense of chemicals, John's fear of them is a major reason he farms organically. He talked about an experience he had many years ago:

> One day when I was about seventeen I took a Styrofoam cup, of course this wasn't a real smart thing to do, poured the insecticide...for the sheep ticks in the Styrofoam cup, of course then went back in to get the sprayer and the water and came back out, and it had just eaten, the Styrofoam cup was gone...all the bottom, except the rim was sitting on the pavement...

John further added that he was told this chemical would kill sheep ticks, and not to worry about the danger. His experiment gave him cause for concern.

John gradually made the transition from conventional to organic production. When he initially began, his farm was about 20 to 30 percent organic. The first year John's farm was completely organic was in 1998, and the year prior to this, he sprayed one field. He currently has about 90 clear acres. In the area he had previously farmed he had 250 acres, and thought he could access land more easily when he moved. But obtaining land is difficult, as John attested to: "...if you're not growing potatoes, you just can't pay the big rent money, so it's limited our acres."

John told me that an organic farmer needs to get double for a product to justify the work. He noted that what he received for his wheat crop barely covered his

efforts. However, he has had success with his soybean crop that compensated for losses in his wheat crop. Some of his experiences have indeed been disheartening, particularly with the financial losses he incurred with his potato crops. Once again, his soybean crop paid the debt on his potatoes. He told me he would not be able to farm organically, if it was not for the "income generating capacity" of his soybeans. John's shared his feelings about these experiences: "... it's quite easy to get discouraged and get down."

Though some of John's experiences have been challenging, I felt he presented a realistic view of the demands involved in organic farming. He spoke honestly when he said:

> ... it's a decision we've made to go organic and taking the good with the bads, we're gonna stay with it but you can certainly appreciate where a conventional farmer is looking at ya and questioning whether you're wise or otherwise to be organic farming...because really when you're out there pulling these weeds, you know you're kinda questioning it a little bit yourself.

I had heard someone once say that there were not many "success" stories of organic farming on PEI. John agreed. I also questioned about what, in his experience, contributes to a success story. He suggested I ask someone successful! He did, however, offer some insights on the topic of success: "... just because you're farming organically doesn't mean you can just sort of sit back and "oh well, we'll just see what happens here" you know. Any successful farm requires a lot of good management and it's so easy conventionally."

Conventional farmers, he added, when faced with a problem go to the fertilizer plant where they are supplied with a dangerous chemical that is supposed to

meet their needs. The organic farmer, on the other hand, does not have the same option. He explained:

> ...the system to help ya for the conventional farmer is far better established and that knowledge is far better established, whereas the organic farmer, in a lot of cases, you're pretty much on your own wondering what to do, and it seems if you want local advice, you've gotta get a farmer that's over 80 years old...

As we have seen in other stories, organic farmers often play multiple roles and do not have much support in their endeavors. John alluded to a system that was not firmly established for the organic farmer. In the next section, John talks more about the challenges involved in organic production and marketing, in particular, his experiences in the co-op.

Challenges with Producing and Marketing

Part of John's story centers on the time he spent as a member of the co-op. Like other members of the co-op, he shared similar stories of challenging experiences in processing and marketing, and his comments echoed their frustration. For instance, he spoke about an upsetting experience in which he negotiated a deal, but the other party did not fulfill its part of the agreement. John commented that legal support and advice would be helpful, to know how to deal with such problems.

He told me that his decision to leave the co-op was a difficult one. He felt that he could sell his product more easily on his own. He also felt the co-op was in financial crisis. He shared that there were advantages and disadvantages to being part of a co-op, and spoke honestly about the effort that goes into making a group effective and meeting everyone's needs. However, John spoke highly of the people, his friends,

with whom he worked. He enjoyed learning from them and enjoyed the sharing that took place.

What is significant about John's experiences as an organic farmer, and as a former member of the co-op, is that they confirm what we have already heard across stories--that farmers face obstacles in marketing. Accessing markets, with little or no support, is incredibly difficult. When John spoke of the challenges he and the co-op encountered with certain business deals, I was reminded of how difficult it must be for organic farmers -- especially those trying to survive within a co-operative value system-- to do everything on their own. A lack of external support and funding contribute to a challenging reality.

In light of the struggles John and the co-op faced, I asked how his experience as an organic grower might compare to the experience of a conventional grower. John explained that the experiences of the conventional grower would be different, as there would be lots of places for conventional growers to grade their produce, they could sell them to a "good guy" and there would be certain standards and rules in place. He noted: "The whole structure would be in place to handle them. They [produce] could be graded quite cheap in a conventional system because it would be in place to handle the volume and everything. The trucks would be going, the freight would be a lot cheaper on a small load."

John explained that farmers need to get a good price for organic food. For example, to survive, an organic farmer needs to receive double for potatoes. And, in reference to the experiences they faced in the co-op, when farmers "get a burn" [have a bad experience selling] they need to make that much more to sustain their work. As

well, when we hear John's story, it is apparent that farmers also need an outlet to sell their food on a consistent basis.

Theme 2: The Role of the Consumer

According to John, communities and local citizens can help sustain organic farming by purchasing organic products. The role of consumers and the need for consumer support are evident within and across stories. However, John recognized that the price of organic products can sometimes be a hindrance. He was honest in saying that he and his family eat as much as they can organically,

> But I ashamed to say...although I sit here and I tell you that an organic farmer has to get at least double for their product to survive, as a consumer, you know when it reaches the store shelf it's three or four times as much...I'm just not ready to pay that. I probably would for potatoes, because I know they're saturated with chemicals, and I would for turnips, because I know they get even worse than potatoes.

John argued that paying extra money for organic potatoes is worth it, "...because the organic farmer had to put a lot of effort into producing them, and you as a consumer are avoiding a lot of food chain build up there with chemicals in the plants."

Consistent with comments made by other farmers, I argue that there is a need for consumer education. John mentioned that even as a farmer he does not always know what he is buying. And consumers, he explained, see a worm track on a turnip and will not purchase it. Yet, if they were aware of what was used on conventional products to avoid worm tracks, they would choose the organic product.

When I asked John if he thought the organic movement will survive on PEI, once again, he mentioned the role of consumers. The farmer will produce, he said, "...but it comes down to the consumer, if the consumer's not willing to pay 2-3 times

as much for it when it hits the shelf and not ask for it, I think it'll survive, just what the growth rate will be is very debatable."

Organic farmers simply cannot afford the extra expense of producing food organically that they will sell on the conventional market. John further explained:

> Certainly the public opinion is coming on side of the organic farmer in that respect, but yet the amount of people that are willing to go down to the supermarket and pay twice as much for their produce, they're not there to support the organic farmer so, so it's pretty tough to expect the chemical guy to, like I mean there's an awful lot of people out there who would love to be organic farming, if they could get twice as much for the product, ...we'll change our tune...

Theme 3: The Survival, Success, and Future of Organic Farming

Organic Farmers' Relationship with Conventional Farmers

Effecting change and promoting organic farming are complicated tasks. Although John has adopted an organic approach to agriculture, he was not critical of conventional farmers. After our interview, I wrote in my notes: *The other part* [of the interview] *that stood out for me was his appreciation for the conventional farmer's perspective and a need to go easy on them. He seemed to appreciate where they were coming from. Some were his neighbours. He seemed to want to continue on as a silent example in a way. Spoke of the pressure they* [conventional farmers] *must get and it wouldn't help for organic farmers to apply pressure.*

He talked about the controversial issue of chemical spraying on PEI and the increased opposition to it. He remarked:

> Certainly some of the protest over the chemicals were the cheapest advertisement a person could a got...the public is getting so upset with chemicals...it must be awful hard on a conventional farmer trying to operate...with the public attitude towards sprays handy their yards and

> stuff. If I was still a conventional farmer I would kinda want to have the right to farm too...

John said that he has great neighbours who are conventional farmers and he is not interested in starting a feud. He empathized with their situation when he said: "...I certainly see where they're at, and heck if I was producing what they're producing, you'd be crazy to be trying to do it organically..."

He was not sure of the most effective way to promote organic farming stories,

> ...without upsetting the conventional farming community, like, like we as organic farmers upset the conventional and they get all upset then they're gonna dig their heels in worse than ever. I think the best way is just to keep trying to, you know, work with it slow... like I don't like to see two groups going at things head on to solve their differences. I don't think that's gonna work at all.

John's comments spoke to the importance of stakeholders working together and the obstacles involved. Clearly, John is hesitant about an active, vocalized approach to change and his approach is to serve as a successful example. He noted: "...just carry on here and try to be successful and let them see that hey, you don't have to be using poisons to survive...try to be someone they can look at that's being a success maybe, rather than go over and start preaching to them when your own house isn't in that good of order perhaps." Referring again to the experience of the conventional grower, he added:

> ...people phone them up complaining, "what are you spraying here?" It's hard on them, and then you get some simple little organic farmer with two acres of potatoes saying you don't have to spray. Well, that's just, icing on the cake, you know, it's like, how you know, how I am supposed to operate this place without these chemicals. And it's true, they can't, but maybe... if they were a little smaller, they could control it.

If farms were smaller, farmers might have more control. John's last comment is critical in framing the current research, because he referred to a "smaller is better" idea, which perhaps is the most realistic hope for the survival of organic farming. Clearly, he does not consider angering conventional farmers to be effective social action, and in the following section, makes reference for the need for new government policy.

The Current Farming System

On becoming an organic farmer, John commented: "...we got into it [organic farming] at a good time when you could just gradually work your way in but now, they're pretty strict on parallel farming with your two farms side by side...it's a lot harder to start organic farming now than it was." He suggested that conventional farmers look at organic management practices, but also recognized the difficulty in doing this on big farms. Compared to where he had lived previously, John likes where he farms now because he has smaller farm neighbours. He talked about how it is beneficial to be able to share equipment with farm neighbours, which is not possible with bigger potato growers.

Like others, John was concerned about the direction of farming on PEI. He argued:

> ...the farms have just gotten so big now and so totally out of control, like people growing a 1000 acres of potatoes on one farm. Like once, once one generation goes off the farm, it's almost impossible for the second person to come back cause they don't have the resources to buy the land back, they don't have the knowledge of how to run the farm.

He called the current farming situation a "vicious circle" and "a monster out of control."

The smaller farmer is indeed threatened. John remarked that: "...every farmer that drops off makes it that much harder for the other little guy beside him to, to hang in there because you can't work backward..." He continued: "...these farms get so big, they just can't think of organic farming...it's impossible, or almost impossible for these big guys to go organic....It's too bad that the government politics...could've been set to try and keep more people on their little farms."

John shared many important insights and experiences in our interview. His last comment regarding the importance of keeping small farms alive is central to this discussion, and is a major lesson for government and citizens to seriously ponder. I suggest, in support of John's contention, that as long as government promotes large scale farming, organic farming will exist on the margins and organic farmers will struggle to survive.

The Community Narrative

Each individual story is unique and each farmer had unique experiences. But each farmer is also part of a collective story; their common membership in the group is the thread that ties their experiences together. Their stories contained some similarities. To construct a community narrative, I reviewed each individual story and recorded the major points contained in each. Then, I compared these points across interviews to present the ideas that they hold in common. Several major themes constitute the community or group narrative. Each section is somewhat of a summary of points made by participants in relation to the relevant theme.

Theme 1: Corporate and Monoculture Farming and Its Effects on Island People, Communities, and the Land

All participants in their individual stories talked at length and/or alluded to such factors as the presence of corporate power on PEI, the monoculture direction of farming, the hardship farmers face, and a system of dependence many farmers experience. Some participants suggested that farmers make little money from their produce; those who make money are people who live off the farms and corporations. People and land are "owned" and controlled by corporations. Some participants talked about the fact that farmers must compete for a land base and are struggling to survive and make a living.

Essentially, farms on PEI are too big. Several participants noted that smaller farmers' existence is threatened by a monocultural farming model, and some are just "hanging on," as one participant put it. There is no support to make the transition

from chemical use, and government supports corporate operations, noted a couple of participants. One participant, in particular, seemed to have a different vision of how farming should operate, emphasizing the importance of not being dependent, keeping resources within communities, working locally, and building community. Another participant talked about how the current farming system that promotes farming as a business has altered relationships amongst farmers, affected families and communities, and has broken old traditions.

