

CHANGING SCENERIES. RESURRECTION OF SMALL SCALE FARMING IN A DEAGRICULTURALIZED REGION (THE ROLE OF FARMERS' MARKET AND OTHER SHORT FOOD SUPPLY CHAINS)

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Introduction

The first new farmers' market (FM) in Italy was established in 1984 when the medieval Fierucola in Florence was re-invented. It was managed by small organic producers' associations in the framework of a strong political commitment to 'alternative food' (Rossi et al., 2008). FM growths however in Tuscany and other Regions¹ was very slow until 2005. In the following years FM were launched on initiative of local authorities, farmers' association and Slow Food. This growth has been supported by new FM laws adopted by several Regions including Lombardy on the wave of the campaign in favour of FM fostered by the 'Coldiretti' the most important Italian farmers' association². In 2008 the popularity of FM and 'local food' discourse reached a peak due to the growing anxiety about food increased by scandals like the Chinese melamine milk.

FM and other kind of local partnerships successful experiences represent a response not only to food safety anxieties uncertainties (Poulaine, 2005; Lamine, 2005) but also to other contradictions of the world food system (Hendrickson and Heffernan, 2002).

They also provides benefits to rural development (Battershill, and Gilg, 1998; Marsden et al., 2000; Renting et al., 2003). The very fast growth of FM in Italy however implies several risks. 'Institutionalization', focus on physical resources rather than on social capital and trading-off with the FM normative values, could undermine further development and their 'alterity' (Rossi et al., 2008). The question about the 'alternative' nature of FM has been already investigated in different countries but is still controversial (i.e. Hinrichs, 2000, Kirwan, 2004, Smithers et al., 2008).

The present study explores the recently development of FM in the Province of Como e Lecco (North-west Lombardy). The case study area interest from the point of view of small food chains relies on the early development of the different experience: raw milk automatic dispensers that were introduced for the first time in Italy in the Province of Como in 2004 and FM started in 2005 in the Province of Lecco (first experience in Lombardy following Tuscany). Furthermore in the mountain sector of this area the traits of 'marginal' and 'persistent' rural areas are still present. According to Marsden (1995) 'given certain political and economic conditions' under these circumstances it could be possible to develop post-productivist and endogenous forms. FM are one of these conditions and a tool to define a re-territorialized food space?

In order to answer to these questions and to contribute to the understanding of the controversial issues of FM 'alterity' and perspectives we analyzed the points of view of customers and vendors participating to the FM. The attitudes of FM customers were also compared to those of the other group involved in a short food chain: the raw milk automatic dispensers customers³.

¹ Regions correspondent to States or Land in genuine federal country. The Province is the lower administrative level. In the paper we use the word with the capital letter when referred to the political level.

² Agriculture in Italy is a matter devolved to the Regions.

³ The present study has been conducted in the context of a wider survey on SFC including raw milk dispensers and the Slow Cooking experience of partnership between restaurants and local farmers in the same area and in the neighbouring Sondrio Province.

The case study area

This area (surface 2,100 km², population 920.000) is an hybrid one with an highly urbanized and industrialized area in the South and a mountain area in the North (68% of the total surface). In both areas, due to environmental or socio-economic constraints large scale agriculture is virtually absent and the agricultural land account for only 17% of the surface. The process of deagriculturalization is still going on. Between 1990 and 2000 53% of the farms disappeared along with 22% of the agricultural land.

