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***Situating the 'alternative' within the 'conventional' – local food experiences from the East Riding of Yorkshire, UK***

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**Abstract**

Policy makers rarely feature in research into alternative and local food systems (ALFS), yet are often regarded as central actors in supporting such local food systems, sometimes as part of wider rural development strategies. Furthermore, what 'local' actually means has long been debated in the alternative food networks literature, with the consensus that the term is contested and defies definition. This paper explores discursive constructions of 'local' food, drawing on in-depth interviews with farmers, local food businesses, consumers and policy makers in East Yorkshire. The paper argues that the concept of local food is contextualised and refracted through the people and places in which food is produced and consumed. It illustrates the complexities involved in understanding, and making sense of, local food networks and their relationship with conventional food systems.

The paper has two core concerns. The first is to challenge conceptualisations of local food as linked only to non-intensive agricultural regions. The second attends to situating food production and consumption within local contexts to understand the diverse and relational interpretations of the 'local' which policy makers, businesses and consumers have with

regard to food. The paper concludes that alternative and local food systems interact with the conventional food system in complex and multiple ways, underlining that it is not a case of 'either / or', but that food production and consumption are heterogeneous and refracted through specific places.

Keywords: Conventional agriculture; local food networks; East Yorkshire, definitions of local food.

## **1. Introduction**

Local food systems, it is argued, can be a key part of sustainable rural development strategies (Marsden *et al.*, 2000; Renting *et al.*, 2003; Seyfang 2006; Tregear *et al.*, 2007; Marsden and Sonnino 2008). However, we know relatively little about the capacity of different places to develop local food systems, and the significance that they have for sustainable rural development strategies, especially in relation to the ways that policy makers can effectively support their development. Local food has become increasingly viewed as a means to revive lagging rural economies (Ilbery *et al.*, 2004), respond to farming crises, alleviate fears about food safety, and bring equilibrium to a food system regarded by many as being out of balance (Hendrickson and Heffernan 2002; Goodman 2004; McMichael 2005; Seyfang 2006). However, although there is a clear record of policy intervention in the local food and rural development sector at different scales (local, sub-regional, regional, national and EU), and an ever-increasing volume of academic and policy research, such research tends to focus on areas that were bypassed by industrial farming methods. For instance, parts of Wales, Devon and Cornwall, areas which are viewed as being marginal or peripheral. For these regions, alternative and local food systems (ALFS) have been seen as a

means of adding value to local economies and capitalising on consumer demand for local quality food (Renting *et al.* 2003). As a result of this geographical focus, there is a lack of attention paid to ALFS in 'conventional' agricultural areas, where the richness and diversity of farming and food attributed to some other areas is often assumed to be lacking. Industrial agricultural spaces are, paradoxically, seen as being somehow marginal themselves to the development of local food networks (albeit central to the standardised globalised food chain) (see Qazi and Selfa 2005). Additionally, although policy and the work of policy makers are regarded by many as being critical to the future success of ALFS, very little academic research specifically addresses the role of policy makers in supporting local food in industrial agricultural areas. Policy makers have recognised the value of ALFS, especially the concept of reconnecting consumers and food producers. Moreover, a further gap relates to how policy makers themselves define and make sense of ideas of 'local' food and rural development. In addressing this gap, Little *et al.*'s (2012: 90) discussion of regional policy makers' support for local food in the UK's South West and West Midlands, emphasised the lack of research dealing with power in the governance of such networks. Within the ALFS literature, 'policy' is frequently relegated to a fleeting and momentary comment regarding its centrality, without lingering to explore what this so-called 'centrality' might mean, or what form it might take.

ALFS have defied precise definition (Eriksen 2013), and interpretations of what they encompass are broad and geographically varied. ALFS have been described as food provisioning systems which are different, or even countercultural, to conventional food supply chains which dominate in developed countries (Tregear 2011), and as part of a distinctive, ecologically-sensitive food network (Morris and Kirwan 2011). Examples include

localised and short food supply chains (Hinrichs, 2003), farmers' markets (Holloway and Kneafsey, 2000), farm shops, producer co-operatives, box schemes, community supported agriculture (CSA) (Holloway *et al.* 2007a), and community gardens (Holland 2004). ALFS are often based on characteristics such as direct contact and increased trust between consumers and producers, embeddedness within the region, and proximity to the site of consumption (Sage 2003; Kirwan 2004). Nonetheless, ALFS are diverse and specific, with varying motivations for production and consumption. Jarosz (2008: 232) suggests that ALFS are often defined in four major ways: (1) by shorter distances between producers and consumers; (2) by small farm size and scale, and organic or holistic farming methods, which contrast with large scale, industrial agribusiness; (3) by the existence of food purchasing venues such as food cooperatives, farmers markets, CSA and local food-to-school linkages; and (4) by a commitment to the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable food production, distribution and consumption. However, she recognises that ALFS may employ industrialized production techniques, exploit farm workers and still produce organic food, and that some ALFS may emphasise certain characteristics at the expense of others. These different methods of food production-consumption involve relationships between the growers and producers of food, and those who consume it, in ways which are different to those relationships in globalised food systems. In the 'conventional' system of food provision, consumers are argued to be geographically and physically removed from production processes, and food is viewed as anonymous or 'placeless' (Ilbery and Kneafsey 2000: 319). Watts *et al.* (2005) stress that it should be the networks (or systems) between producers and consumers and the food that are investigated in analyses, rather than simply the food itself, as it tends to be such networks that represent the otherness, not the food. So while commodity products like wheat or

vining peas are grown locally, they are then processed, packaged and retailed by companies linked into transnational (vertical) networks of supply and demand. As Sonnino (2013: 4) notes, whether it is 'mass produced, industrial corn from the American Midwest, or milk sourced from an intensively managed farm in Devon, (they) are still local for somebody'. Food itself might also be 'alternative', as mainstream markets forsake some items, such as rare-breed animals (Holloway *et al.* 2010), or perhaps, heritage varieties of fruits and vegetables, that do not fit into industrial production methods and conventions.

