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# **Regulatory Enclosures: Small Scale Women Livestock Farmers**

Martha McMahon

## Abstract.

There are efforts by a variety of social movements and civil society organizations to encourage the development of alternative agri-food networks that are socially just, ecological, humane and which ensure food security and food sovereignty. Many activists focus their critiques on the role of large multinational corporations in restructuring and globalizing the agri-food system. They offer in its place a vision of locally oriented, small scale ecological farming. Drawing on the gendered experience of small scale women farmers on Vancouver Island, BC, Canada who are developing local markets for their farm products and the impact of new Provincial food safety regulations, this paper argues if such social change initiatives are to be successful, one will need to look at how food safety regulations accomplish outcomes that have relatively little to do with food safety but effectively close the possibilities for more ecologically grounded and locally focused food production and distribution. That is, food safety regulations seem inevitably to close off to farmers the possibility of economic alternatives to the globalizing agri food system. There will be 'no alternatives'. Paradoxically, consumer led food and food security movements can undermine the very changes they wish to see happen.

## Regulation

Small farmers  
Food safety

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## **From Standard Fare to Fairer Standards: A Political Economy of Meat Regulations**

*“Meat Inspection Regulations threaten small farmers”* announce the headlines of the front page of *The Island Tides* (2005), a small local newspaper from the South Coast of Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Canada. The newspaper tells us that local small farmers who have been supplying local residents (and even the Queen on one occasion) with lamb and beef and who were hitherto exempt from Provincial meat production regulations will, in the name of food safety and public health, shortly have to conform to the same standards and rules as apply to major slaughterhouses (Island Tides, July 14, 2005, p.1). There had been no reported health problems caused by meat from uninspected facilities. Thus the new regulations appeared of questionable necessity from a public health standpoint.<sup>1</sup> The cost of meeting the new specifications will be prohibitive and will put most small-scale livestock farmers and local processors out of business, the news

article explains.

How are we to make sense of such regulatory standards in a context in which there is increasing consumer and social activist support for local food and growing

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<sup>1</sup> . Contaminated meat can be dangerous. However, there are many ways of producing safe food. There is no evidence that industrially based procedures and facilities are the best or even at all appropriate for small-scale food production.

concern about the risks of the industrial food system?<sup>2</sup> There is a growing array of locally based and globally interconnected social movements and organizations working to encourage ecologically sustainable alternative agri-food networks that are socially just, humane and which ensure food security and food sovereignty. These movements span the socio-economic spectrum- from Via Campesina, a global movement of peasants originating in the South, to the Slow Food movement, for example, mobilizing primarily elites and the urban middle-classes in the North. Many activists focus their critiques on the role of large multinational corporations in restructuring and globalizing the agri-food system. Too often it is assumed, even by activists and researchers, that small-scale agriculture and local processors simply cannot compete in the market. But this is not necessarily true. The resurgence of farmers' markets across Canada, the US and the UK suggest that in the North a strategy of re-claiming the market could be usefully employed to counter the ideological and economic hegemony of the distorted market and monopolies that characterize the corporate dominated agri-food system. There really are alternatives. If activists are to be successful in making social change, they will need to look far more closely at the role of the State and new international forms of governance in creating a regulatory environment that marginalizes small-scale, locally oriented alternative agri-food networks (AAFN).

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<sup>2</sup> The Chief Medical Officer for the Provincial Capital of BC recently declared local food to be part of a broad understanding of health promotion. For background on BC's new meat regulations see [bcfarmnet.org](http://bcfarmnet.org), look under library/articles. For general critiques of industrial meat production see Beyond Factory Farming website at [www.beyondfactoryfarming.org](http://www.beyondfactoryfarming.org) or Tansey & D'Silva (1999)

All societies regulate and organize their members, albeit in a wide variety of ways. Increasingly, nation states and supra national bodies such as the EU and WTO are adopting the position that differences in local, regional or national standards are 'technical barriers to trade' and are encouraging their harmonization (Campbell, 2005; Council of Canadians, 2005; Dunn, 2003). The 'standardization of standards' (Dunn 2003, 1493) is supposedly instituted in order that all competitors in the marketplace bear an equal regulatory burden. At first glance, the paradox of new meat regulations in a period of government deregulation appears anomalous. Closer analysis would show, however, that we are witnessing a shift from direct government accountability (and liability) for safety in favor of instituted processes, for example Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP), where (consistent with the bureaucratic logic of public administration, Saul (1999) it is the process, procedures and the exercise of 'due diligence', not the outcome or product that matters.<sup>3</sup> This shift, according to a recent report by a major civil society organization (CSO), is creating a dangerously unsafe industrial meat supply (Government Accountability Project, 2004). Gouveia & Juska's (2002) study of HACCP monitoring, for example, suggests that it offers the appearance of dealing with food safety issues but provides few extra benefits in preventing the contamination in the first place.