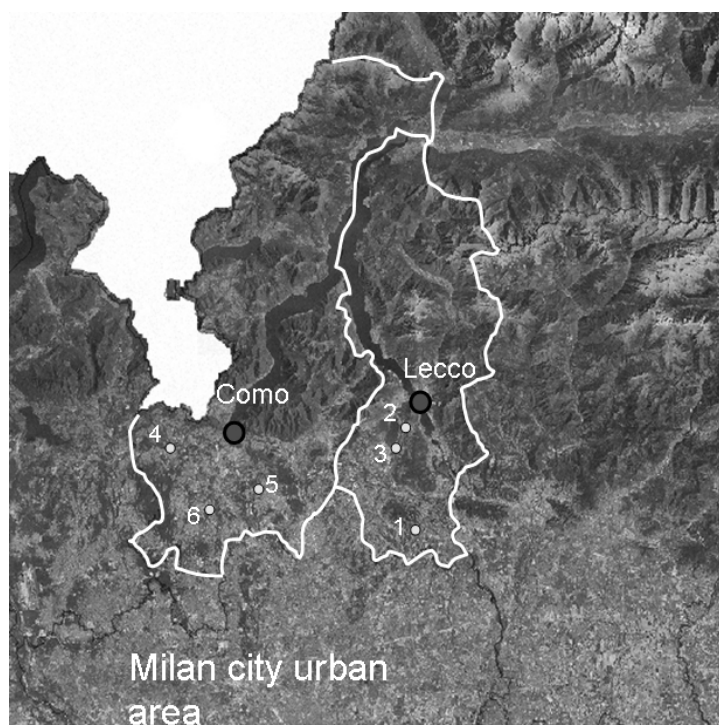


Fig. 1 – The borders (white lines) of the Province of Lecco and Como. The with area is Swiss territory. Each numbers corresponds to a FM: 1 = Osnago; 2 = Galbiate, 3 = Oggiono; 4 = Olgiate comasco; 5 = Cantù; 6 = Lomazzo.

The markets

The study included 4 out of 6 FM present in 2009 in the area. Their features are shown in Table 1. The first FM of the area has been established in 2005 at Osnago. It was fostered by a project of the regional authority (Province of Lecco) and occupy twice a week the otherwise underutilized premises of the local Osnago Fair. The vendors are members of the ‘Terre alte’ (‘Highlands’) consortium with about 30 members managing all the FM of the province and promoting agritourism.

Vendors come mostly from the Province of Lecco (a few one from the bordering areas). The ‘Terre Alte’ consortium rely on an office and a small staff managed by the former regional secretary of a farmers’ association (CIA, ‘Italian farmers confederation’).

Table 1. Farmers’ markets in the province of Como e Lecco¹ and their features

Site, population	Year est.	Frequency	Facilities	Vendors ²	Management	Food item
Osnago (Lecco) 4,556	2005	Biweekly	Indoor /refrigerated display cases	12-14	Producers’ consortium	Dairy (cows, goats), meat (rabbit/poultry), flowers, fruit, vegetables, honey, wine, olive oil
Galbiate (Lecco) 8,637	2007	forthnighly	Semi-outdoor refrigerated display cases	6-7	Producers’ consortium /Municipality	Dairy (cows, goats), meat (bovine), honey, fruits, vegetables, burning wood
Olgiate (Como) 10,829	2008	forthnighly	Outdoor (square market)	6-8 ²	Friendly countryside foundation	Dairy (cows, goats), honey, fruits, vegetables, flowers, wine, rice.
Cantù (Como) 37,431	2008	forthnighly	Outdoor (square market)	6-8 ²	Friendly countryside foundation	Dairy (cows, goats), honey, fruits, vegetables, flowers, wine, rice.

Notes: 1. In the Province of Lecco in 2009 a new market was established in Oggiono, in the province of Como a third FM with the same feature and vendors of Olgiate comasco e Cantù is active in Lomazzo. 2. All producers participate to more than one of the three FM in the Province of Como

The Galbiate FM has been launched by the municipality which provided the premises and advertising facilities. It is managed by the ‘*Terre alte*’ Consortium. Farms outside the boundaries of the municipality are non admitted. Three FM in the Province of Como started in 2008 (at Olgiate comasco, Lomazzo and Cantù). They were launched by the farmers’ association ‘*Coldiretti*’ through its satellite ‘*Fondazione Campagna amica*’ (Friendly countryside foundation).

