Farm Fresh Connection: Research for Potential Bowdoin “Buying Club”

II. Community Partner Information:

Organization: Farm Fresh Connection (FFC);
Parent Organization: Maine Sustainable Agriculture Society (MESAS)

Farm Fresh Connection Contact:
Andrew Files
(207) 581-3108
Andrew.files@umit.maine.edu

Bowdoin College Contact:
Amy Donahue
(207) 725 -3302

Local Farm Contacts:
Lisa Turner (Laughing Stock Farm)
(207) 865 – 3743
Amy Sprague (Wolf Pine Farm)
(207) 324 – 3743
Dave and Christine Colson (New Leaf Farm)
(207) 353 -5263

III. Organizational History:

FFC has a brief and undeveloped history, as it is a relatively young organization. FFC’s first season began in October of 2002; it is just now finishing its second full season of work. The initial idea for FFC came from Adrian Wadsworth, who was a student at the University of Southern Maine’s Muskie School of Public Policy, as well as a dairy farmer, and the president of MESAS. The idea of FFC came from a class project Adrian did while at USM. When FFC first began, the non-profit organization (MESAS is a 501(C)(3)) adopted a strict mission statement, which was later revised in the winter of 2003. Their mission statement reads:
Farm Fresh Connection (FFC), a program of the Maine Sustainable Agriculture Society (MESAS), builds relationships between institutional markets, Maine farmers, students, and local communities, thereby sustaining Maine farms, boosting local economies and fostering community spirit. The social mission of building relationships and developing networks is accomplished by coordinating the sale of fresh Maine food from the farm to the institutional marketplace.  

Basically, FFC wants to directly link local Maine farmers to the people of Maine through institutions such as colleges (Bowdoin and Bates) and hospitals by acting as a “middle-man” to organize the logistics of any transactions between local farmers and institutions. Linking these two groups together creates a dialogue of connection for both, helps sustain local farmers, and provides citizens of Maine with quality produce, thereby forming a symbiotic relationship.

FFC buys from about sixty small to medium size farms and gardens that produce exclusively for small markets. In other words, none of these farmers ship mass quantities of produce across the country, though the farms do not sell exclusively through FFC. The biggest farms FFC works with have fifteen to twenty acres of vegetables and fruit, with an additional twenty acres for other commodity-type crops. The smallest farms are about five acres. Most of these farms are strictly organic in their growing methods, though a few are not. But, the non-organic farms still do not use a large number of chemicals because the product does not need to be preserved for the amount of time that produce traveling across the country might. None of the products are genetically engineered, like

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1 E-mail from Andrew Files to group, 29 Sept. 2004.
those of major farming corporations. The farms supply fresh fruits and vegetables, potatoes, meat, eggs, dairy, and honey in yearly cycles so that FFC can supply all year long, not just in the summer. In fact, one third of FFC’s total sales are in November through April. FFC sells many products during the winter months; these products are predominately ones that can be stored, like apples, potatoes, root products and honey, or ones that can be grown year round like beef, eggs and hydroponic tomatoes.² By using FFC, farmers receive a higher price for their goods than they would if they sold to a wholesale market, but probably a lower price than if they sold directly to consumers. FFC facilitates higher gross sales for farmers than would normally be possible and it helps to facilitate year round sales programs for farmers.

FFC has many diverse types of buyers. Initially, Bowdoin and Bates, FFC’s college consumers, were the main buyers. Both colleges have increased their buying significantly from the first growing season. For example, Bowdoin has increased its spending by 25-30% from 2003, and has expanded purchases from just produce to meat and potatoes as well³. Student demand for local, organic food helps to drive the increased purchasing by colleges. Local hospitals were originally anticipated to be another main buyer from FFC. However, there is not a high demand for locally grown products by the patients of any hospitals, so buying has not succeeded as well as it has with colleges. It is crucial for the constituents of any institution to demand local food if the institution is to take the step toward buying local. In the last year, FFC has expanded beyond institutions and moved toward the private market. Restaurants who want to keep a reputation of high quality food can buy through FFC. Some examples include Fore Street Restaurant in

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² Email from Andrew Files to John Gronberg, 5 Dec 2004.
³ Interview with Andrew Files, 22 Sept 2004
Portland and the Chebeague Island Inn. FFC also sells to some small organic foods distributors, such as Jonathon’s Organics as well as to some other farmers with large farm stands who want to diversify their product selection by offering meats and cheeses that are not grown on their own farm.

The operations director, Martha Putnam, coordinates all of the buying and selling for FFC. Martha acts as the face of the operation, she communicates regularly with both farmers and institutions. She sends out lists of products available to the customers and takes orders. She then collects the food from all the farmers, takes it to a refrigerated warehouse in Portland to organize the orders (because an order from one institution can require goods from many different farms) and delivers the orders within a day or so. She is also able to match certain institutions to specific farms upon their request, if they want to insure that all their goods come from the same reliable or reputable source. Martha works hard to do all the personal business; it is her job to satisfy both the farmers and the institutions in terms of both prices and quality of food. The farmers are not under any contract to stay with FFC and the institutions must be certain that their orders will always arrive on time. These working relationships of the program are built solely on trust, and Martha is the main person to uphold that standard. Andrew really could not speak highly enough of Martha; he said she keeps the whole operation running, and this is very true.

