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The Nature of Food Localisms Among Consumers in Ireland:
defensive localisms, sustainability and reflexivity

Brídín Carroll

A thesis supervised by Dr. Frances Fahy and submitted to the Discipline of Geography, School of Geography and Archaeology, National University of Ireland, Galway, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

September 2013
Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is entirely my own work and has not previously been submitted in whole or in part as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university.

Signed: [Signature]

Date: 30/09/13
Abstract

Food is arguably the best example of the interaction between nature and society, fitting squarely in the jurisdiction of human geography topics which include sustainability, consumption, political economy, culture, nationalism, agriculture, communities, commodities and globalisation. The globalisation and industrialisation of the prevailing agri-food system have caused negative effects on human health, the environment and developing world communities and livelihoods. Partly in reaction to this, the positive value of local food, over industrial ‘placeless’ food, has been recognised and is seen as offering something alternative: an environmentally friendly system of production with fewer food miles and (often assumed) less industrialised production; a necessarily safe and equitable labour environment due to the opaqueness of the food chain; stability of income and livelihoods for producers and their families and consequent community resilience; and traceable food which comes embedded with information about the place and manner of the food’s production. As a result, there has been a drive recently towards reducing the distance between consumers and the origins of their food, spurred by consumer demand and bolstered by promotions of local food originating from the realm of production.

In recent years, food system localisation has become an area of importance for national governments, industry, policy-makers and local communities. Although past studies have critically engaged with some of the issues surrounding a transition towards localised food systems, research to date has largely ignored the conflation of local and sustainable (by consumers, amongst others) in alternative food systems, preferring to focus instead on quantitative measuring of how consumers view local food. Discourses of scale, which formed the basis of this examination, argue that as scale is a social construct, it cannot be said that there is anything inherent about the local. By extension, to believe that local food is good, just or sustainable amounts to spatial valorisation. The mistaken conflation of local with a number of positive characteristics, including sustainability, obscures the hand which local food systems can have in perpetuating undemocratic ideals and practices. Using Galway and Dublin as two case study locations and utilising a theoretically-informed, multi-phase mixed methodology, this study aimed to analyse how consumers in Ireland understand, perceive, value and prioritise local and sustainable food.
Drawing on empirical data obtained from interviews, focus groups and surveys with over 1000 participants, the study found that the majority of respondents were motivated in their local food purchasing by defensive rather than by reflexive processes. Participants in this study appeared uncomfortable with the term ‘sustainable food’. By contrast they were confident in the meaning of ‘local food’ and largely defined it according to limits of spatial proximity. Participants attributed a number of positive traits to local food, sustainability among them, and this led to the prioritising of the issue of local provenance when choosing food. However, in spite of the importance of local provenance, the results from this study indicate that it was not the most important issue for participants; instead, pragmatic considerations such as affordability most often prevailed. Nonetheless, participants’ motivations appeared to be driven by defensive localisms and personal beliefs in the value of helping ‘our own’, rather than by reflexive values of environmental protection and support for democratic principles of social equity. These results have implications for food system transformation away from its current unsustainable state to one which involves alternative modes of production and networks of provisioning.

The results of this study represent new and significant contributions to academic knowledge in a number of areas. It is the first of its kind to qualitatively examine the understandings of consumers in Ireland towards local and sustainable food. A key outcome is the creation of a new framework of localist typologies which is theoretically and empirically informed. This framework is the first of its kind in that it applies the esoteric concept of reflexivity to the views and values of consumers in the hopes of advancing discourses of food localisms in new and fruitful directions.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Overview
Although food has been traded internationally for hundreds of years, this has increased exponentially in the recent past as neo-liberal policies have fostered the global integration of food systems. Similarly, although technological innovations have been continually assimilated in food production for centuries, the industrialisation of agriculture is a relatively recent phenomenon when contextualised within the millennial history of agri-food production. Despite the relatively recent emergence of this globalised and industrialised food system, it is firmly embedded as ‘the norm’ in the current era. Although these ‘conventional’ food systems are credited with efficient production, tremendous gains in productivity and with allowing for diversity of diets year round, concerns have been raised in relation to their negative implications. In fact, prevailing food systems are widely criticised due to their environmental, social and economic unsustainability. These consequences are often hidden from consumers as they have become increasingly physically, socially and psychologically distanced from the source of their food’s production (Feagan, 2007). As a result, efforts to organise the food system differently have emerged and the most prominent among these are the fair trade, organic and localisation movements (Carroll, 2014). Such ‘alternative’ food movements are subject to growing academic and political interest as the health, social justice and environmental impacts of the prevailing food system have become apparent.

This thesis empirically investigates the relationship between scale and sustainability in consumer food choices in Ireland. It examines the understandings and perceptions of consumers towards local food and sustainable food, and investigates consumers’ values with a view to unpacking the potential factors which may motivate or inhibit local and sustainable food purchases. Using a theoretically informed measurement framework, this thesis critically investigates the concept of local food and applies these critiques to manifestations of food localism. The research aims to test the extent to which processes of *reflexivity* may find acceptance among consumers in Ireland, through the presentation of (reflexive) food localisms which are based on progressive and democratic ideals. As the following chapter will identify, there are numerous gaps in our current knowledge and this thesis hopes to address some of these.
Chapter 1: Introduction

The following sections contextualise the problematic conditions of the prevailing food system (1.2.1), with a specific focus on the Irish situation (1.2.2). Next, Section 1.3 presents a review of policy on local food and sustainable food, which are the focus points of this research. The theoretical background underpinning consumer understandings and perceptions of local and sustainable food are then introduced (1.4). Following this, the aims, objectives and key strengths of the study are outlined (1.5) and a brief overview of the methodological approaches employed in the research is presented (1.6). The key strengths of this study are elucidated (1.7) before a concluding section which previews the overall thesis structure (1.8).

1.2 Context

1.2.1 The problematic condition of the prevailing food system

The current food system could be analysed from a number of geographical perspectives namely globalisation, commodity chains or political economy. The genesis of the industrial and globalised condition of this system is well established and there is increasing recognition of the political economic origins of the problems associated with this (Carlisle & Miles, 2010; Hawkes & Murphy, 2010; Robbins, 2010; Friedmann, 2009; Morgan et al, 2008). In this prevailing food system, the chains through which food travels are distanciated and multifarious, with elongated links between producers and consumers (Morris & Buller, 2003). The increasingly global orientation of food chains involves growing corporate control and the employment of mass-production techniques (Allen et al, 2003). As a consequence, the power differences of consumers and producers are altered by their increased physical, social and psychological distance, and the dislocation of production from consumption leads to further disconnections. The global reach of commodity chains can all too easily elide its ecological and social effects and this is particularly so in the case of the food provision system (Sage, 2011; Hinton & Goodman, 2010). Therefore, while powerful actors at all stages of the neo-liberal corporate food regime benefit from their involvement in the global and industrial food system, the negative outcomes which have been ‘externalised’ are in fact borne by the environment and by those who are less powerful (Alkon & Agyeman, 2011; Sage, 2011). Citizens of the global South who are disempowered by this regime often suffer from a loss of food sovereignty which has been proven to lead to food insecurity and in crisis situations, hunger and famine (Holt-Giménez & Altieri, 2013; Kneafsey et al, 2013;
Chapter 1: Introduction

Rosset, 2011; Halewood, 2011). For example, the food crisis of 2007/2008 has been attributed to political economic processes, rather than to absolute food shortages (McMichael, 2009). Nonetheless with worldwide population growing at an exponential rate, and with the social and environmental unsustainability of current production practices acknowledged, the notion that the prevailing food system must undergo a fundamental and comprehensive transformation has found widespread acceptance.

1.2.2 The Irish context

Agri-food production plays an enormous role in Irish society and in the Irish economy with 64% of all land in the Republic of Ireland under agricultural production (Teagasc, 2011a). In addition, 12% of those in employment in Ireland are engaged in work in the food system (CSO, 2012c) and 8% of GNP is derived from the agri-food industry (Teagasc, 2011b). The sustainability of the food system is therefore very important in the Irish context. However, the significant contribution which the agri-food industry makes to the Irish economy may be attributable to Ireland’s embeddedness in the European and wider global food market. This embeddedness means that not alone does the country benefit economically from its place in the prevailing industrial and global food system, but also that it suffers from (and is responsible for) some if not all of its ill effects (as described in the Section 1.2.1).

Although Irish agriculture is comparatively extensive in its production methods, its carbon footprint remains high (Emerson & Gillmore, 1999). While 10% of greenhouse gas emissions in the European Union are from agriculture, in Ireland this figure is much higher at 28% due to a large emphasis on livestock industries (Fitzgerald, 2009). In addition to matters of environmental degradation, economic and social issues are also relevant in the Irish context. The economically precarious nature of agri-food production in Ireland may be attributable to the high prices of industrial agricultural inputs and to a cost-price squeeze inflicted by corporate actors. This is exacerbated when adverse weather events such as droughts, freezes and floods occur and cumulatively this can leave farmers with no choice but to sell their land. This process has environmental, social and economic implications and despite predictions of increasing farm incomes in

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1 2,232,203 people make up the Irish workforce and of these, 268,334 are involved in food production, manufacturing, retailing or the food service industry. The numbers are as follows: Farming: 101,053; Food manufacturing: 39,205; Non-specialised food and beverage retailing: 64300; Specialised food and beverage retailing: 11,194; Restaurant work: 40,935; Work in canteen or catering: 11,647 (CSO, 2012c).
coming years, these still remain low and vulnerable to external conditions. For example, average Irish farm incomes for 2012 were 11\% lower than the previous year due to extremely wet summer conditions (Hennessey et al., 2013). In tandem with the globalisation of food systems, numerous agri-food crises, such as the recent horsemeat scandal, have emerged and Ireland has not been immune to these (Premanandh, 2013). Arguably, one of the worst social problems which is said to arise from the global nature of food systems is that of food poverty; despite food products to the approximate value of €8 billion are exported from Ireland every year, 10\% of the Irish population are thought to suffer from food poverty (Carney & Maitre, 2012).

Not surprisingly, there have been efforts in Ireland, just as in other countries of the global North, to move away from the damaging effects of the prevailing food system through the adoption of alternative and more sustainable food system practices (Murtagh, 2010). Sage (2007) writes of the disconnection between the worlds of food production and food consumption inherent in the global food system and a subsequent increase in the occurrence of face-to-face or at least closer connections between small-scale food producers and their consumers, in the alternative food system in Ireland. Moore (2006), in his examination of organic food consumers in farmers’ markets in Ireland, argues that these new -or perhaps renewed- connections are credited with increased support of the local community and with lower levels of pollution through the decreased distance between consumer and producer.

1.3 Mapping developments in food policy from supra-national to national approaches

Given the political economic framework which underpins the existence and condition of the prevailing globalised and industrialised food system, it would be remiss to neglect the policy perspective on food systems and sustainability. Therefore, this section presents a review of the orientation of policies at an international and national scale. In addition to governmental policy the following review includes documents produced by agencies licensed to act on their behalf, for example Bord Bia in Ireland (the Irish food board). Broadly speaking, documents published by all organisations of interest suggest that there is widespread acceptance of the grand challenges which face agri-food production in its current state and the consequent need for reform. Again, there
appears to be consensus on how this reform should manifest itself with strategies structured around two key pillars: firstly, it is argued that productivity must increase through ‘smart’ intensification in order to meet predicted future food demand; and secondly, as food production relies on its ecological basis, any increased production must be sustainable. The largely unified message is not surprising when one considers the globalised nature of politics. As the following policy review highlights, there has been a growing number of statements and programmes emerging from government departments and agencies on the topic of ‘alternative’ food provisioning (Kneafsey, 2010; Morris & Buller, 2003). As European frameworks set the scene for how policy-makers in Ireland approach the issues of food systems and sustainability, this section presents a brief overview of trends within European Union (EU) food policy before focussing on policy development in an Irish context.

1.3.1 Food policy and the European Union

Following a review of EU policy documents which relate to food systems and sustainability, it appears that these are largely market-oriented and guided by the mantra of the Europe 2020 strategy: smart, sustainable, inclusive growth (McGuinness, 2011; European Commission, 2010). Therefore, although policies state that emissions should be reduced more quickly in the current decade than this occurred between 2000 and 2010, it is said that reductions should be achieved through the exploitation of new technologies and innovations (Council of the European Union, 2011; European Commission, 2011). The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is undeniably a powerful tool in encouraging and applying such innovations. Concessions towards environmental sustainability follow a ‘mutually beneficial’ ecological modernisation efficiency approach. In addition, the ‘inclusive’ element of Europe 2020’s strategy could be construed as being relatively exclusive in that it is specifically concerned with social and territorial cohesion among member states and makes no mention of food impoverished non-member nations (European Commission, 2010).

This review suggests that the EU hopes for multi-scalar implementation of the strategies and initiatives of Europe 2020. The Commission itself aims to achieve these goals through a number of schemes including the mobilisation of financial instruments and the enhancement of frameworks for the use of market-based instruments, for example encouraging public procurement of sustainable goods and services (European Commission, 2010). The European Commission has translated its Europe 2020 goals into
national targets in the hopes that each member state will tailor them to suit their national situation. These national targets include the phasing out of environmentally harmful subsidies and the incentivisation of energy saving instruments (ibid.). In addition, a European Commission report (2011) highlights consumption as an area which is of strategic importance in orienting future European policies. In conclusion, it would seem that the growth agenda has emerged as a more prominent (or at least a more pressing) concern than that of environmental care, since the economic collapse of a number of EU member states. Negotiations for CAP reforms which are to take place in the near future will likely confirm the extent of these tensions.

1.3.2 Mapping developments in Irish food policy

Ireland maintained a relatively undamaged environment until late in the twentieth century due to its lack of heavy industry. However, changes in economic activity, population and settlement patterns precipitated a deterioration of environmental quality beginning in the 1980s. Patterns of over-consumption in the areas of energy, transport, waste, water and food have been the main sources of environmental pressure associated with rapid economic growth of the Celtic Tiger period of the 1990s and early 2000s. However, the onset of the economic recession in 2007 and 2008 brought about new challenges and responses, some of which touch directly on the field of consumption.

It would appear that agencies tasked with directing Irish policy on food and agriculture recognise the pressures put on food production systems. These pressures include freak weather events, the increase in production of bio-fuels and the meatification of diets in large and rapidly economically developing countries such as Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRIC countries) which diverts many foodstuffs for feed (Sage, 2011). They also acknowledge that current levels of food production will have to increase to meet the demands of the exponentially growing world population (Bord Bia, 2011c; DAFF, 2009). Documents produced by the Irish Government’s Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) and Teagasc (the Irish Food and Agricultural Development Authority) contain stated aims to lead agri-food production towards sustainable development (Teagasc, 2012; DAFM, 2010). Strategic actions which have been identified to this end include promoting and implementing measures to support environmentally sensitive agricultural practices, developing and implementing initiatives to promote the highest possible animal welfare standards, and encouraging
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diversification of the rural economy to enhance the quality of life in rural areas (ibid.). Bord Bia has adopted these actions with the stated aspiration of enabling Ireland to become the most efficient and innovative food producer in the world (Bord Bia, 2011c). These goals fit within the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government’s (DECLG) policy document *Our Sustainable Future* which is a medium to long-term framework for advancing sustainable development and the green economy in Ireland (DECLG, 2012). It is argued that Ireland is in a good starting position from which to implement such strategies as it has among the lowest agriculture carbon footprints (proportionally) in Europe (Teagasc, 2012). However, as European environmental targets become increasingly stringent, it is argued that Ireland will be left with a distance to travel before achieving these goals (Murphy, 2011).

Ireland’s key policy statement on the future of agri-food systems is *Food Harvest 2020*, a framework which is based on the EU’s *Europe 2020* framework. The Food Harvest 2020 document offers a vision for the future of smart (based on innovations, technology and knowledge), green (based on the implementation of world-class environmental practices) growth (increased exports). While this document purports to give equal weighting to these three goals, it would seem that in practice, the goal of growth truly drives the *Food Harvest 2020* vision (DAFF, 2009). This parallels statements made in *Our Sustainable Future* that the ‘mutually supportive’ goals of economic growth, social cohesion and environmental sustainability should be achieved. However, this document also states that the creation of jobs for Irish citizens remains the government’s top priority (DECLG, 2012). *Food Harvest 2020*’s growth targets are set out specifically as a €1.5 billion increase in the value of primary output, a €3 billion increase in value adding, and achieving a target of exports worth €12 billion. This final figure represents a 51% increase compared to 2009-2011 average export values (Bord Bia, 2011c). According to Bord Bia’s Statement of Strategy for 2012-2014: ‘*The prospect of high commodity price levels as world supply struggles to keep pace with the expanding demand for food represents a significant opportunity for Irish primary food exports*’ (ibid., 3). Because of Ireland’s green credentials, having world class environmental practices and delivering high quality, safe produce, this is said to be a natural marketing opportunity (DAFF, 2009): ‘*The world wants the clean, green food (with verifiable credentials) that Ireland can supply*’ (Bord Bia, 2012c, 7). It would appear therefore that policies which orient the food system in Ireland towards change for greater sustainability are motivated by a political economic/political ecological agenda. This is
perhaps not surprising as Ireland struggles to return to economic growth following its fall into economic recession in 2007 and 2008.

The DAFM claims that part of its mission is to help Ireland’s effort to fight global hunger and malnutrition by engaging with the United Nation’s Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) (DAFM, 2010). This issue also occupies a central position in Our Sustainable Future; this document recognises that the interdependent nature of the world requires all countries to play a role in achieving global sustainable development. All policies, it states, should be aligned with the UN’s Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)\(^2\) in order to help countries which are vulnerable to poverty and hunger to be part of an inclusive, equitable and climate resilient future (DEGLC, 2012). This framework document argues that ‘developed’ countries which have benefitted from past growth based on high carbon emissions have a responsibility to cut emissions and to financially assist ‘developing’ countries. It recognises that all MDGs are undermined if food is not available and accessible to all and suggests that Ireland’s food production system, which is said to be efficient and green, can be a role model for worldwide sustainable production (ibid.). As Our Sustainable Future was Ireland’s contribution to the Rio+20 summit in 2012, it is perhaps not surprising that the MDGs form such an integral part of this framework. However, the review of Irish policy thus far highlights that Irish economic development is of utmost importance, evidencing a contradiction in the rhetoric of these policy documents.

Motivations aside, it is necessary to assess the nature of policy approaches to increasing sustainability in food systems. Bodies responsible for influencing food system policies in Ireland accept that increased food production creates an environmental burden, but the prevailing message is that productivity should be increased in a way which is ‘smart’ thus minimising such negative outcomes: a strategic priority of Bord Bia is that the Irish food and drink industry is the most innovative and efficient in the world (Bord Bia, 2011c); Food Harvest 2020 offers a vision of future food systems that is based on advances in technology and knowledge (DAFF, 2009); Teagasc’s mission (as the Irish

\(^2\) One MDG is the eradication of poverty and hunger. A twin track approach to the achievement of this goal is suggested: increasing agricultural productivity and promoting direct access to food for those who are most in need (FAO, 2010). Another MDG is to ensure environmental sustainability and specific targets within this goal include reducing biodiversity loss and for countries to integrate principles of sustainable development into national policies in order to counteract the loss of environmental resources (UN, 2010).
Agriculture and Food Development Authority) is to support science-based innovation to encourage sustainability in the agri-food sector (Teagasc, 2011b). This ‘sustainable intensification’ approach reflects much of the rhetoric of EU and Irish policies. This is in spite of the fact that it appears to conflict with alternative visions of the food system which hope to foster greater sustainability (in its holistic sense).

According to the Irish policy approach, achieving a sustainable and productive food system will require the participation of and/or input from actors from a range of scales. As food security is a global issue, the DAFM recognises that this can only be achieved through a collaborative international, EU and national approach. For this reason, they commit to collaborating with other organisations to deliver policies on environmental sustainability and biodiversity (DAFM, 200). Pathways for Growth, a report commissioned by Bord Bia posits that sustainable production must begin on the farm before being rolled out to other arms of the production network (Bord Bia, 2012c). The Origin Green sustainability charter is a result of this recommendation; it is an ongoing programme which seeks to aid Irish food and drink manufacturers to engage in sustainable practices and to demonstrate their commitment to operate sustainably (Bord Bia, 2012b). Pathways for Growth, in addition to championing the role of food producers in future food system change, emphasises the importance of understanding the consumer perspective. Bord Bia, as the body responsible for the development of a market for Irish food, has a strategic objective of positively influencing consumer attitudes in this direction (Bord Bia, 2012c). To this end, they pay due attention to the views of consumers, publishing numerous reports of research they have conducted on the consumer perspective on food issues such as organics (Burke, 2008), ethical food choices (Bord Bia, 2012a) and the environment (Bord Bia, 2011b). Food Harvest 2020 also highlights the importance of continually obtaining consumer feedback in order to respond to future food system needs (DAFF, 2009).

1.4 Rationale

This research has strong synergies with several topical research areas including sustainable consumption and alternative food movements. Over the past ten years
there has been a growing interest in sustainability and debates over alternative systems of food provisioning. This study aims to complement on-going work in this area.

Authors such as Hinrichs (2010) argue that sustainability is a useful and important framework with which to underpin investigations of the nature of food systems. Despite the many criticisms of the concept of sustainability, this thesis echoes Maye et al’s (2007) contention that it should not be abandoned in favour of an alternative emergent framing, namely food security, food sovereignty, or food resilience. This is because to do so ignores sustainability’s ‘analytical potency’ (ibid., 10). Sustainability, it is argued, is a flexible and powerful tool which varies according to context and it should be seen as a means to the ends of secure and resilient food systems, over which communities have sovereignty (Koc, 2010). Considering the importance of this concept, it has framed innumerable policy and academic research studies. This study aims to build on existing work, and to address some key unresolved issues around consumers’ attitudes towards local and sustainable food.

The realm of production has benefitted from analyses based on a sustainability paradigm but this has been at the expense of a focus on the stage of consumption in commodity chains (Tregear, 2011). Nonetheless, the importance of the concept of sustainable consumption is now recognised with it being afforded much policy and academic attention of late (Delfila et al, 2012; Smart, 2010). Consumers, as the subject of this process, have also been proven to be important factors in a drive towards greater sustainability with binary assumptions of consumer and citizenship activities now largely discredited (Lockie, 2009). Rather, alternative food movements have been construed as a manifestation of consumer-citizenship whereby they involve different processes and networks to those which currently prevail (Murtagh, 2010).

Consumer theories which emerge as prominent in the examination of food choices, in particular sustainable food choices, highlight their complicated and contextual nature (Ma et al, 2011; Roininen et al, 2006). These choices are based, at least in part, on how consumers understand issues such as local provenance and sustainability. An examination of previous studies which probe these understandings reveals that while local is associated mostly with limits of spatial proximity there are some who base their understandings on non-spatial factors such as processes, networks or relations (Whitehead, 2007). On the other hand, there is less of a consensus in relation to the meaning of sustainable food. Building on basic conceptual
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understandings, previous studies have also shown that consumers attribute a number of traits to both local food and food with qualities of sustainability (Onken et al, 2011; Sirieix et al, 2010; Ulvila et al, 2009). International research has shown that the former is viewed more positively than the latter and although both issues are high on the list of consumer priorities, they do not top this list. Research from Sweden has found that consumers balance their different values, trading off those which they are less motivated by (e.g. concern for a distant ‘other’) against those which they are more motivated by (e.g. affordability) (Svensfelt & Carlsson-Kanyama, 2010). The tension between pragmatic and altruistic considerations is often responsible for a gap between consumer values and their behaviour, the so-called value-action-gap (Megicks et al, 2012). As consumer perceptions, values and motivations are embedded in their particular cultural and political contexts, existing research cannot be applied to Ireland hence there is a need for an Ireland-specific dataset.

Local food is of central focus in this thesis and therefore it is appropriate to critically assess this concept. Drawing on discourses of the social construction of scale, it can be argued that there is nothing inherent about the local scale. By extension, to believe that local food is good, just or sustainable is to fall into the ‘local trap’ (Born & Purcell, 2006). The mistaken automatic conflation of local with a number of positive characteristics, including sustainability, obscures the potential role local food systems may play in perpetuating undemocratic ideals and practices (Goodman & Goodman, 2010). It has been suggested therefore that a new form of localism is necessary; one in which issues of social justice, equity and environmental care are central. The process of reflexivity has been proffered as a potential path towards these goals (Goodman et al, 2012). However, a review of relevant literature reveals that there has yet to be a study which applies the concept of reflexivity to consumers, probing the extent to which their food choices are underpinned by the processes and the ideals behind it. Nonetheless, there has been some attempt at critically examining the exact nature of consumer food localisms, with a number of authors developing local food typologies (McEntee, 2010).

In both policy and academic circles, there has been a relatively recent recognition of the need to focus not only on sustainable production but also on sustainable consumption. Nonetheless, it could be argued that there is still considerable scope for studies in the area of sustainable consumption to draw level in terms of the amount of conceptual and applied knowledge in this area. As the notion of consumer-
citizenship has largely been theoretically debated, there is also scope for applied investigations of the extent to which consumer activities are synonymous with acts of citizenship. Although there are numerous studies which focus on local organic food, or fair trade organic food, there are none which juxtapose organic fair trade and local food, or sustainable food more generally with local food. This represents an important gap in knowledge. There are few a small number of studies which focus on consumers’ understandings of local food (cf. Dunne et al, 2010; Ostrom, 2006) however there are no in-depth qualitative studies on this topic in the Irish context. In addition, only one study (Kloppenburg et al, 2000) has explicitly explored understandings of sustainable food. This represents a significant gap in knowledge, considering the emerging prominence of local food and sustainability rhetoric within academic consumer literature. There has yet to be a study which investigates the understandings, perceptions, values and motivations of consumers in Ireland towards local and sustainable. More widely, there is a dearth of research which explores the extent to which local may be conflated with qualities of sustainability. This represents another important gap in knowledge. The collection of in-depth data on the understandings of consumers will enhance not only academic but also industry knowledge. Local and sustainable food marketing campaigns may be more effective, increasing sales and potentially increasing the viability of alternative food systems. Although theoretical discussions of reflexive localism are growing, no attempt has yet been made to empirically test this concept with consumers. Discourses of reflexive localism aim to progress critiques of local food rhetoric in new and fruitful directions. However, the dearth of knowledge on how the process of reflexivity might actually be applied in the real world represents an important gap in knowledge. Furthermore, a review of literature in the field shows that, to date, there has been a considerable amount of quantitative research on local food (cf. Gottschalk & Leistner, 2013). This study also aims to use quantitative methods but these will be mixed with qualitative methods with the goal of contributing to knowledge concerning the complex and contextualised social processes of attaching meanings and values to foods.