Table 2. Details of items on sale in Osnago FM

# vendors	Items
3	Dairy products (goats’ milk), raw milk, cheese, yogurt, processed goat meat
1	Meat (rabbit) , processed rabbit meat + poultry meat (re-sold) + eggs (re-sold) + processed poultry meat (re-sold)
1	Pork meat, salami etc.
1	Flowers and plants
2	Fruit, vegetables (largely re-sold)
1	Honey + Olive oil (from farmer’s own farm in... Tuscany)
(5)	Very local wine from 5 cooperating producers (but another vendor sells)
1	Fish (local lake fish), processed food from fish/fish eggs

FM of the Province of Como are small outdoor markets without facilities as refrigerated display cases. They look like ‘old’ FM. Producers participate to more than one of these markets on a rotational basis and must be members of ‘*Coldiretti*’ and ‘*Campagna amica*’.

Producers participating to these FM come from the whole Province (including the mountain valleys) but someone come from other Provinces of Lombardy (in case the items they sell are not grow/produced locally, i.e. rice and wine as discussed later in the paper). The farmers’ association ‘*Coldiretti*’ provides only the institutional framework but locally these FM are managed by one of the producers.

Data collection and analysis

Research was conducted between May and July 2009 mainly in the form of participant-observation. The point of view of producers/vendors, organizers and local political representatives was investigated through informal interviews whereas self-administered interviews was employed in the case of customers. They were invited by the author who was always present or by one of the organizers to fill the questionnaire providing a table, pens and explanations.

Very few customers refused to answer while many were pleased to have the opportunity to declare their enthusiastic consensus toward the FM and to make comments. A total of 313 questionnaire were collected (Osnago 206, Galbiate 48, Olgiate Comasco 35, Cantù 24). Complete filled questionnaire allowing full statistical analysis however were only 202. The number of questionnaire reflects roughly the relative importance of the FM. Statistical analysis included Wilcoxon signed rank test, chi-square and ordinal logistic analysis (the model included as independent variables the whole set of the socio-demographic and behavioural traits and as dependent variable the items related to the attitude of the customers). All test was performed at 95% level of confidence.

Customers were invited by an advice posted on the dispenser to pick up the questionnaire form from a pocket, to fill it and to return it to the dispensers. 8 automatic dispensers were involved in the collection of the questionnaires. Results from the raw milk automatic dispensers customers were treated in the same way.

The FM customer and their point of view

Women represented a very large fraction of the sample (68%) whereas in terms of age there was a prevalence of central classes. Younger shoppers (age 18-38) accounted only for 17% of respondents and the elderly people (age 65+) for 12%. The age group between 39 and 52 accounted for 32%, the largest group being that between 53 and 64 (38%). The sample displayed quite an high education level with 22% of respondents having an university education, 48% a secondary school background and only 23% and 7% attended only a middle or a primary school respectively. Other socio-demographic and behavioural traits of the sample are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. The FM customers sample traits

Consumers in the family unit	1 = 14%, 2 = 25%, 3 = 26%, 4 or more = 35%
Shopping also for friends, relatives, etc.	Yes = 26%
Mean of transportation to get to the FM	On foot = 20%, bike = 4%, motorcycle = 2%, car alone = 34%, car with relatives = 38%, car with friends etc. = 2%
Shopping frequency	First time = 9% , sometimes = 12%, one a month or more = 23%, regularly = 55%
Residence	95% in the municipality or neighbouring municipality
Incidence of FM on usual food shopping	Most of food from FM = 43%, Less than 50% of food but purchasing of several FM items = 38%; only selected items purchased = 19%.
Most interesting items	Fruits and vegetables = 29%, dairy = 13%, meat = 4%, honey, flowers = 2%; more than a category = 52%

The results indicating the FM customers declared much importance to some issues related both to intrinsic local food qualities and to its environmental and social values as shown in Table 3. Other results expressing the FM consumers point of view are shown in Table 4.