The funding of FFC is the most crucial ingredient to its success. The organization had two main sponsors to begin with: the US Department of Agriculture and Common Good Ventures. The USDA gave a grant to MESAS to start up the program, but they required a one-to-one match for the $108,000 they gave, which the state of Maine provided. The rest of the money came from the philanthropic group from Maine called
Common Good Ventures, who promised $30,000/year for three years, as well as technical expertise to MESAS and FFC. This money has kept FFC running. FFC’s main goal for the future is to become self-sustaining; they want to be able to fully support the operation on the money made from sales. The only way to do this is through continual expansion of buyers to about six times the current levels. FFC estimates it will take between two and four more years to meet this goal. At the moment FFC’s gross revenue is about $155,000 for the year. The costs of their goods sold, what they pay to farmers, is $130,000. This leaves only $25,000 for operating costs; however, total expenses come out to be $100,000, of which paid labor and benefits are about 45%. FFC is not making anywhere near enough money to be self-sustaining at the current time.

FFC’s other goals for the future include helping farmers to expand their marketing opportunities and providing affordable, high quality products to local markets. FFC also has serious concerns for the future. Their day-to-day concerns involve transportation and shipping logistics, as well as the high cost of labor. For the long term, they are most concerned with finding more funding and increasing their rate of growth.

IVA. Environmental/Social Problem and goals of FCC:

According to a study by the University of Wisconsin, food travels an average of 1,300 miles from its point of production to our mouths. In a normal day we eat oranges from Florida, tomatoes from Mexico, chicken from Maryland and beef from as far away as Argentina. To put this in perspective, one would have to drive to Portland and back 25 times to cover the distance that the “average” piece of food we consume travels. One’s

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4 E-mail from Andrew Files to group. 20 Oct 2004
immediate reaction to this disparity is most often: “so, what?” Or, as Henry Work ‘06, jokingly put it, “Well, I like my food well traveled.” The nearest “local” farm for Bowdoin College is less than 2 miles away, Crystal Spring Farm on Pleasant Hill Road.

Most people do not realize the advantages of buying and consuming locally grown food. According to foodroutes.org, there is a three step process to getting people to buy local: “raising awareness about where to find and how to identify locally grown food, communicating a message about why it is important to buy local, and removing the obstacles to buying local.” As the primary goal of FFC is to increase the purchases of locally grown food, these steps need to be taken. The first two steps offer the greatest challenge for FFC. They represent the core of the problem that FFC tries to address; the advantages of locally grown food need to be shown to consumers.

Locally grown foods are better than corporately grown food in every way imaginable. Local food is more nutritious, fresher, tastier, and more aesthetically pleasing. Local food supports a home economy beyond just farmers; it fosters stronger community ties, and builds a better community. Many will think that local food is more expensive than corporately grown food, but when one looks at the numerous external benefits of buying local, the price suddenly seems to be quite a bargain. Comparing only the prices of local, organic food and corporate produce is unfair, it is not (pardon the pun) an apples-to-apples comparison, says Andrew Files. For FFC to increase its customer base it needs to educate people on all the advantages of locally grown food, and show how local organic goods are not the same as corporately grown ones.


We will take “locally grown foods” to mean food from non-corporate farms owned by members of communities near the location the food is actually consumed.

Email from Andrew Files to John Gronberg. 2 Dec. 2004.
Community members will benefit a great deal from buying local food. As outlined above, the food itself is more nutritious. When food is transported from corporate farms to consumers it will lose much of its nutritional value and taste. The transit time for produce often can be 3 or 4 days. As soon as fruits and vegetables are picked, they lose their source of energy, the plant or tree they grew on, and begin to lose their nutritional value as enzymes break down their structures. “Conventional produce [can] lose up to 60% of their nutritional value and flavor within 48 hours of harvesting, well before most can be purchased by consumers.” Over the 1300 or so miles the average piece of food travels, much of its primary value is lost as the amounts of nutrients are depleted rapidly. Local food provided through FFC is delivered the day it is picked, or the day after, so nutrients are maintained.

Local food is healthier than corporate food for many reasons beyond freshness. Local food grown for FFC is almost all organic. Organic food will not be inundated with dangerous pesticides and chemicals that are put on other foods. Local, organic food can be a healthy choice because when we buy it, we are only buying the food and not the chemicals that large companies add to the food to make it more saleable. It is safer to buy organic, consumers can get food that has fewer chemicals and, even when chemicals are used, the consumers have a person to turn to who knows the reasons for using these chemicals and who can answer to any problems associated with those chemicals.

On a more subjective note, taste is also a major concern in food consumption, and fresh food tastes much better than comparable food that has been sitting on a shelf for four days. Produce supplied by FFC is often delivered on the same day it is picked, and consumed soon after. By getting food from FFC, community members will receive the best taste and most nutrition possible. Food that is delivered so close to the time it is harvested will look great and feel good as well. It will not be some apple that has bounced around in the back of a semi-truck from Florida that has gone through 6 major interstates, and numerous truck stops. The person eating the apple will get a wonderful piece of produce brought to him in a small shipment from just down the road; something that looks fresh and comes from a farmer that the community member probably knows.

FFC endeavors to “put a face on the food”. In our increasingly computerized society there are many people with whom we interact everyday that we will never meet or speak to. FFC seeks to break down this trend. Food is something we deal with everyday and knowing those who provide it to us is extremely valuable. One will find comfort in knowing the person who handles the food one is eating. Knowledge of production helps one feel less like a number in a corporate account, and more like a real person.

Local farmers, while getting to know others in their community better through local purchases, also benefit from the income that they can receive from community members buying their produce. Most farmers must fight to stay in business. In fact, since 1935 the U.S. has lost 4.7 million farmers.11 This, despite the population of the U.S.