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<sup>3</sup> See Joel Salatin (2004) well known ecological farmer, activist and author of *Salad Bar Beef* (1995) for an account of his ongoing battle with US authorities around this issue. He argues his on-farm production is safer than supermarket meat and also has the merit of providing a host of other benefits in terms of on-farm family employment, rural revitalization and biological diversity.

In meetings with farmers government spokespersons on the new meat regulations repeatedly emphasized the desire for a uniform, single set of standards for the province (and by implication, nationally and internationally), presenting it as a self-evident good. How could public health authorities expect investors to invest in upgrading or in building expensive meat new processing plants if little backyard operations down the road were allowed to continue operating with lower costs, they repeatedly asked. They seemed genuinely puzzled at farmer opposition. They spoke as though they felt farmers didn't "get" the importance of public health issues and were simply psychologically resistant to change.

Food safety standards, however, are far more than technologies for ensuring food safety and organizing markets. Rather, grades and standards are part of the moral economy of the modern world, (Busch, 2000) and this moral economy defines what (and who) is good and bad, disciplining people and things that do not conform (Busch, 2000, 274). Far from being technically neutral, standards are often introduced precisely in order to alter the relationships among actors and give one an advantage over another (Busch, 2000). In this case, industrial standards designed for large-scale meat production are being imposed on very small-scale farmers and processors, at the cost of their elimination. For example, half of the UK's abattoirs closed between 1995 and 2000 and even a UK government Task Force acknowledged that due to the increasing regulatory burden only the largest abattoirs will stay in business (Soil Association, 2000). It must be emphasized that small-scale farming and alternative agri-food systems **cannot** survive if their infrastructure is destroyed. Clearly it was the farmers at those public consultations who 'got it'.

### **Political and Methodological Positions**

The political economic analysis of these new meat regulations that we offer in this paper is grounded in the situated context of small-scale women farmers in and around Southern Vancouver Island. Methodologically, the paper does not ‘represent’ small-scale women farmers’ experiences in either a statistical or literary sense. Rather it approaches women farmers’ experience as a site of analysis and praxis. Following Escobar (2001), place based struggles can be understood as multi-scale, network-oriented subaltern strategies of localization. Such struggles may be place based but are not necessarily place-bound (Escobar, 2001). The local resistance to the increased industrialization of farming on Southern Vancouver Island is connected with globalized networks of resistance, greatly facilitated by electronic communications and email networks. Furthermore, the local small farmers’ struggles around meat regulations is a struggle to maintain a local alternative agri-food network (AAFN) and as such can be understood as connected to wider struggles for social justice, animal welfare, fair trade, bio-diversity and indigenous people’s efforts to maintain some control over local resources. Struggles to create AAFNs are embodied and need to be understood as socially situated are therefore shaped by the complex racialized, regionalized and class social relationships of late modernity rather than simply expressing any homogenous identity or single, shared economic interest. They are also gendered. More than a third of BC farms are farmed by women (almost twice the national average) and almost half of BC’s organic farmers are women. Women farmers are typically small-scale farmers. On Southern Vancouver Island where this research was done, women farmers are in the forefront of efforts to



build alternative food networks (AAFN) by socially and ecologically and locally re-embedding food locally (McMahon, 2002). It can be argued that the logic of the industrial food system is masculinist (McMahon, 2002, Shiva, 1988). That is masculinist in a historical, particular cultural sense of privileging qualities associated with masculinity and erasing or marginalizing qualities more associated with women: small-scale rather than big, the local (home and community) rather than distant and impersonal, the particular rather than universal (in this case global), non-rational and oriented to relationship and emotional concern with animal welfare rather than abstract rationality. Although women farmers' key role in developing the recent revival of community oriented food system in Canada and the US has been established in research (De Lind & Ferguson, 1999; Chiappe & Butler Flora, 1998; Hall and Mogyorody, 2002; Krug, 2004; Abbott Cone, Cynthia and Andrea Myhre. 2000; McMahon, 2002; Sumner, 2004), it is not recognized politically. What does seem clear is that the future of women farmers in BC is intimately tied to the future of small-scale farming.