Table 3. Importance to costumers of some factors (5-point Likert scale with 5 as most important)

Item	#	Average ¹	Variables affecting the item
Genuine food appreciation (food without additives and preservatives)	299	4,7a	gender (F+) age (-)
Environment concern (less pollution from packaging and transportation)	298	4,6ab	age (-) education (+)
Supporting local farming	299	4,6b	age ²
Freshness appreciation	292	4,6b	gender (F+) frequency
Personal trust (the vendor is a local producer)	300	4,5c	gender (F+), age ²
Price/quality	299	4,5c	gender (F+)

1. average with different index are significantly different (Wilcoxon signed rank test)

2. higher scoring in extreme vs central age groups (two groups comparison)

Table 4. Average agreement of FM consumers to some statements (5-point Likert scale)

Item	#	average	Variables affecting the response
Consumer plays a major environmental role	295	4,6	gender (F+) age (-) education (+)
FM offer a very good items variety	298	4,1	FM category (large+)
Buying local seasonal food instead of off-season	299	4,0	Family size (-)
Interest in visiting the farms	294	4,0	Family size (-)
Re-selling by vendors in FM	292	3,1	FM category (large+)

Socio-demographic variables affected most of the items even though the general consensus toward the FM was very high. Gender affected items related to food intrinsic properties coherently with the tradition role of women in matter of food choice. Age affected the items related to social and environmental issues. The age central classes exhibit a more pragmatically attitude. This attitude is strengthened by family size. Consumers buying food for a larger family unit is less interested in seasonality and visits to the farms

Positive attitude toward local agriculture are higher amongst young and old people. Over 65 experienced in their youth the rural life and maintain an emotional sympathetic attitude towards agriculture and local food. In the case of young people support to agriculture is allegedly mediated by the rural revival supported by the media.

In term of FM categories the customers attending to the larger Osnago FM exhibited an higher degree of fidelity. Most of Osnago customers declared to be regular shoppers (64%) whereas regular shoppers were only 43% in the small FM. Furthermore 54% of the Osnago customers declared that their food provision from FM cover more than 50% of food family purchasing (27% in small FM).

These differences may be explained either with the different frequency and number of vendors in the larger FM. Consumers in small FM exhibited a completely different attitude toward re-selling. 50% of large FM consumers declared to agree with re-selling vs 19% in small FM. This reflects as discussed later in the paper a trading-off mechanism between the basic principle of FM 'vendor is the producer' and convenience (to find a wider range of item). Differences within the FM categories reflects also FM location. Galbiate and Cantù FM are in the very centre of the town, thus they are preferred by the elderly resident people who do not drive a car.

Comparison between FM consumers and raw milk consumers

The sample of raw milk consumers differs widely from that of FM consumers. Women were only 54% (68% in FM) and the age group over 52 years accounted only for 37% (41 in FM). Large size families accounted for 45% of the sample (35% on FM).

Table 5. Importance to crude milk costumers of some factors (5-point Likert scale with 5 as most)

Item	#	Average ¹	Variables affecting the item
Environment concern (less pollution from packaging and transportation)	199	4,7a	
Supporting local farming	198	4,6a	
Personal trust (the vendor is a local producer)	199	4,6ab	Education (-)
Health properties	198	4,6b	
Taste	198	4,5c	
Price	199	4,5d	Education (-) Family size (+)

1. average with different index are significantly different (Wilcoxon signed rank test)

The raw milk consumers declared to assign more importance to social and environmental values than to intrinsic milk qualities. For FM customers' most important motivation is related to the concept of purchasing 'genuine' high quality food as previously observed in the case of direct selling and as observed by previous studies (Battershill and Gilg, 1998).

In comparison with FM consumers raw milk consumers give more importance also to personal trust in the producer. This may reflect the perception of milk as healthy but at the same time risky food. The main difference between the FM and the raw milk customers groups however concerns the interpretation of 'local' food/milk. FM adopt a much wider geographic definition of 'local' whereas 75% of raw milk consumers' spatial reference is limited to their municipality or neighbouring municipalities.