Theme 2: The Need for Support

All participants talked about a lack of support for organic initiatives. They needed support because of their negative and challenging experiences in marketing, selling, and processing, but did not receive it during times of crisis. For example, in general, all have experienced a lack of government support for organic endeavors, and overall, their stories suggested that government does not seem to be keen on supporting organic farming or smaller farmers. Support is also needed for farmers who would like to make the transition from conventional to organic production. Organic farmers want more funds to promote and prolong their work. They are on their own for everything, including accessing information for organic farming and in marketing. Marketing successfully without support is difficult, as there is no structure in place to help them. Some participants mentioned that there was an unfair support system in place. Two participants also mentioned a lack of support from other farmers and the fact they are often targets of criticism from others, such as farmers.

Organic farmers need promotion through government and consumer support. There is also a need for consumer education. They need support from consumers and environmentalists through the purchase of products. One participant talked about the need for a more a localized economy and the need to support each other within their own group. Another participant advocated for support for an alternative marketing system. And another participant spoke of the critical need for both a market and a steady supply of produce to survive, though there are challenges securing markets and producing sufficient volume. A participant noted that if conventional farmers could obtain their money's worth for organic food, they would make the transition from conventional agriculture.

Theme 3: Smaller is Better

Four participants spoke about the idea that smaller is better and emphasized the importance of staying small. One farmer talked about how his farm had not fallen into the monoculture trend and that he and his family farm had stayed small and self-sufficient. Another participant supported "smaller" ideas so farmers can have more control over their farms. There are small farmers, suggested one participant, who would like to switch to organic agriculture if they had the means. He spoke of the need for a political force and how organic farming can survive on the will of people, that small initiatives could happen on PEI.

The future for organic farming, asserted one farmer, is with the small farmer; whose land has not been intensively farmed with chemicals. One participant did not specifically mention that smaller was better, but he believed in building and

maintaining community and keeping resources within communities. He alluded to the benefits of a smaller approach, linking survival with such things as direct marketing and supporting the local economy. Though they did not talk at length about small approaches, two participants noted the importance of making the transition to organic production on a small scale.

Theme 4: The Struggle to Survive

All participants talked about the struggle to make a living as organic farmers, and as farmers in general. If they are to sustain themselves, they need monetary success. One participant talked about having to survive on the benefits of one crop to cover the losses of another. Some have not made much money farming organically and have sold their produce on the conventional market. One farmer talked about his struggle to survive with so many other demands that do not allow him to move forward. Further, there is little economic security in farming, shared one participant.

Two participants worked regular jobs off the farm, and another participant accessed contract work to supplement his income. Organic farmers, however, would like to make a sole living from farming, and other employment takes them away from the farm. For other participants, farming was their primary source of income (other than if they had a partner working off the farm or another source of income). Only one participant did not talk about his struggle to survive at length, but he alluded to the fact that making a living has not always been easy and there was a lack of government help, for example. Two participants shared the challenges involved in

farming organically and how they built their farming operation from nothing, which was not an easy task.

Theme 5: Group as Support System

Three participants mentioned the co-operative group as being a support system for them. The group also offers information. One participant, in particular, noted how the group serves as a source of inspiration as well. Another participant talked about success as a group of people working together, and how they have survived on the will and commitment of people involved in organic farming.

Theme 6: Being an Example

Three participants did not identify with an environmental activist approach. Two participants in particular felt that their agenda differed from an environmentalist agenda and wished to be consulted on matters pertaining to organic farming. As there is a lack of education about organic farming, they emphasized a willingness to teach and share their knowledge. Another participant felt ostracized and isolated within his community at times and did not want not to alienate or criticize conventional farmers, but to promote organic farming by a positive example. These three participants wanted to serve as successful examples of organic farming. One participant spoke about the importance of not criticizing the conventional farmer and he appreciated their reality. Rather than criticize other farmers, he supported previous assertions and suggested that organic farmers be an example and demonstrate that organic farming is possible. The words of one farmer, who said to show that organic farming can be done, encapsulates their message.

Theme 7: A Future for Organics

While many have struggled farming, several participants made reference to the possibilities for organic farming and the market opportunities that exist. Some participants seemed hopeful about opportunities while at the same time some of them were anxious about making it to the next year. With support (e.g. monetary, legal), as discussed earlier, they might be able to explore opportunities.

Theme 8: The Time is Now

Two participants mentioned that organic farming is in a critical period or at a pivotal point. I sensed urgency within their stories for validation and recognition of their work as well as financial, legal, technical, and marketing support, as these will determine whether they have a future in organic farming. Change must occur before it is too late.

Lessons From the Stories

The farmers you have met have undoubtedly faced challenges. As evident from their stories, they have not had significant monetary success. Some of the lessons I discuss below can account for their challenging experiences. Regrettably, however, because my thesis mainly documented and explored their general stories and experiences, and because I have only known them for a short period of time, there is much about their approach and strategies that I do not know that would serve as the basis for an excellent follow-up study. In so far as the data permit, I humbly offer my interpretations of their experiences and the lessons, across the farm families, that we might glean from these experiences in ensuring their survival.

Tangible Monetary and Legal Support

For struggling organic farmers, tangible monetary support is their best chance for survival. A prominent theme across the farm families was the need for monetary and legal support, in part due to the challenges in marketing and shipping. As evident from the community narrative, support, particularly from government, was also noted regarding organic farming research and in making the transition from chemical to organic farming. Island farmers need a bridge in making this transition. While doing my research, I met a conventional farmer who was attempting to make the switch on his own and shared that some farmers cannot do so because they will lose the farm, which speaks to the critical need for assistance and transitional support (Davies, 1992). Pretty (1995), in suggesting policy changes, noted that farmers need direct transitional support, there need to be subsidies and grants for sustainable agriculture and more information for consumers and the public about food choices. Access to credit for local groups was also cited. The Seaspray co-op could potentially benefit through access to credit in their endeavors, as it is difficult for both individual organic farmers and a group to establish an economic foundation. Provincial government assistance would be beneficial, though how much government involvement is desired or necessary is undetermined.

The organic farmers profiled here demonstrate that by farming organically, farmers can save money and not be dependent on chemical inputs. But because organic farming, as Allister and Margaret Veinot shared, is risky, experimental, and not based on a recipe, support is even more critical.

Most of the farmers here endeavor to make a living solely from farming. To survive, farm families also need consumer support and the purchase of their food,[27] which is a way for citizens to tangibly support organic farmers. While consumer support is needed, the reality as John MacLauchlan shared, is that consumers might not pay extra money for organic produce. Best (1992), in writing about his organic farm, noted that the main factor in his farm's survival has been the premium prices he receives. Some farmers in my study have not received a premium price for their products and have sold them on the conventional market. But as John MacLauchlan further argued, organic farmers cannot afford to sell on the conventional market.

Technical Support, Advice, and Information

John Hardy made reference to the fact that organic farmers are "on their own." He referred to the need for support to prolong their work and an information database for dealing with problems farmers encounter on a yearly basis. Some authors (e.g. McDermott, 1990; Reganold et al., 1990) have also noted the lack of information for farmers regarding alternative agriculture. Reganold et al. (1990), for example, wrote that government sponsored research in the United States has focussed on chemically based agriculture. Similarly, Baltaz (1991) found that Canadian ecological farmers were critical of a system in which there was a lack of funding for research on alternative farming.

Klinkenborg (1995) wrote about an individual who travels as an organic farmer and agricultural consultant to help farmers make the transition. Resource staff to perform similar tasks would be useful to PEI organic farmers, not only in making

the transition, but in providing ongoing assistance and technical support for those who already farm organically. Gagnon (1999), in her research with Nova Scotia organic farmers, found that an "organic specialist" within government was received with criticism as he lacked knowledge and did not work on the farms; his presence was seen as an initial step in addressing the need for "comprehensive support." A barrier for organic farmers, Gagnon wrote, is a lack of information. As a result, farmers lack knowledge and skills to operate their farms.

Groh and McFadden (1990) argued: "We have to establish and support training programs closely connected to farms that are under ecologically sound management, to train and educate the future farmers. And in connection with such farms, we have to establish research programs that support all of these aims" (p. 41). Further, as will be discussed in a later section, organic farmers themselves could serve as teachers for other interested farmers.

Marketing Advice and Assistance

The stories in my thesis suggest that organic farmers face challenges in the marketplace. The success of farmers Curtis (1998) profiled was based on several factors such as obtaining information and assistance from alternative sources and developing new skills in areas like marketing. For Canadian organic farmers, there is no definitive marketing system and farmers use a variety of marketing systems and strategies (Baltaz, 1998).

Gagnon (1999) noted the growing demand for organic food and the market this provides for organic farmers. But participants in her study also noted a limited

market as one disadvantage to organic farming, particularly in rural areas. The participants in my thesis also face a limited market within a rural area and province.

Reg Phelan, in his story, talked about the need for support with an alternative marketing system. The farmers I profiled also need technical advice and information from a business perspective to deal with the marketplace, as noted by Alfred Fyfe. The need for marketing advice, which they have sought in the past, and ongoing examination of marketing strategies and goals are critical. Allaby and Allen (1974) noted the importance of identifying and studying the market, getting to know customers and retailers, and discovering what they will buy. A market study of Seaspray Farms Co-op, undertaken by a group of UPEI business students in 1998, was informative but the group needs direct assistance in building on the suggestions put forth.

The Need for Infrastructure

Conventional farmers, as one participant shared, have a structure in place. Organic farmers, on the other hand, play multiple roles as producer, processor, and marketer with no established support structure. Members of the co-op are trying to make a name for themselves and promote their work. We have seen, across stories, the challenges involved for this group in trying to play all of these roles. Farmers would like to focus on what they do best: growing food. Other systems need to be in place to line up markets and assist farmers with aspects of the farm operation.

The farm families in my thesis, according to one participant, meet challenges in trying to supply volume of product, which requires much coordination when

working together. Volume of product and an existing market are key to success. Farmer Gerrit Loo noted how the distance between farmers, who do not have a central location, nor the resources to justify a central location, hinder their efforts. Indeed, one farmer told me that it is difficult to justify the costs of driving many miles to Charlottetown only to deliver a few bags of produce.

Because farmers in Nova Scotia, like the farmers profiled here, produce small amounts of food and have an uncertain supply of product, distribution can be difficult and alternative distribution routes should be explored (Gagnon, 1999). Most farmers in Gagnon's study sold some of their product at the farmer's market, at the farm gate, or combined methods of selling. Gagnon (1999) further wrote that organic farmers in Nova Scotia, and I would add PEI, need an infrastructure that will allow them to produce and distribute more food as well as support other growers who might wish to adopt organic farming.

Supporting the Local Economy

Alfred Fyfe talked about the importance of supporting the local economy. One of the characteristics of organic farming, as outlined previously, is its emphasis on a localized economy. Organic farmers in Gagnon's (1999) study mentioned that they endeavor to be connected to their local community and central to organic farming was to grow, distribute, and buy on a local basis.

It is challenging for some of the participants in my study to work within the local PEI economy. To my knowledge, one of the reasons for this is the small size of the PEI population, which may not provide an adequate clientele for many farm

families. Baltaz (1998) referred to the fact that some organic farmers are "trapped by marketing realities" (p.106) in which they must ship crops to distant markets as opposed to smaller localized ones. Participants alluded to the challenges they faced in shipping and processing for other markets, and problems with "distancing" (Kneen, 1993).

Most members of the co-op wish to make a sole living from farming, therefore as a collective, they seek bigger contracts and target markets across Canada, the United States and Europe. Ideally, I suspect the group would likely want to sell their produce on PEI and within Atlantic Canada, if they could find adequate support and sufficient contracts to make a living. Based on my research, it is uncertain, however, whether there are sufficient market opportunities to sustain organic farmers who do not have off farm income. The demand for organic food is mainly in urban areas or centres. Nova Scotia farmers can operate in areas like Halifax, but as previously noted, there are challenges for farmers who want local markets in rural areas (Gagnon, 1999).