While being grounded in a specific locality, these experiences speak to a global phenomenon. Regulations advanced by organizations as seemingly disparate as the WTO, WHO, Codex Alimentarius, the EU, and various levels of national government are being instituted around the world 'scientific standards' necessary for the maintenance of societal health. This destruction of traditional rights and practices can have the effect of destroying the livelihood of entire classes of people (Shiva, 1988, 1999.). (Last week, farmers at a local farmers' market on one of the Gulf Islands were threatened with prosecution by local health authorities for selling eggs that were not graded for size at an inspected government grading station. There is no grading station on the island and

farmers have sold their unofficially graded eggs at the market for decades. The eggs were apparently of perfectly good quality, and after farmers launched an effective and embarrassing media campaign, health authorities agreed to not enforce the regulations, to the displeasure of Ministry of Agriculture officials, who it seems were as concerned about regulatory marketing board issues as about health issues, if not more so.)

Far from being neutral, regulatory agencies can become “captured” when they end up representing the interests of the industrial food producers and retailers the legislation was really intended to regulate in the first place (Harper & LeBeau, 2003, 119). One might better understand the lack of interest in the regulation of GMO food in Canada compared with the increasing regulation of small-scale farmers on Southern Vancouver Island by recognizing that the Canadian government itself is in partnership with private biotechnology corporations, explained as part of its mandate to promote trade. The real issue is not about the presence or absence of regulation as much as about what image of the world and whose interests are embodied in those regulations and how they are enacted. Animal welfare activists, for example, decry a lack of regulation, arguing that the WTO trade and sanitary rules prevents them from getting strong protective legislation enacted nationally (Stevenson, 1999). Rather than seeing conspiracy, Harper and LeBeau (2003, 119) explain, one needs to understand the multi-‘stakeholder’ nature of the regulatory processes in which interest groups with the most money and most effective mobilization get a large share of the policy benefits. From a small-scale farmers’

perspective, however, it might not be too much to suggest that we are witnessing kinds of new Enclosure Acts on a global scale, albeit in locally specific ways.<sup>4</sup>

Theorizing the new meat regulations in BC provides an opportunity to investigate how the establishment of national and international standards that specify the nature and qualities of goods, and exactly how they may be produced, is becoming not just an increasingly prevalent means of governing and coordinating the world economy (Busch, 2000; Dunn, 2003), but of configuring structures of economic and political power that regulates people locally, their ways of life, and the nature of their relationship with the commons and the natural world. This mode of regulatory governance is relatively independent of the formal political process. Yet it can accomplish significant social transformations and economic restructuring that would otherwise be politically

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<sup>4</sup> The new meat regulations are in some sense just a tip of the iceberg for livestock farmers. There is also the new livestock traceability program with its metal ear tagging and record keeping; the (probably) soon to be mandatory externally audited separate on-farm food safety plans for each of the ‘commodities’ a farmer produces, no matter how few (eg one for sheep, another for dairy, one for vegetables and so on); a separate on-farm environmental management plan (including a nutrient management plan). Plans require initial workshops, will be subject to external auditing, at farmers expenses and extensive paper work. Purebred sheep breeders are now also being encouraged to start genetically testing their animals for genetic resistance to particular diseases. Large-scale farmers may be able to spread the costs in time and money over a large over a high output and hire additional help but the burden on small farmers is unmanageable in terms of time and unaffordable in terms of money.

impossible. There would, for example, be little support in BC's parliament for measure intended to eliminate small scale farmers, discourage local food production, penalize ecological farmers or disadvantage women farmers who make animal welfare central to their mode of farming. Yet this is exactly what these new standards do. And they do so under the benign rubric of a neutral bureaucracy reducing risks to public health on a 'scientific' basis.