Table 6. FM/Raw milk consumer concept of 'local food'/'local milk boundaries

	FM consumers		Raw milk dispensers consumers	
	#	%	#	%
Municipality/neighbouring municipality	46	16	141	72
Sub- provincial area	49	17	37	19
Province	82	28	10	5
Province/ neighbouring province	65	22	2	1
Lombardy	47	16	5	3

The high level of consensus toward the social, environmental, health and economic advantages of raw milk consumption was not affected by gender and age. According to these findings the raw milk consumers appear strongly motivated confirming observation from other countries (Enticott, 2003). In order to understand the attitudes of raw milk consumers it is necessary to point out that in 2008 raw milk became a transparent public issue. Following a political and media campaign against the allegedly risks of consuming raw milk a decree of the Ministry of Health stated that warnings against non boiled crude milk consumption should have been posted to the raw automatic dispensers. In spite of this only 23% of our the sample declared to boil raw milk on a regular basis.

New perspective for farming

The stories of farmers participating to the FM tell that FM provide an unique opportunity to farmers to change from farming methods bound to the industrial food system. FM encourage farming differentiation, sustainability and even new small farms establishment.

The only producer selling his own bovine meat in FM was a former dairy milk producer with 80 Holstein cows. Thanks to the FM he became a meat producer fattening beef and farming 16 suckler cows. Cattle are fed mainly farm produced hay and fattening take quite a long time (17 months). He his very proud to 'sell quality meat' to local customers and very satisfied.

'Every time I come to the market here I am sure to sell half a beef. I know what kind of meat the consumer wish so I prepare in advance different kink of packages'.

The positive interactions with customers seems to enhance social sustainability by providing additional motivations to the producers and social reward according to previous observations (Kirwan, 2004). As far as environmental sustainability is concern this study case implies lower farming intensity and lower external (industrial) inputs thus providing a sound example of the

linkage between sustainability and FM and other short food chains (Gilg, A.W. , Battershill, M. , 2000).

From the point of view of occupation and ‘come back to the farm’ FM proved to be effective. They helped a young man to leave his extra-agricultural job and become a full time farmer in the dairy cows family farm. Three out of four dairy goats farms participating to the FM are new farms managed by young men who previously worked in the buildings industry. One of these new milking goats farms is in the mountains (Municipality of Cusino, Cavargna Valley). It is largely based on a rangeland system (even though the previously farmed Lariana autochthonous goats have been replaced by the ‘globalized’ French Alpine goats’). The farmer’s girlfriend who have a job in Lugano city (Switzerland) is part-time concerned with the small dairy and her vision of farming is clearly self-reflexive and political conscious.

“Politicians do not realize the difference between our low intensity farming based on pasture and preserving the landscape from goats farming system based on industrial feedstuffs. We use abandoned meadows, pasture and woodlands and do not add industrial starters to the milk. There is a goat farm in a nearby village that maintain their goats always indoor, purchase hay and feedstuffs and use starters in the milk. They are much supported from the politicians who appreciate very much their cheese quality without understanding what local quality food means’

This is another example of FM promoting low intensity farming but also an example of the role of FM as incubators of endogenous post-productivist development from a pre-productivist (Marsden, 2005).

Horticultural farms were boosted from FM as well. Young people introduced vegetable growing in family farms where it was absent or marginal and some of them established new horticultural farms. Thanks to the FM a family could close its small fruits and vegetable retail shop and the members previously engaged every day with it were able to dedicate more time to the horticultural activity. This role of ‘business incubators’ is in good agreement with previous observations (Brown, 2000).

All these experiences even though clearly ‘alternative’ to conventional farming and food systems do not involve people with urban background. The rural background of these new farmers however do not prevent them to have a self-reflexive vision of the ‘alternative’ nature of short food chains and of their social role. This reflects the large degree of overlapping between rural and urban cultures in the late modernity. Producers and vendors pursue their own specific goals and continue to play their role but thanks to ‘culture hybridization’ they share largely common languages and visions in matter of food. The anxious urbanized shoppers and rural people nowadays share the same distrust toward industrial food. The new FM should have been impossible without this common background and the sense of reciprocal engagement between customers and producers.