Using East Yorkshire in eastern England as a case study of an 'industrial' or 'intensive' agricultural region, the paper explores how ALFS are spatially distinctive and contingent, and discursively constructed by, and through, people and place. As Jarosz (2008) observes, ALFS emerge from processes-in-place that both constitute and sustain them. The paper contributes to the literature on local food systems in two key ways. Firstly, it presents new evidence from East Yorkshire which challenges conceptualisations in the UK of local food as linked, almost exclusively, to non-intensive agricultural regions. The paper further extends the debate on place and food, by viewing local food systems as co-existing, and as co-constituted, with the intensive food production sphere. ALFS might thus be entangled in complex ways with more conventional agricultural practices. Secondly, by attending to the situatedness of food production and consumption within specific local geographies, the study highlights the varied interpretations which policy makers and local food businesses have regarding ALFS. Examining local food systems in specific agricultural regions offers interesting insights through exploring how the history, experiences and practices in each place frames contemporary understandings and discursive constructions of what constitutes 'local' food. At a time of renewed concern about food provenance in light of the horsemeat

scandal in the UK (Farmers' Weekly, 2013), interest in alternative and local foods has been reinvigorated. It is, therefore, important to examine how local food systems are continuing to gain footholds in diverse agricultural regions.

## **2. Food for thought – policy making for local food**

For policy makers, local food is often viewed as an opportunity for economic development in areas which are economically and / or geographically marginal, as well as providing a means of reconnecting consumers and producers (Ilbery *et al.* 2001; Policy Commission for Sustainable Food and Farming 2002). This can be part of a new paradigm of rural development (Renting *et al.* 2003), thus overcoming the cost-price squeeze of conventional agriculture. By concentrating on areas that were somehow peripheral to the development of industrial agriculture (e.g. Marsden and Sonnino 2008), the ALFS literature tends to dismiss the potential for ALFS in spaces of industrialised agriculture. In such places, 'alternative' and / or 'local' food systems are presumed not to be relevant. This fails to take into account the diversity of local farming systems – as (even) intensive farming areas can display signs of diversity of practice (Carolan 2011), and people can be staunchly defensive of local economic activities.

Marsden *et al.*, (2002: 809) and van der Ploeg *et al.*, (2000) promote agriculture as a critical part of rural development, suggesting that policy making is essential to bring about a holistic rural development incorporating agriculture. Agriculture can, of course, encompass many different types of activity. More localised and diverse systems could, therefore, offer greater benefits for rural development through being more locally embedded. This is in

contrast to the negative externalities and disembeddedness associated with conventional agriculture, which can be detrimental to the health and success of rural areas and economies. The extent to which agriculture should be integral to rural development is not agreed, nor, indeed, is the form such agriculture should take. Furthermore, it is open to debate as to how policy makers can help achieve this (and even if they should support the sector in this way). Few academic studies have specifically addressed the role of policy as it relates to the development of ALFS. Where policy is considered, there is a strong leaning towards an emphasis on planning issues (Curry and Owen 2009).

More recently, researchers have acknowledged the role of policy makers, their practices and subjectivities, in affecting both policy development and policy outcomes (see Ray (1999) on the role of policy implementers). Harvey *et al.* (2011) explore how regional policy makers imagine the spaces of the South West region of England, and how this influences the work that they do. Meanwhile, Little *et al.* (2012) examined the way that policy makers understood and attached meaning to local food, and how their views differed from those understandings held by farm businesses. Increasingly, the practice of 'making' policy is recognised as being far from neat and linear, rather being inherently complex, leading to a more interesting and reflective conceptualisation of policy processes in general.

### **2.1. UK Rural Development and Food Policies**

The UK government's Policy Commission on Farming and Food (2002: 43) concluded that 'one of the greatest opportunities for farmers to add value and retain a bigger slice of retail price is to build on public enthusiasm for locally-produced food, or food with a clear regional

provenance'. Thus, following the 2001 Foot and Mouth outbreak policy initiatives concentrated on localised and shortened food chains. Lord Haskins (2003), former chairman of Northern Foods and member of the House of Lords, provided rural policy advice to the Blair Labour Government during the 2001 Foot and Mouth outbreak. Lord Haskins subsequently reviewed rural delivery in response to Foot and Mouth, arguing for simplified and innovative policy delivery. Defra (the UK Government department responsible for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) developed the Rural Pathfinder programme to encourage innovation at a local level, with rural service delivery 'experiments' which aimed to mainstream best practice (Goodwin 2008). East Yorkshire was one of the eight areas designated for Rural Pathfinder status. One such 'experiment' concentrated on local food. East Yorkshire has also been allocated successive European Union LEADER funding programmes which have specifically aimed to develop local food as part of a wider rural development approach. Such policy initiatives aim to promote local food for its potential to support rural economies, as tourists and consumers perceive local food as healthier and better for the environment (Enteleca 2001; Bessiere 1998). They also act to discursively construct meanings around what 'local' food is.

More recently, *Food 2030* (HM Government 2010) identified the previous Labour government's intentions towards addressing food security and sustainability of food supply for the UK, in response to the criticism that there was a distinct lack of clarity on food strategy from the government (Curry and Owen 2009). *Food 2030* was criticised for containing few new or original ideas (Marsden 2010). Particularly problematic is that the global and the local are used interchangeably and unquestioningly (Marsden 2010: 444). The concerns of *Food 2030* stem from issues surrounding food security and it envisages the

UK's future food delivery as being through the supermarkets with little to say about other modes of accessing food. The Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government has had little to say about food, with the exception of the Green Food Project. Exports and increasing food production to meet the needs of a growing population remain priorities for the coalition government (Defra 2013). Clearly, policy frameworks for food in the UK (local, alternative or otherwise) are contradictory and evolving, with the role of 'local' food continually shifting.