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climbing 163.6 million in the same period.\textsuperscript{12} Increasing the amount of locally bought foods will help to keep farmers in business and to foster a stronger community financially.

Commercial farmers do not offer the same product as local farmers, as noted above. Local, organic apples and corporate apples are not the same. One is a nutritionally deficient, decaying foodstuff that only serves as something to consume. The other is freshly picked, nutrient filled fruit that fulfills both qualitative taste desires and health necessities. Though farmers have a difficult time competing against the apparent cost advantages of large farms, increasing awareness of the problems with “big farm” food, and the advantages of local food, can help local farmers sell more. This, in turn, will support their farm, and enable them to continue to exist in a community of which they may have been a part for many years. Food produced by large commercial farms has no “face”. The consumer knows nothing about the food beyond what can be seen on a plate. We are so closely reliant on our food; we deserve to know something about its origin and history. Local farmers provide that, and local initiatives like FFC help to keep them in business.

Beyond the individual benefits of buying locally grown food, buying local will enrich a much larger group. Most importantly, local agriculture helps to foster a stronger community. Buying local will financially support farmers and introduce them to other members of the community whom they may not know otherwise. Community members take a stake in each other’s lives. They interact on a level that makes them depend on one another. This dependence creates a community that is closer. Without this connection we must be dependent on unknown mass farms located in other regions of the country, and

even other regions of the world to support our survival. A “strong community” is more than a group of people who feel good because they interact with each other. A “strong community” is a group of people who depend on each other. Being codependent creates a unified community that will offer myriad benefits to its inhabitants.

Buying local also helps to protect the environment. The large distances over which food must often travel necessitates the use of semi-trucks (which require fossil fuels), and the use of pesticides and other chemicals to maintain food for the period it must be transported. Carbon dioxide emissions are drastically reduced when food travels less. The environmental burden of having large trucks move produce thousands of miles is eliminated. Further, smaller farms tend to follow more sustainable farming practices. Especially in Maine, much of the farming by local growers is organic.\textsuperscript{13} Often, small organic farms can produce more efficiently than large farms; the density of produce per acre is much higher. Small organic farms also avoid the use of the dangerous chemicals and pesticides that liberally coat almost all food that is bought from corporate farms. These chemicals can be damaging not only to the environment, but also to the humans who consume these foods. These chemicals create a soil dependent on artificial enhancement for production to occur, and plants become further dependent on these chemicals. Corporate land cannot be productive without a constant flow of unnatural products. Organic farmers and small farm owners have a strong commitment to the sustainability of their land. They use drastically fewer chemicals and those that they do use are natural, and will integrate with the environment smoothly. The environment stands to gain a lot from local farming, especially when it is organic.

Increasing the amount of locally grown food that is purchased helps both producers and consumers; it benefits community members as a whole. Local farming can help entire regions through maintaining a better environment. FFC helps goals like this to be achieved by supplying a negotiating link between consumers and producers. FFC hopes to make consumers aware of the benefits they can gain from buying locally. Many institutions are willing to pay slight premiums on food when they learn about the benefits of buying locally.

FFC must address people beyond their “attitude” to local food, few people are “opposed” to local, organic food. What FFC needs to do is to alter buying habits and decisions, those crucial moments when people pick up an organic tomato and choose not to buy it because the “other” ones are cheaper. FFC’s focus, though on institutions, is affected by the thinking of individuals. When surveyed, most people claim to be concerned about local food, but will immediately turn around and buy corporately grown onions or other produce. Though one may be concerned when the issue of local food is brought up, it may be soon forgotten as one goes shopping. FFC needs location of production to become a major factor in the buying decisions people make. People need to be more strongly introduced to the benefits and importance of local food. FFC can help people put local food closer to their hearts through its reputation and well-intentioned mission. When people can easily come across local food, and further, choose to buy it not only because it is local, but because they can make the independent realization that the food is better, then FFC has achieved its goals. Knowledge and, more importantly, awareness, are the things FFC needs to give to people.

14 In our survey of Bowdoin Students, 86% claimed to be interested in buying local, despite few actually buying local food.
Though expanding beyond the institutional market may hold promise for FFC’s profits, it is something that would pull the group from its intended purpose. Many local farmers already sell to small-scale health food stores and organic groceries. Expanding to a sector in which local farmers are already involved could make FFC a competitor with other farmers, which would be damaging for the ends sought out by the creation of FFC. Andre Files notes that grocery sales have not been pursued because groceries are not in the mission of FFC, however if revenues cannot increase, this market may be considered.\textsuperscript{15} Though FFC’s options for expansion may be limited, there are still many options that can be pursued. Because of this, our group is researching the interest of Bowdoin in a CSA or buying club that could support both local farmers through direct sales and FFC through indirect purchases in a buying club.

\textbf{A theoretical approach to the expansion of farming:}

Ronald Jager, a philosopher and professor from Yale University, grew up on a small farm in Michigan, which proved to be very influential in his life and work. He has written three books on the topic of local farming, and has structured a way of thinking about local and sustainable agriculture that very intellectually addresses one of the major issues for local farmers and for FFC. In his talk at the Curtis Memorial Library on October 30, 2004, he spoke about his book, \textit{The Fate of Family Farming}.