Reshaping power relationships?

This new kind of farmers consciousness rising from FM experience have some political implications. The organizer of the FM in the Province of Lecco was the former regional secretary in Lecco of the CIA (‘Italian farmers confederation’). He left his job not only because of the interest in the new FM challenge but also because of his criticism towards the farmers association system affected by bureaucratization.

‘Farmers’ associations do not much differ from a commercial service centre. The CAP multiplied the administrative procedures and the farmer became a customer’

FM are part of the strategy of the 'Coldiretti' (the most important Italian farmers association) in order to reverse the perception of a bureaucratized organization promoting productivism amongst small farmers (Corti, 2005). Farmers who participate to the FM of the Province of Como launched on initiative of the 'Coldiretti' however share the same criticism. Thus FM is as a self-managed space where farmers learn to cooperate each other, managing transactions with other actors and experiment in a new kind of self-organization. When the market is not crowded producers have quite a lot of time to chat and exchange news and ideas.

FM with their face to face relationships and close contact with consumers' values, needs and wishes help farmers to shift their focus from production and productivism to a 'human face' market. This affects farming methods, promotes crop differentiation, re-introduction of old crops. The result is the economic viability of a small scale farming much less dependent from industrial inputs, the industrial food chains and the techno-bureaucratic agencies.

This perspective is made possible by the new active role of 'critical' consumers (i.e. Wilkinson, 2001) but we find that FM experience of the Province of Lecco tells that municipalities could play a pivotal role in the local food alliance. Furthermore the active role of the local political level may balance the support to productivism and industrial food chains from the higher political levels. The engagement of Galbiate municipality in the FM is an example of strong commitment to the local food cause.

In spite of the evidence of positive experiences the perspective of FM is still uncertain and it is hardly believable that they could effectively influence the food governance. FM potential growth in the case study area is limited by the small number of farms able to gather and attain the 'critical mass' of food items variety necessary to establish a FM. In the last decades in the case study area most of the agricultural land has been lost in favour of extensive urbanization. The remaining farms were forced to produce commodities like cows' milk or to shift from food production to commercial gardening. Furthermore, because of the high demographic density, several producers are able to sell directly to the farm their products. These farmers are allegedly reluctant to be involved in a FM since it implies a public commitment and adhesion to normative values. Pressure from local authorities and consumers and the success of FM and other short food chains however could force these farmers to join to the movement and to shift from commodities and specialized farming to local food oriented small scale farming.

Controversial issues and visions

FM is not a place, conflicts and contradictions. To the FM participate very small producers selling only their potatoes and cabbages or their small goat's milk cheese. But side by side to this kind of producers which correspond to the idealized or even picturesque vision of the FM there are very different kinds of producers/vendors selling a wide range of items including processed food and traded items. Re-selling and several other practices contradict the theory and 'integrity' of FM. The customers' vision of FM itself however is ambiguous since it derives both from the pragmatic experience of interactions with the vendors and the 'official' FM rhetoric.

'Direct purchasing from the farmers is the most effective way to enhance local farming and environment. It is the easiest way to get healthy and tasty food to consume and to establish friendly relationships within the community' (booklet presenting the Galbiate FM).

'We assure that all products come from our farms according to the Decree 228/2001' (leaflet advertising the Osnago FM).