Organic farmers, like Reg Phelan or the Loo family, sell some of their food locally. And there are Island organic farmers, such as the Veinot family, who have off farm income but who service local markets on PEI. I have met other organic farmers whose primary income is generated off the farm, but continue to sell produce at farmer's markets and to local restaurants. Building on the strategies and resources of these farmers would be an important step in developing a local economy.

Group Support, Capacity Building, and Networking

Some farmers alluded to the fact that the group offers forms of support. Many members of the group have known each other for years, and as Alfred Fyfe said, offer inspiration to go on when faced with challenges. John Hardy talked about how farmers rely on each for information regarding problems they encounter. Efforts to work collectively as a cooperative likely differ from efforts by farmers who work individually. Indeed, the farmers in my thesis not only strive to make a living on their own farms but they expend time and energy maintaining their group. While my thesis is not specifically about the sustainability of co-operatives, working together effectively and successfully is important for the survival of Seaspray Farms. One participant in my study made reference to the challenges he experienced in working together. Yet, being able to work together is important for the development of organic farming (Gagnon, 1999).

Ed Bennett (p.c., 1999) shared that within his Ontario community and the organic farm families with whom he works, support, networking, and capacity building are strongly present. Farm families regularly engage in workshops and evaluation processes of their work. In the past, to my knowledge, the co-op profiled here has been involved in organizational and marketing work, though I do not have a thorough knowledge of their history and actions in this regard. Perhaps the co-op could continue to benefit from similar activities to those mentioned, in which the group would more formally serve as an information resource for technical knowledge. Further, additional capacity building and the development of a strong and cohesive

internal support system could help sustain their efforts. And like Bennett, an evaluation of their group and individual strategies would also serve as an excellent feedback exercise. In addition, assistance to carry out strategies is critical.

Margaret and Allister Veinot, as well as Reg Phelan, made reference to sharing information with other farmers. Farmer exchanges, especially since my participants possess much knowledge and expertise, would be beneficial in the promotion of organic farming on PEI. According to Pretty (1995), farmers are the best educators for other farmers (e.g. peer training, information exchange, farmer visitations). An effective way to communicate information about sustainable agriculture is through farmer networks (Reganold et al., 1990).

Forty-one percent of organic farmers in Gagnon's (1999) study were involved in some form of education and information sharing, such as farm tours and workshops. There were also activities through organic organizations that offered education, information exchange, as well as research and technical activities organized by organic farmers.[28] Farmers in Curtis' (1998) research were also involved in networking and teaching. One couple, for example, helps other farmers learn how to farm organically. They hold farmer meetings to talk about production and marketing, have on farm visits, and a monthly newsletter. And, as Curtis wrote, farmer driven education and technical assistance programs now exist. An effective way for farmers to learn from each other and make the transition to alternative agriculture is through informal networking. In fact, all of the farmers in her research had help in some form through a person, program or publication for technical support and information. Some farmers relied on each other for information or utilized

government programs. Similarly, information sharing was a common activity among farmers in Wiebe's (1993) research and having access to information from other organic farmers was the most important part of their membership in OCIA.

Increased networking and the sharing of resources and information are necessary amongst Island organic farmers, and amongst groups, a topic I shall now briefly discuss.

Lack of Dialogue Amongst Groups

Allister and Margaret Veinot specifically referred to a lack of communication and alliance between environmentalists and organic farmers. Their comments suggest that they wish to be consulted about organic farming matters and that farmers want a meaningful and inclusive role in organic farming matters. Their comments also point to the practical need for change efforts that incorporate an inclusive process and bring many stakeholders together in a collaborative manner. To my knowledge and as suggested in the Land Use Report (see endnote 16), a framework for discussion is needed on PEI and not much dialogue has taken place amongst groups.

One of PEI's biggest challenges is to find a way to bring diverse perspectives together in an effort to create change within the farming community. There are many ways to offer support, raise awareness, and promote education about farming alternatives. Whether we agree or disagree with their methods, many Island citizens have educated people and engaged in valuable forms of protest. However, various groups, committed to similar visions, could be pooling their resources and working towards a common goal. According to Gagnon (1999), there is a diversity of opinions

within the organic farming movement, which makes it challenging to work together. But organic farmers need to build alliances with other farmers and areas to promote organic farming. There is "...a necessity of working together as a movement, or as group of people committed to the same ideals, towards increasing the visibility and recognition of organic farming" (p. 176).

Recently, on PEI, conservation and farm groups came together to call on government for changes in farm legislation, to address industrial potato production, and to support sustainable farming. Efforts, like this one, that bring together diverse groups, are critical.[29]

Studying Successful Examples

Barry Wookey (1987), one of Britain's well-known farmers, is an example of a successful organic farmer. His book shares the story of his large mixed farm, which was gradually converted from conventional to organic. Part of his success stems from careful planning, and as he suggested, one must know what foods the market wants and one must produce for those markets. They receive a premium price for their food because they produce what is wanted on the market, which speaks to the need for marketing knowledge.

The group of farmers with whom I worked could benefit from studying and working with "successful examples," specifically by building upon successes within their own group. For instance, I was struck by the business approach and advice offered by Allister and Margaret Veinot. Although they both earn off-farm income and this differentiates them from other farmers, they have generated sales, built a

clientele, and their story suggested that they have been successful in their endeavors. They shared that they could not produce enough food to fill their orders, suggesting that their produce is in demand and they have accessed a local market.

I close this section with a table that offers a list of strengths and vulnerabilities of the organic farmers whom I interviewed, which is based on the lessons reviewed above as well as from the stories and my time spent with the farmers. The following table presents important considerations for the survival of this group, as well as areas to build on and work with in a social and environmental change process.

Major Strengths	Major Areas of Vulnerability
- Established small and close knit group - History of working together from a co-operative value-base - Knowledge of and experience with various markets and farm contacts - Willingness, perseverance, commitment and belief in the benefits of organic farming - Knowledge and expertise of organic farming techniques - Members of small Island communities and connections within communities	- Lack of local markets; small population base - Lack of financial, legal, marketing, and technical support and information; lack of infrastructure - Difficulties playing multiple roles - Lack of relationship between farmers, government, and groups who share similar vision - Need for ongoing evaluation of approaches and strategies, group capacity building, support and networking

I now turn to a discussion and interpretation of my findings.

V. Interpretation of Findings and Discussion

In this section, tied to the lessons section, I discuss previous literature in relation to my findings and comment on the viability of the organic farmers profiled here and their possibilities for survival. Then, I present theoretical frameworks that relate to their experiences of marginality, the importance of small initiatives, and organic farmers' potential role in social and environmental change. Next I discuss my role and responsibilities, limitations and future directions for my research, as well as my personal reflections. I conclude with a statement to Islanders about the critical importance of adopting and supporting organic farming.

My Contribution

I believe that the most important contribution of my research is in documenting the stories of a group of PEI organic farmers -- who have been historically marginalized -- and validating and honoring their work. I contribute to the literature on organic farming through an empirical exploration of their farming stories; farmers who are situated within one of the most corporate-driven and monoculture farming provinces in the country. Further, I have promoted the idea that organic farming plays a role in sustaining the natural and social ecology, which supports previous literature. And through an exploration of experiences and lessons, I have presented information that might be useful to other farmers who wish to start organic farming and for those who endeavor to sustain their present work. In the next section, I highlight findings from a few previous studies that relate to some of my

major findings. I also comment on the viability of the organic farmers profiled and assess their possibilities for survival, which I feel is a unique contribution.

Previous Literature

One of my major findings centered on the lack of various forms of institutional, government, and consumer support for organic farming, as well as a lack of information about organic farming. My findings support previous literature. For example, Curtis (1998) profiled stories of 22 farmers in the United States who successfully made the transition from conventional to alternative agriculture through pesticide reduction. Most farmers made the transition on a small scale and did so while maintaining or improving their profit. But like the farmers in my study, Curtis contended that farmers face barriers in terms of government policies and programs that hinder the adoption of alternative agriculture, which suggest the need for new public policy that allows farmers to adopt alternative methods of farming. There was also a lack of research on farms, education programs, and markets for foods grown with alternative agriculture. Based on the farmers' experiences, she suggested several recommendations such as an educational and technical assistance program, education for farmers about existing alternatives, more research focused on development of alternative agricultural systems, research conducted on farms in coordination with farmers, increased government funding for sustainable agriculture, technical and financial assistance during transition periods, and increased consumer access to foods grown without pesticides; familiar ideas that I explored in the previous lessons section.

Kramer (1984) surveyed 80 organic farmers across Canada and some of the findings were also consistent with those of the participants in my research. For instance, farmers felt isolated, lacked institutional support, lacked access and information about organic methods as well as assistance from agricultural channels. Farmers wanted further government research on organic farming problems and educational information. Many conventional farmers who switched to alternative agriculture had difficulty receiving information. Organic farmers received information from written organic farming sources, organic associations and conferences, and through contact with friends, other farmers, and relatives.

And Wiebe (1993) profiled three Maritime organic farms, one of which was that of a participant interviewed for my study (Alfred Fyfe's farm). All three farmers noted that provincial governments do not support organic farming. In his discussion, Wiebe summarized several obstacles to farming organically such as low prices for products, high production and processing costs, limited public understanding of organic agriculture, limited number of organic farmers, geographic distance in remote areas, a poor relationship between farmers and government, and lack of coordination for organic research between farmers and institutions, which is not used by farmers.

Moreover, Gagnon (1999), in her Masters thesis, surveyed and interviewed organic farmers in Nova Scotia in an effort to understand the social, economic, and institutional aspects of organic farming. Limited government support, consumer indifference, and limited markets were just three of the main disadvantages of organic farming, cited by participants. The participants in her study noted the lack of research and support from government (i.e. department of agriculture) who favors large-scale

farming and exporting. While some farmers in her study did not feel government could offer appropriate support to organic farmers that is consistent with its goals and values, others felt government intervention could play a role if it honored organic farming principles and practices, encouraging small farming, providing information, research, programs, organic farming agents, an infrastructure, and validation of their work. These findings also resonate with the findings of my research. Gagnon further noted the need for support for organic farming and allies in many areas of society (a lesson noted in my previous section) and the need for farmer-based studies. Farmers can serve as "educational tools," Gagnon argued, as they possess much information that cannot be obtained from other sources; an idea I explore in an upcoming section regarding their potential role in social and environmental change.

Marketing struggles was another significant finding in my research. Kramer (1984) found that marketing was a serious obstacle to financial success. Many farmers marketed products through conventional channels and did not receive premium prices, which echoed some of the problems faced by the Seaspray Co-op. Some marketed through specialized channels but faced challenges such as distance, small orders, and storage problems. Most farmers did not spend much time on marketing. For those who did, they had to spend significant time sourcing markets, delivering to these markets (in the city) and maintaining individual customers. Farmers, like on PEI, did not receive agricultural marketing information.

Finally, the stories in my thesis illustrated that most participants struggle to make a living on the farm, which is true of other organic farmers. Gagnon found that on 75% of the Nova Scotia organic farms she surveyed, at least one individual

worked off the farm, and about the same percentage of respondents felt that their economic situation was the same or better than conventional growers. Many farmers' gross farm sales were low. Financial difficulties were mentioned as a drawback to organic farming, although some farmers were not primarily interested in profits. In addition, some participants were critical of the way in which organic farming's principles (e.g. as part of a local community) are being abandoned as it becomes more commercialized or industrialized.

Overall, it is apparent that other organic farmers face obstacles similar to the farmers in my research. These obstacles threaten their survival. Wiebe (1993) noted that it was difficult to comment on the viability of the individual farms studied. In fact, only one of the farms he studied, the Fyfe farm, survived solely on farm income. Other farmers could not continue without off farm support. The Fyfe farm was noted as an organic farming example of success, but their earnings were very low.