Drawing on a social constructivist perspective, this thesis is concerned with how knowledge surrounding local food and sustainable food is constructed and understood. Social constructivism places significant emphasis on the everyday interactions between people and how they use language to construct their reality. It regards the social practices people engage in (e.g. the daily purchase of food) as the focus of enquiry. This epistemological perspective is compatible with the grounded theory approach utilised in
this study (Andrews, 2012). The many political, cultural and economic contexts that frame and inevitably produce experiences and understandings of local and sustainable food consumption are recognised as very significant within this perspective.

In conclusion, a number of gaps in knowledge have been found and this research aims to address these. These areas include: sustainable food consumption; the extent to which consumer activities can also be classed as acts of citizenship, that is, are their motivations community-oriented or self-oriented?; consumer food choices which juxtapose local food with issues of sustainability, in particular organic production and fair trade; understandings of consumers in Ireland of the terms local food and sustainable food; the perceptions, values and motivations of consumers in Ireland towards local and sustainable food; the extent to which local is conflated with qualities of sustainability in the minds of consumers in Ireland; and the practical use of the concept of reflexivity, that is, how appealing to consumers are food characteristics or attributes which come about through processes of reflexivity?

1.5 Research aims and objectives

This research aims to respond to current needs and priorities within policy and academia, as identified and discussed above. Its primary aim is to explore the views of consumers in Ireland with regard to the local food system, particularly whether local food is conflated with qualities of sustainability. Specifically, drawing on existing and emerging discourses within food geographies and sustainability research, this study aims to:

1. analyse consumers’ understandings of ‘local food’ and ‘sustainable food’;
2. test the hypothesis that local food is conflated with a number of positive characteristics, in particular sustainability;
3. provide a nuanced understanding of the values of consumers, and by extension, the relative importance of local provenance and sustainability when faced with competing considerations;
4. and develop a conceptual framework of how these understandings, perceived attributes and values may motivate or inhibit consumers’ purchases of local and sustainable food.
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As such, using a theoretically informed measurement framework (Chambers et al, 2007; Marsden and Smith, 2005; Holloway and Kneafsey, 2000) the role of this project is to empirically investigate the relationship between scale and sustainability in consumer food choices and to investigate if and what type of food localism consumers in Ireland subscribe to.

1.6 Research approach and scope of study

1.6.1 Theoretical and conceptual approach and scope

A review of social science academic literature on food systems demonstrates the rich variety of disciplinary interest in this field, which of course includes human geographical perspectives. Human geography can be defined as the study of nature/society interactions and nowhere is this interaction exemplified better than in the consumption of food. To illustrate, food may be examined from a number of geographical perspectives: culture, communities, colonialism, population, social justice and climate change to name but a few. This thesis is underpinned by a key and foundational concept in the discipline of geography, scale. Scale provides a structure for the discussion of food geographies (Bell & Valentine, 1997) but more often it provides a theoretical framework with which food systems are critically analysed (Born & Purcell, 2003). This study is also framed by geographical (and non-geographical) discourses of sustainability and consumption (Smart, 2010; Luke, 2005) and by literature which investigates the connections between care, ethics and responsibility, and geographic distance (McEwan & Goodman, 2010; Massey, 2004; Smith, 1999). As such, this study not only fits within the realm of geography but its findings inform geographical knowledge and theory.

1.6.2 Parameters of key terms and concepts

This study engages with a number of contested topics and concepts often with controversial and shifting definitions. Therefore, it is important to establish the scope of this study, and to explore some of the key terms used throughout this thesis. As discussed in detail throughout the forthcoming chapters, it is generally recognised that the concept of the ‘local’ is a social construct (Massey, 2004; Marston, 2000; Delaney, 1997). Although ‘sustainability’ is not widely discussed as a social construct, the broadness of its meaning has been criticised from the perspective that it allows actors to apply the interpretations which are most suited to their agenda and this term is, in
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effect, meaningless (Marshall & Toffell, 2005). This suggests that sustainability is constructed according to the relevant social context. Taking such a social constructivist position, this research focuses on the context of consumers in Ireland and their understandings of local food and sustainable food.

Ireland is the setting of the fieldwork in this study and as such the word ‘Ireland’ should be explored. Understood geographically, ‘Ireland’ refers to the entire island of Ireland while ‘Irish’ signifies that which comes from this island. Although not disputing this meaning, as the research population for this study was all adults living in the Republic of Ireland, the use of ‘Ireland’ here is shorthand for Republic of Ireland.

As this study’s key aims are to analyse the understandings, perceptions, values and motivations of consumers in Ireland in relation to local and sustainable food, it is also appropriate that these terms should be defined at the outset. ‘Understanding’ describes the processes of ‘figuring out, deciphering, decoding’ (Ziff, 1972, 19, quoted in Rosenberg, 1981), but it also describes the result of this process. This thesis is concerned with the latter (result): it attempts to unpack the understandings of local food and sustainable food which are derived from either conscious or unconscious processes of ‘figuring out’. A ‘perception’ can be defined as the way in which something is regarded (OED, 2013). This study is interested in how local food is viewed; specifically it aims to uncover the attributes which participants see as being present in local food. The concept of ‘values’ permeates a range of disciplines and it has been argued that ‘values’ are the core concept of the social sciences (Rokeach, 1973). Vincen et al (1977) illustrate how values are defined differently according to discipline: anthropologists view them as related to cultures, seeing them as objective social factors which are imposed on an individual; sociologists see values as related to ideologies and customs and believe they bind groups in society together; psychologists consider values to be more personal – they are said to be enduring individual beliefs which guide a variety of decisions and actions. This study draws on all three understandings and conceptualises values as simultaneously culturally and socially embedded, and based on individual variables.

Motivation, according to Bayton (1958) ‘... refers to the drives, urges, wishes, or desires which initiate the sequence of events known as ‘behaviour’ (282). The use of the word initiate encourages the adoption of this particular definition as it makes clear that motivations can, but do not always, result in behaviours.
Due to their centrality in this thesis, the terms ‘localist’ and ‘localism’ deserve attention. Although they are not words which are used in an everyday context, ‘localist’ and ‘localism’ are similar to others which use the suffixes –ist and –ism: a ‘localist’ is one who subscribes to the dogmatic belief that the local scale and all therein is preferable to non-local counterparts (DuPuis et al, 2011); ‘localism’ is the ideological belief which localists hold, in this case, of the superiority of the local (Goodman & Goodman, 2010).

A significant element of the methodology employed in this research involves the purposive sampling of three groups (for participation in focus groups discussions) formed of participants who are interested in issues of food sustainability and it is important to set out the parameters of this ‘Interested’ designation. This classification is based on whether the mission of each group either in part or wholly, personally or collectively, or explicitly or implicitly, aim or hope for future food system change towards greater sustainability. This phase of the research also examined the views of three ‘Not Interested’ groups whose composition was, in contrast, not contingent upon interest in food system sustainability.

Finally, as it is a key aim of this study to analyse, test hypotheses and develop theories regarding consumers’ views (while simultaneously acknowledging the large role which other food system actors such as producers and processors play), it is important to discuss the parameters of this term. It is accepted that the prevalence of consumer culture has resulted in the replacement of the words ‘individuals’ or ‘people’ with ‘consumers’, perpetuating the notion that consumption activities define us more than any of our other activities (Shankar & Fitchett, 2002). However, this thesis uses the word ‘consumers’ due to the recognition that as human beings, we must all consume to satisfy our basic needs (Lockie, 2009). This study relates to food, our most basic of needs, and participants are therefore referred to as ‘consumers’ based on this recognition alone.

1.6.3 Methodological approach

This research uses a multi-phase mixed methodology (surveys, focus groups, interviews) to study the understandings, perceptions, values and motivations of consumers in Ireland as they relate to their food choices, with a particular focus on the meanings and values which are attached to local and sustainable food. The research population for this study was all adults living in the Republic of Ireland and the sample frame was all.
residents of counties Galway and Dublin who were aged at least eighteen years old. As a result, the sample encompassed consumers resident in Ireland but not necessarily consumers who would classify themselves as Irish. A multi-stage cluster sampling technique was employed at all three phases of this study to ensure the equal inclusion of participants from both urban and rural areas in the two case study locations. Although there was a chance that participants may have coincidentally occupied a role in the food chain other than consumer (e.g. farmer), all people are food consumers and participants were approached as such.

Analysis of data was guided by a grounded theory approach; this allowed for the emergence of theories, which could then be tested in subsequent phases. The resulting themes and concepts cannot be said to be theoretically generalisable. Rather, this study aimed to gather a quality of data from this sample population and it is thought that such data can be indicative of the contextualised meanings and values held by the individual participants. The research was conducted in the period following the onset of economic recession in 2007 and 2008- the first recession in a generation- and it is possible that the findings of this study may have differed if this study had been conducted five years previously at a time of economic boom. As such, the findings of this study represent a detailed and nuanced snapshot of the understandings, beliefs and motivations of consumers in Ireland at a specific time.

1.7 Key strengths of the study

This study offers three major advantages over much existing social research on food consumption by focusing on consumer understandings and their views towards local and sustainable food. First, this study utilises qualitative research to provide an in-depth understanding of consumers’ perspectives on local and sustainable food. By concentrating on gathering a wide range and quality of data, this thesis sheds light on consumers’ understandings, values, perceptions and motivations as they relate to local and sustainable food. As consumers can play a role as initiators and facilitators of change, the nuanced consumer insights gained in this study have the potential to influence a move towards greater food system sustainability. Second, a key strength of this study is its focus on the Irish context. Little social scientific research has been conducted to date either by researchers in Ireland on the topic of food or on the topic of food consumption in Ireland and this study represents an important contribution from
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This perspective. Findings of this thesis are informative of the unique geographical, social and temporal context in Ireland during the period 2010-2012 (when the empirical research was conducted) and the theories generated may be applicable to similar study areas, for example those enduring economic recession, those with an agricultural tradition, or those which occupy a peripheral geographic location. A third and perhaps the most important key strength of this thesis lies in its theoretical and conceptual contribution to knowledge and debates on local food, alternative food networks, and sustainable food consumptions. The main contributions are as follows:

- This thesis offers a novel critique of ‘local trap’ rhetoric by highlighting the contextualised and nuanced nature of understandings of ‘local food’.
- It also offers unique insights into the complex and contextualised nature of consumer choices by critiquing a number of existing theories in this area, namely the ethics of care, the local trap and the value-action gap.
- This thesis builds on McEntee’s (2010) food localist framework to create a new framework for the context of this study. The emergent localist typologies are then assessed according to their reflexivity and this processes is entirely novel. It is reflected upon and represented the first theoretical engagement of its kind.

1.8 Structure of the thesis

This chapter introduces the study providing contextual information and an overview of literature relevant to this topic. The aims of this study are described and justified by the identification of key gaps in knowledge. Finally, the theoretical and empirical approach taken to this investigation is described in brief. The remainder of the thesis is divided into six chapters. The next chapter, Chapter 2, provides the conceptual lens through which the research may be viewed, examining literature pertinent to sustainability, local food, food consumption and scale in particular. Chapter 3 outlines the methodological approach adopted in the research, including details on sample selection, a justification for the methodology applied and an account of the research experience. Principle empirical results are thereafter presented and critically discussed in three separate but interlinked chapters. Chapter 4 outlines the main findings relating to how consumers understood the terms local food and sustainable food. It tests the hypothesis that it is not just spatial proximity which underpins consumers’ understandings but also issues such as the networks and processes involved. Chapter 5 discusses key results of
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investigations of participants’ perceptions, values and choices towards food, specifically local and sustainable food. It presents data on the context-based nature of food choices, considering issues such as affordability and aesthetics. Chapter 6 builds on the previous results chapters to provide a discursive exposition of the nuances of food localisms. This chapter explores the most significant themes to emerge from the empirical work. The seventh and final chapter summarises the study and highlights the contribution of this research to wider academic, policy and industry knowledges.
Chapter 1: Introduction
Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Introduction

To provide a conceptual background for the chapters which follow, this chapter explores perspectives on sustainable food consumption, consumer insights regarding local and sustainable food, and theoretical discourses on food localisms. First, the concept of sustainable food consumption is examined in Section 2.2, to provide the broader context for the research. The choice of a sustainability paradigm, as opposed to one which focuses on emergent themes such as food security or food resilience, is justified through analysis of debates in this area. The focus is then narrowed to focus on an examination of sustainable consumption (as opposed to sustainable production). Continuing a focus on consumption, literature which debates the virtues of attributing power to consumers is discussed. The focus is narrowed further in a third sub-section which provides a critical overview of three key areas which are relevant to sustainable food consumption, namely organic production, fair trade, and food system localisations initiatives.

The next substantive section, Section 2.3, reviews literature on consumer choices, in particular as they relate to local and sustainable food. This begins with an analysis of broad theories of consumer decision-making. The focus then narrows to a review of literature on how consumers understand the concepts of local food and sustainable food. The final part of Section 2.3 proceeds to review previous studies on how consumers perceive local and sustainable food and how these perceptions align with their values. This section is essential as it provides a wider context of consumer insights within which to situate consumers in Ireland.

Thereafter, Section 2.4 explores some broader theoretical debates relating to scale and its social construction. This section establishes the fallacy of local food rhetoric before championing an alternative approach to the politics of food localisation. To set the context for the results presented in later chapters, previous studies which have critically explored the nature of consumer food localisms are outlined here. Literature reviewing popular methodological approaches used in previous studies is also reviewed. Finally, the conclusion summarises existing gaps in current knowledge bases and the contributions this research will make to attempt to address these voids in scholarly work.
Chapter 2: Literature review

2.2 Sustainable food consumption

Considering the negative effects arising from the current system of agri-food production, there are many who propose an alternative ‘post-productivist’ framework which is more sustainable. The cause and effect relationship of economic growth on social and ecological concerns has been widely accepted since the publication of the Brundtland Report (UN, 1987). Sustainability represents the junction between environmental, social and economic concerns and is defined as ‘...a way of thinking about how to simultaneously meet the needs of people and the environment by enhancing human well-being without undermining ecological integrity... ’ (Mansfield, 2009, 47). This definition can be bolstered by encompassing not only the bounded (local, regional, national) community, but also the unbounded (global) one, to ensure that the ‘people’ of the definition are not just those in close proximity (Bullen & Whitehead, 2005). This point is a reminder that although localisation strategies may appear to be shortcuts to sustainability, global spaces and those who inhabit them should not be automatically associated with unsustainability. The term ‘sustainable’ has been applied to a number of food related subjects. Sustainable diets are said to be those which are healthful and embody environmental care (Duchin, 2005). Sustainable agriculture is often associated with decentralised and more local production; independence and self-sufficiency; community; harmony with nature situating humans as parts of and subject to nature’s diversity; and, restraint of resource use with an eye on the long-term consequences of production (Altieri, 2009). A sustainable food system is frequently defined as a system that comprehensively incorporates efforts to protect the environment, encouraging economic vitality and social justice and equity for all involved by focusing not only on production but on networks involved (Hinrichs, 2010).

2.2.1 Sustainability as the preferred paradigm

The concepts of sustainability and sustainable development have been much criticised, and this is often because they are not criticised (Glavic & Lukman, 2007). Sustainable development is said to be oxymoronic and over the past decade researchers have started to question the ability of the concept of sustainability to endure when critically analysed (Wood, 2010; Luke, 2005). Sustainability can be construed as a meaningless concept because of the multiple definitions which are applied to it. The wide range of issues which are associated with sustainability are said to devalue it to the point where it is nothing more than a vague and tired cliché (Bonevac, 2010; Hinrichs, 2010; Tisdell,
Marcuse (1998) accepts the value of this concept in theory but argues that it has not always been interpreted appropriately. These ‘misinterpretations’ occur innocently when actors fall into the trap of positioning sustainability as a goal, rather than recognising it as the means to an end. In contrast, sustainability can be interpreted in more deliberate ways so as to justify continued economic growth within the prevailing market-oriented neo-liberal paradigm (Koc, 2010). With this in mind, it should not be assumed that sustainability has only positive connotations as there are of course things which few would want to sustain such as poverty and disease (Tisdell, 1997). The World Commission on Environment and Development declared that sustainable development ‘...meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’ (WCED, 1987, 43). It is therefore important to consider whose needs are most and whether justice is truly being served. Some may want to sustain the status quo but to believe in justice is to recognise that prevailing social and economic systems cannot be sustained (Marcuse, 1998).

Criticism of the concept of sustainability has influenced the manner in which emerging food policy has been framed. In the current food policy arena other discourses have begun to emerge, such as ‘security’, ‘sovereignty’ and ‘resilience’. MacMillan & Dowler (2011) in their review of Food Policy in the UK note that although UK food and farming policy centred on sustainability for much of the past decade, discourses of food security have begun to proliferate. Worldwide growth in policies which reference food security has been precipitated by sharp increases in food prices in 2007 and 2008, ensuing worldwide civil unrest (Marsden, 2012), and concerns for continued and future economic recessions, climate change and natural resource use (Kneafsey et al, 2013). Food security is not a new concept and was first stated as a political and social goal in nineteenth century post-famine Ireland (Carroll, 2012). The UN’s Food and Agricultural Organisation posits that food security exists when: ‘...all people at all times have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life’ (FAO, no date). However, discourses of food security have been criticised for often adopting a neo-liberal perspective which focuses on increasing global agricultural productivity and international trade (MacMillan & Dowler, 2011).
Food sovereignty is considered by many as an appealing concept as it avoids making normative assumptions of what is desirable in a food system (Shattuck & Holt-Ginénez, 2010). The literature on food security highlights how this concept asks for more than the provision of universal access to food; it advocates a community’s right to democratically control their own food system (Altieri, 2009). It requires the provision of access to safe, nutritious, high quality, culturally appropriate, sustainably grown food (Kneafsey et al., 2013; Heynen et al., 2012). A sovereign food system is one which is sensitive to the type of production involved and advocates of food sovereignty argue that any system which promotes the commodification of food puts power in the hands of global corporations, reduces the agency of producers and consumers over the food supply chain, and ultimately leads to food insecurity (Heynen et al., 2012; Patel, 2009).

According to Gonzalez: ‘Food sovereignty...is a framework through which to critique the corporate-dominated food trade and production system so as to develop more democratic, localised, just, and sustainable alternatives’ (2011, 522).

A resilient food system is one which can absorb shocks and continue to function, and this capacity is seen as being of critical and immediate importance (Cabell & Oelofse, 2012). Wilson (2012) acknowledges that resilience is increasingly replacing ‘sustainability’ in policy-making but he also draws parallels between the achievement of both resilience and sustainability at the intersection of environmental, social and economic capital. It would appear that some commentators fail to draw any critical distinction between the concepts of sustainability and resilience (Allouche, 2010), and sustainability and food security (MacMillan & Dowler, 2011). However, Lang and Barling (2012) draw a clear distinction, arguing that sustainability has emerged to replace outmoded food security framings. Their criticisms of food security are similar to the criticisms of those who favour the concept of food sovereignty but in this case a secure food system is said to be one which addresses issues of sustainability. They acknowledge the problems inherent in using an expression as highly contested as ‘sustainability’ but also see these same concerns as helping to reinvigorate debate on the usefulness of terms such as ‘food security’ and ‘food sustainability’. Therefore, rather than being posited as concepts that are in opposition to sustainability, food sovereignty, food security and food resilience are conceivably complementary to one another. It has been argued (cf. Holt-Gimenez, 2010) that they should be framed as strategies, or the means, employed in the move towards a sustainable food system. They should be critically questioned and scrutinised to investigate how they may contribute to the end of a food
system which inheres equitable principles and which fosters environmental care (Koc, 2010).

Despite suffering from much criticism, following the UN’s Rio Conference on the Environment in 1992, the notion of sustainability has been widely accepted in the global North, particularly by policy-makers. This could be attributed in part to the hope which sustainability discourses offer in contrast to the apocalyptic scenarios offered by some environmental groups (Mannion, 1995). The concept of sustainability is considered by many to be useful and important:

‘The most important concept in current environmental thinking is sustainability’ (Bonevac, 2010, 84)

‘...I argue...that the notion of ‘sustainable food systems’ presents conceptual merits and opportunities that, overall, justify its retention. Indeed, with care, caution and some creativity, ‘sustainable food systems’ can provide a useful springboard for thinking about theory and practice surrounding food and agriculture... I believe it would be premature to abandon sustainability as a concept. Instead, more consideration for the shifting currents of sustainability discourse and politics can inform and potentially strengthen our research and practice on food systems’ (Hinrichs, 2010, 17-21).

‘...I...argue that sustainability needs to be seen as a discursive tool, concurrently aiming to legitimize and transform the structures and institutional practices of the modern capitalist system’ (Koc, 2010, 37).

‘... (sustainability has)...analytical potency when used in a critical and relational way’ (Maye et al, 2007, 10).

‘... (sustainability)...still becomes a useful point of entry in discussing development and the environment’ (Redclift, 1992, 395).

Used as a powerful analytical and discursive framework, sustainability has the potential to reflect the complicated nature of the real world. Interpreted most positively, sustainability integrates a number of constructive issues such as quality of life, the environment and livelihoods (Mannion, 1995). Within this thesis, sustainability is accepted as a process towards these ends rather than as the final point in this process. This argument negates the many attempts to define sustainability as a static entity and favours its interpretation as a process which varies according to the specific context. Viewed as a flexible and useful tool which can be used to achieve food system security, resilience and sovereignty, sustainability is an important framework through which to examine issues of the prevailing food system.
2.2.2 A focus on sustainable consumption and consumers

Production and consumption are recognised as being interconnected but inhabiting conceptually different spheres or ‘worlds’. Although traditional capitalist production has long been implicated in unsustainable outcomes, a greater focus has been given of late to the role of consumption, heralding efforts to achieve ‘sustainable consumption’ (Jaeger-Erben, 2013). The importance of this was identified in the United Nation’s Agenda 21 (1992) and reiterated more recently in the Marrakesh Process (2002) (Delfila et al, 2012). Sustainable consumption, it is said, exists when ‘...goods are acquired, used and disposed of in such a fashion that all humans, now and in the future, are able to satisfy their (basic) needs and that their desire for a good life can be fulfilled’ (ibid. 13). However, definitions of sustainable consumption can conflict; just as the world of commodities is divided according to conceptual lines of production and consumption, so too are approaches to sustainable consumption (Smart, 2010).

‘Business as usual’ sustainable consumption strategies utilise greater efficiency of production which is often achieved through the use of new technologies. Consumers are encouraged to switch their allegiance to these ‘green’ products, thus maintaining (or increasing) their level of consumption and allowing for profit-making and economic growth to continue unabated. In contrast, many community-led approaches advocate a radical change for consumers towards low- or no-consumption lifestyles (Sanne, 2002). These ‘voluntary simplifiers’ both consume less and consume differently and are often ideologically motivated to protect the environment while simultaneously concerned with the ‘qualitative development of the individual’ (Bahro, 1984, 102). Approaches to ameliorating the social and environmental impacts of food systems can be classed according to these two divergent modes of sustainable consumption and these different approaches are referred to throughout this dissertation. It is the former of these two approaches (‘business as usual’) which, perhaps not surprisingly, business and government have been apt to embrace. Driven by the common goal of economic growth through ever increasing sales, business strategies and government policies are often based around the notion of increasing efficiency through ecological modernisation.

Regardless of deviating approaches, discourses of sustainable consumption emphasise the powerful role of consumers (Barnett et al, 2005). By flexing their metaphorical muscle, that they can exert the influence of ‘consumer demand’ (Lockie, 2009). Some have gone beyond attributions of agency to argue that consumers have a
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*responsibility* to work towards greater sustainability. They are most accountable and should ‘do their bit’ to save the planet by purchasing an array of so-called green and ethical products (Goodman, 2007; Seyfang, 2006). However, it is important to question the hegemony of ideologies of ‘buying power’. This rhetoric has been dismissed as a perpetuation of neo-liberal principles which absolves those engaged in policy-making and governance of responsibility (Guthman, 2007). This is perhaps ironic considering the immense power which those in authority wield to alter social values and influence consumption patterns (Seyfang, 2005). Neo-liberal consumer choice rhetoric positions individuals as self-interested and seeking to maximise personal benefit by the exercise of consumption, which is seen as conceptually separate from the exercise of citizenship (Soper, 2006). By contrast, ‘citizens’ are said to be more connected with their communities because they engage in producer-consumer relationships which go beyond simple commodity exchanges (Lockie, 2009; Wilkins, 2005; Baker, 2004).

However, both neo-liberal perspectives which valorise the role of consumers and left-wing theoretical positions which espouse a non-market citizenship agenda often employ restrictive dualistic thinking (Kjaernes & Holm, 2006). By utilising such binary assumptions, it has been argued that they fail to recognise the potential role of a citizen-consumer hybrid who is simultaneously concerned with functional and ethical concerns (McEwan & Goodman, 2010; Soper, 2006; Paavola, 2001). Moving beyond traditional understandings of citizenship, consumption is now widely seen as a site of political activity where people can ‘vote with their dollar’ (Wilkins, 2005). This ‘third way’ (Parker, 2005, 67) should not be conceived of as a dilution of citizenship, an abandonment of activism or as a replacement for top-down regulation. Instead, it should be construed as the use of consumerism to extend democratic practices.

Considering these arguments within the context of transforming the food system towards one which fosters environmental care and social justice, it is clear that consumers can indeed play a role by making responsible food choices (Garnett, 2013; Wilkins, 2005). Harnessing the power of consumers to ensure their choices are more citizenship-oriented rather than consumer-oriented is not unproblematic but this can only be encouraged by gaining a greater understanding of the consumer perspective, as this thesis aims to do. Although much marketing research exists on the mechanics of consumer choice in general, there has been less research at the international and national level, especially within the discipline of geography, which examines the
perspectives of consumers towards alternative and local food networks. Consequently, this study hopes to begin to address this key gap in scholarship, by focusing on the consumer in Ireland about whom scant research has been conducted to date.

2.2.3 Food system alternatives for sustainability

Dominant approaches to sustainable consumption within societies of the global North have thus far utilised mainstream market-based strategies to increase sales of ‘eco-friendly’ products. The corporate agro-food sector has also recognised the potential for engaging in the production and marketing of ‘green’ or ‘ethical’ products. More recently however there has been a proliferation of food movements which fit within a sphere which is arguably ‘alternative’ to the mainstream system of food provisioning. They are alternative in that they utilise methods of production which are different to mainstream industrial and intensive modes, and also because these foods travel through shorter or more transparent supply chains (Murtagh, 2010). Alternative food movements can be identified by the values, priorities or processes which underpin them, many of which align with the key principles of sustainability. These include social and political embeddedness as well as embeddedness in a specific place (often a ‘local’ place); relationships of regard or connectedness between actors which it is often hoped will lead to economic viability of production; awareness of the morality of food’s production with the aim of ensuring equity for all involved in the network; goals of ecological sustainability in production and distribution; and finally alternative food movements are often signified by a prioritising of aesthetic values such as high quality (Tregear, 2011; Wiskerke, 2009; Maye et al, 2007; Watts et al, 2005; Sage, 2003). These alternative food movements, therefore, appear truly transformative in nature and many believe them to be instrumental in achieving sustainability in food systems (Sage, 2011).