The statement about the exclusion of trading reflects the old set of laws regulating the FM before 2008 (Osnago FM started in 2005). The contradiction between this assurance and the presence of a large degree of re-selling however reflects also the compromises that a FM must eventually accomplish in order to attain commercial success. At present 50% of Osnago customers agree with re-selling, a figure to be compared with the 19% of agreement by the new established small FM customers. When asked to add a personal comment to the questionnaire the most frequent request was that for a wider range of products (i.e. bread and flour). Thus it seems that there is a lot of flexibility of the FM customers vision and that they are ready to trade-off the ‘alterity’ of FM with convenience. This flexibility depend also on the higher importance assigned to concept like ‘authentic food’, ‘local agriculture support’, ‘pollution sparing’ than to concrete nature of the farming practices employed to produce the food. Low costumers interest in the knowledge of the production methods actually used for the food they purchased has been already reported (Gigl and Battershill, 2000; Smithers et al. 2008).

Both vendors and the manager in Osnago FM claimed that the presence of re-selling is necessary to offer an adequate range of products for the convenience of customers. The same arguments has been reported in the case of Ontario FM (Smithers, 2008). Re-selling thus is viewed as a compromise in order to increase the number of FM customers particularly those purchasing most of their weekly food. Some vendors label his own grown vegetable and fruits but re-selling is not always transparent and sometimes traded and own farm products are mixed in the display cases (as noticed by some customers). Limited re-selling is present by the small FM as well. Strong pressure in favour of a wide range of items conflicts also with seasonality (another FM principle) was clearly observed in the UK (Holloway and Kneafsey, 2000)

The presence at Osnago of a dairy cooperative collecting milk from 16 dairy cows farms however seems to contradict more seriously the values and principle of FM. This dairy sells its own pasteurized milk and pasteurized milk cheese. Non only these products are processed from someone else but the farmer but are sold side by side with farmers’ raw milk and raw milk cheese. This do not help the strategy of sound differentiation between small cheese producers and industrial cheese based of three pillars: using farm own milk, using raw milk, sell through short food chains. This strategy has been adopted also by North-Americans producers even though they had to invent an artisanal cheese manufacturing tradition (Friedmann, 2005).

Another controversial issues are represented by the presence of processed food ready to cook (mainly in Osnago FM) and by the participation to the FM of the Province of Como of producers coming from the Province of Pavia (in the South of Lombardy). They sell only their own products (wine, rice) not grown/produced in the Province of Como but this tends to enlarge to a large scale the vision of ‘local food’. A ‘catalogue’ of controversial practices is shown in Table 7.

Table 7. A ‘catalogue’ of FM potential conflicts

Degree of conflict	Observed practices conflicting with the declared principles of FM
Low?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • some vendors sell more traded food than their farm’s products • some vendors come from far away (even though their products are not available locally; • re-sold food not always labelled and physically separated; • some producers manage a second farm far away and sell the products in the FM; • some producers sell ready to cook food processed by food processing firms (i.e. pasta makers) even though using some farm ingredients; • producers not physically present in the FM delegating selling their products to other producers/vendors
High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • traded food non only from farms but also from wholesaler (i.e. locally not available fruits);

- | | |
|--|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• food processed by cooperative semi-industrial plants when the same item is produced and sold by individual farmers |
|--|--|

Wine and olive oil: an example of FM dilemmas

Wine and olive oil provide interesting example of 'FM dilemmas'. Both products are deeply embedded with symbolic values since the remote time of ancient Mediterranean civilization. In Italy thanks to the Catholic Church they still have a sacramental role. Symbol of abundance, joy, wisdom, peace, vitality etc. these fluids along with bread constitute the so-called Mediterranean trinity the living evidence of high agricultural and food civilization. 'Olive tree' was a used from 1995 to 2007 successive by the former centre-left Italian political coalitions. High quality olive oil and wine became a matter of fashion and social behaviour and more recently the herald of food re-localization. Thanks to climate changes and to the pressure in favour of local food vineyards plantations were carried out where they disappeared in the XIX century (because of the Phyllossera infection) or later because of national market development and agriculture specialisation. Our study case area is one of the best example of this. The hills of the Province of Lecco represented one of the most important vineyards landscaped rubbed out by the Phyllossera. Only a few one survived in the Montevicchia hill. A small local wine production survived also in the Province of Como in the North (Domaso, Como Lake). At present Montevicchia and Perego (the neighbouring village) counts 5 farmhouses with vineyards and that cellars and the new vineyard landscape is portrayed in the poster and leaflet advertising the Osnago FM as a symbol of agricultural renaissance. These wineries are the only ones in the Province. They participated to the Osnago FM on a rotational basis but eventually they delegated a local vegetable producer to sell their bottles in the market claiming that they could non spend their time to sell few bottles.