### **Standards: Public Health Tools or Practices of Exclusion?**

Provincial government explanations for the new meat regulations shifted somewhat over the course of the consultation period but primarily included: public health concerns; the need to have a single set of standards for the whole Province; harmonization of provincial, national (federal) and international standards (particularly with the US); the BSE crisis and the closing of the border to Canadian live cattle exports; and importantly, the intention of creating a level playing field and fair and attractive investment environment for those willing to build upgraded (capital intensive) slaughtering facilities in BC.

A senior Government representatives at one public meetings accused local farmers who opposed the new regulations of being willing to put both public safety and a billion dollar trade in agricultural products at risk. Local farmers were portrayed as putting their private interest in "lifestyle" farming above the public or national interest. Government spokespersons at those meetings often portrayed farmers' concerns as parochial, local abattoirs as unclean and inefficient and representing unfair competition, and they proposed a future of efficiency, cleanliness and order in the service of the

greater, if not universal, good. They displayed frustration with farmers' opposition. Apparently surprised by the level of opposition, the government eventually extended the consultation period, introduced a two-year transition period and provided a small amount of funding to some groups for research to help farmers adapt. The regulatory standards were not changed.

When asked at a meeting, government spokespersons could not give any data on how many farmers would be affected and in what ways and with what consequences, nor how many uninspected facilities existed. They did not know how many lambs were sold at farm gate nor where farmers would take their livestock if local facilities were closed down. In all of this can we infer a devaluation of an entire locally specific social category who are deemed so unimportant as to not merit the consideration of perfunctory study?<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Perhaps they felt small farmers are too inefficient to justify efforts to ensure their survival. Government sources will frequently tell you that a small number of large farms produce 90% the agricultural produce in BC, thereby implying that small farmers are both inefficient and economically unimportant. Government figures, however, exclude from their calculations much of the farm produce from small farms that goes for subsistence or is traded locally. Much of the agricultural produce in their calculations, by contrast is destined for intra-provincial trade and export. Small farmers would argue that industrial agriculture is 'inefficient' in social and ecological terms. The privileging of export oriented agriculture appears a consistent bias in government policy on food and agriculture. For research on the greater efficiency of small scale and agro-ecological farming see the work of Jules Pretty and Miguel Alegerie(sp?).

Farmers expressed the belief that the new regulations represented government devaluation of small-scale agriculture if not the continuation of a long-standing agriculture policy to eradicate it altogether in favor of (to many local organic farmers present, environmentally harmful and socially destructive) corporate agriculture. But they were politically powerless to stop the new legislation and were ideologically vulnerable to government legitimations that invoked health and issues of animal disease control. How could anyone be for BSE! How could anyone risk human health! The political struggle for small-scale farmers on Southern Vancouver Island will now shift to how the new regulations will be interpreted and enforced.

By invoking health, Beck-Gernsheim explains, obstacles are pushed aside and doubts allayed. “One cannot argue against health, particularly not so in a society where many no longer know a god.”(Beck-Gernsheim, 2000, 127). The political weight of the Ministry of Health rather than the far less politically important provincial Ministry of Agriculture ensured a speedy passage of the new legislation through parliament. Farmers typically prefaced their opposition with remarks with phrases like “we all want to make sure the food we produce is safe and healthy, but.... and ‘we are not against regulation but ....” No doubt to the embarrassment of some local health authority officials, critics of the new regulations emphasized that government was not responding to any existing food safety problem nor was there was no evidence that contaminated meat was being distributed from Provincially uninspected facilities.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Some regions of the Province were regulated by Provincial standards, others by local health authority standards. In all regions it was required meat be produced in a way fit for human consumption, but the health authorities’ role in making these determinations

The engagement of themes of health and notions of the public good in the case of the new BC meat regulations raises intriguing issues that speak to the heart of global phenomena. It goes beyond economics and agriculture and agricultural considerations to the contradictions of the risk society (Beck, 1992) late modernity (Giddens, 1990) and dystopian outcomes of rationalization. Scientific and industrial development have produce new kinds of risks and hazards that cannot be addressed or alleviated by the same scientific, bureaucratic and industrial systems that produced them (Beck, 1992). That the protagonists in these events were operating not just in different moral economies but different universes of reference is clearer when we contrast the technocratic rationality of the regulations with what is, from farmers' viewpoints, the empirical irrationality (but interested rationalizations) of the new regulations.