However, the hegemonic power of labels such as ‘alternative’ and ‘conventional’ should not be underestimated. Dominant conventional global and corporate food system practices are normalised while emergent alternative food movements are seen as mere reactions, some would say inadequate reactions, to the prevailing system of food provisioning (Di Vito Wilson, 2012). A consequence of this may be to restrict the ability of alternative food movements to affect meaningful change by, amongst other things, failing to recognise that the goal of some of these movements is not to alter the mainstream system of food provisioning but to create a second pillar in a dual food system (ibid.). Nonetheless, conventional and alternative food systems should not be
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considered in binary terms (nor should they be considered as necessarily conflicting) because in reality there is often interpenetration between the two (Sonnino & Marsden, 2006). This interpenetration suggests that alternative modes of food provisioning can exist within the mainstream, as organic, fair trade, and local produce have arguably succeeded in doing. Considering their embeddedness within conventional systems, it is particularly important in the context of this thesis to explore alternative food movements and their potential power to create a sustainable food system. Since organic food production and fair trade networks have enjoyed relative success, and they are widely discussed in academic food sustainability discourses, this research focuses on these as two key examples of alternative food movements for sustainability. Food system localisation has also emerged as a dominant alternative to conventional modes of food provisioning. The aim of this study is to analyse consumer beliefs in relation to local food, in particular whether it is conflated with qualities of sustainability. For this reason, this chapter prioritises an analysis of literature which addresses the issue of local food. Sustainable food generally, and organic and fair trade food specifically, are relevant in how they relate to perceptions of local food and as such they are afforded slightly less attention in this literature review.

2.2.3.1 Organics

The organic food movement represents the most prominent manifestation of opposition to unsustainable damaging industrial modes of food production (Johnston et al, 2009; Raynolds, 2006). Considered to be safer and healthier, its popularity has exploded in recent years following several worldwide food scares (Levitte, 2010). The organic agriculture movement is considered ‘alternative’ as it rejects the use of synthetic chemicals, genetically-modified (GM) ingredients and irradiation, in favour of traditional and natural production methods. These methods are soil-building as they use crop rotations, organic fertilisers such as manures, seaweed and nitrogen-fixing plants, lower stocking rates, the natural immunity of (often indigenous) plant and animal breeds, and natural pest controls (Duram, 2005). Not alone do these methods add to soil quality, they limit the exposure of ground, air and water sources to damaging toxins contained in synthetic fertilisers and pesticides and are arguably more environmentally sustainable than ‘conventional’ methods. Organic production has also been reported to have positive health implications as both producer and consumer populations are neither exposed directly nor indirectly (e.g. in groundwater) to these chemicals. Although the health implications are debated, it is widely accepted that conventionally-produced
foods are implicated in the cause of many illnesses, including asthma and cancers (ibid.). Aside from ecological care, a further key standard of organic production is its basis in agrarian values of small-scale family farms which are embedded in community networks (Johnston et al, 2009; Raynolds, 2006; Robinson, 2004). The labour-intensity of organic production provides jobs, thus contributing to the stability of rural communities. Many believe that organic farm workers are treated better and paid a fairer wage than their non-conventional counterparts and it has been established that the gender profile of these workers is more equitable with more women involved in production and management than on conventional farms (Levitte, 2010). As fewer external inputs are required, it is in theory cheaper to run organic farms and organic farmers’ livelihoods also benefit from the higher prices paid by consumers for what they consider to be a quality product. In addition, as organic food is often sold through alternative direct channels, the reduced number of intermediaries has the potential to provide organic producers with a greater percentage of the food dollar (Seyfang, 2006). This is because the cost/price squeeze which is endured by many farmers who operate in the conventional food system may be lessened.

However, organic production is also often considered to be less economically sustainable due to lower yields. This lack of productivity and the implications of this for predicted future worldwide food insecurity cause many to feel that organic production cannot hope to achieve more than niche status. Another key criticism of organic production is that labour standards are in fact absent from many certification requirements (Guthman, 2011) and due to the economic pressures which many organic farmers face, they are unable to pay high wages or provide worker benefits (Levitte, 2010). Nonetheless, the organic production system is criticised most-often because of the involvement of large and often multinational corporations in all stages of the production-consumption cycle (ibid.). Many of these corporations are said to be market-rather than mission-driven and their association with organic production is described as nothing more than ‘green-washing’ (Raynolds, 2006). A review of the emerging literature indicates that the organic movement is morphing into an organic industry as it is penetrated by large agribusiness capital and as a consequence suffers from many of the problems which this movement was founded in order to avoid (Johnston et al, 2009; Robinson, 2004). Guthman (2011) argues that it is because of these limitations that newer more targeted and strict food labels (e.g. fair trade) have emerged, as has a shift towards discourses which go beyond organics, such as food system localisation.
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2.2.3.2 Fair trade

Fair trade has emerged as an alternative mode of food provisioning in response to the socially (and ecologically) destructive effects of the dominant corporate global food system. Following the growth of neo-liberalism and global corporate power, and the problems attendant to this, calls have come for greater corporate social responsibility and ethical sourcing initiatives (Barrientos & Dolan, 2006; Raynolds, 2000). The prominence of fair trade has been due to its ability to connect producer populations in the global South with consumer populations in the global North. It is also due to the fact that it is a market-based initiative and has fit well into the prevailing capitalist paradigm (Raynolds & Unathi Ngcwangu, 2010). This is ironic considering that many who engage in these global North/global South transactions do so in order to challenge pre-existing capitalistic relations which inhere exploitation (Goodman, 2009; Jaffee et al, 2004). Nevertheless, the success of fair trade is contingent upon consumers choosing these foods because of the ethical characteristics which (they are told) they embody (ibid.).

Fair trade involves arrangements which are alternative to traditional modes of ordering trade; it is based on partnership, alliance, responsibility and, most obviously, fairness (Renard, 2003). To use the example of coffee, in order to use a fair trade label on their product, coffee importers must commit to purchasing contracts of more than one year in order to provide stability for producers; they must pay a minimum price per pound of coffee which is not related to market prices but ensure that the cost of production is covered; they must also pay an extra social premium of five cent per pound to fund community development initiatives in health, housing and education; and they must offer credit facilities to growers which allows them to invest in production (Raynolds et al, 2004). These concessions work to re-distribute power in the commodity chain away from powerful intermediaries and retailers, towards small-scale growers, this making it more sustainable (Smith & Barrientos, 2005).

However, as fair trade largely operates within the prevailing capitalist system it has been criticised as a neo-liberal solution to a problem created by neo-liberal policies (Dolan, 2010; Goodman & Goodman, 2009). Its popularity has seen it move from an alternative commodity network into the mainstream and being taken up by multinational corporations which seek to capture this niche market (Brown & Getz, 2008). Many of these corporations have been implicated in socially unjust business

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4 US dollars
practices leading to the suggestion that their adoption of fair trade standards is a cynical act of public relations which attempts to deflect attention from long held exploitative practices (Fridell, 2007). Quite often, any control which corporate actors lose by agreeing to third-party certification is offset by avoiding basic fair trade obligations and undermining key principles such as equality and transparency, suggesting that fair trade has begun to move from an alternative to a conventional mode of food provisioning (Dolan, 2010; Raynolds, 2009). This corporatisation raises doubts as to whether fair trade labels can ever be trusted. As an alternative food movement which is spatially distanced, fair trade is at a disadvantage when compared to spatially proximate alternative food movements which involve face-to-face interactions between producers and consumers, as the local food movement often does.

2.2.3.3 Localisation

As there are numerous problems in the prevailing food system (as set out in Section 1.2.1), localisation is said to be a key alternative in the transition towards greater sustainability (Wilkins, 2005; Allen et al, 2003; Morris & Buller, 2003; Henderson, 2000; Kloppenburg et al, 2000). Local food communities conceivably represent the epitome of alternative food networks and relations. A local food community could be inclusive enough to incorporate those who are not only spatially proximate but also the spatially distanced (although this is not often the case). Both spatially proximate and spatially distant ‘locals’ require a short food supply chain (Tregear, 2007). This chain can be spatially short (as is obviously the case for the former), or socially short (as would apply to the latter), or a mixture of both. These supply chains allow for the short-circuiting of formerly long and complex industrial food networks (Marsden et al, 2000).

Perhaps the most commonly cited reason to adapt to a localised system of food production is to reduce the environmental impact of the emissions associated with ‘food miles’ (Coley et al, 2009; Edward-Jones et al, 2008). Local food is (often mistakenly) assumed to be more ecologically sustainable in its production practices due to the use of local varieties of plant or animal and less chemically intensive farming techniques (Feenstra, 1997). In contrast to de-territorialised and placeless food transactions, local food transactions are thought to involve a markedly different level of interaction between producers and consumers. This (re-)territorialises food, (re-)embeds social relations into food transactions, and (re-)constructs localised relationships of care, exchange and co-operation (Sage, 2003). Local food products are embedded with
information about the place and circumstances of their production, feeding into the perception that local food is of high quality, traceable, trustworthy and safe (Edward-Jones et al, 2008). The use of narratives of place and provenance in local food fora such as farmers’ markets challenges the dominance of conventional multinational retailers (Goodman & Goodman, 2010). This represents a financial opportunity for producers, especially since consumers have shown great enthusiasm of late for food of traceable local provenance (Onken et al, 2011). Participation in local food systems also allows producers to attain a larger proportion of the retail price due to the reduced number of intermediaries in alternative food transactions. As such, local food systems potentially offer one effective route towards strengthening local economies and making them less vulnerable to external forces (Feagan, 2007). Outcomes which are said to arise from the development of a local food economy include community well-being, integration and revitalisation, as well as social equity (Kneafsey, 2010; Morris & Buller, 2003; Feenstra, 1997). Therefore, the concept of local food is not only associated with food which has been purchased, processed and distributed within a particular geographic origin, but it is also associated with a context (community), meaning (authentic, small-scale) or interaction (face-to-face) (Meyer et al, 2012). These varying social and spatial constructions of local food are discussed in more detail in Section 2.3.2.

Localised food networks go towards addressing the challenge set forth in the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, that is, ‘... a radical re-organising of economies to be more localised, decentralised, smaller-scale, and oriented towards human well-being and environmental protection’ (as cited in Seyfang, 2005, 298). However, it should not be assumed that the many benefits which are widely attributed to local food and the systems through which it moves will always apply. Given that local food is a pivotal issue in this study, an entire section of this dissertation (2.4.1.2) has been dedicated to a critique of the rhetoric of food system localisation.

2.2.4 Section summary

A review of the literature which critically discusses sustainability indicates that although this concept may appear to be falling out of favour among both policy-makers and theorists, it does not necessarily conflict with emerging discourses of resilience, security and sovereignty. Sustainability, it is argued, should be seen as a strategy to be utilised in the achievement of these goals, rather than as a goal itself. Because of the many criticisms which the concept of sustainability has faced with the emergence of newer
more popular paradigms, it is of upmost importance to justify the relevance of discourses of sustainability here, as this concept is central to this thesis. Section 2.2 also presents arguments in favour of affording due attention to consumers and their role in reversing the negative and unsustainable consequences of global capitalist production systems. Consumers, it is said, have agency to affect such changes and can wield this power to perform acts of citizenship. Given that many commentators doubt the relevance of consumers in achieving food system sustainability, it is important to highlight arguments which support them as essential parts of the food chain. In the context of this research, this is crucial as consumers are positioned as experts; this study is interested in participants’ perceptions, values and motivations and their expertise lies in their ability to provide these insights better than any other group. Literature which examines the transformative power of alternative food networks and movements is also considered. It is important to discuss the distinction between alternative and conventional engagements in the food system because of the prominence of binary assumptions about these. This literature review specifically focuses on the most prominent alternative food movements - organic, fair trade and localisation - critically discussing all three to gain an understanding of their (potential) role in encouraging greater food system sustainability. The multi-faceted and complicated nature of these food movements illustrates that consumers’ perceptions and choices towards these foods may not be easy to predict. For this reason, this thesis explores the understandings, perceptions and choices of consumers in Ireland as they relate to organic, fair trade and local food. While this portion of the literature review provided a contextual overview of the key concepts and frameworks which underpin this thesis, the following two sections (2.3 and 2.4) highlight the prominent gaps in research and illustrate previous theoretical approaches which this study hopes to build upon.

2.3 Consumer insights: local and sustainable Food

Encouraging people to consume sustainably is not as simple as providing information on the social and ecological benefits of certain ‘green’ choices. Consumers’ attitudes to sustainable choices may be positive, but their responses to these are often passive (Salonen & Ahlberg, 2013). Conflicts arise, whether consciously or not, between self-oriented and other-oriented motivations and most consumer choices are embedded in and influenced by social contexts (Salazar et al, 2013; Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002;
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Paavola, 2001). Consumer food choice is arguably even more complex than other household consumption decisions due to the embodiment of food and the cultural and historical relevance of food behaviours (Kniazeva & Venkatesh, 2007). Consequently, in choosing foods, consumers balance an even wider array of issues than when making non-food based choices, including economic value, hedonistic pleasure, social perceptions and altruistic concerns (Wikstrom et al, 2010; Vermeir & Verbeke, 2004). Since consumption choices and food cultures are socially embedded, it is not surprising that food choices are thought to be regionally specific (Prescott et al, 2002). This thesis brings together the two issues of sustainable consumption and food choices to explore sustainable food consumption with the goal of contributing to theoretical and practical understandings of the views of consumers in Ireland in relation to local food. Section 2.2 provided a contextual overview to justify a focus on the consumer perspective towards alternative food systems for sustainability. In this section (2.3), a review of prevailing theoretical discourses in relation to how consumers choose their food sets the scene for a discussion of previous applied research which scrutinises the understandings, perceptions and choices of consumers as they relate to local and sustainable food.

2.3.1 Review of underlying theoretical frameworks

This thesis supports the notion that consumers are powerful actors who can affect change (in particular, food system change) through their purchase actions or inactions. Also recognising the agency of consumers, many social scientific studies have focused on the influence of variables such as values and perceptions, on purchase motivations. However, the theoretical positions taken in such studies have been criticised from the perspective that they fail to recognise the contextual nature of consumer attitudes and behaviours. Nonetheless, critiques of frameworks such as the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) have provided a springboard for the development of more recent theoretical approaches which recognise the social embeddedness and contextualised nature of consumer choices. This section reviews some of the prominent theoretical perspectives which guide consumer behaviour literature, focusing in particular on those which have emerged as most prominent in previous studies of consumer attitudes towards sustainable or local food systems (cf. Ma et al, 2011; Dentoni et al, 2009; Roininen et al, 2006).

In the study of consumption, rational choice models have had a long and consistent presence and are based on the premise that consumers make rational
choices, in the pursuit of self-interest (Jackson, 2005). Rational choice frameworks assume that consumer behaviour is the result of an assessment of all available information resulting in a decision which will afford the consumer the greatest utility. This ‘information-deficit’ model assumes that ‘if only they knew’ (Guthman, 2008, 387) about the consequences of their decisions (or indeed their power), consumers’ attitudes and behaviour would differ. Under a rational choice framework, the role of education and information provision has therefore dominated in academic and policy approaches to changing attitudes and behaviours towards greater environmental awareness (Fahy, 2005). Within the arena of sustainable food consumption, eco-labels and campaigns to reduce food waste are examples of communication initiatives which are founded upon principles of rational choice models. However, this approach has been criticised for its stereotypical and dualistic visions of ignorant and impotent consumers, contrasting with knowledgeable and powerful consumers. Cook et al (1998) argue that these binaries are often exaggerated and simplistic, particularly in the context of food as all consumers possess some knowledge in this area. Nevertheless, there are two key barriers which are often cited as preventing many consumers from gaining a comprehensive understanding of their foods’ origins: firstly, the social and spatial distance between farm and fork makes this cognitively impossible; secondly, many consumers are ambivalent about gaining knowledge of food origins, having a ‘...combination of an impulse to forget and need to know...’ (ibid. 165). Acknowledging these two key barriers, a deficit of consumer knowledge is not thought to be the sole cause of consumer inaction, nor will a ‘knowledge fix’ necessarily drive consumers to choose a certain type of product (Eden et al, 2008a; 2008b). Rather, there are a variety of other non-cognitive processes at play such as previous experiences, trust and social context.

Following in the footsteps of rational choice models, Attitude Behaviour Choice (ABC) models (Shove, 2010) offer another perspective which has dominated the social scientific study of consumption behaviour over the past few decades. These models emerged in the 1970s and are based on the assumption that attitudes are the dominant force behind behaviours. Within the suite of ABC models, Fishbein and Ajzen’s (1975) Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) sees attitudes as learned but constant. These attitudes are thought to affect behaviours which, due to the supposedly stable nature of attitudes, are said to be relatively predictable. Although the TRA has been successfully applied to predict consumer choices amongst other behaviours, its usefulness has come into question. Research has suggested that, at least in terms of the environment,
attitudes are not significantly correlated with pro-environmental behaviour (Davies et al, 2014). Building on the TRA, Ajzen developed the TPB (Ajzen, 1991) which incorporated additional variables such as demographics and subjective social norms into their model of factors which influence beliefs. The TPB has been used to underpin a number of environmental studies and it is particularly prevalent in studies of consumer food choices (Ma et al, 2011; Nurse et al, 2010; Tregear & Ness, 2005). Bellows et al (2010) were influenced by this model in their study of US consumers’ attitudes towards organic and local food. They report that consumers, in making food choices, are affected by much more than their personal values with issues such as social standing, demographics and membership of a social group also of relevance. Similarly, Sirieix et al (2013), when discussing their study on UK consumers’ perceptions of sustainable food labels, contend that consumer choices are not isolated practices but are embedded in social and institutional events and contexts. In fact, it has been argued that to describe consumers as individualistic and isolated is simplistic and ignores the fact that perceptions and buying behaviour are tied to social and institutional norms (Thogersen, 2010). In the context of food, these norms are the prevailing global and industrialised food system, and the regulatory frameworks which underpin it (Zanoli & Naspetti, 2002). The normalised and routinised consumption of food varies according to time and, more importantly for this study, it varies according to place. Consequently, the consumption of food as embedded in the unique normative elements, and social and institutional practices of everyday life in Ireland is the focus of this study (Kjearnes & Holm, 2006).

Rational choice and ABC models have been criticised on the basis that behaviours, including consumption choices, can rarely be attributed to rational deliberation processes. The Means-End model, which features prominently in much food consumption literature, reasons that consumers make food choices based on an assessment of how the (perceived) attribute of a product (the ‘means’) will result in an outcome which is consistent with their values (the ‘end’) (Roininen et al, 2006; Makatouni, 2002; Zanoli & Naspettit, 2002). As many consumers are often unaware of the existence or effect of their values, decisions which arise from these cannot be said to involve rational choices (Thogersen, 2006; De Pelsmacker et al, 2005). Values therefore influence issues such as the constructed perception of foods, for example organic food, and they have been especially implicated in ethical consumption behaviour (Ma et al, 2011; Kemp et al, 2010). Food purchasing motivations can be classified according to the type of values which they hope to satisfy such as self-orientation or other-orientation.
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The former can be subdivided according to functional (e.g. health) or hedonistic (e.g. taste) motivations while the latter can be classed according to consumers’ ethical (e.g. animal welfare) or environmental (e.g. food miles) motives (Brown et al, 2009; Hoyer & MacInnis, 2000). Nonetheless, a value-action gap can exist due to the plural nature of values. Consumers simultaneously hold differing sets of values which may, but do not always, complement one another. In the case where a conflict occurs, a product or its attributes – which speak to these differing values – are traded off against each other (either consciously or unconsciously) (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2004). Therefore, it is clear that attitudes alone are poor predictors of consumer behaviour. In fact, studies have shown this to be particularly relevant in the context of local and sustainable food choices, when consumers may have to trade off pragmatic considerations such as affordability against altruistic concerns, such as social justice (Megicks et al, 2012; De Pelsmacker et al, 2005; Hoyer & MacInnis, 2000). Many quantitative consumer behaviour studies have produced evidence of value-action gaps but this study goes further by qualitatively exploring some of the factors which contribute to this gap. It aims to identify the motivations and barriers to purchasing local and sustainable food, by analysing the perceptions, values and motivations of consumers in Ireland as they relate to local and sustainable food.

2.3.2 Consumer understandings of ‘local’ and ‘sustainable’ food

Despite the recent interest in local food, precisely what the term local food means has regularly been taken for granted. This ambiguity highlights the importance of examining its meaning critically, going beyond conflations of spatial and social relations, binary comparisons with ‘global food’, and assumptions of desirable traits such as sustainability (Mount, 2011; Pearson et al, 2011; Amilien et al, 2007).

Local food is most often understood in relation to quantifiable spatial distance which the food has travelled to the consumer and this conceptualisation is bolstered by the concept of ‘food miles’ (Dunne et al., 2010). The spatial limits of the local, however, are also contested. Ranges are most often limited by unidirectional spatial distance, demarcated by a radius which tends to range from as few as thirty kilometres to as many as 650, but most frequently close to 150 kilometres and for some concerned

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5 These figures have been drawn from an analysis of literature which mostly details studies from the UK and the USA where imperial measurements of distance are used. In this literature, the range of twenty miles appears to be the narrowest cited as demarcating what ‘local’ means and as this study has been conducted in Ireland, a country which uses metric measures of distance,
these defining parameters may cross municipal boundaries. Almost as common are understandings of local food which are delineated by a politically designated region such as city, county, state, or state and neighbouring states (Dunne et al., 2010; Louden & McRae, 2010; Sirieix et al, 2010; Darby et al, 2008; Pirog & Rasmussen 2008; Futamura 2007). The concept of the bioregion as the range for local food is also proffered and such regions may span political boundaries such as a mountain range, a coastal area or an island, as is the case on the island of Ireland (Coit 2008). Previous Irish market research which used a large scale quantitative survey instrument found that consumers prefer space-based definitions of local food which range from ‘down the road’ to ‘within my country’, with most accepting a definition delineated by national borders (Bord Bia, 2009b).

While local food is often understood as being from a bounded space, it could also refer to a context, meaning or interaction with the world around us (Whitehead, 2007). This raises the question: to what extent could definitions of local food go beyond space to incorporate social factors such as a small scale of production, use of traditional production methods, family farm provenance, or a connection, face-to-face interaction, relationship, regard or trust between the food producer and consumer (Meyer et al, 2012; Mount, 2011; Onozaka & Thilmany McFadden, 2011)? If, in fact, local food is associated with characteristics such as small scale, greenness, specialty, uniqueness and quality, it has been suggested that the local may not be a destination in itself but rather a path for consumers to quality produce (Bord Bia, 2010a; Wilkins et al, 2000). For those who consider local to be inherently tied to such qualities, it is important that food producers are both spatially and socially local; a large multinational supermarket may be an ‘outsider’ compared to a greengrocer who is perceived to be part of the community: ‘The local foods movement is about an ethic of food that values reviving small scale, ecological, place-based, and relationship-based food systems... Large corporations peddling junk food are the exact opposite of what this is about’ (Severson, 2009, D-1).

this has been translated to the approximate equivalent of thirty kilometres. The upper limit of 400 miles has also been roughly converted to its equivalent of 650 kilometres. Finally, the 150 kilometre limit which is said to be the most commonly accepted spatial range for local food has been derived from the conversion of a 100 mile range. Although this translates to closer to 160 kilometres, the lower number of 150 kilometres is chosen as this more closely reflects the easy to remember, rounded and catchy range of the ‘100 miles diet’ which has received much media attention of late.
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Taking this a step further, local food can be understood solely on the basis of social relations, without mention of spatial proximity. Transcending localities, we are tied to many locals around the world through alternative food chains which either contain fewer links or, allow ethical norms or values to prosper (Mount 2011; DuPuis & Goodman 2005). Certainly, definitions of local food which encapsulate facets of both spatial and social propinquity seem to more comprehensively satisfy sustainability criteria. Nevertheless, it is vital also to consider exactly who may read local food in such a way and who may alternatively show a preference for meanings which rely on the notion of geographical closeness.

As groups are essentially diverse, this diversity not surprisingly shows through in varied understandings of the term local food which diverge across places, social spaces and actors’ agendas (Coit 2008; Selfa & Qazi 2005). To first focus on geographically differing meanings of local food, it has been found that those from large places, both spatially and in terms of population size, are more likely to attribute wider space-based definitions to local food than their counterparts from relatively small places (in terms of political designation) or those places with comparatively low populations (Onken et al, 2011; Khan & Prior, 2010; Pirog & Rasmussen 2008). A recent study in the UK, a nation with a large population, found that a majority of consumers prefer narrower spatial definitions with just 3% opting for their country within the UK as their designation of ‘local’ and just 2% choosing the UK as the limit of local (YouGov, 2013). Furthermore, urbanites are more likely to equate local food transactions with proximate and direct interactions with food producers than their rural counterparts. Rural dwellers tend to accept food sourced from a food system intermediary who they consider to be socially local to satisfy their understanding of local food (Palovitta, 2010; Selfa & Qazi 2005). These variations could be attributed to the differing contexts, norms and values of these places and it is not illogical to expect even greater variations across nations or supranational regions.

Research has highlighted that consumers in the USA are more likely to define local food spatially, compared to in the UK where spatial factors are prioritised, but in conjunction with the customs and traditions of a given area (Zepeda & Leviten-Reid 2004). Previous market research conducted by Ireland’s food board which used quantitative methods highlights that the understandings of consumers in Ireland of local food appear similar to UK consumers’ understandings: ‘available at a farmers’ market’
and ‘produced within close proximity of where I live’ are the most highly favoured demarcations of local food among consumers in Ireland (Bord Bia, 2011b). Rather than representing all of Europe, the Northern European perspective on local food differs from that in Southern Europe; it is said that Northern European cultures are farther removed from the origins of their food and are less likely to expand their definition of local food beyond short distances to encompass concepts of know-how and terroir, as is the case in countries such as France, Italy and Spain (Amilien et al, 2007; Bérard & Marchenay 2007).

Consumers are just one group of actors who inhabit the food chain and as their agendas differ from other actors, such as policy makers and retailers, so too will their definitions of local food differ. It is the subjective views of consumers which are of interest, as per the social constructivist framework which underpins this thesis. Consumer understandings of local food often incorporate conditions of social relations into space-based definitions. For some consumers, the knowledge and assurances gained through a face-to-face interaction with a producer are important in constructing the meaning of local food; it is these relations which tie that person to their local food, rather than the place of production (Futamura, 2007). The disparity between retailer and consumer definitions of local food is compounded further by the differing understandings which are held within the body of consumers. Similar to retailers, it cannot be said that consumers are a homogenous group and if retailers were to align their definitions of local food with consumers’, they would first have to decide between consumer definitions. For example, ‘alternative’ consumers are more likely to demand accountability and to define local in relation to qualitative and intangible traits, compared to ‘conventional’ consumers who are slightly more likely to consider local food to be that which is spatially local (ibid.; Zepeda & Leviten-Reid 2004).