However, examples of possible opportunities for organic farmers, according to Wiebe, include personal contact with consumers through direct marketing, a loyal clientele, reduction of costs, financial stability through crop and animal diversification, access to information through OCIA (The Organic Crop Improvement Association), and the assistance of established organic farmers in helping new farmers. Wiebe further argued:

> The case study farmers offer three examples of Maritime farmers for whom the opportunities associated with organic farming have thus far outweighed the obstacles they have encountered, and they intend to farm organically into the future, optimistic that they will find continued success with their chosen method (p. 110).

Similarly, Gagnon (1999) concluded that Nova Scotia could sustain and nurture organic farming due to the existence of such factors as institutional support, growing demand for organic food, alternative distribution systems, and committed farmers.

Assessing Possibilities for Survival

Some of the findings presented in my thesis speak to the challenges of organic farmers on a micro, individual and group level, while other findings point to the presence of larger environmental factors that threaten survival. It would be beneficial to empirically examine both environmental and institutional obstacles, as well individual organic farms and their strategies. Currently, a three year longitudinal study at the University of Windsor involves a survey of organic farmers in Ontario as well as case studies of individual farmers. The study is "aimed at understanding the economic, cultural and social factors which influence the survival and relative success of organic farm operations."[30]

Individual Farmers and the Co-op

How have the organic farmers profiled here survived to date? As suggested by Reg Phelan, they have survived (like many other farmers) on their will, efforts, and commitment to farming. Even with limited support, they have persevered and have adopted organic farming as more than just a way to farm; it represents a way of life (Baltaz, 1991, 1998).

Their reality, as we seen across stories, is that making a living has sometimes been a struggle. As a result of these struggles, one might not regard them as the perfect business model. Whether they have been "successful" depends on how one

defines it. But they have survived and have gained knowledge and experience; strengths to be built upon as they embark on the rest of their journey. The organic farmers in my thesis constitute a small group and their energies are taxed. But the group -- whether or not they should continue -- do continue because they believe in what they are doing and feel hopeful about a future for organic farming. They are not millionaires. They are, however, people who farm because they would like to make a living at farming. For some, as Allister Veinot put it, farming is in their blood. I am impressed by their courage and commitment. As outlined in my previous table (pg.163), some of their greatest strengths, I suggest, lie in these qualities and experiences and also in a history of working together.

While the will of farmers is present, to thrive within the current climate, it is obvious they need forms of external support. In addition to support for individual farmers, various forms of support and encouragement need to be offered for more collective and cooperative endeavors to create a non-competitive atmosphere for farmers to operate. Organic farmers need the means to further their farming initiatives and to move from the margins.

Some organic farmers are more resilient (p.c., Ed Bennett, 2000) than others and can therefore find ways to sustain their work, even in a less than favorable climate. The challenges faced by Seaspray farms seem to reflect not only environmental obstacles, but point to the need for work on an internal level, building on their group experiences and the lessons from previous negative experiences. Their challenges might also reflect the complex nature of social and environmental change within the agricultural community.

Environmental Factors and the PEI Climate

PEI has not always been the most nurturing environment for organic farmers. It is difficult to ascertain how much has changed within government and in Island communities over the past few years. The stories are not a ringing endorsement for the supportive efforts on behalf of communities and the government of PEI, and a prominent theme is the government's push for a "bigger is better" approach that threatens small farmers. With the PEI economy grounded in large scale conventional farming, there are great obstacles for organic farmers.

A strategy for change to address the systemic issues that face PEI, one that will realistically allow Island farmers people to adopt farming alternatives, is imperative. Action, such as concrete steps to adopt organic farming practices and support current organic initiatives, is necessary. Kevin Arsenault, Islander and social activist whom I met several months ago, has directly approached government to implement organic farming supports. In a presentation,[31] he critiqued use of the term "farm crisis," which suggests a turning point and new direction and suggested that, although the term has been used by government,

> ... the agenda has never been to fundamentally change either that system, or the *direction* of farm and food sector trends. There has been no focus on the need to make hearings -such as this one- serve as a catalyst for a true turning point. Unfortunately, the systemic factors, dynamics and policies fuelling farm and food-related disasters have remained in place, paving the way for regular hearings into the 'farm crisis.'

Organic agriculture, he argued, offers a turning point, a way to address the root causes of farming problems. He pointed to organic farming as a "commercially-

viable business choice," and suggests that the "time is right" for PEI to support organic initiatives.

There are also impediments to the success of organic farming that need to be addressed. There are, Arsenault contended, no supports or policies in place on PEI for organic farming[32]. He recommended the creation of a new position within government, an organic farming consultant. The goal of this position is to undertake a needs assessment to access input from PEI organic farmers regarding needs and problems and ascertain next steps to promote organic farming. He also suggested working with others, marketing experts for instance, for the purposes of policy and program development to support organic farming. The consultant would also network, consult, and distribute information to farmers and others, as well as consult with staff at the PEI Department of Agriculture, with organic farmers, and form an organic farming sub-committee. Finally, information needs to be brought together into a resource centre, along with an information database, that will address inquiries regarding organic farming.[33]

The 1999 Speech to the Throne in the PEI Legislature noted: "Specific initiatives will be undertaken to reduce pesticide usage, and an Integrated Pest Management Specialist has already been hired to develop pest control strategies. Expertise will be made available to those growing crops under organic conditions. Efforts to diversify Island agricultural production will continue." As recently as August 1999, as previously noted, government leaders expressed interest in organic farming when they visited organic farms on PEI.[34] Premier Pat Binns stated that any major changes in agriculture would take time, but recognized the importance in

reducing and eventually possibly eliminating chemicals in farming. He noted: "We have to invest some money in this area." It is uncertain at this point what form their interest will take, although Minister Hammill noted that they would not simply allow other regions to take over the growing organic market. A recent study suggested that Maritimers need to address the growing demand for organic food, and government needs to support organic development, so they can tap into market opportunities.[35] More research and promotion of organic farming would mean that it would be more credible to other farmers (Giangrande, 1985).

On the positive side, organic farming seems better known now, organic farmers seem to "crop up" in numbers, and there is hope and evidence of change, if nowhere else than in the stories of the farmers in this thesis. One of the participants in my thesis noted that in the past things were not positive in relation to organic farming, but now there are hopeful signs, like the ones I have mentioned. He also pointed to my thesis as one example of "getting the word out" about organic farming. Another participant mentioned that the climate and attitudes are changing. Organic farming, as one farmer told me, had received increased publicity by Fall, 1999. In the near future, however, organic farmers will witness how much support government and others are truly willing to offer. When substantial funds are allocated to organic farming, for example, then we might be hopeful in the truest sense of the word. It might be some time before the present interest translates into concrete action and tangible forms of support. The final chapters to this larger story are yet to be written, and therefore, critical variables in the survival of organic farming remain unexplored.

Conclusion

The stories in my thesis suggest that the survival of these seven organic farmers is, in some respects, uncertain as they have endured many struggles and received little support in their endeavors. The findings also suggest that there are currently insufficient supports in place to allow them to make a decent living on their own. Much needs to be done on PEI to provide an acceptable and just environment within which organic farmers can flourish. I am reluctant to suggest that presently PEI can adequately sustain, let alone nurture, organic farming.

I also feel it is difficult to comment on the participants' future. I recognize their major strengths as well as areas for improvement. PEI has several skilled and knowledgeable organic farmers who are deeply committed to their work. I believe the farmers in my thesis will continue to farm organically, even in the face of hardship or challenge. With various forms of support, it is reasonable to suggest that they could prevail and achieve monetary success.

And it is important to remember that they are not alone. Other Islanders are working towards change. Since I began my research, there has been increased awareness about environmental issues (particularly regarding chemical farming, lawn spraying, and waste management), which indirectly promotes organic farming in addition to other environmental issues. More people are slowly starting to recognize how many environmental issues are related, and they are beginning to acknowledge that organic farming has a place on our Island and in our world.

Theoretical Frameworks

Experiences of Marginality

Community psychology seeks to identify and eliminate oppressive and disempowering social conditions (Prilleltensky & Nelson, 1997). Previously, I provided a context for farmers' experiences and stories, which suggest that they exist within an oppressive climate, one that is characterized by a strong corporate presence. Oppression, according to Goldenberg (1978), involves the experience of marginality. It also involves such feelings as helplessness, powerlessness, and expendability. The oppressed person deals mainly with the task of survival. The experiences of the farmers in my thesis teach us that they are a group whose main focus is survival and who often lack support and validation.

In their stories, farmers also alluded to their lack of "success," particularly monetary success. Success, as Goldenberg further explained, liberates a person to deal with quality of life as opposed to survival. Organic farmers dedicate their energies to obtaining support and recognition, and on some level, I suggest that they are denied quality of life. In addition, because they are a threat to the status quo, farmers' access to goods and power has been restricted and they live within an "oppression-inspiring social fabric (p. 70)."

While I recognize the powerful forces that operate within farmers' lives, I am cautious about use of the term oppression as the participants did not specifically call themselves oppressed nor might they whole-heartedly define themselves as such. Fortunately, for the farmers I interviewed, they seem to be involved in work that they

love, despite the obstacles they face in making a living, and some of them seemed to have a sense of hope about the possibilities for the future of organic farming. However, in the short period of time getting to know the participants, I sometimes sensed that some farmers experienced frustration, fatigue, and felt disenchanted by trying experiences. Indeed, although Island organic farmers are increasingly gaining support for their work, they remain a marginalized group. Gagnon (1999) supported this assertion and noted that while organic farming has gained support, in North America, it is a "marginal agricultural activity" (p. 1). Because they are marginalized, Gagnon asserted, organic farmers find themselves "swimming upstream," as they look for recognition and support, though there is debate as to how much support is wanted and how much organic farming should "stick with its roots."

The experience of marginality is not limited to the stories here. "Farming is a hard way to make a living," I was told by a farmer I met while completing my thesis. Based on the reading I have done and the farmers with whom I have spoken, most farmers, farming methods aside, are marginalized. In writing about Saskatchewan farmers, Lind (1995) wrote about "when the system farms the farmers (p. 69)." He discovered in his research that farmers experience a sense of powerlessness, frustration, and feel like objects of agricultural production. He further noted that people involved in agriculture "experience broken relationships with their fellow citizens (p. 89)."

Celebrating "Small"

Although there is no ideal size for an organic farm and its size range varies (Wiebe, 1993), based on what I have learned, organic operations are typically small or at least smaller than conventional farms (e.g., see Gagnon, 1999, for a breakdown of farm sizes for NS organic farmers). Not surprisingly, several farmers talked about the importance of staying small. John Hardy, for example, suggested that the hope for organic farming lies with the small farmer. And for farmers interested in organic production, a piece of advice shared by a couple of the participants pointed to the importance of a gradual transition to organic farming and starting small, which is consistent with other farmers' experiences (Curtis, 1998).

In the promotion and adoption of organic farming, the stories point to important theoretical considerations that value "smallness." Small initiatives, like organic farming, are consistent with the values of community psychology as they promote the protection and preservation of the environment as well as communities, families, and democracy. While perhaps not everything in society should or can exist on a small scale, I have learned that with food production, a small approach is beneficial to our individual and community health and allows us, as some environmentalists say, to tread more lightly on the earth. Further, small initiatives can be powerful in a social and environmental change process.

Small is Beautiful

"Small-scale operations, no matter how numerous, are always less likely to be harmful to the natural environment than large-scale ones, simply because their individual force is small in relation to the recuperative forces of nature. There is wisdom in smallness if only on account of the smallness and patchiness of human knowledge, which relies on experiment far more than understanding" (Schumacher, 1973, p.31).

Of all places in the world, the people of PEI can appreciate the beauty in being small. A guiding notion for me while doing my research and in hearing the stories of a small group of organic farmers was the potential and inherent beauty in small initiatives. Schumacher's (1973) classic, Small is beautiful, promoted the value and importance of embracing smallness. He spoke to the "the idolatry of giantism" within society; an approach that PEI seems to have adopted within farming. Schumacher offered an alternative to a "bigger is better" mentality and he argued that large scale chemical farming contributes to environmental destruction and disconnection with the natural world. He contended: "... any society can afford to look after its land and keep it healthy and beautiful in perpetuity.... It is not a question of what we can afford but of what we choose to spend our money on" (p. 107). He further wrote:

> Science or technological 'solutions' which poison the environment or degrade the social structure and man [sic] himself are of no benefit, no matter how brilliantly conceived or how great their superficial attraction. Even bigger machines, entailing ever bigger concentrations of economic power and exerting ever greater violence against the environment, do not represent progress: they are a denial of wisdom. Wisdom demands a new orientation of science and technology towards the organic, the gentle, the non-violent, the elegant, and beautiful (p.29).