### **Inclusions and Exclusions: Moral Universes of Safety, Standards and Sense**

To many farmers, the new regulations appeared to be a solution in search of a justifying problem. This seemed especially so given that the meat they produced was almost entirely for very local markets – often farm-gate sales to the farmers' neighbors

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was to be replaced by the Province. Some facilities were small scale and very local in orientation and neither known to nor inspected by anyone. At a later point in the consultation a senior Ministry spokesperson introduced the idea that the Province of BC had a higher rate of enteric disorders than elsewhere in Canada. However, it was not clear that this was from eating meat. When challenged the spokesperson acknowledged that the per capita rate of enteric disorders was no different from inspected and uninspected regions of the Province (Lyle Young, 2004).

and relatives. There were no documented health problems with it. None of the meat in question is destined for inter-provincial trade let alone the international market. It is sold locally. Furthermore, much of the meat produced by small-scale local facilities is lamb. Local facilities often do not have the capacity to handle large animals such as beef cattle, the object of BSE concerns. Lambs don't get BSE. Yet it the local farming of lamb that is mostly likely to be hurt by these regulations. Ironically, while regulatory agencies have emphasized the importance of traceability in their efforts to improve food safety in response to the BSE and other food related crisis, the alternative local food system being undermined by the new regulations, farmers argued, has a pre-existing built-in traceability. Consumers who buy locally know exactly where their food came from if there is a problem. Neither is meat from one animal distributed over a geographically wide area and large numbers of consumers – one of the hazards of the industrial meat system. None of the explanations offered by government spokespersons make a great deal of sense to local farmers. Email communications among local farmer internet networks often expressed the belief that the policy changes are part of the Federal government's policy of deep economic integration with the US.

However, let us temporarily bracket other analytical framings and take government representatives at face value and accept that from their perspectives they were addressing two pressing problems: fear of a crisis of confidence in the safety of the food system (as had happened in Europe) and the challenges of being part of a single North American market for agricultural products. From this perspective, standards and regulations can appear to resolve both problems. Standards, as Guthman (2004, explains, can harmonize production or processing in the interest of trade and, in addition,



“...standards, certification schemes, and labels all enable ‘action at a distance’ ... that is, institutional as opposed to personalized ways to (re)establish trust in a given chain of food provision.”(Guthman, 2004, 512). Issues of trust and risk are central.<sup>7</sup> Whereas the dystopian side of the risk society of late modernity may have brought difficult to contain and potentially catastrophic new hazards, many social commentators point out that the enhanced reflexivity of this kind of society means we are also living in a ‘culture of fear’ (Furedi, 2001; Adams, Beck & Van Loon, 2000; Wildavsky, 1988). The widespread use of the term ‘at risk’ Furedi (2001) argues expresses an irrational cultural attitude to life in which (some) perceived dangers are out of all proportion to real danger involved, where (some) real hazards are ignored, and where the populace in affluent societies, despite living historically unprecedently ‘safe’ lives, seem to expect that professionals and authorities will eliminate all the messy, unpredictable and risky dimensions that inevitably come with being alive. Government initiatives around food safety must also be located in this context. One wonders whether moves such as the new meat regulations far from being motivated primarily by the rational economic trade interests that many farmer groups suspect or the technical rationality that the government spokespersons maintain,

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<sup>7</sup> There is some evidence to suggest that government authorities may doubt that the hazards and risks of the industrial food system can really be contained and that their concern is to do and be seen to do ‘due diligence’. This would help explain that it is the processes designed to achieve food safety, not the actual outcome in terms of inspected quality of meat, that is the focus of government regulation. Hence the emphasis on HACCP.

are not kinds of ritual enactments of safety in a context that seems overwhelmed by potentially uncontrollable dangers.