It has been argued that the development of the local food system will benefit from a widely accepted definition of local food and many recognise the specific benefits which standardisation or regulation would provide, such as improved convenience in marketing local food, less confusion for consumers and ultimately the conservation of the essence of the term ‘local’ (Dunne et al, 2010; Zepeda & Li, 2006). Some even go so far as to claim that, rather than guidelines which will require local food actors to adhere to strict criteria, definitions of local food will be necessary, enforceable and prolific in the near future (Braaten & Coit 2010; DEFRA, 2008). This has caused concern for some
stakeholders. They fear that if ‘local food’ is codified according to the understanding of one faction of the food system, this definition may be limited and may negate their food system agency. This has prompted calls for the ‘real’ definition of local food, that is, one based on the understandings of producers and consumers rather than on those of powerful food system actors and regulators (Amilien et al, 2007). Consumers can have multiple and flexible understandings of local food which most often change according to the type of food in question (Mirosa & Lawson, 2012; Pearson et al, 2011; Smithers et al, 2008; Ostrom, 2006). To apply a rigid meaning to local food would fail to recognise the fluidity of consumers’ understandings. Flexibility in understandings of local food is also promoted from the perspective that to allow consumers to choose their own definitions will allow for reflexive understandings and will ultimately open the door for forms of localism which are more sustainable (Guthman 2003; for further discussion on this, see Section 2.4.2).

In contrast to local food, there have been few investigations, whether academic or not, into consumer understandings of sustainability in food systems. The term ‘sustainability’ is widely contested and is seen as confusing for consumers. It is defined differently according to the goals of the definer who may choose to focus on one or more of the three pillars of economy, society or the environment (Boogard et al, 2008). Kloppenburg et al (2000) consider this to be particularly worrying, writing: ‘With “sustainability” having achieved canonization as a kind of cultural shorthand for “the green and the good”, the term is deployed by all sorts of organisations and actors who want to access the word’s discursive potency but whose goals and interests are not necessarily compatible’ (178). In illustration, they highlight that even the corporate agri-food giant Monsanto claims to be committed to sustainable agriculture.

A review of the literature indicates that organic and fair trade, as the two most common incarnations of sustainable food, are concepts with which consumers appear comfortable. However, smaller numbers appear to hold understandings which conflict with those of many academics, policy-makers and industry actors (Henchion & McIntyre, 2008). In fact, it has been found that 10% of consumers surveyed conflate the term fair trade with its antithetic opposite free trade (McGarry Wolf & Romberger, 2010). Consumer research conducted by Bord Bia has produced data which allow for
comparability of consumers in Ireland and those elsewhere on this subject: collating results from four separate studies, agreement with the statement ‘I don’t know what sustainability is’ ranges from 11% (Northern Ireland, France) to 38% (Germany), with 15% of consumers in the Republic of Ireland agreeing with this statement (Bord Bia, 2011b; 2010b, 2010c; 2008b). However, there has yet to be an in depth open and qualitative study which investigates how consumers in Ireland (either those who do or do not proclaim to understand the term ‘sustainability’) understand the concept of sustainable food. Kloppenburg et al (2000) conducted one of the few studies which focus solely on consumers’ understandings of sustainable food, in this case with ‘interested’ food system actors in the USA. This group included organic growers, chefs and employees of sustainable food NGOs. Their findings illustrate the contested and complicated nature of this concept; participants discussed fourteen different attributes which they considered to underpin sustainable food systems, including ecological and economic sustainability but also issues such as justice, knowledge and communication, participation, diversity and cultural nourishment. A clear disparity is evident between understandings of sustainability as applied to food systems by participants in Kloppenburg et al’s study (2000) and interpretations of sustainability which are ubiquitous in marketing and corporate social responsibility rhetoric, as well as in policy discourses. Although the formation of a rigid definition of sustainability and sustainable food systems is not advocated here, an investigation into the understandings of consumers (as powerful actors in the food chain) is adopted in this thesis. Kloppenburg’s study sample were all ‘interested’ food system actors and there has yet to be a study, either in Ireland or internationally, which investigates how consumers (whether interested in issues of food system sustainability or not) understand and view sustainable food systems. The research hopes to begin to address this gap.

2.3.3 Consumer perceptions & choices

2.3.3.1 Perceptions of sustainable and local food

Organic food has been found to be most often associated by consumers with an absence of chemicals and is thus seen as clean, natural and good for one’s health (Sirieix et al, 2010; Roininen et al, 2006; Padel & Foster, 2005). Studies have also shown that it is

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6 For example, their ongoing PERIscope studies analyse the shopping and eating habits of consumers in Ireland, the UK, continental Europe, New Zealand and the USA.

7 Results from other countries are as follows: New Zealand 16%; Great Britain 22%; Sweden 23%; Spain 27%; Netherlands 27%; USA 36%
generally thought to be of high quality and to taste well. Proponents of organic production methods cite its environmental benefits, as do many consumers of organic food. However, in research at an international level the environmental impact of organic production methods have not been found to be a primary association or driver for consumers, especially when juxtaposed with health concerns (Gottschalk & Leistner, 2013; Padel & Foster, 2009; Seyfang, 2007). Nonetheless, when organic food is held in high regard, research has shown that this will often lead to organic food purchases; 66% of those surveyed in La Trobe’s study (2001) reported to buy organic food at least occasionally.

However, organic produce has been found also to be negatively perceived by many consumers and these views could be connected to a lack of awareness of the benefits of organic food which has been found both in Ireland and elsewhere (Banks, 2008; Padel & Foster, 2005), or a lack of trust in claims which proponents of organic production make (Zepeda & Deal, 2009; Henchion & McIntyre, 2008). Organic products are often perceived by many to be unattractive in appearance and poorer in quality and taste than ‘conventionally’ produced goods (Burke, 2008; Seyfang, 2008; Zanoli & Naspetti, 2002). These negative associations leave many consumers to believe that organic food is no better than its non-organic counterpart or that this characteristic is simply irrelevant (Ulvila et al, 2009; Banks, 2008). There is a widely-held belief among consumers as to the lack of affordability of organic food (Gottschalk & Leistner, 2013; Sirieix et al, 2010; Roininen et al, 2006). As evidenced in a number of studies, these negative perceptions can cumulatively lead to unwillingness among consumers (or a perceived or actual inability) to pay a premium to procure organic food (Dilley, 2009; Zepeda & Deal, 2009; O’Donovan & McCarthy, 2002). A final commonly cited barrier to the purchase of organic produce is its perceived lack of availability and inaccessibility. Research which explores how consumers view organic produce has found that this is often attributable to the belief that organic food is available only in alternative and less convenient sales fora such as through box schemes or at farmers’ markets which are time consuming and awkward to access (Nie & Zepeda, 2011).

Studies have shown that fair trade produce is perceived by consumers to be high quality and ‘clean’ (Ulvila et al, 2009). However, the most commonly found association is the provision of economic support for economies in the global South (Paloviita, 2010). Ensuring producers in the global South obtain a fair price for their goods has been found
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to be important for many and concerned consumers are willing to be loyal to fair trade products because of this. So too are they willing to pay a higher price for these goods (Ma et al, 2011; Castaldo et al, 2008). Fair trade has become synonymous with coffee, and coffee drinkers are said to prioritise brand, flavour, taste and quality first, and affordability second (McGarry Wolf & Romberger, 2010; De Pelsmacker et al, 2005). However, it has also been found that fair trade products are thought to be inferior in all of these categories compared to a non-fair trade equivalent, being commonly associated with high prices, poor quality and bad taste (Bord Bia, 2009a; Ulvila et al, 2009). In addition, consumers in Ireland have been found to be distrustful of claims that foodstuffs which are said to be fairly traded are in fact so. This is due to what they perceive to be the weakening of standards as large corporations increasingly utilise fair trade labelling (Bord Bia, 2008a).

A review of literature which studies attitudes to food of local provenance has found that many consumers have a strong preference for locally grown food and as a consequence they feel that its purchase is important (Onken et al, 2011; Onozaka & Thilmany McFadden, 2011; Hu et al, 2010). Previous quantitative research conducted in the Republic of Ireland indicates consumers in Ireland appear more likely than those elsewhere to prioritise local provenance in their food choices. 61% of survey respondents in Ireland agreed that it was either fairly important or very important to buy local food, compared to 52% of those surveyed in Great Britain, 58% of those in Spain and France, and 31% of Dutch survey respondents (Bord Bia, 2009a; 2008b). This issue has grown in importance as Ireland has endured economic recession with agreement rising to 61% in 2009 from 57% in 2007 and 50% in 2005 (Bord Bia, 2009a; 2007b; 2005). Studies show that local provenance is valued in and of itself but more often it is intertwined with further intrinsic and extrinsic indirect benefits (Dentoni et al, 2009; Darby et al, 2008). For consumers, local is said to imply something other than simply a close location; it signifies certain qualities and relations which provide a pathway to a desirable type of product (Bord Bia, 2009a; Ostrom, 2006).

A review of the literature highlights that local food is often thought to be more natural, healthier, tastier, fresher and better quality than non-local food (Leat et al, 2011; de Krom & Moll, 2010; Khan & Prior, 2010; Palovitta, 2010). These perceptions are underpinned by two key beliefs: firstly, that locally produced food contains less preservatives and artificial ingredients, and is purer than non-local food (Thomas &
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McIntosh, 2013; Bord, Bia, 2011b); and secondly, that local food is better, fresher and healthier because of the short distance between producers and consumers (YouGov, 2013; Chambers et al, 2007; Roininen et al, 2006). Local food is perceived by consumers to be more traceable and either because of or independent of this perception, it is seen to be more trustworthy than non-local food (Palovitta, 2010; Wier et al, 2008). The direct nature of marketing chains and small-scale of production which can be part of local food systems means that a greater quantity of information is available to consumers about the place and processes involved in the production of local food. This can give rise to increased trust in food producers and by extension, local food itself (Thomas & McIntosh, 2013; Palovitta, 2010; Eden et al, 2008a; Ostrom, 2006; Winter, 2003). However, it has been found that local provenance alone can signify such qualities (de Krom & Moll, 2010). The perceived trustworthiness of local food gives consumers confidence in its safety, relative to non-local food and this is particularly so in Ireland. 75% of Irish survey respondents agreed that they are more confident in the safety of local over non-local food (Bord Bia, 2011b). This finding contrasts to just 48% of those in France and 20% of Dutch respondents who were surveyed on their views of local food (Bord Bia, 2008b). A trust in local food has been found to be especially strong for meat products in Ireland (Howard, 2005a; McIntyre et al, 2001). According to Palovitta (2010, 1507): ‘The battle between global and local food seems essentially to be a battle of trust between widely recognised standards and familiarity based on proximity and personal contacts’. Familiarity has been found to be an important factor in the food choices of consumers in Ireland. They prefer familiar local food which they have grown up with as these foods represent security and safety but also tradition and comfort. This has been particularly important since the onset of the current economic recession when a ‘back to basics’ attitude emerged (Bord Bia, 2010a). Local food transactions, especially those which involve face-to-face interactions between producers and consumers, are valued because of these personal connections and the solidarity which results. Unlike their non-local counterparts, these involve the embedding of social networks in economic relationships (Dilley, 2009). A key point emerging from the literature is that consumers also value consumer-consumer relationships which can develop as local food communities emerge (ibid.; Zepeda & Deal, 2009). In summary, previous studies at both the national and international level which investigate how consumers view local food have found that it is associated with a myriad of qualities which are of personal benefit to consumers. However, local provenance also signifies a number of characteristics
which speak to consumers’ altruistic motivations to support local and distant communities and economies, and the environment.

Many consumers strongly associate local food with the support of local producers and farmers in their livelihoods (Onken et al, 2011; Kemp et al, 2010; Feagan & Morris, 2009). This is particularly so for short food supply chains in which primary producers can hope to earn a greater proportion of the ‘food dollar’ (Smithers et al, 2008). By extension, local food purchases are perceived to aid in local (and regional and national) economic and community sustainability (Thomas & McIntosh, 2013; Megicks et al, 2012; Leat et al, 2011; McEntee, 2010). Supporting local economies and communities has been found to be an important priority in many studies of local food consumers and this is particularly true in Ireland where buying local food is considered a key tool in helping economic recovery (Bord Bia, 2011a; 2010a; McIntyre et al, 2001). Evidence indicates that many consumers also report the belief that buying local food will aid in the preservation of farming as a traditional industry and farming communities; these are seen as important parts of local social and environmental heritage (Mirosa & Lawson, 2012; Leat et al, 2011; Smithers et al, 2008). For many consumers, their food choices appear political and a preference for local, regional or national food can be connected to nationalist or patriotic tendencies (Kemp et al, 2010; Eden et al, 2008a; Seyfang, 2006). Previous studies from Ireland point to the notion that consumers in Ireland are highly motivated by economic nationalism. These studies suggest that many of these consumers feel that to support the Irish food and drinks industry and the wider national economy is a civic duty; this is especially so since it is thought by many that ‘charity begins at home’ (Bord Bia, 2011a; 2009b; McIntyre et al, 2001).

A trait which is less commonly associated with local food is that of social equity in production (de Krom & Moll, 2010). Studies have shown that many consumers appear to assume that workers on local farms and in local food production enterprises are treated and paid better than if they were involved in non-local food production (Zepeda & Deal, 2009; Howard, 2005b). Local food is often conflated with economic and social sustainability, and justice but more often it is assumed to embody characteristics of environmental care. The fewer food miles involved in local food distribution is the most commonly cited benefit to underpin the environmental friendliness of local food systems (Leat et al, 2011; Palovitta, 2010). Local food producers are presumed to be particularly conscious of animal welfare (de Krom & Moll, 2010). Many consumers
report the opinion that local food is less processed, thus utilising less energy-intensive production methods and less environmentally damaging packaging (Seyfang, 2008). Many consumers cite the environmental-sensitivity of local production methods as a reason why they prefer local food: it is thought to use fewer synthetic chemicals than conventional ‘global’ agriculture and local farmers are thought to be more mindful of the need to encourage biodiversity (Thomas & McIntosh, 2013). In fact, one study found that many consumers appear to understand ‘local’ and ‘organic’ as interchangeable terms, in the context of food production (Mirosa & Lawson, 2012). The importance of this research is clear: it aims to theoretically analyse consumer food localisms in Ireland and the extent to which food of local provenance may be assumed to embody qualities of sustainability.

Despite the many positive characteristics which are attributed to local food, a number of negative associations have also been identified as key barriers for consumers. These barriers prevent or reduce local food purchases and the three barriers which have emerged most prominently are discussed here. First, the austerity of a local only diet is said to create a tension for many consumers who think it important to have a wide choice of foods even if they are out of season. Consumers may theoretically support local foods but in practice many prefer to have the option of (at least some) non-local foods which they like the taste of and which offer what they consider to be a nutritionally adequate diet (Brown et al, 2009; Chambers et al, 2007; Wilkins, 1996). Second, local foods are thought to be inconvenient and difficult to access. Alternative sales fora, such as farmers’ markets which many consumers assume to be the only source for local food purchases, are described as being held at inconvenient times and inaccessible due to insufficient parking in close proximity. Many consumers report the belief that shopping in such disparate fora involves a time commitment which supermarket shopping does not require and which modern busy lifestyles do not allow for (Megicks et al, 2012; Khan & Prior, 2010; DEFRA, 2008; Chambers et al, 2007; McGarry Wolf et al, 2005). Third, the most prevalent perception to inhibit local food purchases which emerged following analysis of relevant literature is the belief (or experience) that it is too expensive (Thomas & McIntosh, 2013; YouGov, 2013; Mirosa & Lawson, 2012; Roininen et al, 2006). In Ireland, this barrier has become increasingly relevant as the proportion of household disposable income has decreased in line with national economic recession (Bord Bia, 2011a).
2.3.3.2 Food choices

As local food is perceived to embody a variety of positive traits, consumers consequently believe that its purchase is important, resulting in regular local food purchasing (Brown, 2003; Winter, 2003). Consumers in Ireland have been found to be especially common purchasers of local food and this has grown in tandem with economic recession. Survey respondents in Ireland agreed with the statement ‘I buy local food’ in the following proportions: 56% in 2005, 61% in 2007, 64% in 2009 (Bord Bia, 2009a) and 83% in 2010 (Bord Bia, 2010a). Moreover, a number of international studies indicate that many (but not a majority of) consumers report a willingness to pay more for local food (Schneider & Francis, 2005; Weatherall et al, 2003). Approximately half of respondents in Bord Bia’s 2009 PERIscope study (investigating food purchasing and eating among consumers from Ireland and the UK) reported to try to buy fair trade products where available (Bord Bia, 2009a). This finding supports Belgian research which studied the importance of fair trade labels in coffee buying decision: De Pelsmacker et al (2005) described approximately half of their sample of coffee drinkers as either fair trade ‘lovers’ or ‘likers’ who were willing to pay a premium for a product with a fair trade label. Regular purchasing of organic food appeared to be much less frequent than local food purchasing reflecting a gap between positive perceptions and consumer action. This is said to be at least partially attributable to the belief that organic food is unaffordable (Banks, 2008; Brown, 2003).

In spite of the high regard with which sustainable food and food of local provenance are often held, a number of international studies have shown that consumers are not primarily motivated by these qualities in choosing foods. Instead, pragmatic considerations are quite often more highly prioritised resulting in local and sustainable food often losing out in a trade-off with these more individual and practical issues (Svensfelt & Carlsson-Kanyama, 2010; Doran, 2009; Weatherall et al, 2003). The considerations which have been found to be more important to consumers include affordability and value, quality, health, taste, freshness and appearance (Pearson et al, 2011; Wirth et al, 2011; Bellows et al, 2010; Sirieix et al, 2010; Darby et al, 2008; Smithers et al, 2008; Zepeda & Li, 2006).

Studies which segmented consumers according to typologies have found that the greatest interest in buying local or sustainable food appears to exist among consumers who are described as alternative, adventurous, or concerned. This interest is
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said to reflect these consumers’ altruistic, universalist or egalitarian values which highly motivate them in their food purchases (Zepeda & Nie, 2012; Zepeda & Leviten-Reid, 2004; Weatherall et al, 2003). However, studies have noted that it is these ‘concerned’ consumers who are most likely to highlight that local food production is not necessarily sustainable and is therefore less preferable when compared to organically produced food (Roininen et al, 2006). Nonetheless, a review of previous studies on consumer food preferences appears to suggest that the characteristic of local provenance will almost always be preferred over food which is fair trade or organic as the balance of positive perceptions and negative barriers tips in favour of local food (Onozaka & Thilmany McFadden, 2011; Thilmany et al, 2008; Weir et al, 2008). Zepeda & Deal (2009) found that those consumers in their sample who bought a lot of organic food reported to be increasingly attracted to local food over organic food. These consumers felt that local food represented the small-scale of production, shortened food chains and anti-corporate ethos which first attracted them to organic food, but which they felt organic food no longer embodied. The trade-off between organic production methods and local provenance is a complex one for many consumers, especially those who are identified as ‘concerned’. This has led to the suggestion of a synergistic melding of locally produced organic food which may present new opportunities for producers of these foods (Palovitta, 2010; Dilley, 2009).

2.3.3.3 Demographic variances

Many studies which examine how consumers approach local and sustainable food choices are mindful of the social embeddedness of food choices, as set out in Section 2.3.1. Consequently, there are many which highlight the variability of how consumers perceive and choose local and sustainable food, depending on certain demographic conditions. Higher income has been found to be somewhat correlated with choosing food of local provenance and food with characteristics of sustainability, such as organic food (Tonsor & Schupp, 2009; Carbone et al, 2007). A number of studies present the finding that those with the highest income often do not show the highest level of preference for local or sustainable food (Hu et al, 2010; Selfa et al, 2008). Nonetheless, many more argue that very low incomes are likely to act as a barrier to their purchase (Zepeda & Nie, 2012; McIntyre & Rondeau, 2011; Khan & Prior, 2010). The presence of children in a household appears to increase the appeal of local and sustainable food for concerned consumers who value the health benefits of food which has not travelled long distances and which has not been produced using synthetic chemicals (Zepeda &
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Nie, 2012; Nie & Zepeda, 2011; Bellows et al, 2010). These consumers could be considered to be self-oriented but also oriented to protect those in their direct circle of care. However additional economic pressure created by supporting offspring causes the importance of local and sustainability characteristics to decrease for those in the majority who are more ‘conventional’ (Tonsor & Schupp, 2009). Gender is a third demographic variable which has emerged from an examination of pertinent literature. Studies show that more women than men have a preference for, and often have a willingness to pay more for, local and/or sustainable foods (Hu et al, 2010; Khan & Prior, 2010; Howard, 2005b). Studies suggest that this correlation is connected to the traditional role which women play in sourcing food, preparing family meals and caring for family members, in this instance through the provision of safe and nutritious foods (Zepeda & Nie, 2012; Bellows et al, 2010; Padel & Foster, 2005). Urban or rural dwelling has also been found to affect the perceptions and values of some consumers. International studies have indicated that urban consumers appear to be less likely than their rural neighbours to associate local or sustainable food with positive characteristics and are consequently less likely to purchase local food. Previous studies have stated that rural dwellers are more interested in supporting local economies than those in urban areas and this is attributed to the closer social ties which those in rural areas have to farmers and farming, and their greater knowledge of the processes and networks involved in food provisioning (Chambers et al, 2007; Roininen et al, 2006; Tregear & Ness, 2005; Weatherall et al, 2003).

2.3.4 Section summary

In conclusion, Section 2.3 has presented a review of literature which examines theoretical and practical studies of consumer food choices. Section 2.3.1 provides a brief overview of four key emergent theories which underpin the processes involved when consumers decide which foods to buy. These theories are complementary to one another and together highlight the importance of recognising the complicated and contextual nature of food choices. A review of previous consumer studies which focus on understandings, perceptions and choices of consumers, in particular towards local and sustainable food, was presented in Section 2.3.2. This review suggests that consumers view organic, fair trade and local food in largely positive terms but nonetheless, each are associated with certain negative traits such as poor quality produce (organic), misleading labelling (fair trade) and inaccessibility (local). Pragmatic issues such as health and affordability, it is reported, are prioritised over more altruistic
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concerns which local and sustainable foods are said to embody, representing a value-action gap. In addition, when traded off against one another, local food is said to almost always prevail over organic and fair trade food. Nonetheless, local, organic and fair trade food have been found to be more likely to be positively perceived and purchased by those with higher incomes, women and those in rural areas.

Understanding why it is that consumers value certain attributes is essential in investigating the reasons for consumer preferences and any barriers which may exist to the purchasing of such positively perceived goods. In addition to enhancing academic knowledge and policy-learning, gaining an understanding of how attributes of food products are perceived by consumers can aid in more effective marketing; a lack of consumer knowledge is counter to recommendations for market orientation. Studying consumers’ views and actions towards local and sustainable food will allow marketers to formulate tailored sales campaigns which will find acceptance with consumers. It has been argued that increased sales may result from this and it is hoped, this will in turn encourage the viability of an alternative and more sustainable food system. Consumers’ perceptions and choices regarding sustainable and local foods have garnered much attention in the past decade resulting in a plethora of academic, policy-oriented and marketing-oriented research on this topic. However, much of this research has taken place in North America (Onken et al, 2011; Tonsor & Schupp, 2009; Schneider & Francis, 2005), in the UK (Eden et al, 2008a, 2008b; Seyfang, 2008, 2007, 2006; Weatherall et al, 2003) and in continental Europe (Vecchio, 2010; Wier et al, 2008; Roininen et al, 2006). Consumers’ perceptions and actions vary according to geography, culture, demography and economies and consequently the paucity of academic engagements in the Irish context in this area highlights an important gap in knowledge. As such, this thesis represents the first major academic piece of work to probe the views and behaviours of consumers in Ireland with regard to local and sustainable food.

2.4 Food localisms: a critical reflection

Normative presentations of localisation see it as a key strategy in fostering greater environmental care and economic resilience. However, it is necessary to question this in order to provide a more nuanced understanding of the role which local food may play in a move towards food system sustainability. This interrogation begins by acknowledging discourses on the socially constructed nature of all scales and progresses to review
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literature which highlights the fallacy of assuming only positive traits in the local scale. The process of spatial valorisation is criticised as are those who fall into the ‘local trap’ by (often mistakenly) attributing value to local food, which can be to the exclusion of other non-local foods and the people involved in their production. Growing out of critiques of such a negative localism which is based on defensiveness, an alternative reflexive localism has been conceptualised. Reflexive localism is not so much a form of localism but it is a tool which facilitates a transition towards greater sustainability by encouraging reflection on the processes, relations and networks involved in food systems, rather than solely on provenance (Goodman et al, 2012). Section 2.3 posited that consumers assume local food embodies a number of positive traits, including qualities of sustainability. Following a review of the theoretical criticisms of such an assumption and suggestions for a more fruitful alternative, this section (2.4) is concluded by an examination of studies which critically assess the precise nature of local food interest.

2.4.1 The fallacy of ‘local’ rhetoric

2.4.1.1 The social construction of scale

Many diverging critiques of scalar conceptualisations have been proffered but it is agreed that inherited perceptions of geographic scale are inadequate in helping to comprehend the complexities and transformations of the modern world (Sayre, 2009; Delaney, 1997). Everyday understandings of scales see them as a fixed and nested hierarchy of bounded spaces of different sizes (Russian doll, concentric circles) or as horizontal or vertical networks (tree roots, ladder) (Herod, 2011). It is difficult to skip or jump over a particular scale as each one is a conceptually separate entity which fits together with others in a very specific order to make a meaningful system. Trojan Horse binaries (micro-macro, local-global) which are inherent in fixed and bounded hierarchical understandings of scale are also problematic (Marston et al, 2005). Local places are denigrated as passive fields of play where the penetrating force of global economies and power are felt (Herod, 2009; Marston et al, 2005; Marston, 2000). The agency of ‘the global’ therefore comes above local social practices which are considered impotent in challenging globalisation and global dominance. These socially constructed binary assumptions have become ontological givens which represent pre-configured accounts of social life rather than reflect actual socio-spatial relations. As a result, instead of simply framing realities, scales have become implicated in the formation of
social, economic and political processes (Gibson-Graham, 2002; Delaney, 1997; Swyngedouw, 1997; Harvey & Swyngedouw, 1993; Smith, 1993).