In the 1950s, the success of the family-farming ideal hit a high point. Especially in the Midwest, family farms achieved the ideal that had been a fixture, an unconscious success and goal, since the Jeffersonian era. Entrepreneurship swelled after shortages in World War II had ended, which encouraged many families to take the risk of starting up

\textsuperscript{15} Email from Andrew Files to John Gronberg. 12 Dec 2004.
their own farms. Farms, in those times, still supplied a lot of a family’s own food, which meant highly diversified cropland. People viewed this era as part of, “the long honorable American tradition of the family farm.” Then, over the next 50 years, a revolution in farming came about. Two-thirds of the family farms vanished, bringing the number down from 6 million to 2 million farms. The number of people that work on farms shrunk from 10 percent of the population to 2 percent. Many crops today are corporate and genetically modified. For example, in 2002, 70 to 80 percent of all US grown soy was genetically modified, as was 40 percent of all US corn. These new products were modified to be herbicide-resistant so farmers could spray entire fields with herbicides to kill the weeds. They were also modified to be insecticidal crops, there were chemicals in plants themselves that would produce proteins toxic to insects. The public saw this transformation in two ways, as a historic catastrophe and as a huge achievement.

Jager, as well as FFC, view this transformation as a catastrophe. Jager derived the “farm food complex”, a machine that is driven by nobody and delivers a lot of cheap food. This complex is the farming version of corporate capitalism and controls everything that we eat and wear. His question is, “How do we understand something that is so big and intimidating?” His answer, then, is that we divide the two sides of the farm food complex into The System versus The Resistance.

The System, obviously, is agribusiness. It includes everything and everyone involved in growing, processing, packaging, and retailing our food. This even includes the USDA, which is meant to protect and provide the citizens with healthy food but instead encourages an efficient market that creates cheaply produced food that therefore

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is not of high quality or nutritious. Today, ten farms account for half of the food sold in America, and these farms average about 225,000 acres each. These corporate powers monopolize the food industry in the name of efficiency and at the expense of other human values.

The System focuses on economic efficiency because food provides a small margin of profit. The average farmer only makes $0.23 per consumer dollar spent on food. Therefore, corporations will make more money if they vertically integrate and control all the steps that it takes to produce and transport their food. Monocultures are becoming huge because it is more cost efficient for companies to specialize in only producing one foodstuff. Unfortunately, this often leads to soil degradation and environmental damage from the “corporate countryside” that pollutes from its shear, excessive size. Globalization has become a big part of corporate farming. The concept of “global food” has taken over the economic theories of food production. This concept promotes that every country specialize in growing a small number of commodities that they can trade with their fellow world producers. Supposedly, every country will benefit by making more money so they can then buy food. The System has been a major cause of world hunger, starvation, and environmental degradation. Environmental degradation comes from pesticides, fertilizers, decreasing biodiversity, and the fossil fuel use and emissions that come from distant transport of the food.

The Resistance, on the other hand, is small and subtle in its approach to the farm food complex. It channels people and forces outside The System such as organic farmers,

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farmers’ markets, farm-restaurant enterprises, as well as the counter-play of values through newsletters, conferences etc. Jager says it is important to view The Resistance as a collective whole. It is an ethically driven social force – an idea, collective values, and consumption choices. It has no overarching control, though. Rather it is uncoordinated which differentiates it from The System. The Resistance became more conscious of the quality of food and drove consumer trends to have concern for how nutritious food is, where it is coming from, who produces it, how fairly the workers are treated, and so on. FFC belongs to The Resistance because they encourage sustainability in farm communities. They are in opposition to domination of consumer markets by corporate powers, and feel that local, individual farming is of more value to society. FFC can add to and strengthen this vital social force.

Russell Libby, head of MOFGA, spoke about the importance of keeping farming at the local level to keep Maine’s economy and communities viable. He cited that if every family in the state spent ten dollars per week on local food (which is ten percent of weekly food expenses) that would keep $100 million within the state economy. He feels that Maine is a unique state and that it can build upon and change the face of local agriculture by making a commitment to have important local food sales. To promote local agriculture, Libby says there needs to be a place, a face, and a taste. The “place” is the state that supports a local farm economy. The “face” involves the farmers getting their individual names known within the communities they provide. And the “taste” means that people need more nutritious, fresh food and that society needs to change its knowledge of healthful living, including its food choices. These are all problems that The System is unable to address but that local farming revolves around. FFC remains

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20 Russell Libby, Fate of Farming lecture, 30 Oct 20004.
instrumental in bringing a face and taste to Maine’s citizens by linking small local farms that provide healthy food to larger institutions that would otherwise be stuck in the System’s corporate trap.

V. Definition of Group Project:

We will be working with FFC by doing research for them. We intend to learn about the opportunities and constraints of Community Supported Agriculture programs (CSAs) and buying clubs. A buying club is similar to a CSA in that members still buy shares for a season. The farmer would bring the share of produce to Bowdoin. FFC would assist if there were a demand for something the farmer couldn’t provide, like a meat or dairy product. FFC would make the delivery to the farmer who would then be able to provide the goods to the customer, in this case, Bowdoin. Our main goal is to explore the possibility of a successful buying club on the Bowdoin campus that could perhaps be implemented at other institutions. There are some crucial questions we hope to answer: How are other systems working? What are the limits other systems? Are there problems similar to those of FFC and what are the other systems doing to solve them? Our main source of research for this project will be interviews with farmers who market their products through either CSAs or buying clubs. We will also survey and interview students and faculty at Bowdoin to gauge their interest in a CSA or buying club.