This practice conflicts with the rule of the market. Re-selling from producer is accepted but not the reverse (the physical absence of the producers). FM tried to promote very local wine (from few km far away) but its price is higher than wine from the well-known vineyard area of 'Oltrepo pavese' (extreme South of Lombardy). In the FM of the Province of Como a few wineries exist as well but the organizers preferred to allow the participation of a producer coming from the 'Oltrepo pavese'.

Olive oil presents analogous dilemmas. In Galbiate FM a local olive oil producers was not able to fulfil the regular participation due to the small quantity of product he obtains from his grove. In Osnago FM the local oil from the cooperative mill in Perledo (municipality of Bellano on the Como Lake) was replaced with a product from ... Tuscany.

This contradiction is formally legitimated by the fact that the vendors sell mainly his honey and the oil come from his own farm in Tuscany. Someone in the market told the author that the local olive oil production is suspiciously high in comparison with the extension of the olive groves but it is possible that the high price of Como Lake olive oil, made from the northern-most groves in Europe, could have discouraged his presence in the market.

Because of environmental condition local food may be much more expensive a fact that implies another dilemma between the shoppers convenience and the FM and its 'integrity'. Have the FM to be a popular, large family markets or it could be also a place for *gourmands*? Several of these questions are likely to remain open. In the meanwhile we tried to summary some advantages/disadvantages and uncertainties of FM from both side of producers/vendors and customers.

Table 8. A summary of FM advantages and disadvantages from the point of view of consumers and producers

	Advantage	Disadvantages/uncertainties
Producers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • positive interaction with consumers, other producers and other actors • healthy and friendly competition • good prices • regular selling channel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • commitment to rules and regular participation • pressure for variety • lacking of facilities (fresh products) • farm member/s daily engagement
Consumers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • face to face interaction • food freshness • cooking suggestions • well known products origin 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • limited food variety • seasonal constraints • local available food may be expensive • limited market frequency

Conclusions

The FM is an hybrid place where different kind of producers and customers negotiate the vision of ‘local’, ‘quality’, ‘artisanal’ and seasonal food and try legitimating their role. At the beginning FM adopt quite strict self-regulation but eventually, in order to get the participation of a ‘critical mass’ of producers and a consequently good items range they accepts some compromises. It is not easy to interpreter these compromises on the light of FM values since different risks and uncertainties may be involved.

In spite of several controversial issues conflicting with the ‘integrity’ of FM vision they represent an alternative type of exchange context. Many customers are conscious of their active contribution to this ‘alterity’ while farmers are conscious that FM provide a unique opportunity for local agriculture to survive and possibly develop.

The role of local authorities providing they do not replaces bottom-to-up initiative from the farmers may play a key role in the building of a local food alliance. This may help the farmers to gain more independence from the regulating power of techno-bureaucratic agencies of agricultural productivism. The consumer demand for quality food and a wide range of items may push farmers to change farming methods, enhancing differentiation and less intensive more sustainable systems.

Local food production however in a largely deagriculturalized area have to face several constraints, the more serious being the high cost of some local food and the scarcity of survived farms. These constraints do no influence in the same way the different kind of short food chains. Top restaurants for example are interested in authentic high quality food even though expensive food. Purchasing groups (GAS) are less reluctant than FM consumers to accepts seasonality constraints.

Even if it seems unrealistic to hope that FM alone could become an alternative to the industrial food chain because of their public and educational role they could give a fundamental contribution to the development of a local food system indirectly influencing food governance.

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