Understanding scale as being underpinned by size and level alone oversimplifies it as a concept; there is no single scale at which social or ecological systems can be appreciated, nor can linearity across scales be assumed. Instead, scale should be understood as a flat ontology with all scales linked through intermeshed networks (Marston et al, 2005). This conceptualisation incorporates the notion of relations to already present size and level understandings in the recognition that scales cannot and do not exist independently, as is evidenced in the use of terms such as ‘rescaling’, ‘scale jumping’ and ‘glocalisation’ (Swyngedouw, 2004; Marston, 2000; Howitt, 1998). This final expression debunks the anachronistic theory of societies being made up of a series of bounded spaces within which are self-contained local communities. It also reinforces the argument that all localities are nodes in networks and that the local is not separate from the global but is instead a geographical entry point into the world of global flows. By extension it is argued that the ‘global’ is nothing more than an accumulation of all things local (Mansvelt, 2005). Therefore, the local scale, just as any other scale, does in fact have power and agency (Massey, 2004). In addition, societal processes which take place at a given scale are dictated by the agendas of those actors who are responsible for these processes. It is the goals of these actors which produce outcomes rather than the scales themselves, whether these goals are exclusive or insular, cosmopolitan or parochial (Born & Purcell, 2006).

2.4.1.2 Criticisms of local food rhetoric

Considering the socially constructed nature of scale, there is nothing inherent about the local. Local food systems are therefore ‘...equally likely to be just or unjust, sustainable or unsustainable, secure or insecure...’ (Born & Purcell, 2006, 195). Nonetheless, as set out in Section 2.3.1.1, localised food systems are commonly conflated with a range of sustainability indicators such as the creation of stronger communities, ecological conservation and social justice (Morgan et al, 2008; Morris & Buller, 2003). By focusing only on the place of production this belies the true nature of a food, whereby proximity to place of production can, but does not necessarily, lead to more sustainable or just food systems (Winter, 2003; Gopalon, 2001). A failure to assess the social and environmental processes, networks and relations of local food systems, and to blindly believe in their inherent goodness instead is to fall into the ‘local trap’ (Goodman &
Chapter 2: Literature review

Goodman, 2010; Le Heron, 2009; Born & Purcell, 2006; DuPuis & Goodman, 2005). Those responsible for ‘Buy Irish Food’ campaigns fall into the local trap by highlighting the local Irish provenance of foods as a quality per se and by emphasising the multi-layered, multi-actor supply chains through which these foods pass and the many local livelihoods which supposedly benefit from the purchase of these foods (Carroll, 2012). These campaigns fall within what are known as weak alternative food networks (AFNs) which are so described because of their emphasis on product and place, quality production and territorial embeddedness, with the goal of developing pathways for rural development (Goodman, 2002). Food localisms which fit this category are based on predetermined normative standards which ignore the inherent politics of the local and issues of social justice (DuPuis & Goodman, 2005).

The naïve celebration of the local is a form of spatial fetishisation which ignores the fact that all outcomes in a food system, no matter what the scale, are contextual. In assessing the environmental sustainability of a food product, the entire life cycle should be evaluated (farming practices, water used), rather than simply the number of food miles (Kneafsey, 2010; Coley et al, 2009; Edward-Jones et al, 2008; Watts et al, 2005; Bellows & Hamm, 2001). Similarly, the social sustainability and justness of a food system are said to be laid bare through a focus on the social relations and networks involved in a food transaction (Goodman & Goodman, 2010; DuPuis & Goodman, 2005). This is particularly important as local food systems are shaped by the agendas of those who control them and therefore it is conceivable that these agendas can promote social and spatial exclusivity. In aiming to serve only the interests of those from a bounded space, often within which is a homogenous place and socially homogenous people (white, middle-class), these defensive localisms may exclude and alienate those from ‘outside’ (Goodman & Goodman, 2010; Feagan, 2007; Whitehead, 2007; DuPuis & Goodman, 2005; Winter, 2003). Aspirations for a more localised system of food provisioning in the global North may affect the economic and social lives of food exporters in the global South. This is unjust if distant producers are more sustainable in their farming practices and social relations than those producers who are spatially proximate. It is also unjust as producers of the global South may be more in need of the profits accruing from food sales (Edward-Jones et al, 2008; Born & Purcell, 2006). Therefore, defensive localism is particularly objectionable due to the fact that any given community is permeated by a

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8 For a full discussion on the rhetoric of ‘Buy Irish Food’ campaigns, see Carroll (2012) in Appendix 1
myriad of social groups, economic products and cultural influences which originate far beyond the boundaries of that community (Whitehead 2007). Rather than being isolated and self-contained, local and non-local places are embedded within one another and interdependent (Feagan, 2007).

The retreat into the local stunts the geographical imagination and suppresses wider issues which relate to the geography of power relationships (Born & Purcell, 2006; Gibson-Graham, 2002). Consequently, caution in the belief in the ‘local’ as a site of resistance to the global hegemon is advised as to do so involves the ‘...tacit assumption that elides the issues of power, privilege, and poverty under the felicitous rubric of the local”...’ (Morgan et al, 2008, 189). However, rather than simply presenting a damaging critique of local food rhetoric, in line with Coley et al (2010), this literature review encourages a more nuanced approach to the examination of food system localisation. Such an approach differentiates between localisms which are underpinned by a defense of the (usually spatial) ‘local’ and approaches to food localisation which encourage greater sustainability (Morgan et al, 2008).

2.4.2 Reflexive localisms for sustainability

A parochial form of localism concentrates on the preservation of traditions and the defence of local farmers and the local bounded area, obscuring socio-spatial relations and facilitating the creation of exclusive xenophobic territories (Goodman & Goodman, 2010). Reflexive localisms, on the other hand, are more productive as they prioritise criteria which contribute to the democratising of local food politics (Goodman et al, 2012; Du Puis & Goodman, 2005). In contrast to the weak AFNs described earlier, local food movements which are underpinned by principles of reflexivity are considered strong as they prioritise processes, social and ethical values and supply chain relations, all with the aim of improving livelihoods and well-being (Maye et al, 2007; Watts et al, 2005). Reflexive localisms also support fluidity of understandings which see local places as open, permeable and related to other scales (Feagan, 2007; DuPuis & Goodman, 2005; Morris & Buller, 2003). By scaling up to the ‘extra-local’ or ‘glocal’ level, alliances can be formed with other local actors to create an integrated system of food provisioning which is more localised (Bellows & Hamm, 2001). If a focus on the democratising of local food politics is maintained, a glocal or localised food system can address the social and economic needs of food producers in the global South who rely on food exports (Seyfang, 2005). However, as discussed in detail by Goodman et al
Chapter 2: Literature review

(2012) reflexivity does not prescribe a normative idealised vision of food system localisation but instead provides the analytical tools to assess prevailing food systems and to drive them towards greater equity and inclusivity.

The reported lack of consensus, at least among consumers, with regard to the meaning of local food has previously been discussed and this dissonance could be construed as an entry point for encouraging a more reflexive politics of food system localisation. However, in practical terms consumers will understand this expression according to their own values and consequently its meaning, at least on a personal level, is not only apparent but unambiguous. Most consumers are of the opinion that local food is that which comes from a spatially proximate place (Dunne et al, 2010) and it can be inferred that processes of reflexivity are absent from these definitions. Calls from policy-makers and food producers for codified definitions of local food are increasing and tend to be motivated by exclusivity, rather than goals of social justice or equity (Blake et al, 2010; Braaten & Coit, 2010; Amilien et al, 2007; Bérard & Marchenay, 2007). As such, the preservation of any ambiguity of the term local food is advocated here, to preclude normative understandings of what constitutes a desirable local food system and to leave the way open for more inclusive understandings which are based on reflexivity. Some studies have suggested that local is not considered by consumers to be a destination in itself but rather a path to a desired product (Wilkins et al, 2000); others argue that consumers prioritise local food systems which allow ethical values to prosper (Mount 2011; Selfa & Qazi, 2005; Allen et al, 2003). However to date the acceptability among consumers of incorporating reflexivity as an analytical tool into their understandings and assessments of local food systems has yet to be examined and the research upon which this thesis is based attempted to do just this.

2.4.3 Applying food localists discourse to consumer motivations

A number of previous studies have clustered consumers according to their priorities and behaviours in an effort to understand their values and food choices towards local and sustainable food. Consumers are frequently classed in groups with labels such as careless, egalitarian, personal value buyers, rational and urban assurance seekers (Zepeda & Nie, 2012; Nie & Zepeda, 2011; Thilmany et al, 2008; Seyfang, 2007; Weatherall et al, 2003). Scholars have also grouped consumers according to their likelihood or not of purchasing local or organic food with clusters designated as ‘occasional organic buyers’ (Zanoli & Naspetti, 2002), ‘low likelihood of purchasing local
food’ (Tregear & Ness, 2005), ‘organic purists’ (O’Donovan & McCarthy, 2002) or ‘Irish Loyal’ (Bord Bia, 2011a), amongst other things. These clustering activities highlight the marketing identities of consumers as ‘neo-tribes’ and inform policy and future consumer research. To these same ends, a number of studies have attempted to provide a nuanced understanding of the values and motivations of those who are confirmed local food consumers (Megicks et al, 2012; McEntee, 2010; Seyfang, 2006; Winter, 2003). These studies go beyond simple classification to critically theorise how these motivations may affect the achievement of greater food system sustainability.

Focusing on UK consumers, Winter (2003) found that a majority of local food purchasers engage in a form of defensive localism. They are driven in these purchases not by a desire for community-building, justice and equity, or environmentally-sensitive production methods, but by sympathy for farmers and local food producers. Localisms which are founded upon defensive intentions are not the only forms of local food motivations, as established by Seyfang (2006) in her study of customers of a local and organic farmers’ market stall and box scheme in the UK. These particular consumers were all classed as ‘ecological citizens’; ecological citizenship sees consumption activities as political and primarily motivated by a desire to achieve the common good. Their preference for local organic food is underpinned by a combination of individualist (good taste, health, safe) and universalist (local economic vitality; values-oriented economics; environmental stewardship; community development) motivations. It is argued that the concept of ecological citizenship is a useful analytical tool in understanding the expanded role of citizenship in the realm of consumption (ibid.).

From an extensive review of the literature, a small number of studies have emerged which attempt an empirical investigation of how local food purchasers may be separated into different groups according to their motivations. McEntee (2010) in his work which details a rural US study draws on previous theoretical reviews of different types of food localisms, for example Hinrichs’ (2003) discussion of dualistic diversity-receptive and defensive localisms, and DuPuis and Goodman’s (2005) exploration of unreflexive and reflexive localisms. McEntee’s study involved a practical analysis of stakeholder and consumer food localists in the case study area of New Hampshire, USA, culminating in the classification of the nature of their localisms as either ‘traditional’ or ‘contemporary’. McEntee argues that although the consumers in these groups may exhibit the same local food buying or activities, for example, raising chickens, their
motivations may differ. Traditional localists want fresh, affordable food and like to maintain food traditions; this group might raise chickens in order to save money and because their parents before them raised chickens. Contemporary localists are more ‘alternative’ and are driven to source food locally by a desire for healthy food which is embedded in communities, which helps preserve farming heritage and farmland, which is economically and socially sustainable, and which has a lesser environmental impact. A desire to reduce their carbon footprint is one reason why contemporary localists might raise chickens. This analysis finds that social justice is a motivation which is absent from both discourses of food localism and although McEntee examines the degree to which such motivations are underpinned by reflexivity, it is argued here that they are not. This finding, as well as the uncovering of two diverging forms of food localism, illustrates the importance of understanding consumer motivations and how they may contrast with what has emerged as key characteristics of sustainable food systems: reflexivity.

2.4.4 Section summary

In conclusion, a number of key arguments which frame this study are presented in Section 2.4. It has been established that scale is a social construct and that the only guaranteed traits of a local food system are those which its proponents hope it embodies, whether these qualities are inclusive and democratic or exclusive and parochial. Common local food rhetoric sees local food systems as conflated with sustainability and this view is said to be an example of the local trap. As local food is central to this thesis, an examination of literature which critiques scale was fundamental. It has provided a key starting point for this study, namely the finding that local and sustainable are often conflated. Findings from Section 2.3 suggest that there has been limited academic engagement which focuses directly on a conflation by food consumers of local provenance with qualities of sustainability and this study is therefore the first of such engagements. Proceeding from a review of the criticisms of local food rhetoric, a newer more constructive paradigm of reflexive localism is posited. Reflexivity is a process which is non-prescriptive in the exact nature of food system localisation so long as it is underpinned by principles of democracy. Discussing reflexivity is valuable as this highlights a productive alternative to what have been classed as damaging forms of localisms. Although there has yet to be a study in any discipline which applies the notion of reflexive localisms to the consumer context, studies which segment consumers according to their localist motivations are evaluated in Section 2.4.3 and this analysis has revealed an absence of a consumer tribe which exhibits reflexive localist traits.
Chapter 2: Literature review

Nevertheless, there has neither been an empirical study which is centred on an examination of reflexivity in consumers’ localist motivations, nor one which tests the acceptability for consumers of reflexive forms of localism. This study aims to address gaps in research by building on McEntee’s (2010) emergent framework of consumer food localisms and extending the geographical focus from a rural US space to urban and rural locations in Ireland.

2.5 Conclusion

Discussing relevant academic literature, this chapter provides a context which informs the place of this study. As the reading of literature progressed, it became apparent that discourses of sustainability are far from unified and given that this concept forms the basis of this study, it was necessary to justify its use as a framing paradigm. It also became apparent that views which relate to the role of consumers in promoting sustainability are disjointed. Although it is accepted that to designate consumers as the sole agents of food system change represents neo-liberal devolution of responsibility, this literature review presents the many arguments in favour of consumer agency and a belief in the possibility of a consumer/citizen hybrid. A meta-analysis of prominent consumer food choice theories reveals complementary elements which support the contention that consumers are influenced in their food choices by both their personal values and social contexts (the latter also iteratively influencing the former). It also reveals that positive attitudes towards foods of local provenance or foods which embody qualities of sustainability should not be expected to necessarily translate into positive purchasing behaviour. These theoretical propositions are confirmed by studies which suggest that although local and sustainable qualities are important for consumers, they are not as important as more practical considerations which speak to consumers’ self-orientation. However, the fallacy of attributing too much (or any) value to local food is set out in the final section of this literature review; the social construction of scale means that an automatic valorisation of the local scale fails to assess its fairness and therefore local food may be based on and may perpetuate undemocratic ideals. Following the well-worn path of discourses of scale in the 1990s and the local trap in the early 2000s, a group of academics in the late 2010s sought to drive these critiques in more positive directions. As such, the process of reflexivity has been proffered as a tool which promotes fluidity of understandings of local with the goal of democratising food
systems. Nonetheless, to date, there has yet to be a study which probes the relevance of reflexive forms of localism for consumers.

Clarifying the aims of this research which were established in Chapter 1, this literature review also identified methodological, conceptual and practical gaps in existing knowledge bases, proving the worth of conducting this critical analysis and warranting the empirical investigations undertaken in this study. For example, there has yet to be a study which analyses the possible conflation of local food with traits of sustainability, whether in the consumer context or otherwise. In addition, although there are many theoretical expositions on the topic of reflexivity and food systems, this has yet to be applied in a real world setting. Perhaps the most obvious gap is that which exists in literature detailing Irish studies on the consumer perspective in relation to local and sustainable food. The literature reviewed found just two such studies, one dealing specifically with the perceptions of farmers’ market consumers in regard to organic produce sold there (Moore, 2006) and another with their views on organic meat (O’Donovan & McCarthy, 2002). That Ireland lags behind the UK, continental Europe and North America in such studies is clear. Consequently, the objectives of this research project are to explore the views of consumers in Ireland with regard to the local food system, particularly in the context of sustainability, not only environmental but also economic and social. Using a theoretically informed measurement framework, the project aims to empirically investigate the relationship between scale and sustainability in consumer food choices. It also investigates if consumers in Ireland could be described as localists and if so, what type of localism they subscribe to.

This literature review also provided some insight into the methodologies employed in these previous similar studies. Quantitative surveys are the most frequently employed methodological tool when investigating consumer attitudes and behaviours (cf. Gottschalk & Leistner, 2013; Bellows et al, 2010; Hu et al, 2010); however, qualitative approaches utilising interviews and focus groups are growing increasingly common (cf. Sirieix et al, 2013; Meyer et al, 2012; Blake et al, 2010; Chambers et al, 2007). In reviewing the literature pertinent to this study, it was found that studies which employed a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods are frequently used (cf. Megicks et al, 2012; Wirth et al, 2011; Kemp et al, 2010), as are methodologies which employ a multiphase qualitative research strategy (cf. Blake et al, 2010; Moore, 2006; Padel & Foster, 2005; Winter, 2003). Both qualitative and quantitative methodologies
have used innovative techniques to research specific issues: these include choice experiments to simulate the real world food choice experience; laddering exercises to examine the mechanics of consumer choice (Onken et al, 2011; Onozaka & Thilmany McFadden, 2011; Tonsor & Shupp, 2009); and projection techniques, to prompt discussion of contentious issues (Sirieix et al, 2010). Most of these studies, especially those which employ a quantitative methodology, use random sampling techniques in order to gain an understanding of a cross-section of the research population (Ma et al, 2011; Onken et al, 2011; Onozaka & Thilmany McFadden, 2011). However, it is also common to purposively seek out a sample which represents the views of both ‘interested’ and ‘not interested’ consumers (Palovitta, 2010; Ulvila et al, 2009; Zepeda & Deal, 2009). Before progressing to discuss the results of this empirical investigation, the following chapter sets out the methodological approach which was adopted in this research project.
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The main objective of this research is to explore the perceptions of consumers in Ireland with regard to the sustainability of food systems with a specific focus on the local level. It aims to critically investigate whether food of local provenance and food with qualities of sustainability are valued and prioritised by participants. Following a review of the relevant literature, it is clear that many people who are interested in moving the current prevailing system of food provisioning toward these goals of sustainability recognise the value of localising food transactions (Marsden & Smith, 2005). But what is clear also is that ‘local’ is a social construct and it follows that the localisation of food production does not necessarily lead to a more sustainable food system (Born & Purcell, 2006). Informed by these theories, this research utilised a methodology founded upon the investigation of three particular topics, with regard to those living in Ireland, namely:

- consumers’ understandings of ‘local food’ and ‘sustainable food’;
- the attributes which consumers see local and sustainable food as embodying;
- the values and priorities of consumers in relation to food, particularly whether local provenance and qualities of sustainability are considered important when deciding which foods to buy.

For this study, a multi-phase strategy was utilised; the second and third phases built upon their predecessors’ findings to refine the research strategy further. This methodology was mixed; the use of both quantitative and qualitative strategies allowed data to be triangulated by providing a richer and more complete array of data which could be cross-checked in a number of ways to ensure consistency of findings (Elwood, 2010). In the social sciences, as the divisions between qualitative and quantitative research are seldom clear-cut, studies increasingly employ such a mixed methodology (Tashakkori & Teddle, 2003). The approach adopted involved the initial gathering of a wide range of baseline information in a preliminary quantitative survey, followed by subsequent qualitative focus groups and interviews which explored these initial findings in greater depth (Figure 1). It should be noted that the survey was conducted as part of a large-scale research project called Consensus (discussed in more detail later) which more broadly focused on household consumption and the key sectors of energy, water and transport, as well as food.
Chapter 3: Methodology

**Surveys**

Objective: provide **baseline data** on consumers’ understandings, values and perceptions as to local and sustainable food.

- Analysis and critical reflection informing strategy in phases 2 & 3

1000 surveys
June 2010-April 2011

**Focus Groups**

Objective: further **investigate** consumers’ understandings, values and perceptions as to local and sustainable food.

- Notable research device: Character-based vignettes (X7) used to indirectly prompt discussion.

6 groups (42 participants)
November-December 2011

**Interviews**

Objective: further investigate consumers’ understandings, values and perceptions as to local and sustainable food, in particular probing ‘supporting our own’ local food over more sustainable non-local food.

- Notable research device: Choice exercises (X3) used to prompt discussion.

28 interviews
August-September 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 1</th>
<th>Phase 2</th>
<th>Phase 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>QUANTITATIVE</td>
<td>QUALITATIVE</td>
<td>QUALITATIVE</td>
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**Figure 1** Simplified diagram of methodological approach

64
Questions which were most pertinent to this research but which simultaneously spoke to the aims of Consensus were inserted into the interview schedule and the resulting data were made available in their raw state⁹.

This research was based on a framework of social constructivism which recognises that ‘...the “rules” by which a social system works are not natural. They are sociological constructions...’ (Krippendorff, 2004, 48) and it is those within a particular social context who are the experts. Analyses based on social constructivism focus on discourses of participants, that is, their subjective views, to explore their understandings of phenomena and how these understandings are constructed (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Qualitative data arising from research with individuals are analysed to identify broad patterns and generate theories. As already established, the concept of the ‘local’ is a social construct (Massey, 2004; Marston, 2000; Delaney, 1997); although ‘sustainability’ is not widely discussed as a social construct, it too is considered to be open to interpretation. In fact, the concept of sustainability is often criticised from the perspective that it is meaningless as actors can apply the interpretation which is most suited to their agenda (Marshall & Toffell, 2005). This suggests that sustainability is not a ‘natural’ concept, but one which is constructed according to the relevant social context.

Taking such a social constructivism position, this research focused on the context of consumers in Ireland and their understandings of local food and sustainable food. It followed previous studies which had investigated local and/or sustainable food systems through the lens of the individual viewpoint (cf. Marsden & Smith, 2005; Sage, 2003; Weatherall et al, 2003). To date, relevant research from Ireland has been limited and largely originates from a non-academic arena; Bord Bia has undertaken the only studies of note on consumer perceptions of local food and issues of sustainability (cf. Bord Bia 2011b, 2009a). These studies, used quantitative methodologies which some in the social sciences argue are limited in their ability to examine complicated and nuanced issues such as perceptions (Hoggart et al, 2002; Bauer & Gaskell, 2000). Considering this and the fact that a social constructivist paradigm inherently favours a qualitative approach (Tashokkori & Teddle, 2003), a mixed methodology which leaned more heavily on qualitative methods of enquiry was utilised in this research.

⁹ See factsheets in Appendices 2 and 3 which detail findings of the Consensus survey which relate to Food Consumption and Food Waste
Chapter 3: Methodology

As mentioned briefly in chapter 1, it is accepted that attempts to design research from which generalisations can be drawn is a worthy effort and indeed some would say that this is the basis of scientific enquiry (Ward Schofield, 2002). In quantitative research, generalisability of findings is of fundamental importance and qualitative research has been criticised from the perspective that, as it depends on small samples, findings cannot be used to build generalised conclusions upon (Myers, 2000; Morse, 1999). One counter-argument is that qualitative research does not aim to be generalisable, as it sees this as unimportant, unachievable or both (Ward Schofield, 2002). Another is that qualitative findings are in fact generalisable when judged according to different criteria than those applied in quantitative studies (Morse, 1999). Smaling (2003) argues for the analogical generalisability of qualitative findings, while Morse (1999) espouses the contribution of qualitative data to forming emergent theories which are applicable beyond the immediate group to similar contexts, known as theoretical generalisability. Therefore, although not generalisable in the traditional sense, qualitative findings are still highly valuable in their own right. While this study adopts a mixed methods approach, it does not, nor does it attempt to, represent a population but instead aims for theoretical generalisability.

3.2 Selection of participants

The research population for this study was all adults living in the Republic of Ireland and the sample frame was all residents of counties Galway and Dublin (See Figure 2) who were aged at least eighteen years old. Each of the three phases used separate but largely consistent sampling strategies in order to both facilitate the progressive nature of this study and to allow for comparability across findings. This involved an equal split of urban and rural participants (Phases 1, 2 and 3) and in Phase 2, an equal split of groups who were Interested and Not Interested in food and sustainability\(^{10}\) (see Table 1). Although no phase of this research could be held to be statistically representative of the entire Irish population, conducting this research allowed for snapshots of information to be obtained from multiple participants across a variety of demographics.

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\(^{10}\) See pages 71-72 for more details on the sampling of ‘Interested’ and ‘Not Interested’ groups
Chapter 3: Methodology

Figure 2 Study sites, Dublin and Galway

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Dublin</th>
<th>Galway</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Interested</th>
<th>Not Interested</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>500</td>
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<tr>
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<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>534</td>
<td>534</td>
<td>536</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Table 1 Simple breakdown of number of participants by sampling strategy
Chapter 3: Methodology

The purposive equal inclusion of town and country dwellers was not, nor did it aim to be, representative of the general population division in Ireland which is 62% urban and 38% rural (CSO, 2012a). Instead, this approach hoped to provide for a wider array of opinions based on the thesis that urban and rural populations differ in their attitudes and behaviours to food and its production due to their degree of proximity, both social and spatial, to sites of food production (Padel & Foster, 2005; Van Liere & Dunlap, 1980). It is accepted that many participants living in urban areas may originally be from rural areas (or vice versa) and this is likely given Ireland’s rapid urbanisation in recent years. However, the semi-structured nature of investigations in Phases 2 and 3 implicitly invited discussions of participants’ place of origin and how this affected their attitudes towards food. This methodology was therefore particularly useful in probing the contextualised nature of food choices.

It is also accepted that a significant proportion of the Dublin participants which were identified as living in rural area were living in suburbia\(^\text{11}\). Dublin’s rural population is small\(^\text{12}\) and this presented difficulties for the recruitment of a sufficient number of research participants. Because of this, all of Dublin’s ‘rural’ participants were sampled from the administrative area with the highest proportion of rural dwellers (Fingal: 7.7% rural (CSO, 2012a)) (See Figure 3). Participants from areas which were until recently rural, such as Lusk, or which are adjacent to rural areas, such as Swords, although perhaps not truly rural, are at least more rural than the urban areas which were sampled.

The sampling strategy for Phase 1 saw households selected using a multi-stage cluster sampling technique. The population within the sampling frame was first divided according to electoral divisions (EDs); the EDs were allocated either urban or rural status and they were further ordered by average household income bands. A random sample of thirty EDs was selected across this stratified sample, ten for each county and lists of domestic dwellings within these areas were obtained through the Geo-Directory Database. The researcher cold-called to these addresses by knocking on doors and

\(^{11}\) As per the 2011 Census of Ireland, suburbs are defined as ‘...the continuation of a distinct population cluster outside its legally defined boundary in which no occupied dwelling is more than...(100)...metres distant from the nearest occupied dwelling...New suburbs or environs are defined only where there are at least twenty occupied dwellings outside the legal boundary within the new limit (CSO, 2012a, 43).

\(^{12}\) According to the Central Statistics Office (CSO, 2012a) just 2.2% (n=28,541) of Dublin’s population (n=1,273,069) live in rural areas.
inviting any eligible adults to participate; if this was not successful either because there was no-one at home or because of refusal, the houses on either side of the selected address were approached. Of the 1000 Phase 1 participants, five hundred were from Dublin and five hundred from Galway (see Figure 4); five hundred lived in urban areas and five hundred in rural areas.