Using our research we will hope to answer the questions posed above and help provide working steps (a concrete plan) to take advantage of such opportunities and overcome the restraints found in a CSA or buying club at Bowdoin. As a final product, if our research seems promising, we will develop a presentation for Bowdoin College staff.
and faculty that highlights our findings. This presentation will be in the form of a PowerPoint that can also be used by FFC for presentations to other institutions such as Bates College, the University of Maine, Bath Iron Works, and local hospitals.

Such work will help FFC to examine their options for expanding their buyer pool through promotional education and differentiated methods of selling. The research will also help to promote success for the young organization by observing its challenges and perhaps introducing concepts for improvement.

**VI. Work Schedule:**

We will have a conference call with Andrew Files once every two weeks for about forty-five minutes to update him on the progress of our research. We will be doing research and interview work, whether individually or as a group, for about four hours a week. This will consist of, among other things, doing phone interviews with local farmers as well as surveys and designing a PowerPoint presentation, which will be the culmination of our research. Also, once a week, we will have group meetings lasting about an hour. A specific schedule follows:

**October 17 & 18: Meeting**
- Video viewing
- Construction of questions for interviews with farmers to present to Andrew Files for approval
- Outline of topics to be discussed during phone interview with Andrew Files

**October 29: Goals**
- Interview with two contacts
- Written survey – comprehensive for good, unbiased information
- List of local farmers who have done buying clubs and contact them
- List of questions for farmers to better understand how to overcome constraints
October 30: Meeting about above
November 2: **Historical and Theoretical Section due**
November 2: Conference call with Andrew Files
November 3: Phone interview with Amy Sprague
November 5: Goals
  - Establish a table at Thorne to hand out survey
  - Speak with student groups who would most likely use a buying club (i.e.: culinary club)
November 12: Personal Interview with Mr. and Mrs. Colson
  - Finish and process all interviews
November 29: Goals
  - Finish outline proposal
  - Finish rough draft of Power Point presentation
November 30: **Outline Proposal due**
December 7: Final Presentation and paper due
December 10: Service Learning Symposium

**VII. Completion of the Service Component**

In order to complete the service component of our project for FFC we conducted hands-on research to determine the strengths and weaknesses of FFC and, more importantly, to determine whether a buying club would be feasible for the Bowdoin community. We conducted research primarily through interviews with local farmers, surveys of interest to students and faculty, as well as email correspondence with the purchasing director of Bowdoin Dining Services.

After spending some time crafting meaningful and directed questions for our farmer interviewees, we conducted our first phone interview with Amy Sprague on November 3. Amy runs Wolf Pine Farm in Alfred. She grows organic, natural produce. She has used a CSA for 3 years now, steadily increasing the membership with each year. The first year she had 20 members, then 75 members, and last season she had 130 members. This past year a CSA was her only means of revenue, whereas previously she had also been involved with farmers’ markets and the restaurant industry. Amy believes
that she gives her CSA members a bargain because she only charges $475 for the season but they receive $600-700 worth of produce. She feels this is only fair because she is choosing what type of goods her members receive each week.

Amy’s interaction with FFC has been purely supplementary. She met Martha Putnam at a farmer’s market, Martha said she wanted to offer Amy other goods to sell to CSA members that they would otherwise have to buy from another farmer or at a whole foods store. Martha could provide Amy with apple cider, honey, eggs, organic meats, and cheeses. Amy ended up only selling meats and cheeses. She felt that this process was successful because she could get deliveries in smaller quantities than usually available from distributors. The service was most valued by the members who lived near her.

Amy also mentioned some disadvantages to this supplementary system. First, the price for the goods that she paid, and therefore that her customers paid, was in line with a whole grocery markup to cover FFC’s expenses. Also, the need and demand for such goods by her members was limited and sporadic, so the cheeses often sat in the refrigerator until they went bad. To remedy this, she would have people order their supplemental goods a couple of weeks in advance, but this became too complicated and time consuming. The frozen meats ordered in advance seemed to have more popularity and be more efficient for Amy, though, so she will continue to sell frozen meats from FFC.

Amy feels that FFC’s strengths are that it gets food from farmers who are in many different locations and provides it to those who would not be able to easily attain it otherwise, such as colleges and hospitals. She sees FFC as a more local version of a food distributor. She also feels that FFC helps local farmers find new markets. FFC’s
weaknesses, in her opinion, are that it is straying away from the college- and hospital-sized institutions and is starting to infringe on the restaurant business, and its costs are getting to be high. Issues need to be resolved with the transportation of goods. When we asked her about starting a buying club at Bowdoin College, with the help of FFC, she believed that it had potential but was concerned about breaking down the shares. She raised the questions of: What would shares look like? Would the members have a choice or would it be determined by Martha or the farmer? She also stressed that if the club involved many parties there would need to be a consistent college representative and farmer who worked together.

Our next phone interview was with Lisa Turner, on November 10. Lisa is the owner of Laughing Stock Farm in Freeport, and had supposedly done work with a buying club for Bowdoin faculty and staff over the summer of 2004. Lisa’s CSA has run for eight years. Last season it had 56 members who paid $450 each. Instead of having her members pick food up at the farm, she brought her produce to the Brunswick Farmers’ Market where they picked up their shares weekly. Her CSA uses 20-25% of her summer harvest, while the rest goes mainly to wholesale distributors. Lisa does not supplement her CSA with meat or dairy from FFC because when she had tried this before (pre-FFC) but her members had not been interested and she was disappointed with the product she had tried to sell. She feels that people are more interested in buying local meat from a place that specializes in that type of production; she is concerned only with fresh produce.