### **3. Alternative and Local Food Systems in the UK**

The UK government's department dealing with food and agriculture, Defra (2003), has noted that there is no clear, single definition of local food (see also Eriksen 2013). As such, terms like 'local' have been interchanged with terms such as quality, natural or sustainable (Tregear 2011; Dalmeny 2008; Holloway *et al.* 2007b; Parrott *et al.* 2002; Murdoch and Miele, 2004b). Such terms are themselves nebulous concepts, resisting definition and shifting as soon as attempts are made to anchor them (Holloway *et al.* 2007b: 80). Despite the range of work reviewing the characteristics and definitions of ALFS, it is now generally agreed that this doesn't actually help to clarify problematic terms like 'alternative' or 'local'. Rather, they tend to become more clouded as they are associated with, represented by, and refracted through, these other terms (Holloway *et al.* 2007a; DuPuis and Goodman 2005; Tchoukaleyska 2013). Hinrichs (2003) has argued, for example, that it is dangerous for researchers to adopt a simplistic 'local=good' and 'global=bad' dichotomy, as just because a product is 'local' it is no guarantee that it is inevitably healthier, tastier, fairer, or more environmentally sustainable (see also Morgan, 2011). As Born and Purcell (2006) note, local

cannot be assumed to be an inherently good thing. 'Conventional' is also a problematic term since binaries such as 'conventional' – 'alternative' food systems hide the many variations within, and links between, these spheres of activity (Holloway *et al.* 2007b; Murdoch and Miele 2004a; Ilbery & Maye 2005; Watts *et al.* 2005; Morgan *et al.* 2006), which may simultaneously occur in one region rather than being geographically distinct. It is clear that, on the ground, there are hybrid combinations that obscure the boundaries between the worlds of food (Morgan *et al.* 2006), as 'alternative' and 'conventional' food systems can, thus, mesh together in complex ways in certain circumstances (Ilbery and Maye 2005). For instance, the increasing forays into organic and fair trade food by mainstream processors, retailers and food service industries blur the lines between alternative and mainstream food systems (Allen 2004, cited in Blay-Palmer 2008). Yet, Yeung (2005: 44) argues that such binaries can be useful insofar as they stimulate relational thinking. Taking a relational approach helps acknowledge complexity as well as the relational 'contingency of what is regarded as alternative (or local) at any one time and in any one place' (Holloway *et al.* 2007a: 5; Crewe *et al.*, 2003). While ALFS (in East Yorkshire and elsewhere) do not yet necessarily represent a challenge to, or replacement for, agribusiness, they can supplement, and complement, larger-scale food systems in response to demand from consumers and producers (Feagan 2007: 35). What is 'alternative' can be considered in multiple ways. For example, the 'alternative' can be seen as complementary to the mainstream, offering an additional choice, whereas the 'alternative' can also be viewed as a more radical challenge to conventional processes, where those involved are actively attempting to be 'alternative' (Jonas 2010). As Eriksen (2013) observes, what 'local' means varies by different people in different contexts – understanding the range of meanings in different contexts can help understand the myriad characteristics and nuances

associated with 'local' food. Eriksen (2013) suggests that the definitions / meanings / understandings of local food are diverse, and this is part of the appeal – she cites Futamura (2007: 220, in Eriksen 2013: 50) who argues “that 'local' is a social construct: unfixed and usually defined contextually rather than on an explicit scale”, and does not necessarily specify whether 'local' refers to the site where the raw food is grown, where it is processed or consumed. Often, ALFS have been defined by what they are not, as an opposition to a conventional agriculture based on intensive, industrialised production, resulting in the devaluation of (especially small, family) farm production (Morgan 2010: 1853). As such, local can be interpreted to be associated with alternative means of production and purchase (Feagan 2007), from within a geographically defined zone, as a counterpoint to industrialised agriculture (Eriksen 2013: 53), or based on values such as trust (Kirwan 2004).

The majority of research on ALFS in the UK concentrates on 'marginal' areas (those areas where intensive agriculture is less prevalent, typically more upland areas with less fertile land) such as the southwest of England (Marsden and Sonnino 2008), Wales (Marsden *et al.*, 2002), and parts of Ireland (Sage 2003). There has been little consideration to date of local food co-existing, or as being co-constituted, with an area of industrial agriculture. Whilst this can be justified in that these 'marginal' areas often have the greatest concentrations of such ALFS, it may conceal the developing food initiatives in conventional agricultural areas, thus leading to only partial understandings of developing ALFS. Such initiatives can be the seeds of change in terms of diversifying rural economies and offering alternatives to conventional food systems. Focusing only on more marginal agricultural areas represents not so much a new geography of food (Whatmore and Thorn 1997), but reinforces old lines whereby some rural areas remain wedded to the regime of intensive commodity

production. In contrast, marginal areas continue with their systems of production, gaining new markets as some consumers look for food with particular characteristics. The assumption that a new geography of food will be separated out into 'hotspots' and 'coldspots' is unsophisticated, and does not recognise the heterogeneity of agriculture, rural areas or, indeed, terms such as 'alternative' and 'conventional' (Carolan 2011). For example, it cannot be presupposed that the so-called hotspots of industrial agriculture are problem-free, as they are vulnerable to the vicissitudes of the global market and other shocks, such as oil price rises and extreme weather events. As such, ALFS may offer a valuable boost for some businesses in such areas. Moreover, the 'local' and the 'alternative' emerges in specific situations, always being located within particular discourses and practices of food production-consumption, but more than this, in particular spatial contexts which shape, and are shaped by, the ALFS in question (Holloway *et al.* 2007a, 2010). The 'alternative' is a temporary, imaginary space (Crewe *et al.* 2003: 101). Whilst it is acknowledged that there is diversity, complexity, and even contradictions within ALFS (Sonnino and Marsden 2006), this has often obscured or ignored geographical diversity. So, although ALFS have been explored in many geographical contexts (Holloway *et al.* 2010: 161), these geographical contexts have tended to share the same, or similar, characteristics. How we determine the 'local' in ALFS needs to be contingent on the place (Feagan 2007: 39) and the social, ecological, and political circumstances which circumscribe it. According to Allen *et al.*, 'the local is not everywhere the same' (2003: 63). Whatever form such new foodscapes have, Morgan (2011: 216) argues that they are all part of a quality revolution in the UK's food culture, indicating a significant change in a country that has traditionally promoted quantity over quality, and price over provenance (Morgan *et al.* 2006). Food can be produced for mainstream, distant supply chains (such as potatoes for a national market,

Brussels sprouts for UK supermarkets, or wheat and other cereals for global commodity markets), whilst simultaneously being produced and consumed in ways that might be termed 'alternative' or 'local' (Sonnino 2013:4; Allen *et al.*, 2003). For example, organic wheat milled into flour and sold at local farm shops and farmers' markets, or rapeseed grown conventionally but processed for local (and national) consumption.

