

# ARTISANAL FOOD PRODUCTION AND MARKETING IN THE PERTH AREA OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA: SOME PRELIMINARY INDICATIONS OF DIFFICULTIES WITH CLASSICAL ECONOMICS AND SUPPLY CHAIN THEORY

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## *Abstract:*

*This paper derives from various pieces of research, quantitative and qualitative, among artisanal food producers in the Perth area of Western Australia. The research had a focus on the marketing aims of artisanal food producers associated with attendance at Victoria Park Farmers' Market. It was started so as to locate the motivations of these small-scale producers to be involved in food production at all. Major motivational themes quickly emerged. The first was freedom and the second was self-expression, while community feeling was also important as an other-orientated approach, which was slightly contradictory. Sub-themes also emerged, for instance the desire to promote community health. What was not relevant was the drive towards maximising income, creating substantial income, which is from the perspective of entrepreneurship or economic rationality. That rationality derives, of course, from the propositions of classical economics, which has been looking threadbare for some time. All the findings here with those from others from research work on consumers at Perth farmers' markets and consumers of the artisanal producers' products and this sense of irrationality was further confirmed. Purchasers were little concerned about prices. Ultimately, though, farmers' markets are characterized by high prices and irrationality in terms of classic supply chain theory, whereby the more that intermediaries are removed, the lower the price should be for the purchaser. That simply does not happen since there is a social element, even a relationship element, that is now being factored into price determination as consumers and farmers come face-to-face.*

*Keywords: farmers' markets, vendors, attendance motivations, artisanal food producer motivations*

## **1. Introduction**

This paper considers research undertaken in March 2017, by its authors, on vendor motivations in attending Victoria Park Farmers' Market, Perth, Western

Australia. "A farmers market is a public and recurring assembly of farmers or their representatives selling the food that they produced directly to consumers," claims the Farmers Market Coalition (2017). In practice, though strong rules are applied by some farmer' market owners and managers, especially in Australia (e.g. Miranda Sharp's farmers' markets in Melbourne), many have become fairly broad-based leisure facilities with prepared foods, live music, cooking demonstrations and hobbyist workshops, together with children's activities.

The research focus in academic studies of farmers' markets has been on consumer motivations and behaviour. The examples of consumer-based surveys are extensive and include Pascussi et al. (2011) and Gumirakiza, Curtis and Bosworth (2014). Arguably, this research focus has been misguided in terms of farmers' market fundamentals. Guthrie et al. (2006) have, for instance, suggested that farmers' market development in New Zealand has been supply-side led. Their thesis is that if the pre-existing format of the food supply market is such that small producers struggle to get their products distributed, alternative distribution formats, such as farmers' markets, will emerge. Consequently, consumer behavior is of secondary importance. Meanwhile, Blasi et al. (2015) conducted research in Trentino, Italy, where farming takes place in a marginal and mountainous environment. It is very difficult for farmers to standardise products and guarantee constant or volume supply under these circumstances. That means that, in the mainstream market, they are uncompetitive. Supermarkets and wholesalers are unwilling to deal with them and so they have to sell in other ways, such as farmers' markets and at the farm-gate. Australia has similar problems with the same result of pushing farmers to shorten the supply chain and reach out to the public directly. The problem is exacerbated through the supermarket duopoly of Coles Myers and Woolworths (King&Mortimer, 2013), since their presence acts to restrict alternative retail opportunities for the public.

Cassia et al. (2012) openly admitted a limitation of their study in only considering consumers, since their aim was to develop and test a model of customer/company interaction (CCTI) that would be applicable at farmers' markets and the omission of surveying suppliers was all too obvious. The face-to-face interaction of growers and producers with the public in the way achieved at farmers' markets and, also through farm-gate sales is critical. Social relationships are built, with possible implications for trust and loyalty and for pricing. Hughner, Robinson and Nganje (2008) saw the sociability of farmers' markets, referencing the interactions of vendors with each other and with customers. Equally, though, they saw powerful social motives among customers to support small producers and local artisanal suppliers. Murphy (2011), in his survey of New Zealand farmers' markets, also suggests the high value that customers place on interaction with stallholders, as well as broader social-emotional goals, such as supporting the local community and finding local products. Gumirakiza et al. (2014) found social interaction a significant reason for attendance at farmers' markets by their customer respondents, among whom 14% held social interaction to be the primary reason for attendance.