Lisa had tried to promote her CSA at Bowdoin last year to attract faculty members, but was sorely disappointed with the response. To promote it, she has a website
and leaves brochures in public areas. She sent an email to all staff advertising the summer 2004 season and also set up a table at a faculty function early last spring. Only three faculty members showed interest at her table and two joined for the season. For primarily this reason, Lisa feels that starting a buying club at Bowdoin would not be time or cost effective for a farmer. Further, students, and sometimes faculty, do not know how to utilize or cook the produce. Also, the payment style she offers is not conducive to student budgets because they don’t have a large chunk of money to pay upfront. Lisa suggested that if a buying club were established, Bowdoin could set up a payment plan where the fees were deducted weekly from student and faculty paychecks.

Our last interview came on November 13 with Dave and Christine Colson of New Leaf Farm. This interview proved to be the most fruitful one we conducted in that it gave us full insight into the workings of a small local farm and also introduced us to the struggles a farm goes through as it is forced to make financial decisions. Bought in 1982, New Leaf Farm is nine acres and is farmed in a cover crop/rotation method to keep the soil rich in nutrients. The Colsons have had a CSA for five years. Instead of charging an overall upfront fee, they charge their members $20 per week, which is the exact worth (at wholesale price) of the produce the members receive. They view a CSA as very time consuming because it requires boxing, bagging and dropping the goods off. They feel disconnected with members because they usually do not personally interact with the people who receive their goods. This means that the community bond they so highly value, and that is trumpeted as a benefit of CSAs, is not perpetuated as it is with the chefs and grocers who they do business with face to face. Also, the Colsons say that their CSA gives them an unrealistic view of what they can effectively sell, because they do not
know what vegetables people are actually using. Their CSA is made up of 45 families, but is only 6% of their total revenue, while 10% comes from farmers’ markets and 25% alone comes from the Haraseeket Inn (Natural food stores, grocers, and the restaurant industry are their major markets). The CSA is such a small part of their revenue that the Colsons are strongly considering not organizing one next season.

The Colsons were initially optimistic about the role FFC was meant to play for local farmers. They felt that FFC had the power to bring these local farmers together into a supportive community. FFC would give them more power to sell to institutions by accumulating their individual goods to meet the needs of institutions. But, FFC did not make enough money in this so they had to look to other outlets of profit, mainly in the restaurant industry. The Colsons view this as a huge dilemma because it places FFC in direct competition with the local farmers who also sell to restaurants, but FFC needed to expand to survive. They also said that if Martha can only get so much for a certain product, then the farmers are forced to lower their price when working with FFC or competing with FFC. The Colsons keep very detailed records of their sales and determined that if they worked with FFC they would need to double their output if they were to maintain their current level of profits.

We concluded our conversation with the Colsons by talking about local food at Bowdoin. They used to sell excess quantities of produce to Bowdoin’s food warehouse before the two dining halls had started separately ordering food. They no longer can supply their over-growths of produce to Bowdoin, but were pleased to know that FFC had a corner on that market. They also mentioned that they would not be willing to start a
buying club with our community because not enough people were interested to make it worth the effort.

The farmers we interviewed all gave us valuable insight into local farming and the abilities of CSAs. Though we saw both positive and negative views of CSAs, we were told that a buying club or CSA at Bowdoin would face many challenges, and that these needed to be considered seriously. After we finished the “supply” side of our research, we continued by looking at Bowdoin itself and the students who might demand a buying club.

We conducted a survey of student interest in becoming members of a local buying club. We distributed the survey to 73 people during the dinner hours at Thorne dining hall on November 21. We asked five simple questions of the students: Do you know where the food you consume is grown? Is it important for you to know where the food comes from? Would you want to buy locally grown farm products? Would you be interested in participating in a CSA or buying club? [Definitions of these were given], and Do you cook your own meals on a (semi)regular basis? This last question was followed up with: Would you want/use locally grown goods in your kitchen? How much would you pay per week for these goods? Would you want only produce or meat and dairy as well? We received mixed results on our survey that we feel may not accurately represent the ability to start up a buying club with Bowdoin students. While only 17.8% of students stated they knew where their food came from, 54.8% said that it was important to know where it came from. While 86.3% of students answered that they would want to buy local products, only 46.6% said they would be interested in a Bowdoin CSA or buying club.

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21 A copy of the survey is attached to the end of the paper.
Despite the fairly large interest, only 20.5% of students said they actually cook on a decently regular basis, so at most that proportion of students would be interested in using the produce from a CSA. Lastly, the average amount that students were willing to spend per week was $16.72, which would be too low to make it worth farmers’ time and effort.

Besides the survey, we found a number of concerns about students participating in buying clubs in talking to farmers as well as students. The main problem is that students are not on campus for the majority of Maine’s short growing season. CSAs usually go from May to October, and students are away for the summer for the majority of that time. Also, most students on campus do not have kitchens in their living situations, and those who do, often do not cook, or sometimes don’t even know how to cook. As Lisa Turner pointed out to us, a lot of the produce she provides to her CSA members is unusual and the “average Joe” would not know what to do with it. One of our last concerns regards the affordability of a buying club for students. The farmers often want a large payment upfront of anywhere from $300-500, which most college students would be unable to provide. One positive use of a buying club that a Bowdoin senior brought up, though, was that many students do not have any means of transportation to get local produce. So, a buying club that brings the goods straight to campus would prove beneficial for these people with an interest in using local goods in their kitchens.