#### **4. Research Approach**

This paper draws upon research that explored the ways that policy makers, businesses, and consumers in East Yorkshire think about what 'local food' means to them, as part of a wider research project on how policy makers can support local food systems through their rural development activities. Talking to research participants about local food and rural development necessarily included discussion of how they defined such terms for themselves. In particular, the contingent nature of the processes of 'making' and 'doing' policy, and the subjectivities of those involved in these processes, are shaped by the ways that rural space is conceptualised in specific places, and how local food is framed as a policy driver for local development.

The research involved semi-structured in-depth interviews with policy makers, local food businesses (farmers and growers, retailers, and restaurants / hotels), and focus groups with consumers, to explore issues relating to local food and rural development. Policy makers were selected from East Yorkshire, in particular those involved with the East Yorkshire Rural Partnership (which brings together public, private and voluntary organisations), as well as regional policy makers with responsibility for rural development and local food. An initial

postal survey was sent to 175 local food businesses, selected from the East Yorkshire Local Food Directory, the Regional Food Group's online business Directory, internet searches and local knowledge of businesses declaring to be localised. Businesses surveyed included food growers (producers), restaurants and cafes, hospitality businesses and retailers. Businesses indicating a willingness to participate in a longer, face-to-face interview were contacted to arrange interviews. Consumers were approached through a range of mechanisms, including posters being sent out with organic vegetable box delivery schemes, articles in newsletters, and asking for participants from local groups with an interest in food, such as the Women's Institute. In total, 15 policy makers, 19 businesses and 20 consumers were interviewed. Each interview was arranged by telephone or email, with interviews carried out in a range of locations, from farm shops, butchers' counters, and in cafes. All interviews were recorded digitally, and transcribed. The transcripts were analysed, using Nvivo, and themes were identified from the interviewees' comments and from core concepts identified in the literature, where appropriate. This approach helps to trace the discursive and material understandings of the 'local' that take place in specific geographical contexts, and identifies shifts and tensions which occur as a result of negotiating the practical implications of local food in specific geographic locations. Situating the research in a specific place contrasts with idealised and abstract visions of local food systems, thus illustrating how local food is understood in an area rarely included in such research.

#### **4.1. The East Riding of Yorkshire**

East Yorkshire was selected as a case study to explore the co-presence of globalised and localised agricultural practices and processes, and the ways this can affect how ALFS

develop in such places, and the shape they take. East Yorkshire is a predominantly rural county in Eastern England, with few large towns. The County shares borders with the City of Kingston upon Hull and the City of York (see Figure 1.), which both influence the area in terms of employment and travel. The administrative body covering the area is the East Riding of Yorkshire Council (ERYC), a unitary authority created as England's first rural unitary in 1996.

**Figure 1 here**

East Yorkshire has a varied landscape, but is mostly chalk Wolds with extensive coastal and river plains. Bordered on the east with the North Sea, and the river Humber to the south, and with many drains, rivers and canals internally, it is a watery county. This watery landscape influences the agricultural fertility of the area, enabling large-scale commodity agriculture, following a historical programme of land drainage. The main crops are grains (wheat, barley, rye and oil seed rape), with potatoes, beans and peas. There is also some livestock and pig farming. There are more people employed in agriculture in the county compared to the UK national average according to the 2011 census (2.88% ERY / 0.81% nationally), although this has reduced since the 2001 census (4.27% ERY / 1.45% nationally).

Undertaking case studies in places of conventional agriculture, such as East Yorkshire, enables the analysis of the ways in which policies applied from above are interpreted and implemented within local contexts, illustrating the relational and contingent characteristics of local places, people and policies. As noted above, the numbers of people employed in agriculture has reduced in East Yorkshire, global commodity trading is unpredictable, and

there are increasing concerns about future climate change and its implications for food security. As such, more people are looking to ALFS as an antidote to the negative attributes of the globalised food system (Kirwan and Maye 2013). The next two sections of the paper turn to the empirical material. Firstly focusing on whether the specific conditions of intensive agriculture in East Yorkshire affect how ALFS are understood and negotiated locally by policy makers, local food businesses, and consumers, before secondly, exploring how local food is defined by actors in East Yorkshire.

### **5. Contingent interpretations of local food – industrial framings of ‘local’ food**

In East Yorkshire, policy makers, food businesses and consumers all frequently understood ‘local’ food as being associated with places beyond East Yorkshire, despite a growing ALFS in the area. Three specific counties – Devon, Cornwall and Cumbria – came up repeatedly in conversation with policy makers, businesses and consumers. These areas were seen as having strong local identities, as being better suited, and placed, for local food production. Places such as southwest England generally were viewed as being ‘better’, or ‘easier’, for alternative food initiatives such as farmers’ markets. For many, East Yorkshire did not compare well to other areas in terms of the landscape and type of farming, as regards producing local food. Little mention was made of how East Yorkshire is associated with local food, other than in comparison to other geographical places that are more suitable. More locally, the attractive landscapes of the Yorkshire Dales and North York Moors National Parks were seen to lend themselves more easily to promoting local food, whereas the landscape of East Yorkshire was seen as less attractive for local food promotion (being ‘flat and boring’ in contrast). This had clear consequences regarding the ways that policy makers

viewed certain areas as being associated with local food production:

I think local food has that perception of being produced in the Dales or the hills, where you can see the animals, or the products growing. I think East Yorkshire tends to be...not seen as a local food area... (Policy interview, local development agency, East Yorkshire)

These more 'attractive' parts of the UK not only attract more tourists, but are more prevalent in the imaginations of consumers at a distance, through television programmes (for example the BBC's *All Creatures Great and Small*, set in the Yorkshire Dales, or ITV's *Heartbeat*, set in the North York Moors (see Mordue 2009)), and tourist brochures for example, meaning that food from such areas was viewed as easier to promote:

I mean it's easy to see how you would promote lamb from the North Yorkshire moors isn't it? It's easy-peasy! Promoting wheat from Holderness is...or barley from the Wolds is...just doesn't work in the same way. You are not producing something that's sort of sold directly to the end producer... (in comparison) the chain between the farmer on the North York moors is the farmer-Asda-consumer. (Policy interview, regional rural business organisation)

Such representations of rural areas through television programmes and tourist brochures, for instance, led to specific imaginaries of the characteristics that rural areas ought to have in order to develop successful ALFS. Such imaginaries affected how East Yorkshire was viewed, and how it was compared to 'other' places – policy makers themselves,

subsequently, saw East Yorkshire as more difficult for local food, as the quote above suggests. Many policy makers emphasised how animals were seen to represent areas with strong ALFS, increasing the visibility of 'local' food to those who lived in the area and also to tourists. However, in East Yorkshire livestock farming has declined, and intensive forms of agriculture often means that many animals (predominantly pigs and poultry, and some dairy cows) are kept inside for much of their lives, and are, therefore, not a frequent sight in the landscape. If livestock are seen as iconic representations of farming and (local) food production, this serves to further exclude East Yorkshire as a place of (local) food production. That animals have been so strongly linked to local food production is interesting, as local policy makers and businesses felt that consumers do not know or do not like to know that their food comes from animals' bodies or the processes by which they are slaughtered and butchered (see Stassart and Whatmore 2003) – the above quote eliminates such processes from the chain 'farmer-ASDA-consumer'. Furthermore, another policy maker described her work in promoting local food, and how they've

...never talked about meat interestingly. We've always mainly centred it around fruit and vegetables or cheese, or something like that, where the animal survives...you don't really want to start going into what's happened to this animal to get to you as it is. (Policy interview, East Yorkshire food promoter)

Consumers also expressed such ideas, for instance, at one of the focus groups Joy (FG1) suggested that consumers 'don't really want it to look like an animal, it's easier to go into a supermarket and have it cling-film wrapped and it's just like that'. Despite these imaginaries of what rural areas should comprise, and which areas can or should produce local food, in

talking about the countryside, the Strategy for Sustainable Food and Farming (Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food 2002) notes that people 'do not...want to see a polarised countryside, with some areas zoned for intensive production while others are turned over to environmental theme parks'. Yet, some respondents found the image of distinct and separate areas difficult to relinquish. During an interview with a regional policy maker, she illustrated that she felt that there was a difference between East Yorkshire and other parts of the UK in terms of their potential to develop local food:

National and regional level, heaps [of potential] I mean, unlimited, but...the East Yorkshire question is much harder, because you've got...great farmers, (it's) a really first class farming area but they're producing mainly commodity products...there are small cases where [local food] would work, but actually at the end of the day...there's a limit to how much specialist flour making or specialist bread because there's a great mass of people who just want cheap, sliced bread. (Policy interview, regional rural business organisation)

This conceptualisation of 'great farmers' highlights how 'successful' farming is measured within East Yorkshire – success is linked with large farms epitomising the industrialised approach to farming, and results in ALFS being a 'much harder question'. This policy maker's view that there is a need for 'bog standard milling wheat' suggests that local food can never replace the conventions of cheap, sliced bread for a mass of people who prioritise convenience and cost. Another respondent, a butcher, further emphasised the differences between 'local' food and 'global' food systems. His response promotes the idea that although intensive farming may not align well with consumers' image of farming it was

necessary to ensure an affordable supply of meat:

...farmers farm, they farm an animal for a purpose, and there's a detachment between that, they don't call their cows Daisy and they don't pet them...like the TV thing Jimmy's Farm and stuff like that, [where] they portray animals as pets that have a happy life...intense (sic) farming is not like that and if it wasn't for intensive reared chicken and intensive reared pork it would be extortionately expensive, people wouldn't be able to afford it. (Business interview, butcher, East Yorkshire)

Descriptions of this type of farming were used to justify why 'local' or 'alternative' food systems could not work so well in East Yorkshire. This was linked to cultural expectations and an acceptance of where food came from, what it should look like, and what it should cost. An acceptance of globally traded food was seen to be well established, as one policy maker explained:

I don't think the culture's there for it...people are used to the idea of buying food from thousands of miles away...(East Yorkshire) is just producing commodities...after all...our wheat can go anywhere – we were sending wheat to America two years ago from here. It isn't local, that's not local. (Policy interview, Yorkshire and national rural development policy maker)

Other interviewees could not envisage how industrial farming would change in the future in East Yorkshire, for example a farmer suggested that he thought 'intensive agriculture will continue' but in addition some people will 'in small ways' produce local food – avenues like

‘farmers’ market [will] be...where the starters come in’ (Business interview, pig and wheat farmer). This farmer saw local food as offering an entry point for new farmers who perhaps lacked access to capital and equipment to be able to compete with the large-scale ‘successful’ farmers. Such comments underline the commitment to intensive agriculture in East Yorkshire, and thus potentially lock-in the area to future continued intensive farming. But inflexibility should not be overstated. Local food initiatives are developing in East Yorkshire, and although intensive farming is dominant now, it does not mean that it always will be, or that multiple systems of food production and consumption can’t co-exist simultaneously in one locality. As ALFS have grown in East Yorkshire, common perceptions of industrial farming regions have been challenged, as one policy maker recounted ‘to everybody’s astonishment it was amazing just what is made in East Yorkshire, and is overlooked because the image and everybody’s thought process goes straight to North Yorkshire.’ Increasing the visibility of foods produced in the region has contrasted with previous perceptions; in the words of one tourism business ‘15 years ago I would have said “well we’re just corn barons really,” you know there wasn’t a lot of diversity’. However, for some the enduring image of East Yorkshire as industrial foodscape represents a potential barrier for developing ALFS in East Yorkshire, thus repeating the perception that ‘local’ food will remain a small scale option. Such small scale developments may be as part of a diversification for more conventional producers. For example one farmer, who also had a farm shop, commented:

Well yeah, it’s mainly an arable area, big arable area. (But) even on some big arable farms there’s maybe the wife or the son or daughter-in-law, to make ends meet, they’ll do these little things. (Business interview, farmer with farm shop)

This farmer hints that ALFS may be present on 'big arable farms', but such activities will be small-scale and will be gendered, involving female household members. Although the county is a stronghold of intensive agriculture, food businesses which identify themselves as being 'local' in some way have been increasing in the area, suggesting that even within commodity producing areas there is scope for the development of ALFS. Evidence from East Yorkshire suggests that the number of existing local food spaces is increasing, demonstrated by the growing number of local food businesses, farmers' markets, a local food directory, an annual (and growing) Food Festival in the market town of Beverley, the county's administrative centre, and a recently established not-for-profit limited company, the East Yorkshire Local Food Network (see figure 2.)