Alonso and O'Neill (2011) found motives for attendance at Farmers' Markets by customers substantially beyond what they labelled as "monetary driven exchange economics." They found strong motivations concerning supporting local agriculture and farmers and around the opportunity to engage in social discourse. They concluded that communities can significantly benefit in social terms and can also enjoy economic development opportunities (e.g. Guthrie et al., 2016). These authors

found a substantial void in terms of research on why artisanal food producers are motivated to enter and continue in small-scale artisanal food production (implying small scale and hand or low mechanisation production) at all and began undertaking research on this subject through qualitative, interview-based research, in early 2017. Such research as there is seems highly price-focused, particularly concerning price determination out of producer motivations, e.g. Scott Morton and Podolny (2002) and Bugg (2007).

Caricofe's (2011) work is a more general view of Ohio artisanal food producers and their motivations. It is worth quoting Caricofe's (2011) findings at length for later contrast with the authors' own ongoing findings: "Data revealed food artisans to be values-based individuals emphasizing product quality through their careful sourcing of ingredients (mostly local) and the use of traditional, time-consuming production methods. The food artisans studied expressed a strong desire to operate as locally embedded businesses, consistent with the ideas of Civic Agriculture. Their production practices and product quality goals reveal an alignment with the quality turn occurring in the food system, and a broadening of what the quality turn can encompass. While these artisans were not actively involved in an alternative food system movement as identified by other food system scholars, there were many similarities in terms of personal motivations and business practices among these artisans." This passage indicates some of the apparent contradictions at the heart of small scale artisanal production, which is both part of the market and also outside of the market in terms of costs and motivations. The relatively limited amount of research on this subject and its meanings indicate that there is a need for more data to be provided as a means of enhancing knowledge of issues in a wider range of contexts. The purpose of this paper is, therefore, to contribute to the need for more data from more locations.

## **2. Research Methodology**

As noted above, this study is of reasons for vendors attending Victoria Park Farmers' Market, Perth, Western Australia. The research questions for the study concerned demographic variables, such as age and gender, influence reasons for vendors attending the market, together with how do motivational variables, such as learning from customers or testing new products, influence the reasons for vendors attending the market?

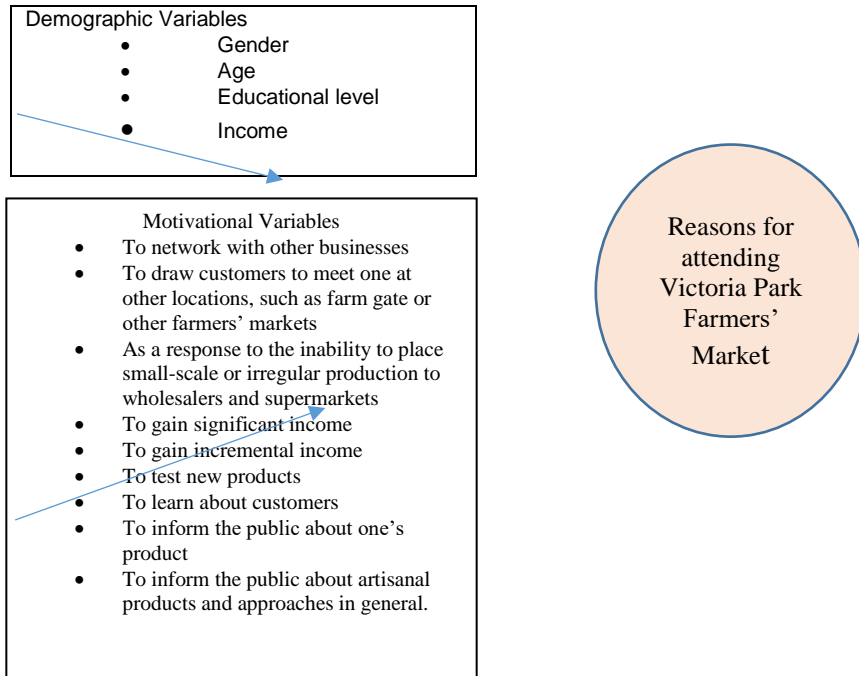
The research questions relate to a variable set introduced into the survey's conceptual framework as below at Figure 1.

The demographic variables became the study's H1 hypothesis set and the motivational variables the H2 hypothesis set.

The H1 hypotheses, as a category, posited that there is a positive relationship between the range of demographic variables in the conceptual framework and reasons for vendors attending Victoria Park Farmers' Market. H2 hypotheses suggested a positive relationship between the conceptual framework's motivational variables and reasons for attending.