Lastly, our group had email correspondence with Jon Wiley, the purchasing director for Bowdoin Dining Services. He was able to explain better the dining halls’ uses of local goods and where they come from. He said that though the growing season in Maine was short, they purchased locally when they could. “Lettuce, tomatoes, squash, peppers, potatoes, broccoli, kale, and onions are just some of the items which we get
from Farm Fresh when they are in-season.” He also said that they buy Maine blueberries and apples all year, all-natural Maine beef from Luce’s Farm in North Anson (but this is only for the Burgers in Smith Union, a small venue), and Maine maple syrup for “special occasions.” He went on to explain that they are selective in the local goods they purchase because, “sometimes the price of organic items is prohibitive, and we will source from a different vendor.” The total purchases of local products came to $35000 last school year, including FFC and other local providers. Mr. Wiley failed to inform us as to what percent that is of their annual budget, though. He also seemed to poignantly avoid the question of whether the dining hall would consider increasing their purchases from FFC in the future.

VIII. Class Readings as They Relate to FFC’s Mission

Confronting Consumption:

This book by Princen, Maniates, and Conca addresses America’s excessive consumer habits that are leading to both societal and environmental degradation. FFC’s efforts to encourage local farming and to keep the food production and consumption process within the community tie into many of the goals of these authors. In the chapter entitled “Plant a Tree, Buy a Bike, Save the World?”, Michael Maniates writes that environmentally friendly citizens attempt to individualize the environmental problem through green consumption habits, such as buying goods from recycled materials, organic cotton clothes etc. Maniates criticizes this because he sees the environmental problem lying in over-consumption rather than the way in which the consumer goods are produced. To solve the problem, he feels that citizens need to work collectively to

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change the political and industrial policies that constrain citizens as consumers.\textsuperscript{23} FFC cannot help to lower food consumption because that would impede its mission. But, FFC helps by playing into Maniates’ I=WAC formula.\textsuperscript{24} FFC increases the “A” section (meaningful consumption Alternatives) by enabling more people to consume locally grown, often organic, food by providing it to institutions and restaurants. Though FFC cannot reduce the consumption of food, it can implicitly reduce the consumption and use of chemicals, fuels, and other products associated with long-distance transport and corporate growing.

The section of \textit{Confronting Consumption} that informed us the most about our project with FFC was Jack Manno’s chapter “Commoditization: Consumption Efficiency and an Economy of Caring.” Manno defines all goods and services as having places on a spectrum somewhere between High Commodity Potential (HCP) to Low Commodity Potential (LCP).\textsuperscript{25} We placed FFC as a service that fell close to the LCP end of the spectrum. LCP means that FFC has, “processes that involve direct and cooperative relationships between people or between people and the natural world.”\textsuperscript{26} FFC provides this to the local Maine communities because it organizes a community of farms that is rooted in the healthy survival of pastoral ecosystems. It is also rooted in the importance of local, communitarian social relationships where the community members financially sustain the farmers while the farmers simultaneously provide for the citizens. This mutual give-and-take creates a closed loop system. Also, the local food that FFC promotes is not mass purchased or mass-produced with multitudes of chemicals and days of excess travel

\textsuperscript{23} ibid, 59.
\textsuperscript{24} ibid, 63
\textsuperscript{26} ibid, 75.
time, such as with HCP food production. The food is not distanced or alienated from where it originates, but rather the sales stay within the community. The labor costs of this type of local production are higher because the profits must sustain farming families, but these higher costs are absorbed and shared by the entire community who purchase the produce.

From all of the essays in *Confronting Consumption* we became aware of one way in which FFC could stand to improve. While they perpetuate a more communitarian style of food consumption, they fail to educate the people who are receiving these goods. Sustainable efforts for local ecosystems and local economies are extremely important to our future way of life, and FFC should more actively educate people as to why these ideals are so important for the citizens of America’s communities as well as for future generations.

*Trouble in Paradise:*

Among the many texts that we’ve read for class, the content of *Trouble in Paradise* by J. Timmons Roberts and Nikki Demetria Thanos can be applied to the issues surrounding Farm Fresh Connections. *Trouble in Paradise* discusses how one of the major factors that inhibit Latin America’s independence from the global market is a lack of localization. This parallels the issues of local farmers trying to survive in the United States.

Since the 1500’s, Latin America has been cultivating cash crops such as sugar cane, coffee and tobacco. These crops do not sustain the people that live within the country. The income that comes from the cash crops helps Latin American citizens buy
the imported food items that nourish them. Such a reliance on the global demand of the 
cash crops makes Latin America dependent on the global economy to sustain them.\textsuperscript{27} 
This problem could be solved by localization where a large percent of the farm could be 
growing the cash crop with a smaller percent of the farm producing subsistence 
vegetables.

FFC is trying to help strengthen the success of local farmers in response to a 
similar issue of localization found in the United States. The United States’ produce 
industry is dominated by commercial farms that can afford to lower prices of vegetables 
and transport them across the nation. This overpowers the local farms whose produce 
exceeds the commercial farms in quality and flavor but is more expensive. Thus, even 
within the United States the commercial dependency on supermarkets and restaurants 
alike is shutting out local farmers.