Korten (1996), in his book When corporations rule the world, addressed the concentration of corporate power in society and the implications of the global economy for both communities and the environment. A prominent theme across the stories in this thesis was the presence of corporate and large scale monoculture farming on PEI, which threatens organic farmers' survival and the land base. In Alfred Fyfe's story, he spoke of the depth of corporate power on PEI and within farming and feelings of ownership. Several other participants talked about how the economic situation for farmers is such that they find themselves caught in a dependent situation that will not allow them to explore alternatives. John MacLauchlan, for instance, alluded to the immense size of farms that prohibit the existence of smaller farms.

Indeed, the PEI government approach, according to Gerrit Loo, does not help the small farmer nor does it assist young farmers with families. As a case in point, Gerrit Loo's story demonstrated that small, sustainable family farms are still in existence on PEI and are viable options that promote life-sustaining values. His tale, among others, suggested that people do not have to adopt a monocultural farming approach. While his situation is unique in that he has had many years to establish his farm, his work represents a socially and ecologically just value system that promotes community psychology values such as diversity, health, and sustainability.

Suzuki (1997) wrote that diversity is the most powerful survival principle. Diversity is an important principle of organic farming (Gagnon, 1999). Organic farmers, like the Veinot family, embrace diversity to run their farm. The 1999 PEI Legislature Speech to the Throne read: "My Government believes deeply that the

future of our Island is to be found in the strength and diversity of Island communities." Islanders live in close knit, diverse, and caring communities, yet some Island agricultural practices and policies threaten both the natural and social ecology. But as Reg Phelan told us, smaller and more ecological initiatives could happen on PEI, where we have a strong community base and a history of supporting small initiatives.

Small is Bountiful

Small farming "provides a productive, efficient and ecological vision for the future (Rosset, 1999, p. 452)." Rosset (1999) argued that despite threats to small farms, they still exist around the world. There is also evidence to suggest that small farms can produce more food than large scale farming. Most importantly, for the present discussion, small farms have "multiple functions" benefiting society and the environment. Because food is a commodity, these multiple functions have been ignored. "Ignoring the multiple functions of agriculture has caused untold suffering and ecological destruction in the past (p. 455)." Rosset, like many authors in Section Two, heralded the benefits of small farming, which produces local and regional economic benefits, contributes to rural life, and protects ecosystems. Small farms promote: diversity, environmental benefits, empowerment and community responsibility, personal connection to food, and economic foundations (from the United States Department of Agriculture's report on small farms in 1998, as cited in Rosset, 1999).

Small is Possible

"Take courage, and start small"
Verena Schumacher (foreword in McRobie, 1981, p. xiii).

George McRobie (1981) discussed and built on the ideas of Schumacher in his book Small is possible. For instance, he noted the growing interest and support for alternative agriculture in Britain and wrote that biological farming is a sustainable and non-violent alternative to chemical farming. He also provided examples of other small initiatives and organizations in Canada and the United States, who support non-violent and sustainable technology as well as self-reliance. Most notable, for the current research, he cited examples of organic farming and gardening organizations that illustrate the possibility for a sustainable food system.

There is debate within organic farming communities as to the future direction of organic farming, that is, whether we will see commercial large scale organic farming or whether there will also be smaller local farming that exemplifies many of the values I have discussed. Gagnon (1999) argued that future organic farming will likely encompass pieces of both. But while large scale organic farms exist, I believe it is important to value the place in this world for both small farms and small farmers, and the values they promote.

Citizen Democracy: Small and Hopeful Examples of Change

"Projects which can inspire hope are valuable in the practice of social transformation work (Bennett & Campbell, 1996, p. 5)."

Community psychology is essentially about building a better world. One of the most important things I have learned through my academic and community

experiences is that citizens have the power to build this world. Suzuki (1997) wrote that the key to human survival is the local community. There are many hopeful stories of citizens (see Suzuki 1997, 1999) that "... show just how much power each one of us has over the Earth's future (Suzuki, 1997, p. 219)." Activist Elizabeth May said: "We can, in fact, move the whole world in a different direction (as cited in Suzuki, 1999, p. 255)." Similarly, Korten (1996) pointed to examples of people making change at local and global levels. "Ordinary people" and citizen networks represent an emergence of what he called an Ecological Revolution, which calls people to "...reclaim our political power and rediscover our spirituality... (p. 14)." Moreover, Lind (1995) wrote that ordinary people can say no to globalization, engage in the "politics of resistance," and through democratic coalitions, build both democracy and community.

Pretty (1995) wrote that the success of sustainable agriculture not only depends on the skills of farmers, but through action by local groups and communities. The notion of small groups and local communities creating and driving change resonated with me throughout my thesis experience as I had an opportunity to directly experience the potential of citizen energy and commitment, which have given me a greater appreciation of the power of small movements. My experiences also allowed me to reflect upon and appreciate the struggle for change, a struggle that organic farmers endure on a daily basis. I now see, however, that change can happen in people's own backyards. I realize that not everyone has the time, energy, or desire to change their circumstances. While it would be idealistic to suggest that change is simple, easy, and equally challenging in every community, I suggest that citizens and communities, whether it be the organic farmers with whom I worked or the residents

of Tracadie Cross, can drive social and environmental change and be a formidable force.[36]

Sim (1988) contended: "There are many ways for rural people to influence the shape and direction of their own lives by personal choice and collective action (p. 177)." Reg Phelan's story alluded to how citizens can be a political and sustaining force. For instance, the Tracadie Cross story is a hopeful example of change. For the residents of Tracadie Cross, their fight was as much about saving their homes and preserving the environment, as it was an exercise in asserting democratic rights as a community and as citizens. Similarly, organic farmers engage in the politics of resistance by the nature of their work, although they fight to preserve their livelihoods. In their quest for social and environmental change, I acknowledge that they and others face the daily reality of paying the bills. Their stories, though they tell of struggle and hardship, also teach us that small organic farmers possess perseverance and determination, which combined with government, institutional, and consumer support, make it reasonable to postulate that they hold great promise for PEI.

Small Wins

A community member recently noted the importance in celebrating small wins. In some ways, my thesis *is* about appreciating small wins and celebrating small steps towards more sustainable farming practices. Weick (1984) advocated for a "small wins strategy" in the process of social change. He argued that people define social problems in such a way that it overwhelms their abilities to conquer them. Small wins, claimed Weick, are building blocks.

In the larger scope of environmental and social problems, the TARRP win or the significance of the work of a small farming group on PEI might seem minuscule. But, like Weick, I see the value and meaning in their existence. Suzuki (1997), in talking metaphorically about the avalanche that can occur as grains of sand are added to one pile, said:

> No one can predict when that critical point will be reached when one additional grain can be the final agent that will cause an enormous shift. Each person, group or organization working towards a different world may seem powerless and insignificant, but all of them can add up to a force that can become irresistible (p. 218).

Many small groups have paved the pathway towards change. There are numerous examples of citizen opposition on PEI, both small and big, that could serve as building blocks in a larger change process. I turn now to a discussion of the role of organic farmers.

The Role of Organic Farmers

Organic Farmers as Teachers and Examples of Change

"We [organic farmers] *are not here to protest.... We are here to set an example. We are the future" (a farmer cited in Giangrande, 1985, p. 167).*

The work of organic farmers is inherently political. As the saying goes, they "go against the grain" and stand in opposition to the dominant agricultural paradigm. As we face ecological and social problems within farming, their role is paramount. For the present discussion, based primarily on the views of three participants, I offer some ideas regarding the promise of organic farmers in sustaining their homes, communities, and the environment.

Firstly, one of the most important lessons from John Hardy's story centered on the approach he takes in creating change on PEI. While he cares about the environment and is an environmentalist, he is not an activist nor does he is lobby or vocalize his opposition to conventional farming. In a sense, as noted previously, he serves as a silent example of change. Being a successful example is also important to him. In fact, he suggested that being an example to model is the best voice for him. His approach takes the political and social context into consideration, as organic farmers must coexist with other farmers and neighbors within the PEI climate. Similarly, a farmer in Baltaz's (1998) interviews suggested "getting the word out" while another preferred the "quiet example route."

Secondly, in support of the idea that organic farmers serve as an example, John MacLauchlan's approach echoes an important lesson about effecting social change. He does not want to criticize conventional farmers, but would rather be someone they can look to as an example.

Thirdly, Allister and Margaret Veinot, as discussed in their story, did not identify with an environmental activist approach to change. Of particular relevance to the present discussion, I was impressed by their willingness to serve as teachers for those who are interested in organic farming, and to share their knowledge and experiences.

Based on the examples presented here, two important social change considerations emerged. Firstly, organic farmers are not necessarily change agents in a stereotypical activist sense, but they promote change in a broader sense of the word: as people who are part of a larger movement within agriculture, as resource people

and teachers who can guide us on a new agricultural path. They advocate for alternatives while appreciating the economic and political reality of fellow farmers. Their chosen role is tied to their livelihood and they do not want to be divisive, operating in a more subtle fashion that defines a way of life, kitchen table activists in a sense.

Secondly, while they may or may not define themselves as successful, as citizens and farmers, for some, their "strategy"[37] entails teaching by example and "being a living example,"[38] which is perhaps an effective approach to change. Best (1992) wrote that organic farmers need to convince those who are interested in organic farming of its viability, sustainability, productivity, and value. Based on the participants' assertions, it is reasonable to suggest that the promotion of organic farming could possibly occur through community-based change, neighbours helping neighbours, farmers helping farmers, a familiar notion that I presented in my previous lessons section. Indeed, a possible role for organic farmers is to serve as both examples and educators (Gagnon, 1999). But as Gagnon further wrote, not all organic farmers feel they are qualified to assume the role of educator. There is debate about this role as well as the relationship between conventional farmers and themselves.

There are practical applications to the role of organic farmers. Despite their challenges, organic farmers have expertise to share. With government support, they could work with farmers now who still have the opportunity to make the transition from chemical to organic production. In the future, farmers might not have a choice. I learned from Alfred Fyfe that some farmers start farming organically because they cannot afford chemicals. As farmers increasingly face hardship and poverty, chemical

bills are often the hardest bills to pay. But without information as to how to farm organically, their fate is likely uncertain. If the organic farmers of today do not survive, we will have no examples or knowledge base to access and learn from. Therefore, it would be beneficial to provide learning opportunities for conventional growers to meet and talk with organic farmers, which could open lines of communication, provide information sharing and a positive learning environment. The voice of success, as John Hardy put it, might be the best chance at establishing amicable relationships with conventional farmers and opening the door for change.

Best (1992) argued that developments within organic farming need to be guided by those who understand it, and both educators and researchers need to be educated. There are older and experienced organic farmers, like Gerrit Loo, who possess novel ideas (e.g., blight resistant potatoes) that could revolutionize agriculture on PEI. As noted in his and Alfred Fyfe's story, my thesis documented the social story of PEI organic farmers. They also have a soil story, which is their knowledge and expertise pertaining to the "how to" of organic farming, the function and structure of organic farming, which should also be documented. With each generation that passes, Islanders are losing knowledge from those who know of and remember organic farming ways. As Klinkenborg (1995) asserted: "...true agricultural technology is the knowledge of farmers..." (p. 66). The preservation of organic farming knowledge is the topic of my next section.

Reclaiming Knowledge and Farming Ways of the Past

"My granddad didn't use chemicals. He didn't have them. My father was the generation that lost the knowledge that my granddad had" (Rod Repp, as cited in Klinkenborg, 1995, p. 63).

"Our forefathers and mothers knew how to live with their environment. We seem to have lost that wisdom" (Maathai, 1992, p. 86).