Sage's (2003) research on Irish alternative agri-food networks and Dunn's (2003) work on Polish small scale farmers (2003), for example, shows that EU technocrats now typically respond to retailers concerns about food safety, liability and the crises of consumer confidence that have come with the enhanced reflexivity of the consumer in the risk society (or late modernity) by a host of technical and regulatory interventions designed to underpin safety, often under the guise of 'quality assurance'. Sanitary and phytosanitary standards are central to this strategy. They are intended to symbolically and practically contain risk. A culture's pollution (sanitary) rules, Mary Douglas (1966) explains, do not really tell us about dirt and cleanliness but they speak to the rules of proper order in that society: what is good and bad, the sacred and the profane, what belongs inside and outside, what is allowed touch what and what must be kept separate. Such rules are boundary-drawing devices for regulating the moral order. Empirically, part of what BC's new meat regulations contain (and will likely exclude) are local, sustainable alternative forms of agriculture and small farmers.

By contrast, environmentalists, food security groups, food sovereignty movements, and food activists typically see the industrial food system itself as the problem and advocate the creation of alternative agri-food networks (AAFN) characterized by shorter food chains, localized and de-industrialized/non-productivist modes of production, and re-embedding food and farming in local communities and ecological regions. The rapidly globalizing industrial food system, they argue, produces unacceptable ecological hazards and health risks: Mad Cow disease and the Avian Flu

(and even Ecoli 157), they argue, are largely products of industrial agriculture with its centralized production and processing, mega feedlots, and cross contamination of meat from different sources. Globalized industrialized food systems, they argue, create food insecurity and human and animal disease, not health. Some see potentially catastrophic consequences from GMO technologies, for example. From this perspective, “solutions” like the new regulations deepen the problem and exposes the profound conflict in the role of the State in the dual responsibility for food safety and the role of also promoting trade (Council of Canadians, 2005, Localfarmwebsites and emailnetworks, 2004-05). In the risk society (Beck, 1992), these two functions are in potentially lethal contradiction.

#### **Standards as Tools of Governance:**

*I raise about 40 lambs a year and grow vegetables for the local market. There isn't a Provincially inspected abattoir around here. We are too small scale for that. I earn twice the return on my lamb by selling directly locally. I make almost no money from farming as it is... I wouldn't sell my lamb to a big factory plant or an auction. They pay too little and you would never know how your lambs would be treated. So ethically and financially, my future depends on farm-gate direct sales. (Kate, 40 sheep farm)*

While the literature on globalization and concentration in the food system and the transformation of agriculture is extensive, the role of grades and standards (and food safety standards in particular) in effecting these transformations has been largely

unexplored (Busch, 2000, 273). One can distinguish standards from standardization. However, because standards are not technically neutral but carry their sedimented institutional, social and geographic origins, the former often functions in the service of the latter. Thus when powerful political, technocratic or economic interests determine that their particular standards become 'the standard', standards operate as a means of 'standardization' and coercive uniformity. This is particularly the case when they carry the force of law that excludes alternatives and advances the interests of political and economic power that are grounded in reproducing the dominant order. There are many ways of producing healthy food. The conflict over standards is often intense precisely because it is not about 'intrinsic' qualities (good food) "... but about profit, market share, premium prices, consumer loyalty and monopoly rents (Schaeffer, 1991 in Busch, 2000, 277). Similarly, because standards are usually developed by those with most to gain by them, standards can create barriers to trade by penalizing firms that developed in other institutional contexts (Guthman 2004, 513, Sage, 2003). Thus standards designed for the institutional context of North American continental trade create significant barriers for those operating in the context of local markets. Dunn's (2003) analysis of the impact of EU phyto-sanitary standards on the Polish pork industry shows that not only did the drive to harmonize Polish national food safety standards with EU standards (a condition of Poland's entry to the EU) create new barriers to trade because established EU standards were embedded in specific geographies, but food safety regulations were used as socio-economic policy tools to restructure Polish agriculture and reduce the number of small farmers. EU technocrats believed that Poland had too many small farmers, and in the context of the EU's support for agriculture, Poland's entry would prove very expensive.

Revealing parallels with the IMF's role of restructuring in the Global South, food safety standards became a technique for eliminating small-scale farmers in an enlarged EU. As Busch (2000) stresses, it is not just things that are standardized by standards, but so too are people, ways of life and the natural environment. Cultural and bio-diversity are greatly diminished.