Figure 3 Dublin study site; Co. Fingal, North County Dublin and various towns highlighted
The second phase of research involved the selection of six pre-existing homogenous groups to allow for the comparison of opinions across sub-groups. Heterogeneous groups are often preferred as they can reduce the chance of ‘groupthink’ and it is said that ultimately this can yield a broader discussion (Freeman, 2006). In addition, the risk of power imbalances and the domination of the discussion by one group member may be higher in homogenous groups and this could negate the group process (DeLyser et al, 2010). Homogeneous groups have also been criticised from the perspective that although they are often described as ‘natural’, discussions among such groups occur within the specific context which is created for participants, rather
than from one which pre-existed (Freeman, 2006). Nonetheless, the selection of such ‘natural’ groups is common in environmental and consumer research (cf. Davies, 1999; Holbrook & Jackson, 1996). This strategy is favoured because it is people such as colleagues, teammates and fellow community group members who are precisely those with whom we might ‘naturally’ discuss certain topics (Kitzinger, 1994). Ideas are often formed and decisions made within a specific social context and these can be to an extent recreated by clustering people according to their ‘natural’ social milieu (ibid.). In homogeneous groups, participants can relate to each other’s comments through their shared daily lives, as occurred in this research\(^{13}\) (Kitzinger, 1994). In addition, as fluid interactions are of key importance to focus group discussions, groups with common backgrounds, positions or experiences are thought to encourage this (Morgan, 1996).

Sampling in Phase 2 involved the selection of six groups, three of which existed because of a common interest in issues of food and sustainability and three of which existed for some reason other than this. It is accepted that the population of Ireland is not equally divided according to such interest/non-interest but it was hoped that this strategy would provide a broader range of opinions. It was also hoped that this would enable the researcher to better attribute difference in results (at least in part) to participants’ Interested and Not Interested characteristics. This approach follows previous studies which also purposively sampled participants who were labelled as some version of ‘Interested’ and ‘Not Interested’, for example ‘concerned’ or ‘altruistic’ (cf. Palovitta, 2010; Zepeda & Deal, 2009; Eden et al, 2008a). The commonalities of each group which ultimately took part in Phase 2 were as follows:

- Focus Group 1: sports team members (Not Interested)
- Focus Group 2: employees of a multinational corporation (Not Interested)
- Focus Group 3: post-graduate students of a rural development and sustainable agriculture masters course (Interested)
- Focus Group 4: Transition Towns group (Interested)
- Focus Group 5: active retirement group (Not Interested)
- Focus Group 6: community garden members (Interested)

These groupings were based upon sound theoretical principles. The Interested groups all satisfy criteria to be labelled as communities of practice. Participants interact and learn

\(^{13}\) This is illustrated by the quoted text from the discussion in Focus Group 1 on page 111, specifically Rachel’s comment on the Keogh family wedding.
together through a variety of activities with the shared concern for food systems and shared goal of creating greater food system sustainability (Wenger, 2006). According to Swaroop & Morenoff’s (2006) framework, the Not Interested group in Focus Group 2 can be classified according to the primary professional function of this group (they worked together). Maintaining the use of this same framework, the two other Not Interested groups can be classed according to the nature of group members’ participation which is expressive of place and a common demographic feature: Focus Group 1 participants were all part of the same local ladies’ Gaelic football team; Focus Group 5 participants were all members of a local active retirement group.

Upon critical reflection on the grouping of people and the labelling of these groups, it is accepted that this can be problematic. For example, Tajfel (1982) notes that ‘... (some of the)... membership(s) of certain social groups or categories... are more salient than others...’ (2). In addition, it is recognised that people can be members of several different communities at any one time. Consequently, members of the Interested groups may have had varying levels of interest in the concept of food sustainability, and similarly, there may have been some Not Interested group members who were in fact interested in these issues. This study is conceivably limited by the sampling strategy which fails to enquire of individual participants in Phase 2 how they would label themselves, in terms of interest in food system sustainability. Nonetheless, the potential varying levels of interest within each group are thought to enrich rather than detract from the value of data arising from focus group discussions.

For each group which was identified, a gatekeeper was contacted and invited to convene a group of participants. A key criticism of gatekeepers is that their control may be exerted in a negative way so as to unduly limit or filter the participants involved and the data provided (Broadhead & Rist, 1973). However, the value of gatekeepers cannot be underestimated (Jenkins, 2004) and in this research, gatekeepers were accessed using information obtained either through existing networks or from public sources, for example on the groups’ websites.

The third and final phase of research drew participants from the sample which had taken part in Phase 1, strategically hoping for a high response rate to invitations due to the pre-awareness of the context of the research and what was required of participants. One hundred and five of the one thousand survey respondents had consented to be contacted for participation in further research and this sample then
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underwent a multi-scale clustering according to county and urban or rural location in order to allow a roughly equal selection across both categories. The fifty-six survey respondents who were invited to participate were equally and randomly selected from these clusters (fourteen from each). In order to ensure a variety of voices, approximately one third of those who were invited to participate were men; the chosen proportion reflects the division of household responsibility for food shopping in Ireland (NCA, 2013). The twenty-eight people who were eventually interviewed to a certain extent selected themselves as the sampling strategy in this phase relied on their accepting this invitation (Babbie, 2010). The location (Dublin/Galway; urban/rural) of each of the twenty-eight interviewees is illustrated in Figure 5.

![Figure 5 Breakdown of Phase 3 interviewee location by interview number](image)

In order to facilitate recruitment in Phases 2 and 3, participants were offered compensation in the form of a voucher to the value of ten euros (focus groups) and twenty euros (interviews). In research ‘payment for participation’ can be highly controversial (Lemmens & Elliott, 2009) and in this study it was necessary to consider whether the provision of vouchers as compensation presented an ethical dilemma. In fact, it may only pose a problem when the compensation contributes significantly to household income and therefore a contextualised approach to evaluating the relative morality of ‘payment for participation’ is necessary (Hammett & Sporton, 2012). If a
refusal to participate is perceived as resulting in an unaffordable loss, the offering of such an incentive may amount to coercion, according to Scott-Jones (2000), and those who are extremely poor are therefore more vulnerable to such coercion. In this study, the offer of vouchers was not thought to be exploitative as these vouchers appeared to be an added incentive rather than a critical factor in inducing participation.

It could be argued that it is of vital importance to compensate participants for their time (Liamputtong, 2011). To do so recognises the sacrifice participants make and can act as a symbol of respect (ibid.). In this study compensation was framed as a ‘thank you’ for participants’ time and effort, rather than as a payment; it was made clear that nothing additional was expected of participants. As food was the topic under discussion, participants were offered a voucher for their chosen supermarket. Being cognisant that some participants may not have sourced their food in supermarkets, it was made clear that a voucher could be provided for some other type of retailer. Focus Group 6 involved members of a community garden and the gatekeeper who helped to convene this group suggested the gifting of vouchers for a hardware shop in the hope that these would be pooled for the benefit of the garden.

3.3 Generating primary data: three phases

3.3.1 Phase 1: Surveys

A survey was utilised as the first tool of investigation in this study. It was employed in order to gather a large amount of numerical and statistical data on the three topics which inform the research objectives, as set out in the Section 3.1. Surveys, it could be argued, are the single most commonly used tool to analyse consumers’ attitudes towards foods (cf. Gottschalk & Leistner, 2013; Herrera & Blanco, 2011; Bellows et al, 2010). They have been used in the past in the Irish context; however they have also been critiqued for being extremely limited (cf. O’Donovan & McCarthy’s (2002) examination of consumer perceptions of organic meat). In addition, Bord Bia has conducted a number of studies utilising surveys but the resultant findings have limited applicability, due to their non-academic nature. In the context of this study, a large scale quantitative survey was considered an appropriate tool for use as baseline data on attitudes were required and questions were included that had not been previously posed in the Irish context. A questionnaire survey was preferred as this tool provides a quick and relatively inexpensive way of discovering the characteristics and beliefs of a
population through the use of a representative sample (Bell, 2010). The findings of this
survey alone go some way towards addressing the aims of this study, but these data also
acted as a foundation upon which the following stages of research could be based.
Surveys are often criticised from the perspective that one cannot learn about social
phenomena or explain social processes and patterns through their use, in particular the
meaning of attitudes and behaviours (de Vaus, 2004). This suggests that surveys cannot
offer a wholeness of data and it was for this reason that survey findings were built upon
in this study using two separate qualitative phases of research.

Five questions (Q22; Q23; Q24a; Q24e; Q24g) were inserted into the Consensus
survey\(^\text{14}\) and were designed to gauge the understandings, values and perceptions of
householders in Ireland of food. (For a more detailed explanation of the formulation and
design of this phase of research, see Appendix 4):

Q22. What is the most important issue for you when you buy food? (Please rank
top three)
1. Price
2. Health benefits or nutritional content
3. Where/how food is produced (i.e. fair trade/organic/Irish etc.)
4. Taste or flavour
5. Brand
6. That it’s easy to cook (i.e. convenience food or frozen food)
7. Other (please specify)

Q23. What do you consider ‘local food’ to be? (Please choose one option)
1. Food available at a farmers’ market
2. Food produced within a 30km radius of where I live
3. Food produced within my county
4. Food produced within my country
5. Food produced within Europe
6. Other (please specify)
7. Don’t know

\(^\text{14}\) The Consensus (Consumption, Environment and Sustainability) Project is a four year large scale
project involving collaboration between Trinity College, Dublin and the National University of
Ireland, Galway. This study is the first systematic research project to examine sustainable
consumption in an Irish context. A large quantitative lifestyle survey was devised and used to
gather data in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland on four key areas of household
consumption which significantly impact on the environment: food, energy, water and transport.
The questionnaire explored people’s attitudes and behaviours towards sustainable household
consumption and sustainable lifestyles. In addition to obtaining key data regarding household
behaviours in the areas of mobility, food, energy and water use, the survey also examined
respondents’ attitudes towards the environment, towards environmental responsibility as well as
their attitudes towards perceived levels of environmental control, perceptions of quality of life,
and their understanding of what constitutes a luxury or a necessity in daily life (Lavelle and Fahy,
2012).
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Q24. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
(On a scale: Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Don’t know)

a. I pay attention to where and how the food I buy is produced
b. I trust eco-labels
g. Food that is organic or Fair Trade is too expensive to buy

Due to the large scale of the Consensus survey, it underwent an extensive process of piloting over a period of months in early 2010; at this stage, the choice options in Question 22 were edited and streamlined for the sake of brevity. The survey was conducted in Galway between June and September 2010, and in Dublin between January and April 2011. Surveys took place on the door-step and took approximately fifteen minutes to complete. They were administered in softcopy format on a portable tablet computer which allowed participants’ responses to be inputted immediately as each question was asked. Participants who consented to be contacted for further research were noted and the sample population for Phase 3 was drawn from this group.

3.3.1.1 Reflections and limitations (Phase 1, Survey)

Upon reflection on the design and implementation of this stage of research, some weaknesses could be identified. Due to the complexity of consumers’ understandings of local food, investigating its meaning may have benefitted from first using an open question which invited spontaneous responses; then this could have been followed by Question 23 (What do you consider local food to be?). However, due to the collaborative nature of this survey and its overall length (over sixty questions in total), it was not practical to add such a question. The limitations of Question 23 became particularly evident following analysis of data arising from Phase 1. However, as a result of this, more open and probing questions on participants’ understandings of local food were included in Phases 2 and 3. Phase 1 was limited as it failed to investigate what participants understood the term sustainable food to mean and this term is of course also fundamental to this study. Large-scale questionnaire surveys do not allow for the collection of a richness of data, which the explanation of participants’ understanding of sustainable food may have required. Previous large scale surveys which examined consumers’ attitudes to food have attempted to investigate consumers’ understandings of the term ‘sustainable’ by offering a choice of definitions (Bord Bia, 2011b). It is not thought that the findings from such a question are particularly informative and
qualitative research is more appropriate in probing such a complex term. Nonetheless, inserting a question on the meaning of sustainable food would have provided key baseline data upon which to base further investigations in Phases 2 and 3.

Criticisms of the limiting nature of closed response survey questions can be applied also to Question 22. Although the choices given in Question 22 were formulated following analysis of literature detailing similar previous studies, key issues such as ‘Quality’ were not included. Participants were free to give an ‘Other’ choice and many did opt for ‘Quality’ as an important consideration when choosing foods. Nonetheless, if ‘Quality’ had been added to the list of closed options, the incidence of participants choosing this would possibly have been higher. Investigations of consumer priorities in subsequent phases of the research attempted to address this deficiency. In addition, the ‘where’ and ‘how’ in the third choice option (and in Question 24a) is problematic. This question was designed with the where of local or non-local provenance and the how of organic or conventional production in mind. When taking part in this survey, some participants were given this information in the form of an explanatory ‘for instance’. However, it is entirely plausible that the where and how they had in mind related to other issues, such as terroir or politics (where), or kosher or halal production (how). Furthermore, of critical importance in this study was the possible conflation of issues of sustainability with local provenance in participants’ minds. Therefore, to amalgamate the issues of where and how food is produced in one choice is potentially leading and is also unhelpful. Although readers of the forthcoming chapters may be cognisant of these weaknesses, they should also be aware that efforts were made to overcome these limitations in Phases 2 and 3 of this research.

3.3.2 Phase 2: Focus groups

The second phase of research in this study utilised focus groups to build upon baseline data gathered in the first phase. Using a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods results in robust findings and this strategy has been widely employed in a number of studies to date which focus on consumers’ attitudes and behaviours in relation to local and sustainable food (cf. Megicks et al, 2012; Wirth et al, 2011; Kemp et al, 2010). In this study, the first specific goal of these focus groups was to further probe topics which had been investigated in Phase 1, triangulating data and ensuring their veracity. Secondly, it hoped to fill gaps in knowledge which became apparent following analysis of data arising from Phase 1. Thirdly, conducting these focus groups extended the scope of the study to
more broadly investigate the understandings, values and perceptions of consumers in Ireland as they relate to local food and sustainable food. Due to the nature of large scale quantitative questionnaires, it was not possible for a richness and quality of detail to be obtained from participants in Phase 1. In addition, due to the characteristics of the particular survey which was utilised, that is, it being part of a larger and separate research project, the amount and type of questions which could have been included was limited. However, not alone was the focus group schedule designed according to Phase 1 findings, it was also particularly informed by literature which focused on studies of consumer food decision-making (cf. Dentoni et al, 2009; Kjaernes & Holm, 2006; Paavola, 2001) and consumer perceptions of local and sustainable food (cf. Darby et al, 2008; Selfa et al, 2008; La Trobe, 2001).

Focus groups originated in consumer research, working on the recognition that consumer decisions are often made in a social context (Robinson, 1999). The emphasis is therefore on the ‘joint construction of meaning’ (Bryman, 2008, 474) and focus groups aim to exploit group processes which encourage participants to explain themselves to each other, which does not occur when conducting interviews (Kitzinger, 1995). The focus group was a particularly fitting research method in this study as the participants were consumers while the topics of focus were socially constructed. Following Davis (2013), focus groups are used ‘to gain insight into participants’ natural vocabulary’ (55) and the vocabulary of interest here related to understandings and perceptions of local and sustainable food. They can be used in a wide variety of circumstances and studies: Selfa & Qazi (2005) employed focus groups to study production and consumption networks in local food systems; Weatherall et al (2003) investigated consumer food attitudes and behaviours using focus groups at a preliminary stage; and Zepeda & Levitan-Reid (2004) utilised focus groups to explore the beliefs and buying behaviours (or not) of consumers regarding local food.

Two distinct but related strategies were employed in order to elicit discussion on the core topics: asking direct questions and using more indirect character-based prompts in the form of vignettes. According to Hughes & Huby (2008, p.382), ‘Vignettes consist of text, images or other forms of stimuli to which research participants are asked to respond. They can be presented in a number of different forms, ranging from short written prompts to live events.’ Vignettes are used in social research when seeking to understand people’s attitudes, perceptions and beliefs, particularly with regard to
sensitive subjects (Caro et al, 2011; Rungtusanatham et al, 2011). Although the vignettes in this study did not deal with sensitive topics they did allow participants to state their level of agreement with a character’s socially undesirable opinion or behaviour without expressly laying claim to these. Sirieix et al (2010) utilised a similar methodology (a ‘projection technique’ which asked participants to react to an imaginary conversation between three consumers) to analyse the tension which consumers feel when choosing between local or organic food. The vignettes of this study allowed previously asked questions to be rephrased in unfamiliar ways to test the consistency of responses received. A further benefit is that this format offered an interesting and accessible way to investigate a broad range of topics, some of which were conceptually difficult, for example, sustainability (Boogard et al, 2008).

Focus groups in this study began with three questions, seven character vignettes were then discussed, and finally three more questions were asked (for a more detailed explanation of the formulation and design of this phase of research, see Appendix 5). This approach was flexible and began with simple questions to ease participants into the discussion, emphasising the value of contributions based on experiences and opinions and establishing them as experts. The vignettes and questions became progressively focused as the discussion progressed. The questions and vignettes which were utilised follow here:

1. Which things are most important to you when choosing food?
2. Different people have different definitions of ‘local food’. What do you think it is?
3. It is argued that the current food system has many problems and can’t last – that it’s unsustainable. What do you think ‘sustainable food’ is?

Vignettes

1. Sonia does think about what she buys but she finds some labels confusing: although she’s clear on the meaning of ‘Fair Trade’, if it says ‘sustainable’, it’s not clear what this means. If it is labelled as ‘local’ or ‘Irish’, these foods are sometimes not even really from Ireland. Because she’s so unsure, she’ll often just give up and buy her favourite brand or the cheapest or the tastiest food.
2. Enda won’t buy Irish food because he thinks that it’s low quality and more expensive. He knows that a lot of people say Irish is better but there’s no way of actually knowing this – even after you eat it, you can’t
tell if the animal was treated well, if artificial chemicals were used or if
it’s better for you – and you’ve spent all that money.
3. Liz wants to support local farmers, jobs, and the local community,
especially since her husband was made redundant last year, so she tries
to buy local food. However, with the inconvenience of the local farmers’
market and how little time she has, she does most of her shopping in
the local Tesco.
4. Sinead, like all her friends, tries to buy ‘sustainable’ and ‘local’ food as
much as possible, but she is often put off doing this because she
couldn’t stick to local only – in that case she’d never have chocolate or
tea, and things like tomatoes and strawberries would only be available
to her in summer.
5. Mark likes local food because it’s better for the environment and more
rustic and homemade – it’s good, honest, simple and healthy food like
we used to have in the past before we all went mad for baguettes and
sun-dried tomatoes. Also, when he shops at the farmers’ market he
knows where and how the food he buys was produced – something he’s
been very worried about since the Mad Cow Disease scare in the ’90s.
6. Emily doesn’t think that what people buy is the problem; the people
who produce and transport the food should be responsible. Even if what
people buy had some sort of effect, what one woman in Ireland buys
isn’t going to make any difference.
7. Alan is sick of the constant promotion to ‘Buy Irish’ as some sort of
patriotic act to help the Irish economy. As Ireland is now an open,
modern and cosmopolitan country, he thinks these ‘Buy Irish’ campaigns
are too ‘parochial’. Why do Irish producers deserve his support over
poor African producers? And why would he need to help the already
rich Irish farmers who get lots of grants and subsidies?

4. What do you think are the similarities and differences between local food
and sustainable food?
5. If offered a choice between a ‘sustainable food’ and a ‘local food’, which
would you prefer and why?
6. All things considered, do you think ‘local food’ is the same as ‘sustainable
food’?

The questions spoke directly to the four core topics of this study, as did the
vignettes. Built on a composite of themes which arose following the analysis of the
Phase 1 data and the relevant literature, the vignettes were in the form of imaginary
characters. For example the character of Liz (#3) was concerned with a number of issues
which were based on emergent themes in the relevant literature: a preference for local
food (Onken et al, 2011); the desire to support local producers and farmers in their
livelihoods (Kemp et al, 2010); a concern for local, regional and national economic
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sustainability (Thomas & McIntosh, 2013); and the barrier of inconvenient sales fora which are inconsistent with the pressures of modern life (Megicks et al, 2012). Participants were asked to discuss the extent to which they agreed with or could identify with the vignette characters’ attitudes and behaviours. Vignettes were drafted and revised a number of times, morphing in size and number before seven short vignettes were finalised. These vignettes were then sent to key food stakeholders in order to obtain feedback\textsuperscript{15}.

The focus group schedule was piloted with a pre-existing homogenous group of eight people and this highlighted the need for one change in Vignette 5 (Mark). Previously, Mad Cow Disease had been referred to as BSE, the acronym of its correct scientific designation Bovine spongiform encephalopathy. One pilot focus group participant was unfamiliar with the term BSE as she was a child at the time of this crisis and she lived in Australia, a place which was largely unaffected by the scandal. Therefore, this change was made in the awareness that other focus group participants may similarly have been unfamiliar with the title BSE due to non-native nationality or young age.

The discussions took place in November and December 2011 and all, but one, were conducted in purpose-built meeting spaces. The focus groups ranged in length from sixty to seventy-five minutes and all discussions were recorded using a digital audio recording device. To augment the discussion of the vignette characters, each participant was provided with a copy of the vignette text. It should be noted that demographic information was not collected in a systematic manner at this phase. However, demographic information was noted if it became known throughout the course of the formal discussion, or before or after in a more informal context. For example, if participants discussed bringing their children to school, it was known then that they had dependent children under eighteen years old. Furthermore, if this information was somehow obvious it was also noted, for example participants in Focus Group 2 were a group of workmates and the discussion took place in their workplace. Therefore, it was clear not only that these participants were employed but also, in this example, that they were all professionals.

\textsuperscript{15} One particular stakeholder from Teagasc (the Irish Agriculture and Food Development Authority) recommended only one change. She advised the omission of Parma ham from Vignette 5 (Mark) due to its status as a food with Protected Designation of Origin. It was thought that this may unnecessarily complicate the discussion and consequently, Parma ham was replaced with baguettes.
3.3.2.1 Reflections and limitations (Phase 2, Focus groups)

Phase 2 of this research was devised with full recognition of the limitations of Phase 1, striving to address its deficiencies while also attempting to minimise any further methodological hazards. However, it is to be expected that some limitations will almost always become apparent following the completion of a study and reflection on Phase 2 suggested that investigations of participants’ understandings and perceptions of the concept of sustainable food warranted analysis. It was clear that the first two Not Interested groups (FG1:D16, FG2:DUN) had difficulty in understanding what sustainable food was. Despite this, discussions of the extent to which sustainable food was similar to or preferred over local food proceeded and the usefulness of data arising from these discussions therefore may be in doubt. However, it is important to note that this methodological weakness was recognised prior to the completion of the third and final focus group discussion with a Not Interested group (FG5:GRN). When it became clear in this discussion that participants did not understand the concept of sustainable food, it was explained as being made up of three constituent parts (environment, society and economy) as per the Brundtland definition of sustainability (White, 2013). In consequence, the ensuing discussion arguably proved more fruitful than those in Focus Groups 1 and 2. The reflection that it was necessary to present participants, especially those who were labelled as Not Interested, with an explanation of sustainable food before attempting to discuss this concept in a meaningful way was carried through into the third phase of this study. In Phase 3, all participants were presented with a definition of a ‘sustainable agri-food system’ before any attempt was made to discuss this topic.

Some difficulties were encountered while trying to complete this phase of study. Firstly, recruitment of participants initially proved difficult; the meetings of two community groups were attended in an effort to recruit participants but ultimately this was unsuccessful. It was recognised that this was possibly due to the outsider status of the researcher (Lim et al, 2012). The importance of developing a relationship with a gatekeeper who could facilitate with recruitment was evident and this was the strategy which was subsequently employed (Jenkins, 2004). A second issue was the unevenness of group members’ contributions. This was particularly prevalent in Focus Group 6 (GRI) when one participant, Lisa, dominated the discussion. In addition, although focus groups can theoretically contain up to twelve members (Carlson & Glenton, 2011), Focus Group

16 D=Dublin; G=Galway; U=Urban; R=Rural; I=Interested; N=Not interested
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5 (GRN) had ten participants and it was felt that this was problematic from the perspective that it was difficult for all members to express their views in the time given (Frey & Fontana, 1991). However, this is not to say that the data gathered in Focus Groups 5 and 6 were not robust. Group discussions by their nature will always involve more and less vocal members, and this is a recognised weakness of using pre-existing groups (Fern, 2001). Nonetheless, the strengths of using pre-existing groups include participants feeling more comfortable speaking around people they know (ibid.). To begin each discussion, participants were informed that the moderator might invite contributions from particular members if it were felt they had not had the opportunity to do so by that point. It was felt that such a caveat minimised the incidence of some participants dominating discussions. Digressions off topic, when they infrequently occurred, required the moderator to re-direct the discussion to the key issues as soon as was possible and this was always done in a diplomatic manner.

3.3.3 Phase 3: Interviews

The third phase of research utilised semi-structured interviews, following the lead of previous studies in this area (cf. Meyer et al, 2012; Blake et al, 2010; de Krom & Moll, 2010). Although those in other academic disciplines have used quantitative methods such as surveys to investigate beliefs and attitudes, the limitations of this are recognised among geographers and social scientists (Holliday, 2007). It is argued that due to the complex nature of personal beliefs and attitudes, in-depth qualitative research methods such as interviews allow researchers to explore complex and value-laden issues in a manner which is likely to expose agendas, political views and biases (Robson, 2002). Therefore, this phase of research hoped to test the consistency of responses from the first two phases, to address deficiencies in knowledge which were apparent following analysis of the second phase of research, and to further investigate new and/or important issues which arose. Multiphase qualitative methodologies have been used in previous similar studies (cf. Blake et al, 2010; Moore, 2006; Padel & Foster, 2005). The specific combination of focus group and interviews, it is argued, provides for a depth and breadth of knowledge which may not be obtained in using alternative combinations (Morgan, 1996).

The structured element of these interviews provides for the same questions to be asked of all interviewees, using similar wording thus allowing for data to be easily compared and ensuring the rigour of findings (Barriball & While, 1994). However, there
is a great deal of flexibility to this structure and these questions guide the process while still allowing for some deviation from the schedule (Longhurst, 2010). This provides for greater detail in answers and ultimately, produces richer and more illuminating data. During the interview stage of this research, if participants made statements which were considered interesting due to their uniqueness in relation to the answers of other interviewees, these statements were explored.

The fourth question in this phase of research used choice exercises which, similar to the character-based scenario prompts of Phase 2, examined previously questioned topics in a manner which was novel and engaging, testing the consistency of statements. Choice modelling originated with efforts to trace food preferences and is preferred to rating questions in which order of preference is captured, but relative importance is not (Hu et al, 2012; Yue & Tong, 2009; Darby et al, 2008). However, strictly speaking, choice modelling involves a large-scale quantitative research protocol which this study does not aim to employ. Choice models are often used within the forum of economic study (cf. Blamey et al, 1999) but amongst social scientists their use has been contested (Bennett & Blamey, 2001). Nonetheless, choice experiments utilising tools such as laddering exercises have been used in previous studies which address topics similar to those of this thesis (cf. Onozaka & Thilmany McFadden, 2011; Wirth et al, 2011; Tonsor & Shupp, 2009).