**Figure 2 here**

For those who have diversified, or started new local food businesses which contrast with the image of industrial farming, they are keen to highlight the differences, even where those differences are slight at the moment. This differentiation can indicate the hybrids that can emerge, as new ways of doing things meet and collide with more established processes. For example, a farmer specialising in poultry talked about their poultry farming business but was eager to distinguish how it is:

intensive but [we're] not...going round ripping all the hedges up...we're quite into conservation and things like that, you know we like to see...all the livestock out and...my husband likes to grow trees (laughs) and [is] quite into keeping the farm

quite sort of natural (Business interview, poultry farmer, East Yorkshire)

This producer started off with a small diversification from their conventional wheat farm, but which now represents a larger portion of their income – their produce is sold locally by name in gastropubs and restaurants. So, although in East Yorkshire ALFS are interpreted and understood differently, as a result of the entrenched industrial agriculture, ALFS are also starting to change the practices of conventional farmers. The following quote, from a conventional farmer who sells at some farmers' markets, shows how he is starting to think about different ways of fertilising his crops:

I don't know what farmers are going to do really...there's only a limited amount of this (fertiliser)...I've missed various years and then you have to replenish the soil...I mean I got some slurry off a local pig farmer...but he only did two fields...I mean it might come to the point where we have to leave fields fallow, put cover crops in you know like organic system or something which would probably halve our cropping you know what I mean? But it hasn't quite come to that... (Business interview, farmer attending farmers' markets, East Yorkshire)

As well as the emergence of viable local food systems in East Yorkshire, external pressures such as rising prices associated with inputs for industrial farming, (e.g. fertilisers and fuel) are seen as starting to change industrial farming eroding some of the ingrained industrial practices. However, organic farming is seen as a last resort when other options have run out.

Some of the more conventional farmers involved in the research observed the success of farm shops in the area, and indicated that they might be interested in developing this in the future. The reasons for changing production practices are diverse and multiple. One farmer used to produce lamb for Marks and Spencer, but following a 'falling out' with them turned to local sales by approaching local chefs at gastropubs, who responded with comments such as 'by heck this is good'. Hence their local food business 'snowballed from there'. This farmer remains committed to conventional production methods, and was particularly scathing about organic production, but sees the benefits for his business of retailing lamb locally.

Although local food systems are developing in East Yorkshire, this paper shows that these are co-constituted by, and interacting with, the mainstream industrial foodscape which is also present locally. This results in complex entanglements of ideas and understandings relating to food production and consumption. It also highlights how ALFS are not relegated solely to 'marginal' areas, but are having an impact on industrial foodscapes. The co-existence of multiple food systems in one geographical location leads to situated and contingent understandings and interpretations of what it means to be 'local', which the next section will address in more detail.

## **6. Shifting Terminologies – co-existing and co-constituting ALFS**

Industrial foodscapes are typically viewed as not being synonymous with local food. Despite this, it has been increasingly argued that diversity within places should be recognised (Carolan 2011). This section will discuss how research interviewees engaged with, and

contested, terms such as 'local', 'alternative', and 'conventional' in an industrial foodscape. The terms 'local', 'alternative', and 'conventional' are polysemic, shifting and (re-)negotiated in the context of East Yorkshire. Policy makers discussed what they perceived 'local' to be, with some variation between policy makers working at the county level, and those whose remit is regional, further suggesting the 'local' is a fluid term, variously interpreted depending on the scale at which policy makers are working, amongst other factors. One local authority policy manager explains this in relation to national rural development policy:

[Lord Haskins] made an awful big play of devolving delivery down to the local level because the local level knows the local area best. And what I think happened was that...if you were sitting in Westminster then 'local' to you was the regions. I think [Haskins] meant devolving it down to the local level to local authority levels...(but local was interpreted as the regional level'. (Policy interview, East Yorkshire)

The majority of policy makers recognised the complexity of defining 'local'; whether such definitions drew on specific geographical identities, or particular processes which could be defined as local. Thinking through the geographical detail of 'local' for example, the specific geography of East Yorkshire means that definitions of 'local' that work in some other areas are more difficult to apply. As in other coastal areas, places on the 'edge' find keeping to specific counties or distance limits difficult. One policy maker explained this by referring to the coastal town of Withernsea in East Yorkshire, '(if) you were only allowed to call yourself 'local' to a 30-mile radius your market is not particularly big.' Although not peculiar to East Yorkshire, this illustrates how policy-makers wrestle with ideas of local food in their policy making activities. Most of the policy maker respondents defined 'local' food as being from

within a specific county boundary, or within a certain distance of the point of purchase, often using FARMA's definition of 30 miles that is used for farmers' markets (FARMA 2013).

However, some used a tiered concept of localness, depending on where the product is being marketed or retailed. One regional rural development policy maker suggested that the same produce should be labelled and branded differently dependent on which geographical scale it is being sold. Her idea of how this might work is illustrated in table 1.