Thus despite the ideological rhetoric of neo-classical economics and support for the market, the new BC meat regulations function to create a monopoly situation. In doing so, they undermine what are small farmers' (and women farmers' in particular) increasingly successful economic survival strategies of re-embedding and localizing food and developing strong community support for local agriculture. Not only do the regulations appear to be out of proportion to the risk involved in small scale meat production, the logic of the new regulatory regime is incompatible with the logic of the emerging alternative, artisan-like agri-food system being developed by farmers and food activists on Southern Vancouver Island with its focused on the local, on direct sales, and personal accountability to consumers<sup>8</sup>.

Will local small-scale farmers and processors face a level competitive playing field and an equal regulatory burden after the new meat standards come into effect? The answer is clearly no. Based in the context of Kate's (above) experience, here is how a monopoly situation is being created.

Because of high costs of upgrading (or building) to meet new Provincial standards there will be only one facility in a region available to farmers such as Kate. One large plant can spread the high capital costs over a large number of animals. A small plant

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<sup>8</sup> For a general argument on the irrationality of the search for safety in the context of late modernity, see Wildavsky, 1988

oriented to local farmers will have much higher individual processing costs per unit and so will be uneconomic. To be profitable, the single large plants will want to process as close to 100% of the meat animals in an area so as to spread capital costs over as many units as possible and “compete” with other large facilities from other regions, whether for local consumers or export markets. Because Kate is a small farmer she typically has no more than six or seven lambs ready to go to slaughter at any one time, and then usually between the months of August and November. Small plants meeting the needs of farmers like Kate therefore only work part year, or just one day a week during quiet times. This low level of through-put, of course, cannot support high capital costs or interest payments. Banks will therefore not lend money to upgrade such small facilities. Custom processing six or seven lambs at a time for individual farmers like Kate to sell at farm gates or local markets will not be an attractive, practical or lucrative option for large facilities. (And Kate rightly suspects she will not get her own lamb back if they agree to do it.) They will either refuse or charge Kate extra for such services, or offer to buy her lamb for processing themselves for retail through vertically integrated retail outlets. Given that the Kate cannot have her lamb legally processed anywhere else, she must either accept the low price the factory offers or pay the high cost of processing. Kate is already facing greatly increased transportation cost in term of time and travel to this now distant facility. The economics of her farm enterprise look less and less sustainable. Furthermore, travel will also mean more stress and distress to her animals, something that undermines Kate’s ethical relationship with her animals and her farming. Economics and ethics will force her to abandon livestock farming making it more likely that the most of

the meat produced will be raised under the same types of conventional arrangements that prevail in mainstream agriculture.

The newly regulated environment will now be safe – safe for a (masculinist,) corporate concentrated industrial food system and investors in industrial scale meat processing plants.

### **Conclusion.**

The agri-cultural monopoly situation that is being created by a new government regulatory environment in BC goes beyond the all too familiar phenomenon of economic monopolies and the appropriation of economic rents. A second kind of monopoly is being instituted just at the time that large scale industrial agriculture is being politically, economically and ideologically challenged and alternative agri-food networks are being created. The new monopoly is not simply the monopoly of a firm or group of firms but the monopoly conditions for a particular type of agri-food system – capitalist corporate agriculture, characterized by industrialization, ecological destruction and homogenization -- albeit with a growing number of niche markets for elite food, also controlled by the same corporations (Guthman, 2004). Most consumers in BC as elsewhere will not have the option of buying meat not produced through this industrial and economic food system. But in a sense, it is farmers, not food, that are really being regulated. Locally oriented, ecological small-scale livestock farming will be largely eliminated.

It is important to understand that the “competition” to be erased through monopoly conditions in the agri-food environment is as much the political and ideological competition of ecologically oriented, localized alternative ‘woman friendly’

kinds of farming, as it is economic competition. And it is on this plane that this struggle will have to be waged.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Kate and some other women farmers spent six months researching options available to allow farmers and local processors to comply with the new regulations and came to the conclusion that a mobile abattoir and mobile or fixed cut and wrap facility would meet many of the technical requirements it was prohibitively expensive. A mobile abattoir has the advantage of probably being the most humane alternative from an animal welfare perspective. However the CFIA announced about the same time that they would not accept such a facility and the Provincial government is not offering any financial assistance or loans to help with the capital costs of meeting the new regulations. The struggle will now move to interpretation and enforcement of the regulations when they come into effect next year.



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