An example of the absurdity of our dependency on commercial farms instead of 
attempting to support local farms can be seen right here at Bowdoin College. Recently, 
there has been a shortage of tomatoes at the salad bar; a note from the college educates 
the disappointed students by saying that due to the flooding in Florida our tomato supply 
is limited. The absurdity of this situation is that the day before, our group visited the 
Colson farm, where there were baskets of ripening tomatoes. The college relies on 
tomatoes that come from Florida when they could be bought right here in Maine, a half 
an hour away. The college buys from the commercial farms in Florida, as the rest of the 
industrialized world, because the produce is more reliable and cheaper. In order to

\textsuperscript{27} Roberts, J. Timmons and Nikki Demetria Thanos. 2003. \textit{Trouble in Paradise: Globalization and 
support local farmers, there needs to be a shift in the social mindset. Quality and taste is more important than quantity and cost, as discussed above.

**IX: Personal Learning Experience**

The relationship we developed with FFC helped to actualize some of the issues we have discussed in class. Working with FFC helped us, as a group, to understand the importance of having a personal relationship with our food. After interviewing a number of local farmers, we have realized how deeply lives are affected by the decisions that we, as consumers, make when buying produce. The local farmers that we interviewed expressed the difficulty of competing with commercial farms; these local farmers could survive only because of a conscious decision by the consumer that quality and having a face to the food was more important than price. We learned that our actions really do make a difference; buying from local farmers is incredibly important to help sustain the farmers’ livelihoods and the surrounding community of which they are a part.

**X: The Future of Bowdoin and FFC**

When our group originally embarked on this semester’s research, we had quite high expectations. It appeared that some sort of a buying club had already begun at Bowdoin, and people had successfully worked with Lisa Turner in a CSA. As we conducted interviews and researched FFC, Bowdoin, and their history together, our outlook became less positive, however. The movement for a CSA at Bowdoin has been small, and interest has been little. Many students claim that they are interested in sustainable agriculture and local food, but when the time comes to put money down to
support their concerns, few follow through. Creating a buying club for college students is a very difficult thing to do. Many students face challenges that put a buying club or CSA out of their reach. Busy schedules, lack of funds, few kitchens, and lack of knowledge are all very limiting factors for local, organic produce in a college setting.

Our research was not all negative, however. We unearthed many facts about the superiority of local, organic produce, and we were able to talk with many farmers about their experiences with FFC. Further, we heard many students comment on how glad they were to see organic foods in the dining halls. At Bowdoin, access to food for the vast majority of students is through the dining halls and expanding this sector of FFC could be very beneficial, not only for its ability to provide revenue for FFC, but because an increased presence begins to combat the single most significant problem FFC faces: the lack of knowledge people have of local foods. As our survey showed, only 17.8% of students claimed to know where the food they consumed was grown. By introducing students to the idea of buying local, FFC can only improve its position. If FFC becomes a large presence in the Bowdoin dining halls, the chances of people becoming further interested in local food will grow drastically. Though a buying club is not a plausible choice at this time, an increase in the knowledge of students and an increase in the presence of FFC on campus is a definite possibility. In fact, for education it is a necessity.

There are a few possibilities that offer themselves up for Bowdoin and FFC, and for local agriculture in general. An expansion of the Bowdoin Organic Garden, perhaps to include a small buying club through Crystal Spring Farm, which is unaffiliated with FFC, is a possibility. Designing a low cost, low volume buying club that would be more affordable to students would have more potential than the expensive CSAs that farmers
tend to use. At Hampshire College, there is a CSA program of sorts that costs only $250 a semester, and can be divided 6 ways. This approach is good for college students for two reasons: the amount of food provided is less, so less is wasted (since few students have time to cook every night), and the lower cost is easier for college students to handle. The issue then is finding farmers willing to do smaller orders, which can be quite difficult.

In terms of marketing a buying club or CSA to staff and faculty, it seems that those who are interested can connect themselves with local farmers through farmer’s markets, and as such a college program may not offer many benefits to farmers or members. A more direct connection between farmers and members is always sought out, and an extra intermediary that food would go through (in FFC and the College) can detract from the efficacy of a buying club or CSA.

Bowdoin and FFC can continue their current relationship and expand upon it, but moving into a CSA or buying club does not hold much promise for FFC, or its constituent farmers. FFC has greatly facilitated the creation of a relationship between local farmers and local institutions, its mission has been followed, but to continue this FFC needs to look to expand its sales, and this can be achieved through steps toward educating members of institutions and introducing as many people as possible to the benefits of local, organic agriculture.
BOWDOIN AGRICULTURAL BUYING CLUB SURVEY

1) Do you know where the food you consume is grown?
   Yes   No

2) Is it important for you to know where the food comes from?
   Yes   No

3) Would you want to buy locally grown farm products?
   Yes   No

4) Would you be interested in participating in Community Sustained Agriculture (a CSA) or a buying club*?
   Yes   No

5) Do you cook your own meals on a (semi)regular basis?
   Yes   No

   a) Would you want/use locally grown goods in your kitchen?
      Yes   No

   b) How much would you pay per week for these goods?

   c) Would you want: 1) Only produce (vegetables, potatoes…)
                          2) Meat and dairy as well

* A buying club is a when a group of consumers (in Bowdoin’s case faculty, staff, and students) pay a set price per season to a local farm to bring a certain share of the farmer’s produce to the group every week. It is then the group’s responsibility to divide up the goods among themselves as they see best. Buying clubs ensure quality produce for you and support local farmers by ensuring them a set profit for their season.

If you are interested in a Bowdoin buying club please email rwilder@bowdoin.edu, jgronber@bowdoin.edu, or amillert@bowdoin.edu.