**Table 1 here**

Such an approach adds to the complexity of understanding what 'local food' might be, for consumers and producers who struggle to identify where they 'fit' in multiple conceptualisations of localness. In addition to geographical scaling, individual products were thought of as representing a scale, from 'basic raw products such as a piece of meat' which were easily identifiable as being from a particular area. In comparison, other products were more complicated and required further unpacking, for example 'if you're looking at a pie then it becomes a little more ambiguous...is it the packaging, is it the baking, is it the ingredients?' (policy maker, East Yorkshire)

Ideas of what 'local' food is can be used flexibly (Morris and Buller 2003), so that it can sometimes be a product from the immediate vicinity, whereas at other times it can be from the UK more broadly. For some consumers in East Yorkshire, 'local' meant British, and a discourse of self-sufficiency and high UK welfare standards informed this. For other consumers, 'local' meant *very* local with 'definitions' including a certain distance (e.g.

interviewees suggested 12 miles, 20 miles and so on). Such definitions which draw on geographical proximity have been influenced by definitions of 'local' used by farmers' markets and the stipulations of how far food should travel for a farmers' market (Kirwan, 2004). The FARMA criteria for farmers' markets have influenced perceptions of localness beyond the 'bubble' of farmers' markets (Kirwan 2004). Numerous respondents used this definition or variants of it to describe their thinking, although this could be stretched for certain products, or in specific areas where it was harder to apply. Consumers were relatively uncritical and assumed that 'local' would be 'better' – as one consumer suggested 'I, you tend to think of it being better for you because it is local, don't you really?' (FG3). Most of the consumers suggested that they did look for local food in their everyday shopping, but what 'local' meant could vary by product, vary by the store they were in, and 'local' could easily be overridden to satisfy their preferences. Apart from one participant, most of the consumers hadn't thought in detail about how food in East Yorkshire was produced. Many consumers thought that local farmers needed help and support and that in general, 'we've got good farmers round here' (Kathy, FG3). In response, Yvonne (FG3) thought that 'looking from the other side of it, really, it's good that you do try and support them all isn't it? Because they're trying to make a living and if we don't buy it then you know...'. These consumers were drawing on a discourse of 'use it or lose it', and of farmers being under threat and requiring help and support to survive economically.

The FARMA definition of localness had also influenced the creation of the East Yorkshire Local Food Directory, yet the rural development policy manager combined this definition of geographical proximity with flexibilities to adapt to the specific geographies of East Yorkshire. She noted that there are 'some ambiguities in what different people term as

local'. The ambiguities in defining what 'local' might be, included specific distances of between 12 and 50 miles, as well as different products and places – much like the consumers above. For some retailers (farm shops, local food shops), distances could extend to the UK and beyond, as they aim to offer a comparable service to the supermarkets. Many commented that their customers could easily go to a supermarket if they didn't broaden their offer. One livestock farmer from East Yorkshire explained that the range of products available 'locally', which he saw as being 50 miles, now even includes wine:

...50 miles is local, if you can't get it in England, particularly the north of England, within 50 miles of here, obviously we're a bit geographically hemmed in by the sea, but you know you can even get wine now out of Leeds can't you? (Business interview, livestock farmer, East Yorkshire)

For most consumers, however, a level of pragmatism was involved. This pragmatism involved accepting that some things just were not available locally, so had to come from further afield. Further afield could be Leeds or Lincolnshire, as well as Kenya and New Zealand. Consumers attached different criteria to different products in terms of localness, with strawberries and meat coming up most often as needing to be very local, and certainly from the UK. Other products (apples, green beans and flowers, for example) could come from further afield. Consumers were drawing on criteria which they had not previously reflected on. These criteria involved how much they liked or wanted something, the colour or size of bananas for example, social justice issues for workers in developing countries (although interestingly this wasn't mentioned for UK workers), and political issues relating to the Commonwealth and political trade disputes. The complexity of the ways that

consumers suggest they think about, and define, 'local' is not only spatially variable (within the case study areas, but also beyond), but temporally flexible too, as people make different decisions depending on the product concerned, as well as their personal situation at that time, such as changing family sizes.

One organic farmer thought through why consumers buy local food. He understood this in the context of East Yorkshire as being related to 'freshness' and 'supporting local businesses', as these concepts were easier for consumers to accept. Several organic producers commented that they would not necessarily highlight the organic nature of their products:

...buying local it's much more likely to be fresh, and people feel good about supporting their local business don't they? (In East Yorkshire) there seems to be a lot more positive response to local food than organic, in fact we probably wouldn't sell it as organic. (Business interview, organic farmer)

However, one policy maker saw 'local' food as involving hard work, especially compared to industrial farming, in particular arable farming. The dominant style of grain farming was repeatedly referred to as being 'easier', as it is less tying than the commitment of livestock. This policy maker suggested that this hard work would put people off entering such a sector. For him, this way of working was discordant with 'English farming traditions', by which he meant industrial farming methods:

Very few farmers want to do it because it's hard work; I mean locally produced food is hard work. And it's more akin to a sort of peasant tradition than...an English

farming tradition, (Policy interview, Yorkshire and national rural development policy maker)

'Proper' English farming traditions are distinct from peasant farming styles, which he thinks have more in common with more labour intensive ALFS.

This section further illustrates the contingent and context specific interpretations of local food networks. The ways that respondents in East Yorkshire interpret, and make sense of, 'local' emerged as a relational, co-constituted and flexible concept, as respondents negotiate the complexities of emergent ALFS in an industrial foodscape. The discussion shows how definitional flexibility needs to be incorporated within policy makers' thinking about ALFS to reflect their spatial contingency.

## **7. Conclusion**

This paper has brought new evidence from an industrial farming region to the debate on ALFS, showing how such initiatives are developing in places previously imagined as being relatively bereft of such food systems. Previous conceptualisations of ALFS have been based on arguments that 'the crisis and failure in conventional food networks allows new or alternative capitalist networks to emerge' (Jones *et al.*, 2010: 106). Such arguments have been thought to be less applicable in places like East Yorkshire. While this study presents new insights into the development of ALFS in an area not typically included in research, the findings may be limited to East Yorkshire only and may have limited transferability. To complement this research, future research questions could include investigating ALFS in

other intensive agricultural areas, both in the UK and beyond. Sustainable intensification and food security as part of the discourse on growing populations and climate change offers another interesting avenue for future research on the role of ALFS in rural development and food systems.