However, Questions 4a, 4b and 4c are framed here as qualitative research tools in the form of choice exercises. Just as with the vignettes, they are not used with the goal of investigating participants’ stated preferences, but simply aim to prompt discussion. To elicit perceptions, values and motivations across the food chain, the choice exercises presented participants with a fresh product (tomatoes), a processed non-perishable product (tea) and a processed perishable product (cheese). Choice exercises allow interviewees to better imagine themselves in the real world situation of shopping when they choose foods and trade off different values. The simulation of some elements of the shopping experience is thought to lessen the risk of a gap between reported and actual behaviour (Stayman & Hagerty, 1985).

In total, the interview schedule comprised of five core questions, one of which was subdivided into three choice exercises (for a more detailed explanation of the formulation and design of this phase of research, see Appendix 6):
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1. When you’re choosing which foods to buy, how important is the fact that it is local or not?

2. ‘A sustainable food system is one which produces food in an environmentally sound, socially responsible and economically viable way, allowing for good food to continue to be produced into the future.’ Considering this definition, how important is it for you that a food is sustainable or not, when choosing which foods to buy?

3. Some consider ‘local food’ and ‘sustainable food’ to be the same thing. To what extent would you agree with this?

4. I’m going to show you some pairs of foods and tell you some details about them. Please tell me which you’d prefer to buy and why?

   a. Here are two packets of tomatoes. Both packets of tomatoes are the same price and look, and taste the same. Which would you prefer to buy and why?

      The one on the left is grown outdoors in Spain and grown organically – this way of growing can be better for the environment as it doesn’t use synthetic pesticides and fertilisers which can damage the soil and habitats, and pollute the water table, and they don’t need energy to heat greenhouses. However, they are flown to Ireland and then trucked to distribution centres and supermarkets which causes a lot of pollution. The tomatoes on the right are grown in Ireland in greenhouses and are not organic – this way of growing is not very good for the environment as it uses pesticides and fertilisers which can be environmentally damaging, as is the carbon produced in the heating of the glasshouses. However, the transportation distance between the producer and the end consumer is much shorter and perhaps less environmentally damaging than the Spanish tomatoes’ journey.

   b. Here are two boxes of tea. The tea on the right has won good taste awards and is 30c cheaper than the tea on the left at €3.19. Which would you prefer to buy and why?

      The one on the left is a well known Irish brand which is part of the Love Irish Food brand, which guarantees a product’s ‘Irishness’. The tea obviously isn’t grown in Ireland (it’s grown in East Africa and South Asia) but it is processed and packaged here. This product doesn’t have Fair Trade certification which means the tea in this product is traded conventionally; the developing world producers of the tea in this product may not get a fair price or have decent working conditions. The tea on the right is a lesser known British brand which processes and packages its tea in Britain, although it is also grown in East Africa and South Asia. This product does have Fair Trade certification which guarantees that those involved in the production of its tea are provided with a fair price for their labour and product and have decent working conditions.

   c. Here are two cheeses. Which would you prefer to buy and why?

      The one on the left is made in Ireland, for Tesco and sold there and in other large multinational supermarkets. The milk used to make this cheese
is sold by Irish farmers to Tesco’s manufacturer for less than the cost of production. It is a cheddar cheese made from pasteurised cow’s milk and costs £2.95. The cheese on the right is made in the Cotswolds in England by farmer, Henry Brown. The cheese is sold directly by Henry to specialty shops where it can be bought. It is a cheese made from unpasteurised goat’s milk, was Supreme Champion at the British Cheese awards in 2010 and costs €5.20 for a comparable amount.

5. ‘People should look after their own local and Irish producers by buying their food before they start to worry about things like the environment or poor foreign producers’. To what extent do you agree with or identify with this statement?

All five questions were designed to address the three topics which were identified as key to achieving the goals of this research. Questions 4 and 5 particularly aimed to target views which appeared prominently in the previous phase of research. Following the formulation of all questions and choice exercise prompts, feedback was obtained and recommended changes were made. For example, the statement in Question 5 initially used the first person plural voice which was advised as being too strong in tone. Due to the perhaps social undesirability of such an opinion, it was thought that to make the language less personal may make this view more acceptable (Table 2). The interview schedule was then piloted twice and transcribed, and following analysis of these transcripts, one substantive change was made to the choice exercise in Question 4c to alter the stated product qualities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original</th>
<th>Revised</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘We should look after our own local and Irish producers by buying their food before we start to worry about things like the environment or poor foreign producers.’</td>
<td>‘People should look after their own local and Irish producers by buying their food before they start to worry about things like the environment or poor foreign producers.’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 Phase 3: Evolution of statement in Question 5

The interviews were conducted in August and September 2012 and most interviews took place in participants’ homes, with others taking place in local locations, including coffee shops or hotel foyers. The interviews lasted on average thirty minutes and were recorded using a digital audio recording device. The definition in Question 2
Chapter 3: Methodology

and the quote in Question 5 were both presented orally and using a visual prompt. The explanatory prompts of Question 4 were dictated by the interviewer but the interviewees were provided with supplementary textual and visual prompts to allow them to process this information (see Appendix 7).

3.3.3.1 Reflections and limitations (Phase 3, Interviews)

Choice exercises could be critiqued at length as their use is sometimes controversial but the focus here will be on the limitations of the design of the three choice exercises in this study. These exercises were developed with the goal of encouraging participants to discuss the trade-off of local foods which are less sustainable and non-local, more sustainable alternatives. Although choice Exercise 3 provided a choice between two foods which differed according to provenance and sustainability, they also differed greatly according to a number of other key issues such as price, taste and quality. Many participants chose to focus on these elements in discussing which food they would choose and despite efforts to redirect participants towards the elements which were critical to this study, the third choice exercise proved less useful than it had been hoped.

A second concern about this phase of study was the range of views gathered. The small number of participants in this phase (n=28) could not represent the Irish population, nor did it aim to do so. However, it was hoped that a snapshot of the perceptions and values of local and sustainable food of a range of people could be explored. The sampling strategy for this phase purposively sought out both urban and rural participants, and both women and men. However it failed to reach those who are lowest and highest paid and those who had completed more than lower levels of formal education. How much one earns influences which factors are prioritised when making purchasing decisions but also it is thought to affect one’s perceptions and values (Drewnowski & Darmon, 2005) and educational attainment is said to affect one’s social norms (Huang, 2009). As such, data arising from investigations in Phase 3 may fail to represent the unique views of these members of society, but as previously stated this was not a stated aim of this project. However, the members of such segments of society are small in number. Of all Phase 1 survey participants just 6% (n=55) and 2% (n=17) fell within the lowest and highest income brackets respectively, and just 5% (n=50) completed no formal education beyond primary level. Of those who were invited to participate (n=56), two were in the lowest income bracket (€0-€18,999) but due to participant self-selection, they did not accept the invitation. Purposive recruitment can
therefore not be fully controlled by the researcher (Bloor, 2001). Nonetheless, if this research were to be re-done, greater efforts would be made to include participants with extremes of income and lower levels of educational attainment.

3.4 Analysis

Grounded theory is a systematic methodological approach to analysis which aims to generate theory from data, using a prescribed set of procedures (Lunenberg & Irby, 2008). This framework, the most popular in quantitative data analysis, was used in the case of this research. Instead of beginning this study in the traditional manner with a hypothesis, a Straussian approach to grounded theory was applied and a variety of concepts (rather than a theory) was reverse engineered from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Grounded theory is iterative in nature; it involves the process of critical reflection on data as they are collected, analysed and the findings incorporated into the next stage of data collection (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). As such, it is more creative and open than traditional rigid research contexts as these procedures allow for the generation of results and findings which are closer to lived experience and the realities of the social scene being researched (ibid.). Analysis of the data in this research therefore took place in a chronological order: data arising from each phase were analysed directly following collection, allowing for results to inform the formulation of each subsequent phase.

In the first phase of research, an Access interface was used for the inputting of data directly during the administration of the survey. This facilitated the data to be easily exported afterwards for analysis. This interface was developed prior to the administration of the survey and was based on a coding system which was developed for each question. Once the data had been gathered, they were coded numerically, recorded on an Excel spreadsheet and cleaned to remove any user entry errors or inaccuracies. The data were then exported to a Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) file for statistical analysis.

Uni-variate frequency analysis was undertaken on the five survey questions which pertained to this research. As respondents could choose only one option in Question 23, these choices were analysed to show the proportionate distribution of understandings of the term local food. Question 22 was a little more complex as respondents were asked to rank their top three considerations when making food
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purchasing decisions. The frequency of number one, two and three rankings for each factor was established and then collated to result in a number of top three rankings for each consideration. For example, of the one thousand respondents in Galway and Dublin, 762 ranked *health* within their top three considerations. Questions 22 and 23 both contained an open element allowing respondents to specify an *Other* answer beyond those provided. These answers were analysed qualitatively using an open content analysis technique, a task which was not overly onerous due to the low numbers involved in such responses (sixty-nine and thirty respectively). Questions 24a, 24e and 24g all underwent the same analysis whereby the frequency of respondents’ levels of agreement with each statement was measured to show their proportionate spread.

In order to understand how respondents’ understandings, values and perceptions of local and sustainable food may have been related to other variables, a bivariate analysis was undertaken. Each of the five relevant questions was cross-tabulated with demographic and attitudinal survey data to provide another layer of information. For example, correlations were examined between urban or rural location and prioritising of ‘how and where food is produced’ when making food purchasing decisions. Investigations were also undertaken to examine if correlations existed between participants’ level of concern for the environment and the extent to which organic and fair trade food were perceived as being too expensive to buy. Although the research population for this study was all adults living in the Republic of Ireland, just as with Phases 2 and 3, this first phase of research did not actually aim to be representative of this population. It is for this reason that tests relating to inferential statistics were not carried out here. This being said, the sample size of one thousand is thought to safely represent the population of both Dublin and Galway combined (N= 1,521,153) and the Republic of Ireland (N=4,581,269) (CSO, 2012b), based on the normal confidence level of 95% and a 1.9% margin of error (Brase & Brase, 2012).

Focus groups are commonly criticised for having too much researcher bias which may result in subjective data which is difficult to interpret (Hoggart et al, 2002). However, it is also argued that when analysis of data arising from focus group discussions (and interviews) is rigorous and transparent, no such criticism can be applied. Due to the nature of data arising from focus groups and interviews, all efforts to interpret them amount to an analysis of content (Stewart et al, 2007). Approaches to such analyses take a variety of forms, namely the ‘scissor-and-sort’ technique, which is
often criticised for relying too much on the judgement of a single analyst (Bickman & Rog, 2009); narrative analysis, which begins with a set of principles and aims to exhaust the text of all references to these principles; thematic analysis, involving the application of themes and subthemes to the data, the themes arising from a thorough reading and re-reading of the research transcripts and field-notes; and content analysis. According to Berg & Lune (2012), ‘Content analysis is a careful, detailed, systematic examination and interpretation of a particular body of material in an effort to identify patterns, themes, biases and meanings...’ (303). Content analysis is seen as one of the most important research techniques in the social sciences (Krippendorff, 2004) and is often unquestioningly presented as how qualitative analysis is ‘done’ (Barbour, 2007). It was chosen as the most appropriate method of analysis for this research and was utilised to analyse the data arising from both Phases 2 and 3.

Following the traditional practice employed in the majority of qualitative and social scientific research, all focus group discussions and interviews conducted in this study were transcribed verbatim by the researcher, providing a large amount of raw text for analysis. Transcribing verbatim contributes to the reliability and quality of research and enables the reader to check the accuracy of contentions and to trace conclusions (Crabbé and Leroy, 2008). To protect participants’ anonymity during the focus group discussions and interviews, participants were given pseudonyms\textsuperscript{17}.

Before analysis could begin, it was necessary to decide the appropriate level of analysis, that is, whether the text would be unitised into words, sentences, sequences of sentences or whole dialogues. This decision is usually driven by the purpose of the research and the researcher’s ability to achieve reliability in the coding system (Rourke et al, 2001). The unit of study in data arising from Phases 2 and 3 was set at sentences or sequences of sentences and included short dialogues among focus group participants. The text was sampled to remove incidences where participants digressed off the topics which were central to this study\textsuperscript{18}. This was achieved by assessing whether the text

\textsuperscript{17} A full account of the demographic information regarding Phase 2 and Phase 3 participants is available in Appendix 8, listed alphabetically according to pseudonym.

\textsuperscript{18} For example Aileen (I21:DU) highlighted her interest in ethical fashion (illustrated by the quote below) and although broadly contextualising her views regarding sustainability, this segment of text was not analysed due to its lack of relation to the key research objectives of this study.

... well first of all I should probably tell you that one of the girls who lives here...we’re best friends and we went to college together. Our primary degree is in fashion – she has her own label and it’s a sustainable, ethical initiative, so it’s all about recycling, up-cycling and making consumers aware...of how clothes end up in landfill and stuff like
answered a question which was key to this study (Table 3, Column A). The remaining text in its organised format is only then construed as data and ready for analysis (Stewart et al, 2007). It should be noted that in both Phases 2 and 3, analysis was structured under headings derived from the key questions (Table 3, Column B).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A: Key Questions</th>
<th>B: Analysis Headings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus Group</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Where do participants get their food from?</td>
<td>• Buying behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What factors are important for participants when choosing which foods to buy?</td>
<td>• Factors influencing food purchasing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What do participants understand ‘local food’ to be?</td>
<td>• Meaning of ‘local food’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What do participants understand ‘sustainable food’ to be?</td>
<td>• Meaning of ‘sustainable food’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Which qualities do participants attribute to local food?</td>
<td>• Qualities attributed to local food and sustainable food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Which issues might prevent participants from purchasing (more) local or sustainable food?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How do participants consider local and sustainable food to be similar or differ?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Do participants prefer local food or sustainable food?</td>
<td>• Barriers to the purchase of local food and sustainable food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Do participants think that local food and sustainable food are the same thing?</td>
<td>• Similarities and differences between local food and sustainable food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Preference for local food or sustainable food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Conflation of local food and sustainable food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interview</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Where do interviewees get their food from?</td>
<td>• Buying behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How important for interviewees is buying local food?</td>
<td>• Importance of buying local food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What do interviewees understand ‘local food’ to be?</td>
<td>• Meaning of ‘local food’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Do interviewees often buy local food?</td>
<td>• Purchasing of local food</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*that. And how much cotton (is used) and who gets...(the most profits)...the whole process of how a T-shirt is made. [Aileen, I21:DU]*
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- How important for interviewees is buying sustainable food?
- What do interviewees understand ‘sustainable food’ to be? What are interviewees’ reactions to the given definition of ‘sustainable food’?
- Do interviewees often buy sustainable food?
- To what extent do interviewees consider local food and sustainable food to be similar to each other or even the same thing?
- To what extent do local food and the traits which are attributed to it win out when faced with competing factors which are explicitly more sustainable or even practical?
- To what extent do interviewees prefer to help bring about the results of buying unreflexively local food over the results of buying reflexively local food?
- Importance of buying sustainable food
- Meaning of ‘sustainable food’/reaction to given definition
- Purchasing of sustainable food
- Similarities/conflation of local food and sustainable food
- Preference for non-sustainable local food over sustainable non-local food
- Preference for reflexive or unreflexive localisms

Table 3 Phases 2 & 3: Key questions & headings framing investigation

The ensuing stage of coding is said to be the most important within the framework of grounded theory analysis (Birks & Mills, 2011). It entails the breaking down of data into component parts which are then classified. It is important to note that choosing a sentence or a sequence of sentences as the unit of analysis required a level of flexibility when it came to coding, allowing for the recognition that some data could fit within two or more categories. For example, the following statement by Avril (FG6:GRI) was coded under two headings, ‘Animal Welfare’ and ‘Environmental Care’ (which themselves spoke to the analysis heading ‘Factors influencing food purchasing’):

...animal welfare is a big thing because if you’re not ferrying animals from one end of the country to another...(there is a higher level of animal welfare)...If you’re not bringing them indoors for intensive finishing, if you’re being extensive with your farming methods rather than intensive then you’re becoming more sustainable. You’re looking after the environment better, there’s less pollution...[Avril].

The process of coding has a number of stages or levels but the first is fundamental in that it openly allows for codes to emerge from the data (a priori codes). This stage is thought to work best when done inductively, without preconceptions. However, it is unlikely that any researcher will come to such investigations without
certain insights arising from the pre-formulation of questions, research on previous studies, and of course their personal experiences (Gouldner, 2004). Therefore, coding is commonly both inductive and deductive but inductive processes are thought to prevail (Berg & Lune, 2012). In this study, although many codes were anticipated due to the extensive review of relevant literature in preparation for formulation of the focus group schedule, the coding procedure was primarily open, allowing for both anticipated and unanticipated elements to emerge. To illustrate this, the coding process involved in analysing focus group data which arose under the heading ‘Positive attributes of local food’ is explained here. An example of a code which was anticipated was that of ‘National economic recovery’, and this did indeed frequently arise and was applied to data such as that below:

...whatever...(Alan (Vignette 7 character))...thinks about Ireland or big farmers ... he’s actually living in Ireland at the moment so things like recession are at his doorstep... you’re better off supporting the community that you’re in... [Keith, FG2:DUN].

An example of a code which was not anticipated is that of ‘Identity’, which was applied to the following datum:

... even in restaurants people look on menus...(and)...they like to see Clare Island Smoked Salmon or Clonakilty Black Pudding or things like that. They ... feel a sense of identity with the product... [Richard, FG3:DUI].

Open coding provides a basis for the next stage of analysis, axial coding, in which primary stage codes are organised into connected groups or concepts (in vivo codes) (Bryman, 2008). Using the same example section from Phase 2, ‘Positives attributes of local food’, Figure 6 illustrates how the concept of ‘Economic sustainability with community benefits’ was built from preliminary codes which were subsumed within this concept. The process of concept-building is iterative and this involved the constant checking of groupings against the data and all auxiliary notes to ensure the data were suitably classified.
Each focus group and each interview was analysed in turn to produce codes and concepts. In order to clarify the relationship between codes and concepts, theoretical memoing was employed at this stage. Sub-sections were dealt with in turn and each was coded both openly and axially. A comparison of all data falling under each sub-heading was then undertaken, followed by a comparative analysis of data arising from all focus groups (Phase 2) and all interviews (Phase 3). Theoretical memos were written again at this stage, and this was facilitated by a tabulation of each section’s codes in relation to each focus group or interview, as illustrated in Table 4 which uses the example of the theme of ‘positive attributes of local food’. Codes were evaluated according to the frequency with which they arose in discussions (in descending order of frequency in Table 4) and also according to how strongly participants felt about each statement, which was established from an implicit reading of the data (the codes which were judged as being most important for participants are shaded in grey). This technique of
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analysis also facilitated a comparison of different groups, for example, urban versus rural.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FG1 (DRN)</th>
<th>FG4 (GUI)</th>
<th>FG2 (DUN)</th>
<th>FG5 (GRN)</th>
<th>FG3 (DUI)</th>
<th>FG6 (GRI)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Community benefits</td>
<td>• Ecological benefits</td>
<td>• Supports livelihoods and Irish economy</td>
<td>• Good taste</td>
<td>• Benefits for farmers and producers</td>
<td>• Good quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Good taste</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Patriotic</td>
<td>• Good quality</td>
<td>• Benefits for economy at large</td>
<td>• Trustworthy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Variety (familiar, proper food)</td>
<td></td>
<td>• The ‘right thing to do’</td>
<td>• Traceable</td>
<td>• Ecological benefits</td>
<td>• Healthy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Healthy</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Ecological benefits</td>
<td>• Trustworthy</td>
<td>• Traceable</td>
<td>• Safe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Good quality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Familiar</td>
<td>• Fresh</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Traceable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Longevity</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Feels right (to support our own)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Community resilience and cohesion</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Table 4 Phase 2: Illustration of tabulation of codes for analysis, using the example of the theme of ‘positive attributes of local food’</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</table>
Analysis of Phase 2 was completed before the third and final phase of research was designed, undertaken and analysed. Phase 2 generated substantive theories which were verified through exploration of similar topics in a different setting (interviews). Findings from all three phases were then compared to produce the key findings. However, analysis continued as results and discussion chapters were written, edited and rewritten. Therefore as themes emerged they were continually incorporated into the evolving thematic template. As the thematic template matured, some themes were combined, discarded or newly created in order to streamline the template. At this stage, themes were verified by linking them to specific data, that is, Phase 1 statistics were presented in graphs and tables and data from Phases 2 and 3 were linked to participant statements. Ultimately, a three-part thematic template emerged with three ‘master themes’ (each dealt with in a separate chapter) which incorporate sub-themes (Figure 7).

![Figure 7 Finalised thematic template](image-url)
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3.4.1 Reflections and limitations (Analysis)

There are always inherent difficulties when analysing and coding large numbers of data. The same can be said for attempting to comparatively analyse data arising from different research strategies and this is especially true when the methodology employed involves a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods (Tashakkori & Teddle, 2003). In this study, some of the key research questions were applied in all three stages and despite the different methods of investigation used, it is still reasonable for these findings to be collated (ibid.). Aside from comparability, a further concern regarding all three phases of this study is the reliability of information given by participants. Of specific focus were participants’ values and prioritising regarding food purchasing and without actually following them around the supermarket, participants’ self-reporting formed the basis of the data. There is therefore a risk of Hawthorne effect, which occurs when a research participant alters their behaviour, whether consciously or unconsciously, because they are being studied (Fernald et al, 2012). In the case of this research, changes in behaviour are not of concern. Rather it is the reports of this behaviour which are relevant. Although it cannot be known if this has occurred, a robust analysis strategy will always be mindful of these potential pitfalls. In addition, it is hoped that the risk of a Hawthorne effect has been minimised by the strong emphasis which was placed on honesty when introducing participants at all three phases to the study.

Phases 2 and 3 produced a large volume of qualitative data which amounted to over 150,000 words. As it was decided that analysis would be based on verbatim transcriptions, it was therefore necessary for all recorded discussions to be transcribed. Transcription is inherently difficult and time-consuming but is made easier when carried out by a person who was present at the initial discussion. In the case of this research, all transcriptions were completed by the researcher and this was aided by field notes which were completed by a research assistant in Phase 2 (focus groups) and by the researcher in Phase 3 (interviews). Field notes provide a further layer of information which can facilitate analysis and also serve as a back-up in case of recorder failure. When the voice recorder was not turned on for the first five minutes of Interview 16, these field notes proved indispensible. There are difficulties which arise when attempting to analyse and discuss data which are qualitative in nature (Boeije, 2010). In the case of this research, coding proved difficult due to the large volume of data and this was particularly true as the qualitative data arose from two separate (but connected) modes of enquiry.
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Specific to this research, two particular discussions provided comparatively limited data due to participants’ short responses which were often not elaborated upon; these were Focus Group 5 (GRN) and Interview 6 (GR). Despite the questioning strategy at both phases being designed so as to invite detailed answers, it is to be expected that some participants were naturally less expressive than others. Data arising from these two specific discussions provided neither the same depth of information as that yielded from other discussions, nor the same nuanced comprehension of participants’ understandings, perceptions, values and priorities of local and sustainable food. Nonetheless, some level of analysis was possible and consequently, data arising from discussion in Focus Group 5 and Interview 6 were sufficiently comparable to other data sources in this study.

3.5 Positionality, reflexivity and ethics

It is necessary for researchers to be reflexive about their research, that is, to recognise their role in the construction of knowledge through writing up findings and the choices made in the research which precedes this (Hay, 2010). This is particularly important in studies which employ qualitative methodologies as these are often criticised as being highly subjective in nature. The risk of researcher bias in analysis is increased but this can be reduced by basing analysis on verbatim transcriptions which are completed as soon as possible following data collection to minimise the chance of misrepresentations. In this study, reflexivity was especially important as the researcher was the sole focus group facilitator and moderator, interviewer, and data processor and analyst.

As there are differing power dynamics throughout the research process, the reflexive practice of examining positionality can be employed to ensure that the researcher remains sensitive to the perspectives of others (Flowerdew & Martin, 2005). A researcher’s unique mix of cultural, political and social origins shapes both how they see the world and their position within it. It influences how the research process is directed, the research participants’ perception of them, and how they ultimately construct knowledge (Hennink et al, 2011). Acknowledging positionality highlights the importance of reflexivity over objectivity, as it is impossible to putting aside one’s knowledge, experiences and background. This is particularly true due to the often close relationship between a researcher and their respondents or the research setting (Sultana, 2007).
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As a consumer of food who lives in Ireland, for the purposes of this study I could be considered an ‘insider’. I source food in the same ways as any others do, based on my own personal values and perceptions and simultaneously facilitated and limited by pragmatic considerations. My insider status is cemented further by the study sites which were chosen (rural and urban Dublin and Galway): I am originally from rural Dublin and now live in rural Galway; in the intervening time I have lived in both Dublin and Galway cities. My familiarity with the areas in which research participants live, the places where they can obtain food and the specific local factors which may influence their opinions or behaviour allowed me to empathise with participants. However, a researcher can differ from participants in a number of ways, for example by gender, age and education, and these factors may have led some participants to view me as an ‘outsider’. My interest in issues of local food and food sustainability arose as both I and many family members have worked in the food production industry at all stages from field to plate. This has raised my awareness of the time, effort and expense involved in the production of food and has also afforded me an appreciation for how difficult it can be for food system actors to sustain a livelihood. Cognisant of the potential effects of this, every effort was made for this investigation to be as equally open to and accepting of those opinions which did and did not support local food and sustainable food. In addition, constant attention was paid to ensure that the language used was neutral and non-leading and that the researcher’s personal views were not conveyed.

Although it was not anticipated that there would be any major difficulties in adhering to accepted standards of care for research participants, every effort was made to consider the ethical implications of all stages of this research. Participants were not classified as being vulnerable as a group; this research did not aim to involve young people, older people, or those who were marginalised, sick or addicted (Peled & Leichtentritt, 2002). Participants were asked to discuss food, a mundane everyday issue, which for most people is not a sensitive topic. Nonetheless, participants in all three phases were informed of the exact nature of the study and what was required of them before they consented to participate. Participants signed forms to signify their consent to participate (see Appendix 9) and these consent forms have been kept on file. Participants were assured as to the confidentiality of their statements and their anonymity in any arising outputs. To ensure this, quotes arising from Phase 2 and 3 data are attributed to participants under pseudonyms. In addition, all recordings, which will be stored for up to a year following completion of this study, are held on a computer in
files which do not allow participants to be identified. These files have administrator passwords which only the principal and supervising investigator have access to. All data arising from these recordings will be stored for five years after completion of this study and will be under the control of the supervising investigator. Ethical approval for this study was granted by the National University of Ireland, Galway’s Research Ethics Committee on January 5th, 2012.

3.6 Concluding remarks

Through analysis of food, consumption and sustainability literature, this chapter has established that a multi-phase mixed methodology which leans heavily on qualitative methods represents the most appropriate form of data collection for an in-depth analysis of consumers food localisms in Ireland. Quantitative methods provide rigorous results which can be generalised but qualitative methods can address gaps left in relation to underlying perceptions, values and motivations that drive consumption decisions. The prevalence of studies which utilise mixed and multi-phase qualitative methodologies further supports the choice of methods in this study.