## Independent Variables

## Dependent Variable



**Figure 1. Conceptual Framework**

Testing of these hypotheses was undertaken through a quantitative, questionnaire-based survey. Respondents were all vendors in attendance at Victoria Park Farmers' Market on Sunday 12th March, 2017, since the market is held on a single day. A randomly selected sub-set of respondents also acted as participants in a qualitative survey.

Respondents to the qualitative research (sample 24, population 24 [1 void]) were asked their demographic profile (age, gender, income) and their motivations in attending.

Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951) was calculated to assess the reliability of the survey instrument. The outcome was a result of 0.642, which indicates that the instrument is reliable.

Quantitative questionnaire construction directly arose from the hypotheses and related conceptual framework for the study and considered both the existing research and gaps in it. Coster and Kennon (2005) and Guthrie et al. (2006) were influential sources, though Lawson et al. (2008) provided a ten-fold coding of qualitative responses on stallholder motivations which was even more influential.

Naturally, the questionnaire used in this study added additional elements, such as around product testing, which Guthrie et al. (2006) found important and around learning about customers, which was found important by Coster and Kennon (2005). The qualitative survey used semi-structured interviews with pre-determined, but open-ended questions

### 3. Research Findings

#### 3.1. Victoria Park Farmers' Market

The data collected on 12th March, 2017 was subjected to a wide range of descriptive and inferential analysis, using the SPSS package and several other statistical tools. The sample was comprised of 56.5 % females and 43.5 % males. The largest group of respondents fell into the age group 26-35 years (39.1 %), with only 13 % in each case being in the group 18-25 years or over 55 years.

Concerning income, the largest group of respondents (45.5 %) reported income of less than AUD \$ 30,000 annually (approximately US \$ 23,600), whilst the largest group of respondents reported their highest level of education as bachelor's degree (39.1 %).

Other descriptive statistics are worthy of particular note. For instance, on attending to learn about customers, 60.9 % strongly agreed, with 34.8 % somewhat agreeing. On inability to place small-scale or irregular production to wholesalers as motivation for attending Victoria Park Farmers' Market 34.8 %, by far the largest group of respondents, strongly disagreed. When it came to informing the public about their products, all respondents agreed either strongly or somewhat agreed that this was important.

Turning to inferential statistics, accepting or rejecting hypotheses H1a through H2i, was against a 0.05 significance level threshold. Results were as below:

**Table 1**

#### Summary of Hypothesis Test Outcomes

Hypothesis	Accept/Reject	Statistical Tool Used
H1 Hypotheses		
Demographic		
H1a Gender	Not accepted	Chi-Square
H1b Age	Partially accepted*1	Chi-Square
H1c Educational level	Not accepted	Chi-Square
H1d Income	Partially accepted*2	Chi-Square
H2 Hypotheses		
Motivational		
H2a Networking	Accepted	Chi-Square
H2b Draw customers to other locations	Not accepted	Chi-Square
H2c Inability to place to wholesalers or supermarkets	Not accepted	Chi-Square
H2d Earn significant income	Not accepted	Chi-Square
H2e Earn incremental income	Accepted	Chi-Square
H2f Test new products	Not accepted	Chi-Square
H2g learn about customers	Accepted	Chi-Square
H2h Inform the public about my product	Accepted	Chi Square
H2i Inform the public about artisanal products and approaches in general	Accepted	Chi-Square

*\*1 Age and to test new products was accepted. \*2 Income and to network with other businesses was accepted.*

The final inferential statistical tests for this study considered rank order between the accepted hypotheses (H2a, H2e, H2g, H2h and H2i) from most to least important determinant of attendance. The summary (recoded) is as per Table 2 below:

Table 2

<b>Rank order of motivations for vendors attending Vic Park Farmers' Market</b>	
<b>Reasons</b>	<b>Mean ± SE</b>
To inform the public about my product	3.74 ± .094 <sup>a</sup>
To learn about my customers	3.57 ± .123 <sup>ab</sup>
To inform the public about artisanal products	3.22 ± .177 <sup>b</sup>
To network with other businesses	3.17 ± .162 <sup>b</sup>
To earn incremental income	3.17 ± .185 <sup>b</sup>

This rank order was tested for statistical significance through one-way analysis of variance, with the result of ( $\alpha$ ) = 0.05 and this was substantiated through the Duncan Multiple Range Test. Statistical significance was affirmed and this adds confidence to the ordering of variables.

Turning to the qualitative data, it was broadly supportive of the quantitative findings. In summary, people seemed to be talking more about marketing than selling. One respondent wanted "brand exposure in this area." Another respondent wanted "to advertise myself and get out there with people."