Verena Schumacher, the partner of the late Fritz Schumacher, wrote that when he visited PEI in the 1970's, he noticed that although we were advanced in our agricultural efficiency, "...many of the basic skills needed by a community had been lost...People had lost skills which used to be part of everyday life to their ancestors (as cited in McRobie, 1981, p. xii)." Over time, chemicals replaced the skills of farmers (Klinkenborg, 1995). Indeed, "chemicals have become a substitute for knowledge" (M. J. Butters, as cited in Klinkenborg, 1995, p. 88). But as Klinkenborg further argued:

> ...there were also farmers who worked the land according to a different belief, a different and in some ways more traditional conception of the earth and the farmer's responsibility to it....Their principles, newly articulated, have inspired new research, new thinking. They have given rise to a movement called sustainable agriculture (pp. 67-68).

Today, in the stories of PEI organic farmers, there is evidence of people who seek to preserve and capture past farming ways, and arguably reclaim some of the simplicity, joy, and wisdom in a farming way of life in communion with nature and community. They build on an endangered tradition of knowledge. Baltaz (1991) suggested that organic farming endeavours to "...restore the farm lifestyle to its original vision..." (p. 219). In Alfred Fyfe's story, I spoke about the fact that organic farmers represent a link to the past and a guide to the future.

Some research did not fully support these assertions. Gagnon (1999) wrote that: "Many people also assume that organic implies returning to old ways of farming,

meaning that organic farms are primitive and inefficient" (p. 15). Wiebe (1993, in citing Lampkin, 1990) noted that a misconception of organic farming is that they are returning to farming methods of past centuries. However, Giangrande (1985) wrote that organic farmers, while more likely to recognize the limits of modern technology and machinery, do not typically reject them. Similarly, Baltaz (1991) cited an organic farmer who said organic farming is a combination of past farm methods with modern technology.

I recognize that many organic farmers complement "older ways" with modern technology. Allister Veinot, in his story, talked about how organic farmers are adapting to current technology. Organic farmers likely differ in how they define themselves and to what degree they accept or reject modern technology. Regardless, as previously discussed, organic farming involves working with the land and nature in a different way than is required in conventional farming. In this way, I believe organic farmers play a significant role in reclaiming and preserving farming knowledge, ways, and a relationship between farmers and their land that was predominant before the introduction of industrialized farming. In the words of Groh and MacFadden (1990): "The community farmers [in community supported agriculture] are experimenting to see if they can't begin to show the way back and the way forward at the same time (p. 49)."

My Role and Responsibilities

I mentioned throughout my thesis that I wanted to provide a forum for farmers' stories and voices to be heard. In a class discussion about her research work

with psychiatric survivors involved in community economic development, Kathryn Church spoke of her role as a translator. Kathryn did not become the voice of the people with whom she worked but she "translated" their experiences. I hoped my work might serve a similar purpose. I did not necessarily view my role as a change agent or social activist. Rather, my role as a researcher and Island citizen might be seen as a translator or facilitator of information. In addition, I wished to be an advocate of organic farmers' experiences, work, and stories.

Because my community psychology program educates students about social and environmental issues, we might enter settings personally affected by these issues and excited about the possibilities for our involvement, thinking that perhaps "we can change the world." This passion and excitement often sustain the work of those who advocate for change and action within their communities. The reality is, however, that change is slow, subtle, and complex. I wondered how my thesis might contribute to change on PEI and I entered the thesis process excited about the many possibilities for utilizing my research. But I eventually realized that I was part of one project that had time limits and boundaries and I needed to be realistic about the impact of my work.

Freire (1970) recognized the importance of praxis, which he defined as "...reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (p. 36). Similarly, Prilletensky (1999) wrote about the "story of praxis" and the importance of changing, not just understanding, the world. I still recognize the importance of advocating for support for farmers, which was also an important theme in their stories. By researching and documenting their experiences, I might help promote their work and help them gain recognition. My thesis will not change the world but my hope is that

my research, in a very small and meaningful way, can help the organic farmers I have come to know.

Regardless of how I define my role, by collecting data and making the stories of organic farmers part of a public document, I am part of a political act. I have presented many ideas for change in my writing, but there are ethical considerations in promoting change. In community research, we advocate change from a position of privilege, where we might or might not be directly affected by the consequences. In my thesis, I am promoting ideas that affect people's lives and livelihoods. One of the main reasons some farmers probably do not adopt organic agriculture is that without support, they worry about feeding their families. Community psychologists have responsibilities and obligations to the people with whom we work, though dealing with these issues is complicated. How do we fulfill our obligations? How do we balance our responsibility to others and to ourselves, recognizing the limits of our work?

A goal of my research was to have an action component in some form. Time and resources did not permit me to achieve this goal. My situation is such that I now seek employment and need to define clear boundaries for my role in my thesis research, while balancing these boundaries with an obligation to the participants and the issue of reciprocity. I am grateful to the participants for their time and friendship and I would like to do what I can, given my situation, to help them in their efforts. Based on my present circumstances, in addition to providing a copy of my thesis to the group, I hope to accomplish two things with the participants in the near future:

i) **Have a feedback session and post-thesis discussion with participants.** I wish to meet with farmers to share and discuss my findings and talk about potential next steps or possible uses for their stories, which could also serve as an opportunity for reflection, planning, and capacity building within their group. Possible questions for discussion include:

- ❑ What do you think of your stories?
- ❑ What have you learned from reading your stories?
- ❑ How have the stories influenced your vision and direction of the group?
- ❑ What are some next steps for the group and for your own farms? How will they accomplished?
- ❑ Who should read your stories on PEI and to whom should they be distributed?

ii) **Distribute thesis and/or stories to members of the PEI community based on suggestions of the participants.** I believe it would be beneficial to share their stories with the larger public and for others to have the opportunity to read them. There are people on PEI who might be interested in reading my thesis and the stories, which might help promote the work of organic farmers. And other farmers could learn from the experiences of the farmers profiled in my thesis. For example, I would like to distribute my thesis to members of the provincial government (e.g., Minister of Agriculture and Forestry) in an effort to show support for organic farming and advocate for a change in farming practices. I believe it is important to "get the word out" about their work in some form. In addition, I gave each participant a copy of his or her personal story as well as the community narrative. Consistent with Rappaport (1995), the collection of stories could be useful within the co-op as an empowering

tool. It is also my hope that members of the co-op might use their stories for advocacy on their own behalf and for educational purposes.

Ideally, with unlimited time and resources and if there was a second component to my research, a meaningful role for me could be to work with participants to implement some of the goals, ideas, and next steps identified in the feedback session. If time and resources permitted, it would have also been beneficial to write an article for a local newspaper or magazine, highlighting my experiences with the group and their contributions to PEI. In addition, the following are other possible roles:

i) **Research funding sources for the group's initiatives**. Research and apply for external funding for educational and marketing activities and strategies. Further, with funding and a paid position, I could possibly have a more significant advocacy or educational role within the organic farming community, and in the promotion of my thesis research.

ii) **An evaluation process.** Based on my graduate training, I could work with participants in an evaluation process of their group and individual work, in an effort to build on strengths, enhance their current situation, and provide feedback for future directions. My thesis research provides an excellent foundation from which to begin an evaluation process, and it serves as a preliminary needs assessment for the participants and the group.

Limitations of Research and Future Considerations

My research could have been stronger had I collected additional data. Comparative data (e.g., interviews with farmers who represented sub-samples such as non-certified farmers) would have yielded rich information and could be the basis of another research project. My findings potentially could have more impact with a larger sample and other interesting ideas and perspectives would have likely emerged with a diverse group of participants. In my discussion, I spoke about the potential role for organic farmers and the significance of their work, but the implications of my findings are somewhat limited to the group of farmers I interviewed.

Further, my thesis is not specifically about the interworkings of marketing co-operatives nor is it about group dynamics. Seaspray's marketing story, though a significant and worthy story, was not the main focus of my research. I recognize that the farmers' experiences are shaped by their involvement in the co-op, therefore stories of farmers who are not members of the co-op would differ. Their goals and objectives as a group likely differ from those of a smaller and independent organic grower. Their experiences as a co-operative on PEI could serve as the basis for a rich case study. In addition, a second interview or focus group with participants might also have been beneficial, where I explored more thoroughly, their strategies of survival and success and looked at the lessons of their experiences on a deeper level.

In my thesis, I briefly commented on social change considerations in relation to the role of organic farmers. I did not explore, in depth, various concepts of social change or place my findings within the context of social change theory. From the

perspective of community psychology, particularly in relation to actions steps, another project could further investigate social change strategies and theory that emerged from the stories. In addition, in relation to a strategy for change, further research could be inclusive of the experiences of conventional farmers and could document their strategies and experiences as well as those of organic farmers. Moreover, while I have discussed my community's experiences in fighting the landfill, it is important to note that the fight to stop a landfill and the situation for organic farmers represents different struggles. Indeed, a community's response to a crisis differs from a long term strategy to sustain and further organic farming on PEI.

I have also characterized the experiences of organic farmers as marginalized, which carries a negative connotation and suggests moving from the margins is advantageous to the organic farming movement. I have not explored the notion of "positive marginality," in particular, the incredible power the participants have as a small group who others view as a threat.

Another potential weakness of my study is conceptual, in part due to the fact that I followed an emergent design, which was sometimes a challenge as my focus was not always clear. Further, by delving into a new area that was close to home, I sometimes felt overwhelmed by the magnitude of the issues I was learning and "got lost" in the numerous facets of my thesis topic as well as the role my research might play in sustaining organic farming on PEI. I had many ambitions and idealistic notions for my project, most of which could not be achieved within the confines of this research.

Most importantly, and what is needed by participants, is an action component. In addition to the ideas previously discussed, a workshop, for example, would allow organic farmers to share their stories, and to work with and offer information to other farmers and interested parties in an effort to gain support for organic farming and to encourage action.

Personal Reflections

"To the extent that the consciousness of everyone is not fundamentally transformed, pollution will not cease (Fukuoka, 1978, p. 82).

I wish to close my thesis in the same way it began, by personally locating myself and offering my insights and reflections. In some ways, my thesis is as much about vision as it is about survival. My vision and worldview have changed and my involvement in my research has further opened my eyes to new social and ecological realities and fostered a critical awareness. My father and mother, "ordinary" citizens, have also gained a critical awareness through their experiences in the landfill fight and through my research at home. My father recently said to me: "I think I am becoming an environmentalist. No, I think I *am* an environmentalist." Indeed, he and my mother are environmentalists (and probably always have been in many ways) and their affinity for nature and animals are now an even more engrained part of their thinking and spirit. In fact, my father recently completed a project that built wetlands for duck habitat on old farmland.

I believe on some level I always cared about the issues I write about, but I, too, now have a deeper interest in and reverence for wildlife and the environment.

And I now truly know the meaning of the proverbial saying, "we are what we eat." I have learned to have a greater appreciation for my food source and I can now make more informed food choices. One of the most important things I learned in my research, that several authors in my thesis have attested to, is that we enjoy great amounts of food because of the toil of farmers, who receive very little monetary return for their work. Suzuki (1999) wrote: "Our disconnection from the Earth is epitomized by our relationship to food" (p. 264). In some ways, my experiences have also been humbling. I have much to learn about ecology and about living the values I speak of. I offer my support to organic farmers through my writing, through education, and by purchasing organic foods when I can.

Living harmoniously with the earth is not simple to strive for or obtain, but based on the findings here, is necessary in the wake of current social and environmental challenges. Translating awareness into action is another challenge, and another thesis and life journey perhaps. The reality of change, the practical applications of the issues presented here and the promotion of alternative ideas, like organic farming, are likely far more complicated in the "real world." My naiveté and idealism might be apparent, especially to the skeptical reader. But within my assertions, hopefully exist elements of truths about what is meaningful in the scope of life and essentially speak to the importance of preserving the natural and social ecology, and the place people call home, wherever this may be.