Despite the potential limitations, this paper demonstrates that in East Yorkshire ALFS are emerging and growing, at the same time as capitalist, intensive agriculture is continuing. Thus, my conclusions suggest that it is not only a so-called crisis in conventional food chains (borne out through consumer anxiety, food scares, etc) which is stimulating the growth of these networks – other factors may be at work. It is not necessarily a complete shift – from ‘industrial’ to ‘local’ for example – as more conventional farm businesses are also starting to explore possibilities for adding value through ALFS, or are changing their practices to incorporate difference, whether in a small or large way. These insights from an industrial farming area highlight not only that ALFS are developing in places least thought to be suitable, but that historical associations with industrial agriculture can shape and frame how ALFS are understood in such places. The evidence presented in this paper further elaborates how interpretations and understandings of ALFS are context-specific and vary amongst different people.

Nevertheless, the historical dominance of large-scale, financially profitable farm businesses in the area continues to frame how other farming activities are understood and perceived. People are, generally, strongly influenced by the type of agriculture that they are in proximity to (Carolan 2011). There was strong commitment to, and defensiveness of, intensive agriculture in East Yorkshire, despite academic arguments of a (contested) post-

productivist transition (Ilbery and Bowler 1998; Wilson 2001; Walford 2003). On a regular basis, in the UK, intensive agriculture is blamed for rapid losses in biodiversity, reinforcing the view that intensive agriculture is far from dead, but perhaps thriving in particular places (Thompson 2012), as EU policies and subsidies encourage these practices (Clark and Jones 2007). However, little is said about how currently 'successful' conventional agricultural areas might also benefit from ALFS (except Selfa and Qazi 2005). Given this local level commitment to endemic farming styles, moving to a new mode of production must be sensitive to the local area, as this paper illustrates. Based on this example from East Yorkshire, it is not a straightforward division into on the one hand, 'conventional' and on the other, 'local', or 'alternative', spaces. Rather, that some of the latter can exist alongside (and perhaps even be integrated with) intensive agriculture. As has been shown throughout this paper, ALFS are developing in East Yorkshire, leading to new understandings and interpretations, and challenging previous perceptions about where ALFS could be developed. These ALFS in East Yorkshire may exhibit character differences compared to ALFS in other parts of the country, but nonetheless they are important divergences from the dominant industrial agriculture in the area. Although the initiatives are currently small in scale compared to the dominance of conventional agriculture, it is not reason enough to dismiss them or find them inadequate (cf. Gibson-Graham 2006). Understanding how such initiatives are growing helps to flesh out understandings of 'local' in a greater range of geographical places. 'Local' and 'conventional' are co-existing and co-constituted in the context of East Yorkshire, creating hybrid farming systems at the farm, local and regional scales, as may be the case elsewhere – here I use the term 'local' deliberately to incorporate 'alternative and local', as this is the way that many respondents have used the term. Such hybrid developments challenge and change incumbent practices, as well as redefining ALFS

as they occur in particular places. These hybrid food practices also contest ingrained perceptions, and illustrate to policy makers, academics, and businesses in other places, that these new developments need to be acknowledged, and understood, so that adequate support can be offered to encourage such initiatives to flourish. With appropriate support and recognition, such ALFS could contribute to rural development and help engender more sustainable agricultural practices, which may be increasingly important given recent concerns about food security and biodiversity losses. The post-2013 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) (EC 2013) specifically targets food and farming as a core element of sustainable rural development and job creation in rural areas. However, there may be a tension between policy goals of creating and sustaining local food economies, and the promotion of sustainable intensification, exports and business growth, which may circumvent ideals of being 'local'. Food businesses wanting to remain 'local' fall into a gap in policy support and priorities and find it harder to access the support and resources available through some policy programmes. The types of developments discussed in this paper are concordant with the proposals under CAP and potentially offer a solid foundation for future rural development incorporating ALFS. Preconceptions amongst academics, policy makers, local food businesses and consumers can include, or exclude, developing ALFS and have the potential to undermine such efforts as resources are focused elsewhere. Looking at East Yorkshire as a specific example illustrates that industrial foodspaces can co-exist with more local and artisanal foodscapes, but that the dominance of conventional agriculture has shaped the ways that 'alternative' and 'local' food spaces are understood in such a context. If we try too hard to pin down narrow definitions of terms like 'local' or 'alternative', then developments in places like East Yorkshire may not always be classified as being alternative, yet they clearly are 'alternative' in the specific context. As such, flexibility and diversity

within such concepts is necessary and indeed may be their strength. Such flexibility enables new and small scale developments to be included while they grow and evolve, allowing such initiatives to become more radical or alternative once they've found their place.

Empirical evidence from East Yorkshire illustrates how, and why, the concept of 'local' comes to be reshaped in various ways in particular geographical contexts, relational to conventional food systems, and local food systems in 'other' places. For example, describing how areas such as Cumbria, Wales, and the South West of England are different to East Yorkshire, involves thinking about complex entanglements of policies, subsidies, climate, geography, market demand, businesses, consumers, retailers and so on to produce locally contingent and distinctive food systems. ALFS have been described as 'modes of resistance to agri-industrial food systems' (Harris 2009: 55) – yet in East Yorkshire, there is less propensity to 'resist' such systems, rather to interact and co-exist in entangled configurations of food systems. The boundaries between alternative and mainstream worlds (as imagined and practised) are both unstable and shifting (Crewe *et al.* 2003: 102); ALFS are, in all places, refracted through and against the world of the globalised food and find escape difficult. Jarosz (2008: 242) also concludes that ALFS are not static objects or sets of relationships, but rather they emerge from political, cultural and historical processes. An inclusive and reflexive politics in place would understand ALFS not as local 'resistance' against a global capitalist 'logic' but as a mutually constitutive, imperfect, political process in which the local and the global make each other on an everyday basis (DuPuis & Goodman 2005: 369). ALFS should not just be seen as modes of resistance to agri-industrial food systems – there needs to be recognition that they are not mutually exclusive modes of production, and that there is a complex relationship between the two spheres, as producers

are rarely involved in one without being enmeshed in the other.

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