Participants used the word "community" frequently. Their idea of community support referenced both support of each other and of consumers. One interviewee described Victoria Park Farmers' Market as a "good opportunity to get my products into the local market." She continued that she was not just present to support other local businesses but the community as a whole.

### **3.2. Artisanal Food Producers, Perth Area Survey of Motivations**

Artisanal food producers were interviewed as to their motivations for establishing and continuing their businesses. This research proceeds in the phenomenological tradition of seeking to interview or observe those closest to the phenomenon, in this case actual artisanal food producers, randomly chosen. This follows the principle of beginning with the individual and her or his stream of experiences (Farver, 1966).

The research used an inductive approach because there was no predetermined theory. The qualitative data itself is the basis for the analytical structure. The particular inductive approach being used is thematic content analysis. This involves analyzing interview transcripts to identify themes within the data, ultimately to list a number of categories that inform the analysis of the material and the further categorization of interviews.

After a first question concerning their initial motivations, interviewer interventions were essentially limited to keeping participants on track in discussing those motivations and intentions to continue. Information was also teased out around the allied topics of challenges and triumphs. The approach may be regarded as semi-structured. This work is emergent and ongoing with interviews not scheduled to end until well into 2018. The aim, following Burnard et al. (2008), is to identify a maximum

of twelve categories. In fact, so far, two over-arching themes have emerged, with six sub-themes or categories. The principal emerging themes and categories are:

### **Self-Orientated**

- Freedom, Control, Self-Determination – “I’m my own boss,” “Master of my own destiny,” “sick of working for other people,” “waking up in the morning at a time I want to wake up,” “It’s totally up to me and that is just – it’s worth gold,” “setting my own hours,” “suddenly I feel like the world is my oyster.”
- Pursuing a Passion – “my passion project,” “I used to work in the Government and I was totally bored [expletive] there.”
- Self-Discovery, Self-Realisation, Engaging Creativity – “I’ve discovered things about myself I just didn’t know,” “I didn’t realise I was such an extrovert.”

### **Other –Orientated/Community-Concerned**

- Community Health – “I wanted to eat healthy food and provide that to the general public,” “just to produce clean food,” “More for health and wellbeing of individuals.”
- Community Education – “we’ve educated people about mushrooms since we started,” “We actually run the classes to teach people about the bees.”
- Part of the Community and Supporting It in the Broadest Sense – “wanted to do something useful,” “We also wanted the community to have a product that was raw, so we sell unfiltered honey,” “I’ve been coming to this market for probably five to six years and you do develop a relationship with the people that you sell to every week. So, it’s been good for me because growing mushrooms, you don’t tend to mix with too many humans.”

All interviewees have spoken, arguably lovingly, of what can clearly be described as artisanal production, involving low volume or small batch production, using high quality, often organic, ingredients, products handmade or at least with a low level of mechanisation and an understanding of how further mechanisation would alter the quality, indeed the nature, of the product. Environmental concern, for instance in waste minimisation was also mentioned.

This research has revealed that personal or family health problems can quite often be a route into artisanal food production: “I used to play around with bread ... because I’m celiac, and I really missed bread ... My daughter came back from America – she’s gluten intolerant too – and she went crazy for them. So, every time she came back from America, she’d live on gluten free bread on toast with avocado and lemon.” Another baker became involved with gluten-free and sour dough bread because his first daughter is on the autism spectrum. Gluten is unhelpful for autism and a range of behavioural issues.

Nobody has discussed income as a motivator, though one agreed that there has to be a survivable threshold level of income.

There are early indications of gender skew in responses, with women contextualising the business in terms of family in a way that men have not done. The business as legacy for the children, time flexibility to be with the children and ability to involve the children in the business have all been mentioned by women. Women also tend to mention self-discovery and learning, while men do not.

#### 4. Discussion

Specific conclusions of the quantitative study lay in the importance of five motivators for vendors to attend. These were to inform the public about one's product, to learn about customers, to inform the public about artisanal products, to earn incremental income and to network with other businesses. These conclusions are broadly in line with the findings of such researchers as Coster and Kennon (2005) and Guthrie et al. (2006). Pursuit of significant income as a motivator was rejected. When motivations were rank ordered, pursuit of incremental income appeared last (or penultimate). This result fitted well with the qualitative study. Only one participant mentioned "profitable sales".. Supporting the community, on the other hand, was often mentioned.