Throughout my thesis, I have talked at length about the importance of preserving home and protecting the natural and social ecology on PEI. Yet, I have also painted a picture of an Island that is threatened socially and ecologically due to a

strong corporate, monoculture, chemical farming orientation. I have shared with the reader that PEI is a place where fish kills happen, which serve as tangible evidence of an ecological crisis within farming. The reality is that "my home" is not necessarily a healthy place to live. The contradiction or ambivalence in my thesis stems from my personal notion of home as a place of beauty that needs to be protected. But I do not wish to preserve or protect the fish kills. I recognize what they represent to PEI, socially and ecologically, and I also realize that they are a comment on the state of the PEI environment. Nonetheless, I see that PEI, while threatened, is still a beautiful place, at least in my own heart and mind. Therefore, the home I speak of in my thesis is defined by this assumption. In this way, based on the present environmental situation, my thesis is perhaps more so a reclamation of home, of a way of life, of the natural and social ecology of PEI that at one time was not characterized by fish kills.

In my introduction, I noted that in doing my research, I struggled with the magnitude and complexity of the many issues I learned about in relation to farming on PEI. In this way, one might suggest that I, too, sometimes identified with feelings of being overwhelmed. Specifically, while I have presented the work of organic farmers in a hopeful light, my awareness of the incredible forces that threaten organic farming and the personal challenges of the organic farmers made me sometimes wonder whether change, and the real possibility of change, was elusive. As a community researcher, I sometimes also did not know "where to begin" with an issue that was connected with many other social and environmental issues. Indeed, the "big picture" was like a vast ocean. I also recognized how challenging it must be to wake up each day working towards change in the face of great obstacles. Luckily, the

notion of small steps and small initiatives served as a hopeful and guiding light while doing my research, and the hopeful story of TARRP was a good example of what can happen when people mobilize and care deeply about an issue, though as previously noted, the struggles of organic farmers differ from the landfill fight.

Contrary to the stereotypes portrayed by the media, environmentalists are not a monolithic group. Caring for the environment and making change, in different ways and to different degrees, are valuable and are starting points in a larger and life long process towards building healthy lives that revere the ecology. While I have spoken about many issues on a macro level, each of us, on an individual level, can introspectively examine our own lives and see where we can, and desire to, make choices in support of health and the environment. Not all of our choices will be ideal or perfect. Each person has her or his own road to travel. In my case, it has been a red PEI road thus far, and I have a long way to travel yet.

Yet, the value of a critical awareness, and small and meaningful steps towards a more sustainable future, cannot be underestimated. Freire (1970) taught the importance of a critical consciousness and he argued that it *is* possible to transform our situations. For my family, the awareness and the process of becoming involved in citizen activity began at home, through efforts to preserve a small piece of the world, so to speak, that meant something to them. Their experiences put them in greater connection with their homes, and action was born. Organic farmers, in their fields, also preserve their little piece of the world and actively work towards a better future. I am grateful to have had this opportunity to glimpse into their lives and learn about and recognize the value of their work. In doing so, I have come to see that small

groups of people, in small and beautiful places like PEI, are making change and working to protect the natural and social ecology. I have learned that people can collectively and individually make contributions and engage in activities -- large or small -- that are meaningful within their own lives.

A Call to Islanders

"We stand now where two roads diverge. But unlike the roads in Robert Frost's familiar poem, they are not equally fair. The road we have long been traveling is deceptively easy, a smooth superhighway on which we progress with great speed, but at its end lies disaster. The other fork of the road -- the one "less travelled by" -- offers our last, our only chance to reach a destination that assures the preservation of our earth.

The choice, after all, is ours to make. If, having endured much, we have at last asserted our "right to know," and if, knowing, we have concluded that we are being asked to take senseless and frightening risks, then we should no longer accept the counsel of those who tell us that we must fill our world with poisonous chemicals; we should look about and see what other course is open to us. (Carson, 1962, pp. 277-278)."

"Despite decades of anti-small-farm policies adopted by nation states, small farmers have clung to the soil in amazing numbers. But today we stand at a crossroads. As a world, we are poised to take steps toward global economic integration that pose far greater threats to small farmers than they have ever faced. Trade liberalisation and globalisation pose grave threats to the continued existence of small farms (Rosset, 1999, p. 455)."

Conclusion: Food for Thought and Action

"If you ate today, thank a farmer"
- on a sign in an Ontario field

In the late 1970's, PEI hosted a conference on ecological agriculture which aimed to provide information and examples of alternative farming strategies, to

encourage more research focused on ecological approaches, and for the sharing of experience and knowledge by those farmers committed to ecological farming. The conference report (Pratt, 1979) noted that Island farmers faced serious problems such as poor soil quality, rising costs, and unreliable markets. But, wrote the conference coordinator, we are now in a grace period where we can focus on a "field by field reclamation of our farms" until soils are returned to a sustainable state. The Minister of Agriculture at that time suggested a strengthening of the family farm and he argued: "We must re-discover the wisdom of the past and use our resources modestly, as custodians for the time being" (p. 1).

Now, over 20 years later, it seems we have largely forgotten much of this wisdom of the past, though organic farmers seem to have more credibility now than they did then. And I am writing today, echoing the voices of the participants, that we are no longer in a grace period. Rather, we are in a critical time period where farms and the environment, according to the stories presented here, are in jeopardy.

In the 1999 PEI Legislature, the Speech to the Throne read: "Greater attention must also be given to the continued effective maintenance and protection of the land itself. The richness of soil and sea has blessed our province. Recent events, here and elsewhere, have further demonstrated the fragility of our natural environment; and we hold a sacred trust in preserving not only the bounty made possible by these resources, but the precious resources themselves." Do Islanders and society really hold a sacred trust with the land and its bounty? The evidence surrounds us that we have much to learn about a sacred relationship with the earth. In a talk by David Suzuki, which I attended in Toronto in October 1999, he explained that, as human

beings, we literally are the earth. We are the sacred air, water, and land. If we recognized this connection, then we would not use the air, water, and land as garbage disposal sites. By doing so, he remarked, we actually "put those things back into ourselves."

Examples abound of the need to protect the natural and social ecology and the environmental, political, economic, and social challenges presented in my thesis are not limited to the topic of organic farming. Recently on PEI, another fight to save a precious piece of the Island took place. Island citizens, environmentalists and Mi'kmaq peoples for example, have fought to stop the development of land near the spectacular Greenwich sand dunes along the north shore.[39] We are once again faced with the decision of choosing economic growth or ecological protection. In a local Island newspaper, a friend and eco-psychology professor at the University of Prince Edward Island, reflected upon his reasons for moving to PEI in the 70's and the situation at Greenwich.[40] Don Mazer's insights speak eloquently to the challenges we are faced with in an effort to preserve an Island way of life, its people, values, spirit, and ecology; the lessons here are all too familiar with those presented thus far in my thesis in relation to the work of organic farmers. He wrote:

> I was drawn to the deep sense of connection that Islanders had to the land. I had never met people who felt so strongly about their place in the world, and about their uniqueness and value of their culture and quality of life. This was an Island, a place apart, a place to be cherished and protected. People seemed to know things here that others didn't know about how to live in a more balanced way. The Island was simultaneously less developed but more advanced. Islanders seemed to live better even while having less than others. P.E.I. had a "spirit of place." Here on P.E.I. people seemed to also understand something fundamental about the scale of things and about living with the limits of their landscape and geography. Small, could

> indeed, be beautiful.... Greenwich is a small place on a small Island where we need to remember what we already know. That there are limits. That we are interdependent upon the land and other forms of life and that we must find ways to live graciously and sustainably in these still unique and wonderful places. If we cannot, then what is unique and precious about Greenwich, and about Prince Edward Island is likely to erode along with the dunes, and the rare and wonderful quality that brings people to this place, and to this Island, will be endangered and then lost.

Indeed, PEI land, like the dunes, is eroding. With it, the richness and diversity of small farms, communities, and a traditional Island way of life. I can appreciate that PEI, like other provinces and countries, competes in the global marketplace. Unfortunately, some current agricultural practices to compete in this marketplace have resulted in environmental degradation and economic and social hardship for many citizens, not to mention the effects on living creatures and plants that really have no voice.

But there is hope, hope in the form of organic farming. With an alternative form of agriculture, we can sow hope for the future. Baltaz (1991) also equated the alternative farming movement with hope. While the farmers in my thesis have not traveled an easy road and some of their experiences are saddening, the fact that they survive, despite hardship, and continue to choose a challenging yet meaningful path, to me, represents hope for the future. While acknowledging their obstacles, I would like the reader to view their work in a hopeful light and focus on the gifts that organic farming has to offer. The farm stories presented here, in their own way, teach us that organic farming is beautiful, sustainable, and possible. With tangible government and

citizen support, they have the potential to make contributions to PEI through preservation of the natural and social ecology.

Some farmers alluded to the fact that there is a future for organic farming. The demand for organic food seems to be growing, especially in the UK (Gorelick, 2000). Therefore, the government and citizens of PEI are faced with an important economic choice of whether to seriously adopt organic farming methods to meet this demand. We are also faced with the political choice of implementing the necessary steps to deal with the challenges on PEI, or to continue along the current path, and be faced with more fish kills. But timing is critical. As some farmers contended, change has to occur now. They have farmed organically on their own with little or no support and recognition, and they have shared what is needed for their survival. The environment will likely be irreversibly damaged and a land base lost if a conventional farming model dominates.

With an ecological approach, PEI has an opportunity to spearhead change within the agricultural community. I realize that changing agricultural practices is not an easy task nor will it happen instantaneously. I have presented a vision for a farming future. Some might regard it as idealistic or impossible, but the examples presented here, remind us that it is a vision to strive for. I suggest that by supporting, talking with, and learning from organic farmers, we begin a difficult process and set out on a path towards social and environmental change. While I cannot generalize to all organic farmers on PEI or in Canada, their stories suggest that as concrete examples, they represent a starting point for change. Their existence points to the presence of alternative farming methods on PEI, and as a case in point, the co-op's

history demonstrates that the seeds for change have been planted for a long time. If we build on the initiatives currently in place and nurture organic farmers, they can help others and the movement could grow.

Listening to the Farmer's Voices

Rachel Carson (1962). in her groundbreaking book, Silent Spring, wrote about DDT spraying in the 1950's to combat Dutch Elm disease in trees and the death of robins exposed to DDT. She contended:

> Over increasingly large areas of the United States, spring now comes unheralded by the return of the birds, and the early mornings are strangely silent where once they were filled with the beauty of bird song. This sudden silencing of the song of birds, this obliteration of the color and beauty and interest they lend to our world have come about swiftly, insidiously, and unnoticed by those whose communities are as yet unaffected (p. 103).

Carson's message about the loss of bird song is an important metaphor for my research. Like Carson, I am writing about threats to the ecology and threats to the voices of ecology. We can either silence or celebrate the stories of organic farmers and their work, like birdsong, represents a diverse and rich part of our world.

Organic farmer Reg Phelan once pointed to the fact that one hundred years ago all farmers were organic farmers. Indeed, despite the name, conventional farming was not the norm. The history of farming demonstrates that at one time people farmed differently. And there is something special and intriguing about looking to our history for knowledge, for lessons, and for information. If we are lucky, our history teaches us something. In the stories presented here, links to a rich farming history are

represented. I hope we listen to what the stories teach us, that we adopt their wisdom and knowledge in creating our future.

As the saying goes, we will reap what we sow. I am reminded of the fishing crisis that resulted from the exploitation of the cod fisheries in Newfoundland. The Atlantic fishing crisis is linked to struggles farmers face across the globe, in that the exploitation of the land and the hardship faced by farmers leads one to question how long current farming practices can be sustained. Elizabeth May (1998) contended: "When the small inshore fishers complained that the cod were gone, it was assumed that these people, who had fished for generations, simply were not good at it. Bigger boats, with better sonar and radar, were seen as the answer. Thus, technological solutions and science outweighed the voice of experience" (p. x). Singing about the fishing crisis in a song called "Peter's Dream," Island singer and songwriter Lennie Gallant also wrote:

> I still get up before the day breaks
> And I still walk down to the shore
> I watch the sunrise from the eastern ocean
> But I don't sail to meet it anymore
> How could they have let this happen
> We saw it coming years ago
> The greedy ships kept getting bigger and bigger
> And the sonar told them where to go.

We have an opportunity to listen to the voice of experience presented in this thesis through the stories of organic farmers, and to learn from them. We can support organic farming, and in doing so, we harvest hope *and* change, and we make real steps towards cherishing what is most precious and sacred: our homes, families, communities, and the earth.

Endnotes

[1] The Guardian (daily newspaper printed in Charlottetown, PEI), 1997, article by Barb McKenna

[2] The Guardian, March 9, 2000

[3] Eastern Graphic, August 14, 1996

[4] Eastern Graphic, January 29, 1997

[5] Eastern Graphic, August 14, 1996

[6] Courtesy of local environmental activist, Sharon Labchuk, my peers and I were provided with a wealth of newspaper and media articles about actions taken against pesticide use in farming, which has informed my understanding of the socio-political climate. Some of my ideas here reflect in summary what I have read and are included in our group paper as well as my thesis proposal. Length limitations do not permit me to discuss these articles or other pertinent sources. I respectfully refer the reader to Griffin, O'Reilly, and MacLeod (1997) for a more comprehensive look at our ''current climate'' section.

[7] For example, The Guardian, August 8, 1996; The Guardian, January 15, 1997 for more details. Also, see their brochure entitled "Dying for Fries."

[8] For example, The Guardian, August 9, 1996; The Journal Pioneer, August 9,1996

[9] The Journal Pioneer, August 9,1996; The Guardian, August 10,1996; The Island Farmer, August 19, 1996

[10] For example, The Guardian, August 9, 15, & 22, 1996; The Island Farmer, August 19, 1996; Eastern Graphic, August 14, 1996

[11] For example, The Guardian, August 8, 14, 15, 17, & 20, 1996; Eastern Graphic, August 14, 1996; The West Prince

Graphic, August 21, 1996; The Guardian, September, 1996; The Journal Pioneer, August 9 & 10, 1996

[12] Organic Times: Perspectives on the organic movement in the Maritimes, Spring, 1996, Vol. 3, No. 1, p. 24

[13] The Guardian, February 3, 1998.

[14] The Guardian, July 16 & October 2,1999

[15] The Toronto Star, October 11, 1999

[16] The Guardian, September 25, 1999; The report was entitled Cultivating Island Solutions, the Round Table on Resource Land Use and Stewardship. Commonly referred to as the Land Use Report, it was a response to many concerns from the public about land use practices and discussed consequences to economic growth, such as loss of habitat and environmental degradation. The report contained important recommendations regarding pesticide use.

[17] ECO-NEWS, (Environmental Coalition of PEI newsletter) Autumn, 1999

[18] The Guardian, September 21, 1999

[19] ECO-NEWS, Autumn, 1999, refer to pages 1,2,7,8

[20] 1999 Speech from the Throne, PEI Legislature, 3rd Session, 60th General Assembly

[21] Since I began my research, OCIA has carried out several activities that I am aware of. For example, they hosted an international conference in Charlottetown that I attended, held public information sessions, workshops, and have set up demonstration organic plots.

[22] PEI's Holistic Health Monthly Magazine, May, 1999

[23] The Guardian, February 11, 1998

[24] The Island Farmer, December 12, 1994; Farm Focus, January 11, 1995; PEI's Holistic Health Monthly Magazine, May, 1999. Also, see Baltaz (1998) for a profile on the

Seaspray co-op entitled "Looking for a better level of life..."

[25] Words from a brief interview with PEI organic farmer, Gordon Carter, featured on the CBC local news, Compass, August, 1999

[26] I first heard this quotation from a classmate in a community psychology class at WLU. I regret that I have not been able to locate the source. It is significant here due to the work of Tracadie Cross citizens, in celebration of my parents' activist efforts, and because it fits with a theme of my thesis regarding the importance of "small."

[27] Many authors, too numerous to cite here, have talked about the need for consumer education about food production and the instrumental role of consumers in the sustainability of alternative farming. Kneen (1993), for example, is an excellent resource.

[28] Gagnon (1999) discussed the Nova Scotia Organic Growers Association (NSOGA) (i.e. tensions, challenges) as well as the Canadian Organic Growers (COG) Association, which served as a source of information for her participants. For the present study, it would be useful to learn more about the role of OCIA, strengths, challenges, areas of improvement, and how it may or may not work as a supportive information system; a couple of participants in my research spoke of their experiences with OCIA (some problematic), but I chose not to include these data. Issues raised in this regard could serve as a basis for an excellent follow up study regarding existing supports.

[29] See ECO-NEWS (Environmental Coalition of PEI Newsletter), Spring, 2000.

[30] Quotation from an information sheet. At the 1998 organic farming conference in Guelph, I met a research assistant for this study. The three year longitudinal study entitled "Organic Farming: Understanding the Barriers," a SSHRC funded project, is being conducted by Alan Hall and Veronika Mogyorody of the University of Windsor. The study will examine such factors as support

systems, farmers' strategies, accessibility to markets, information, etc.

[31] Presentation to the Standing Committee on Agriculture, Forestry and Environment on the Farm Financial Crisis, PEI, April 29, 1999.

[32] See also The Guardian, August 27, 1997 for another example of an Islander calling upon government to support organic farming.

[33] Based on the presentation noted above (endnote 31), as well as a proposal to establish an organic farming program within the PEI Department of Agriculture and Forestry, PEI, May 24, 1999.

[34] Segment featured on the CBC local Island news Compass in August, 1999. Premier Pat Binns, former Agriculture and Forestry Minister Eric Hammill, and people from the Nova Scotia Agriculture College toured Island organic farms.

[35] The Guardian, September 22, 1999

[36] I refer the reader to Vandana Shiva's article (1992). Recovering diversity - a future for India. In P. Conford (Ed.), A future for the land: Organic practice from a global perspective. Hartland: Green Books. She talks in particular about diversity and the future for organic farming, which is linked to small initiatives by local communities.

[37] I refer the reader to J. Rothman & J. E. Tropman (1987). Models of community organization and macro practice perspectives: Their mixing and phasing. In F.M. Cox, J.L. Erlich, J. Rothman, & J.E. Tropman (Eds.), Strategies of community organization: Macro Practice. Although not a source I explore or draw on in my discussion, it contains considerations regarding social change strategies that I was aware of in writing this section.

[38] Article by Anne Gallant, based on an interview with Raymond Loo, son of Gerrit Loo, Holistic Health Magazine, May/June, 2000.

[39] The Globe and Mail, November 13, 1999

[40] The Guardian, December 6, 1999

Appendix A

Information Letter

Dear Friend:

I have spent the past few months beginning a process of learning about the issues facing organic farmers on PEI. By attending meetings, talking with farmers and through reading, I have done some important background work that now allows me to begin more in depth one on one conversations. Over the next while, I hope to have discussions with organic farmers on PEI about their experiences and ideas.

The purpose of our conversation is to provide an opportunity for you to tell your story as an organic farmer - your thoughts, ideas, insights, your experiences on the Island and in your community. I wish to learn more about what is has been like to be an organic farmer and to hear, appreciate, and honour your story. I believe that your story is an important part of Island history and culture.

I am also interested in what you have learned from your experiences, your ideas as to how we might sustain organic farming and what you think about the future of the organic farming movement on PEI. My hope is that the collection of your stories might be used to strengthen your voice and gain support for your work, to promote change in our Island communities, and ultimately help to sustain the organic farming on the Island. I would like to consult with you and all participants throughout the project about what I write and how we might eventually share your stories and ideas with others. I welcome and would greatly appreciate your guidance and input.

I have included in advance a copy of some of the questions we might talk about. My questions are broad and will hopefully allow you to discuss and share the issues and ideas you feel are important. I wish to learn from your experiences and hope that my research can represent these experiences in an honourable and respectful way. As I continue to learn and hear your ideas, the focus of the research will be shaped and informed by our discussions.

In addition to taking some notes, I would like to tape record our talk. I want to assure you that information shared with me in our conversation will be confidential and only myself and my advisor, Professor Richard Walsh-Bowers, will read your transcript. After I type our conversation and take some notes, you will have an opportunity to edit the account of your experiences and delete any information that might pose as a risk to you or your family. If you wish, we could meet to talk about the findings and review the transcript. Based on what I learn from the interview, I would like to write about your experiences and ideas as "your story." I would also like to write about what I have learned from the collection of these stories. Further, I have learned a lot from attending meetings and talking with farmers informally, and I will likely include some of this in my final written document. In addition to reviewing your transcript and your story, you will have an opportunity to review and discuss anything I write to ensure both anonymity and confidentiality.

I would like to share your experiences and promote your work both here on PEI and elsewhere. Your views on how this might happen are important. We both know that the Island is a small place, so we can discuss ways to protect your anonymity (i.e. using a fake name in writing about your experiences) and what we

might do with the information. In doing any type of research, there are ethical issues to consider. As part of university guidelines, an ethics committee at Wilfrid Laurier University has reviewed the ethical issues in doing this research project and has made recommendations.

For our comfort level, I would like for our discussion to be as informal as possible (in the spirit of story-telling and the Island way, perhaps even a kitchen table discussion!) I am honoured to have an opportunity to talk with you and look forward to our chat together. If for any reason, you wish to contact me, please do so at 676-2924 or if you have access to E-mail at kgriffin@isn.net My advisor, Richard Walsh-Bowers, can be reached at 519-884-0710 ext. 3630 or by E-mail at rwalshb@mach1.wlu.ca

Talk with you soon!

Sincerely,
Kara Griffin

Appendix B

Interview Questions

The following are some questions that we might talk about in our discussion.

1)What is it like to be an organic farmer on Prince Edward Island?
Since you began farming organically, what have your experiences been over the years?
What is "your story" as an organic farmer?

2) How have you been received by other people, farmers and nonfarmers, in your community/on the Island?

3) What brought you to organic farming?

4) What are the major issues facing organic farmers on PEI?

5) What have you learned about being an organic farmer on PEI? What have you learned through your involvement with the Seaspray Co-op?
How have you survived as an organic farmer?

6) Based on your experiences, how might the organic farming movement be sustained on PEI? What do you think the future of organic farming (and your group) is on Prince Edward Island?

7) What is the role of communities and citizens in sustaining the organic farming movement?

8) What do you want me to do with this information?
How do you want your voices heard? What can I do with this information to help our work and promote organic farming on PEI?

Appendix C

Informed Consent

I, _____, agree to participate in a discussion with Kara Griffin. I understand that Kara is a student doing her Masters thesis research at Wilfrid Laurier University, and is advised by Professor Richard Walsh-Bowers. I understand that the purpose of the research is to learn about and appreciate my story, experiences, and thoughts as an organic farmer on Prince Edward Island. I also understand that a goal of the research is to use the collection of stories to promote my work as an organic farmer and gain support on the Island and elsewhere.

I understand that our conversation will last as long as I wish and I am free to stop our conversation at any time for any reason.

I understand that if I am comfortable, our conversation will be tape recorded and information shared in our discussion will remain confidential. Only Kara and her advisor will have access to my transcript. My transcript and tape will be kept in a locked cabinet and after the project has been completed, the tape will be erased.

I understand that I will have an opportunity to read and discuss my transcript. To uphold anonymity, I will have an opportunity to edit the account of my experiences to ensure there are no risks to myself or my family with the information that has been shared.

I understand that, consistent with one of the goals of the research, Kara would like to use the findings to promote my voice and work as an organic farmer on PEI. My feedback as to how this might happen is important and valued.

I understand that I will receive a copy of my transcript as well as feedback about the findings of Kara's research on or before November 1, 1998.

_____	_____
Participant	Kara Griffin, MA Candidate, Wilfrid Laurier University
_____	_____
Date	Date

Thank you for taking the time to participate in my thesis project. I greatly appreciate you sharing your experiences, thoughts, and wisdom. I welcome any comments, suggestions, or questions you might have. Please feel free to contact me for any reason at 676-2924 or by E-mail at kgriffin@isn.net My advisor, Richard Walsh-Bowers, is also available at 519-884-0710 ext. 3630 or by E-mail at rwalshb@mach1.wlu.ca

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