The Victoria Park outcomes seem to confirm vendor social motivations as the findings of Alonso and O'Neill (2011) for customers have also argued. Additionally, Sidali, Kastenholz and Bianchi (2013) argue that food products are an important marker not just of consumers' identity but, also, of the food providers themselves, who consciously or unconsciously use them to "construct and confirm their own personalities (Sidali et al., 2013)." The interaction of those personalities is the issue, as measured in both social or economic terms. Two relevant models may be applied. The intimacy model (Treacy & Wiersma, 1993) posits that building an intimate relationship is possible in the farmers' market environment, particularly given that it is a grower who is present, perhaps with a tale to tell, who might represent a major component of a positive customer experience. In turn, the experience model (Pine & Gilmore, 1998) suggests that customers are willing to pay for such a positive experience.

Granovetter (1985) challenges classical economic theory with respect to the rational consumer. Social factors outside of a particular transaction, through their embeddedness, can override or modify traditional economic assumptions. People may pay a premium for goods or services where the social environment is appealing. This study may well be seen as offering support to the other side of the coin, that is, the vendor who is not motivated solely or even primarily by classical economic rationality, meaning, in essence, income. Vendor motivations may even have a psychosociological genesis as that suggested for consumers (Barthes, 2008) in their food choices and involvements, as identity choices and indicators.

Xiao (2017), meanwhile, concludes that "... food has the capacity to assert and express cultural identity." Xiao was considering ethnic minorities. Any sub-cultural or class-cultural environment might be considered. It is of as great validity to consider "vegetarian," "vegan," "organic," "clean" and "macrobiotic" not simply as food descriptors but, also, in terms of proponents of those food types. In some of those cases, food choice may be not only the primary defining characteristic and descriptor of the group but also the individual, if only as perceived by that individual.

Whatever the genesis of economically irrational consumers and economically irrational vendors at farmers' markets, if either or both are apt descriptions, the farmers' market considered may be regarded as an economically irrational marketplace. Given the findings of this study and given the findings of the Victoria Park Farmers' Market customer attendance survey (Azavedo, 2016), where customers proved largely price unconcerned, the totality of those two pieces of research may well have uncovered a marketplace that is wholly irrational in classical economic terms, thereby making an important contribution to knowledge in this fast-evolving area. Not to be forgotten,



though, is that to look at Victoria Park Farmers' Market vendors is to consider people shortening the local food supply chain, by their alternative activity. To shorten a supply chain, cutting out profit-seeking intermediaries, normally creates price reductions to the end consumer. Generally, shortened food supply chains have meant lower prices. However, farmers' markets have been associated with high prices (e.g. Pesch & Keeler, 2015). The accusation was levelled strongly that cost benefits were not being passed on, by a participant in the qualitative study of consumers at Victoria Park Farmers' Market (Azavedo, 2016).

The argument of value being perceived beyond simply the goods in the transaction reasserts itself, now to the detriment of classic supply chain theory. The shortening of the food supply chain, by bringing producer and consumer physically closer together, interacting together at the farmers' market, enables a social dimension to develop. That actually acts as an enabler for higher prices.

The artisanal food producer motivational survey is, so far, very confirmatory of the Victoria Park vendor attendance survey. Participants interviewed so far did not float income as a topic for discussion (or respond to gentle prompting) and were relatively uninterested when compared with other subjects for discussion. Those other subjects fell thematically as being either or both of self-interested and community concerned. Both of these areas were discussed by all participants. There was great depth of feeling over the community-related artisan process topics. However, what came over more strongly was often talked about and apparently with more passion were the self-interested elements, especially around simply not working for someone else. In the language used by several participants: "I'm my own boss." It could be that being one's own boss in any enterprise, not specifically artisan food, would be enough, so strong appears this feeling. Arguably, this is firmly different from Caricofe (2011), whose respondents are portrayed much more as seeing things in terms of artisanal food, possibly in terms of the politics of food democracy.

## **5. Conclusion**

This paper has reported on research that has contributed to the understanding of artisanal food production and farmers' markets in two areas of Australia. The research has contributed to the idea that these activities are not wholly affected by price considerations but more in terms of self-actualisation and interest in the community. The non-transactional aspects of business and of business relationships have been shown, as in other strands of the literature, to be of at least as much importance as the transactional aspects and, in some cases, more important.

The research reported on here suffers from some limitations in terms of time and space. The farmers' market is only open on limited occasions and there may be cultural or geographical factors which mean direct comparison with markets from other parts of the world problematic. The research approach might also be supplemented by other forms of observation in the interests of triangulation. However, additional research is planned in this area in order to try to rectify the limitations and contribute to an agenda for future research. One particular question to answer will be the extent to which the validity of results on non-transactional aspects of the business may be generalized.

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