This chapter has identified the research design, the selection of research population and it has described the processes by which these methods were deployed. This use of innovative qualitative research tools (vignettes and choice exercises) has also been highlighted. The content analysis technique employed has been elaborated as a means of linking the data gathered to the theoretical and conceptual frameworks which underpin this research. Limitations which affect every part of this methodology are acknowledged and this reflexivity has yielded a robust research design. The outputs of this methodological approach represent a snapshot of the nature of consumer food localisms in Ireland and these are presented in detail in the following three chapters.
Chapter 4: Consumer understandings of local and sustainable food

Chapters 4, 5 & 6: Results and discussion

A multi-phase mixed methodology was utilised in this study to investigate the understandings, perceptions, values and priorities of consumers in Ireland with regard to local food and sustainable food. A total of 1042 individuals participated in this study, twenty-eight of whom participated in both Phases 1 and 3. These participants were purposively selected to include participants from Dublin and Galway, from urban and rural areas and in Phase 2, groups which existed because of their interest in issues of food system sustainability (Interested) and those which existed for another reason (Not Interested).

The results from this study are presented here in the three following chapters which together tell a story about the meaning and values attached to local food and sustainable food by consumers in Ireland, and also present a critical discussion of these. Chapter 4 begins by presenting empirical data on how participants understood the terms ‘local food’ and ‘sustainable food’. It is concluded by a critical discussion of the meaning of the findings and their relevance. Chapter 5 progresses to discuss findings on the perceptions and values attached to such foods by participants. It draws on Chapter 4’s findings, as well as data presented in this chapter to develop a detailed critical discussion which outlines the relevance of these findings. Finally, Chapter 6 builds on the data and discussion presented in Chapter 5 to present an in-depth critical analysis of consumer food localisms among participants.

Chapter 4: Consumer understandings of ‘local food’ and ‘sustainable food’

This chapter is comprised of a presentation of data on, and a critical discussion of, how participants in this study understood the terms ‘local food’ and ‘sustainable food’. The analysis focuses on the extent to which spatial (scale), or process, network or relational associations prevailed in the minds of participants. Despite the apparent simplicity of the term and its recent prominence, ‘local food’ has no universal interpretation. This reflects the socially constructed nature of all geographical scales and means that ‘local’

19 A breakdown of the demographic details of participants is set out in Appendix 10
Chapter 4: Consumer understandings of local and sustainable food

cannot possibly have a single definition. Consequently, this chapter is primarily concerned with the various social constructions of ‘local food’ and ‘sustainable food’, and the implications of these.

Given its socially constructed nature, as the agendas of food system actors change, so too do definitions of ‘local food’ (Braaten & Coit, 2010; Allen et al, 2003). However, it is posited here that even those who occupy the same position in the food system, in this case consumers, will hold varying conceptions of the socially constructed and contentious concepts of ‘local food’ and ‘sustainable food’. These varying conceptions are based on their differing contexts. For example, even though all participants in this study occupied the same physical place of Ireland, they simultaneously occupied different places and spaces (Dublin/Galway; urban/rural). Because of this, they occupied different social spaces and this social divergence was compounded by the various demographic differences of participants, for example their age, gender, parenthood, income and educational attainment. In this study, participants were also selected for their interest or non-interest in issues of food system sustainability (Phase 2) thus offering a further layer of potential contextual complication. Finally, the temporal context of this study is also important. The findings presented here represent a snapshot of views taken during a time of economic recession. As such, it was anticipated that the socially-constructed understandings of ‘local food’ and ‘sustainable food’ as presented by participants would be context-specific and complex. Nonetheless, based on previous quantitative market research it was also expected that ‘local food’ would be in some way associated with ‘Irish food’ and that this would be related to a perception of beneficial ‘local’ economic outcomes.

As the concepts of ‘local food’ and ‘sustainable food’ are the fundamental issues of this thesis, gaining a nuanced insight into how participants understood these provided a foundation of knowledge upon which to base other parts of this study. In particular, this study also explored the values of participants, the attributes which they perceived local and sustainable food to embody, and their motivations when purchasing foods more broadly, and these foods specifically. Data on these issues are presented in Chapter 5 and the analysis therein builds on the analysis which is presented in this chapter. The findings presented in this chapter are also of wider practical importance: gaining a nuanced understanding of how consumers view ‘local food’ and ‘sustainable food’ bolsters existing market research which is concerned with increasing the market share of these foods. In addition, this chapter represents a strong theoretical
Chapter 4: Consumer understandings of local and sustainable food

contribution in that it adds greatly to existing knowledge and debates on local food, alternative food networks and sustainable food consumption.

4.1 ‘Local food’ is defined by proximity, not processes, relations or networks

Results from the initial large scale questionnaire in Phase 1 show that 90% of all respondents selected definitions of local which were based on spatial delineations and varying limits of closeness\(^\text{20}\) (See Figure 8\(^\text{21}\)).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure8.png}
\caption{Phase 1: Meaning of ‘local food’}
\end{figure}

Fifty percent considered local food to be from within their country; 24% took local food to mean that which is produced within their county; 12% understood it as that which is produced within thirty kilometres of where they live; 2% defined local food as that which is produced within Europe; while 2% defined it as coming from within some other

\(^{20}\) Based on analysis of data arising from Question 23: What do you consider ‘local food’ to be? (Responses provided)

\(^{21}\) All percentages in Figure 8 are rounded to the closest whole number and as such do not total exactly 100%
Chapter 4: Consumer understandings of local and sustainable food

Spatial limit, for example from within their province (n=3), from within Ireland and Britain/the UK (n=2), or from within North County Dublin (n=16). Surveys from the Republic of Ireland and the UK which investigated consumers’ understandings of local food exhibited similar findings with demarcations of local food based on county limits and similar radial distances popular among respondents (YouGov, 2012; Bord Bia, 2011b). However, they differed in that while country-based limitations were most favoured in this study (50%), in the UK state limits underpinned much fewer (5%) definitions of local food.

Further qualitative investigations in the form of focus groups and in-depth interviews confirmed this preference for space-based definitions of local food. Most participants in both Phases 2 and 3 favoured spatial ranges which are either marked out by radial distance (e.g. produced within fifty miles) or a codified boundary (e.g. produced within my parish, produced within my county). Ostrom’s 2006 quantitative study yielded similar results finding that 71% of respondents defined local food according to a spatial limitation. A similar qualitative study which used four focus groups to explore the understandings of consumers in Michigan of local food also found a prominence of space-based definitions (Zepeda & Deal, 2009). In this study, the local frontier is also denoted, at least in the minds of some Phase 2 and Phase 3 participants, by limits which could be considered fuzzy, for example from ‘close by’, or from ‘down the road’. This final finding reflects those from a previous Irish study (discussed above, Bord Bia, 2011b): the most popular definition of local food (45%) among respondents in Bord Bia’s 2011 survey was food which comes from ‘close by’.

Phases 2 and 3 of this study sought to provide a more nuanced understanding of how participants defined local food. During both phases, participants discussed the importance of a small-scale of production and alternative supply chains in their constructions of local food. Nevertheless, findings suggest that for many participants local food could be produced on a large and/or industrial scale and pass through the hands of many intermediaries before being purchased in a large multi-national supermarket, so long as it originates from a place of spatial proximity. This attitude was articulated by Evelyn (FG1:DRN):

... Brennan’s (bread) is only made up the road...(and I consider that to be local and)... I only buy Johnston, Mooney and O’Brien (bread) because...(my friend)...Serena works there and it’s local... [Evelyn]
Chapter 4: Consumer understandings of local and sustainable food

...so...you think Johnston, Mooney and O’Brien bread is ‘local’...? [Researcher]

Yes absolutely. I think it’s an image thing. Like in a market it’s ... like your granny made it but... Johnston Mooney and O’Brien (bread) is in proper packaging and it’s got a label on it... [Evelyn]

A small number of participants at all phases of the research were interested in interpretations of the term local food which involve process and/or what Whitehead (2007) refers to as network-based considerations. They considered a food to be local if it satisfies the criteria of spatial proximity in addition to other social and environmental factors. These factors included: production with few or no chemicals; food which is home-made, hand-made or made on a small scale; or food which is sold more directly, ideally by the primary producer in a face-to-face transaction. As seen in Figure 8, 8% of survey respondents opted for ‘Available at a farmers’ market’ as their definition of local food and this could be because they considered local food to be that which is sold directly from producer to consumer. A minority of participants in Phases 2 and 3 discussed the scale and/or manner of production, and the directness of supply chain as part of their understanding of local food:

... for me local would definitely be associated with a local scale as well as...a small scale...On first thought it would definitely be...the antithesis of...a large corporation... (which is selling)...mass produced... (food) ... I think...(small-scale local producers take into account)...a lot more ... ethical concerns [Marian, FG4:GUI]

My understanding of local would be going into the market in Galway and buying from the people who are selling their stuff there. I would regard them as local...I don’t think...(food in a supermarket can be local because)...you’re not meeting...(producers)...face to face... [Colin, I27:GU]

In contrast to the small proportion of participants in this study which favoured definitions of local food based on processes, networks or relations, 30% of respondents in a previous Irish survey defined local food as that which is ‘Available at a farmers’ market’ (second most popular answer, Bord Bia, 2011b). Similarly 22% of respondents in a US survey defined local food according to issues such as type of sales forum, embedded food and producer characteristics, and potential economic benefits (Ostrom, 2006).
Definitions of local food which are based on qualitative factors embody greater reflexivity compared to those which are based solely on spatial proximity, which embody defensiveness. If local is defined only on the basis of close geographic origins, this ignores other process/practice factors which sustainable local food rhetoric presents as foundational to this concept (Du Puis & Goodman, 2005). These factors include extensive rather than intensive production methods and a shortened distribution chain (Feenstra, 1997). It is however important to remember Chapter 2’s discussion of the social construction of scale and as such local food does not necessarily imbue any qualities beyond close spatial proximity (Winter, 2003). An assumption of sustainability in local food may actually obscure socially unjust or environmentally damaging processes or relationships (Morgan et al, 2008) thus perpetuating negative consequences which local food is said to remedy. Therefore, in attributing no more meaning to the term ‘local’ than that which is from ‘close by’, have participants in this study escaped Born & Purcell’s ‘local trap’ (2006)? Findings presented in the next chapter will suggest that the converse is likely true as the majority of Phase 2 and Phase 3 participants attributed a number of positive traits to local food, both intrinsic and extrinsic. These included economic support for local producers, resultant community benefits and environmental care.

4.2 Local food is defined fluidly and plurally

Discourses of geographical scale assert that the local scale, just as any other scale (including the scale of ‘close by’), is socially constructed (Marston et al, 2005). The designation of ‘close’ is therefore open to various interpretations and as the milieus of participants change, so too do their definitions of local food. Data from all three phases of this research suggest that ‘food which is produced within Ireland’ was the most common meaning of local food but further probing provides a more nuanced insight into participants’ definitions. In fact, not only was there deviation among participants in relation to the meaning of local food but data also indicated varied understandings within participants. With the variables and vagaries of everyday life, participants’ held multiple understandings of different types, levels or stages of local food.

Two percent (n=21) of Phase 1 respondents offered definitions of local food which were ‘other’ than the five provided choices. Three of these participants said that their understandings of local food differed according to the food in question. Research
Chapter 4: Consumer understandings of local and sustainable food

at Phases 2 and 3 investigated this fluidity of understandings and at both phases it was found that although the meaning of local food can be Irish food, this is not always the case with other ‘levels’ also accepted. These understandings of ‘local’ can, for example, start at the parish level, go up to county level and ultimately end at the national level, as one participant explained:

I equate local with sort of like Malahide22 and around, all this area23; Fingal area if you like. Then the next follow on one is checking if it’s Irish... [Helen, I5:DR]

These differing understandings appeared to exist simultaneously and to vary according to particular circumstances. It is clear therefore that for participants in this study, local food was defined neither rigidly nor singularly and this finding reflects those of Ostrom’s which arose from research with consumers in Washington State, USA (2006).

Following analysis of data from Phases 2 and 3, two variables emerged as most influential in shifting participants’ understanding of local from one level to another: the type of food involved and where the participants themselves are situated when procuring these foods. Firstly, the type of food involved is influential as certain foods are more or less available in a given area. For participants in this study, if a food could be produced very close by, such a food is only considered to be local when it actually did come from this close area. For example, Nicholas (I3:DR) from Portmarnock in North Country Dublin reported that fish was local only if it was landed at the harbour of the neighbouring town of Howth (see Figure 3, page 69); David (I14:GU) from Galway City stated that local lamb was only that which came from the adjacent area of Connemara (see Figure 4, page 70), which is famous for its lamb. Lisa (FG6:GRI) from County Galway reported that she would be willing to extend her general understanding of local food (from within a ten to fifteen kilometre radius) to include artisan cheese and cured meats from West Cork, a distance of almost 250 kilometres. She expressed the opinion that such products were unavailable within her first (or indeed subsequent) local ranges. In addition, if the raw ingredients of certain products could not be produced in a location which was conceptualised as local due to environmental constraints, such ingredients could be transformed through processing in a local place into a local food. This was particularly true for those foods which were manufactured by a company which was considered to be local, for example Cadbury’s chocolate and Barry’s tea.

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22 Helen lived in Swords, Co. Dublin (See Figure 3, page 69).
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The second variable to affect the changeability and plurality of understandings of local food was the physical location of participants. For both Lynne (I23:DU) and Joe (I20: DU) their definitions of local food changed when they moved from Dublin City where they lived, to rural areas. For both of these participants, when they were in urban Dublin, ‘local’ equated to ‘Irish’ but as they moved to rural areas, their understanding of the range of local food, in a figurative sense, shrunk to a smaller spatial scale. In the case of these two particular participants, each had their own justification for these varying conceptions. Lynne specified that local meant something different to her when she was ‘at home’, in the village in which she grew up, in rural West Cork. The change in definition was based on personal knowledge of producers and her connection to their mutual community:

Well when I'm in Dublin...I think local just means Irish...And then down at home, it means Cork...I suppose I'm from West Cork...and when we're down at home then you tend to buy...all the names and...family produce that you know. .. But in Dublin it's more invisible...who everybody is. .. I think Irish but I don’t think Dublin... It would be important if I lived in a smaller community I guess... [Lynne]

Similarly, Joe talked of how local food meant something different to him when he was ‘down the country’ on holidays. He believed that local food from a county or narrower range was simply not available in Dublin, in contrast to the rural area where he holidayed:

What would your definition of local be? [Researcher]

OK say we're down the country... this week...and I wanted some local fruit and veg and I asked for local produce and I got local potatoes and local eggs, and local bread. So they were all made down there...Then after that it would be ...local is Irish. [Joe]

OK so your ‘first’ local would be...the county...or even narrower than that? [Researcher]

The first local would be narrower than that. It would be locally sourced. For instance again, like I'll give the example in Castletown there and I went out of my way to source locally caught fish and to use it there and then. [Joe]

Do you make as much of an effort when you’re in Dublin to do the same? [Researcher]

No. [Joe]

And why do you think that is? [Researcher]

It’s because there’s the perception there that there isn’t any local... (food). The only thing I might do in Dublin is when we’re shopping, and I would often go
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"shopping with my wife, we'd look for Irish labels and Irish producers and the classic example of that is tomatoes. They might be Dutch but I'll try to find an Irish one.‘ [Joe]

As highlighted in the literature review, there are a limited number of academic studies which focus on meaning of local food for consumers (cf. Ostrom, 2006; Zepeda & Levitan-Reid, 2004; Brown, 2003). Few utilise qualitative research methods which are necessary to uncover findings such as those which are presented in this paragraph and consequently these findings appear to be novel. Further research could build on these findings by probing the extent to which definitions of local food change as consumers move location and whether this phenomenon may be unique to Ireland.

The issue of current location was also relevant for Kelsey and Jim, a couple from the United States (FG3:DUI). Now living in Ireland, the acceptable spatial range for local food narrowed significantly as they moved from their larger native country to their smaller adopted country of Ireland:

I think it’s a matter of distance too, because here... just from a geography standpoint... Ireland is the size of one of our states. We’re used to... (greater distances)... ‘local’ obviously is a different term... it can be within fifty miles, one hundred miles, however many kilometres that is versus half way across our country you know which is ten times the difference... [Jim]

This finding highlights that an understanding of local which extends as far as national boundaries is likely uncommon in countries other than Ireland. This may be attributable to Ireland’s comparatively small geographic size and population. As a consequence, it is possible that if this research were carried out on a population in a larger country, definitions of local food may in effect be as spatially extensive as those held by consumers in Ireland. That is, their conceptualisations of local food may be delimited by state boundaries or have a 650 kilometer radial limit (Martinez et al, 2010), which could be equal to or greater than Irish national limits but would not stretch to country-wide conceptualisations of local food. This supposition is supported by comments made by Trish, a participant who was originally from Australia (FG4:GUI):

... so for local it’s definitely in the Galway area or even in Ireland... I suppose being Australian does influence me that way because Australia is so big... Ireland to me is local because it’s the size of my state... [Trish]

The theory that definitions of local food differ in countries of different sizes is supported by findings of UK and US studies. In contrast to the large proportion of Irish
consumers (50%) who define local food as that which comes from within their country, just 5% of UK survey respondents said the same (YouGov, 2012). Instead, 16% favoured a definition of local food as food which is from ‘my region’ and this is perhaps due to greater size of the UK compared to the Republic of Ireland. In Zepeda & Levitan-Reid’s study (2004), many US consumers defined a local food space as that which was within a six or seven hour drive, a length of time which could almost see one drive from the most northerly point in Ireland to the most southerly. Participants in Zepeda & Levitan-Reid’s study also defined local food according to the limit of their state, and some extended this to also include neighbouring states. The state in question is Wisconsin which is more than double the size of the Republic of Ireland.

4.3 Rural dwellers: narrow spatial definitions of local food based on close social connections to food’s origins

Although it was not a specific goal of this research to examine differences across urban and rural populations, it was possible to draw comparisons of these two groups due to the sampling strategy which saw an equal division of urban and rural participants. Phase 1 data suggested that urban survey respondents (n=500) were more likely to favour ‘Produced within my country’ as their definition of local food with 57% (n=286) choosing this option. This compared to 43% (n=215) of rural respondents (n=500) who chose the same option. Conversely, higher numbers of rural respondents opted for ‘Produced within 30km of where I live’ (19%, n=94) to explain local food. This compared to just 6% (n=30) of urban respondents. These survey findings were echoed in the later research phases with many focus group and interview participants who lived in rural areas tending to explain local food according to narrow spatial terms:

...*local and Irish... (are)...different...* [Siún, FG1:DRN]

... *I think local is your immediate catchment area. I would perceive it to be within...* five, ten miles... [Ursula, FG6:GRI]

... *I’d say North County Dublin would be local...* [Pauline, I15:DR]

This compared to the many of those living in urban areas that had broader spatial conceptualisations of the meaning of ‘local food’:

... *Irish is plenty for me. It doesn’t have to be any closer... (to be local food)...* [Raymond, FG2:DUN]
Chapter 4: Consumer understandings of local and sustainable food

... I think ... in the grand scheme of where ... things come from, anything from Ireland, produced in Ireland, by anyone in Ireland is local compared to the rest of the stuff... [Flora, FG3:DUI]

...(local food can be)... Irish...(It)...doesn’t have to be... (from)... my county... [Ita, I26:GU]

Many urban participants in this study appeared to accept that food from Ireland was local while many rural participants differentiated between local food and Irish food. They preferred designations such as ‘from within five to ten miles’, ‘from within the parish’, or, in the case of participants from rural Dublin, ‘from within North County Dublin’. This finding contrasts with Selfa & Qazi’s (2005) hypothesis that definitions of local food are based on a greater spatial range in sparsely populated rural areas and on narrower ranges in densely populated urban areas. It should be noted however that Selfa & Qazi’s finding was based on a survey of food producers.

As was discussed in the preceding section, understandings of local food were fluid enough to change according to food availability. Rural areas are the location of primary production and rural dwellers are spatially (and socially) close to the origins of their food, as illustrated by this segment of the discussion which took place in Focus Group 1 (DRN):

\[I think because we live out in the countryside... going back to the potato thing, if I... saw a bag of Keogh’s (potatoes) compared to...a bag of something else, I’d get Keoghs because I know it’s...(from)...down the road [Evelyn]\]

\[So you have an actual connection with them...? [Researcher]\]

\[Yes [All participants]\]

\[We’d all know them, so we get Keogh’s. We were at the...(recent)...wedding...(of a member of the Keogh family) [Rachel]\]

Rural participants in this study defined local food according to narrower spatial ranges because of the availability (or perceived availability) of food in a proximate area. Mary-Ann (I4:DR) stated that Irish food is a type of local food but she preferred to define local food according to narrower spatial boundaries and indeed could do so because much food is produced in close proximity to where she lives:

\[...to me, Irish...(food is local food but) ... the closer to home the better. If I see something from Rush...I suppose it’s because we’re in a slightly rural area,...I\]
Correspondingly, many urban dwellers perceived a lack of availability of local food (from a very close place) and they had to expand their definition of local food. In the preceding section, evidence from discussions with Joe (I20:DU) and Lynne (I23:DU) highlights their perceptions of closer connections and greater accessibility to the place, processes and networks of food when they were situated in rural areas. It is interesting to consider whether their views reflect the actual level of availability of food which is produced in close proximity, and the implications of this. Although Joe and Lynne perceived there to be a lack of food from ‘close by’ when in the urban area where they live, a large region of agricultural production exists relatively close to their homes. Both Joe and Lynne lived in South Dublin City, located a distance of approximately 30 kilometres from North County Dublin, which is the centre of horticulture in Ireland. This area generates 30% of all field-produced vegetables in Ireland and represents 40% of all Irish agricultural production. The produce of North County Dublin is almost entirely marketed in Ireland with most of this staying in the wider Dublin area (Mc Keon, 2010). Despite the relative proximity of North County Dublin to where they lived, Joe and Lynne seemed unaware of its status as a food production area. Although North County Dublin is spatially proximate, Joe and Lynne lack a connection to the community there, making it socially distant and consequently food from there was not classed as local. As per Weatherall et al (2003), this social embeddedness and disembeddedness will result in contrasting levels of regard for local food and its producers, and consequent divergent levels of local food purchasing across urban and rural populations.

4.4 Sustainable food: Interested participants are more confident in their understandings

As a foundational concept to this study, it was necessary to investigate the nature of participants’ understandings of the term sustainability as it related to food. Explorations of participants’ understandings of the term ‘sustainable food’ began in this research in the focus groups of Phase 2 and the data generated by these suggested that most Interested participants seemed comfortable with the terminology while most Not Interested participants were not.
Participants in all three Interested focus groups (FG3:DRI; FG4:GUI; FG6:GRI) fluently explained how they understood sustainable food, defining it according to the various qualities which they considered it to imbue. Firstly, all three Interested groups cited methods of production which are not environmentally damaging as being foundational to their understanding of what a sustainable food system was. Secondly, the three Interested groups also all defined a sustainable food system to be one in which there is a short distance between place of production and consumption, resulting in lower emissions:

...(when I think of sustainable food)...local comes to mind immediately...this craic of flying in fruit and vegetables daily from Africa and all corners of the world, it’s not going to last. It’s as simple as that...so local is one word I would...associate with sustainability... And crops grown using conservation agriculture...(It’s)... sustainable in that it’s not ripping up the soil causing erosion making the environment unsustainable, you know...it’s done in tandem with nature... [Richard, FG3:DRI]

Thirdly, these three groups also appeared to require that a sustainable food system be one which produces food on a small and non-industrial scale, and which is not embroiled in capitalist commodity relations:

I think you have sustainability there and mass production on the other side... so the more you go away from the mass production, the more you have sustainability...Capitalism is not sustainable... mass production is capitalism...In food...(it’s)...completely wrong...(We)... should go back ...to the way we were two hundred years ago... Capitalism is not sustainable in general, and capitalism in food is not sustainable [Raphael, FG6:GRI]

The Interested participants in Phase 2 of this study therefore defined sustainable food as food which is produced and transported using sustainable processes, networks and relations. Rather than falling into the trap of positioning sustainability as a goal in itself they recognised it as a means which contributes to the end of a democratic food system which also fosters environmental care (Koc, 2010; Marcuse, 1998).

In contrast to the Interested groups, many of those in the Not Interested groups expressed discomfort with the term ‘sustainable food’. Odette (FG1:DRN) and Sabrina (FG5:GRN) both stated that they had only ever heard the term sustainability used in relation to energy. 47% of consumers in Ireland claim to understand the term sustainability (Bord Bia, 2011b) but how this applies to the food system appeared to confuse participants in this study. To begin this discussion in Phase 2, Not Interested
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Participants were asked if they understood the term sustainable food and in all three groups the participants answered negatively in unison. Nonetheless, some of these participants attempted to synthesise sustainability with food, resulting in interpretations of sustainable food which differed greatly from those of academics, policy-makers and the interested participants:

_Pasta... is sustainable food?)... The only reason I’m saying that is that you buy so much pasta... as a student and I know that I’m going to be able to put that with almost every single meal I have that week... (it’s) very sustainable... I can put that with ham... (or) with salad the next day... [Cora, FG1:DRN]

(Sustainable food)... keeps growing and being farmed and... it’s not something that’s hunted and dead and like that’s it, that’s the last of it. It’s something that continues to be... [Ling, FG2:DUN]

Outside of fish I wouldn’t think that there’s going to be a short supply of anything else. There’s not many bees around, there’s not much honey and the cross pollination of things... but apart from that I haven’t thought about... (sustainable food). [Raymond, FG2:DUN]

(Sustainable food is) onions or something like that, something that’s really really easy to grow... [Keith, FG2:DUN]

However, similar to their interested counterparts, participants in these not interested groups associated sustainable food with certain processes and networks. Participants in Focus Groups 1 and 5 tautologically attributed economic sustainability to food which provided economic stability and jobs for producers but did not connect it to a reduction or removal of intermediaries and thus a higher economic return for producers. Two participants in these groups engaged with the concept of environmental sustainability, by stating that unsustainable food was produced using ‘sprays and stuff like that...’ (Sabrina, FG5:GRN). In addition, they connected environmental sustainability to the (large) scale of production.

Despite participants in both Phases 2 and 3 having the ability to synthesise the topic of food with the issues of environmental care, social justice and economic vitality, the notion of sustainable food appears to remain elusive for the average consumer. Given this finding, the usefulness of the concept of sustainability as a paradigm for change may be in doubt. In spite of the prominence of sustainability discourses in policy and governance arenas of the past twenty years, it seems that this has failed to trickle down to have a presence in society. Consequently, might it be more appropriate to abandon the concept of sustainable food in favour of a more understandable and
tangible alternative? Could competing discourses of food security, resilience or food sovereignty be more effective to the ends of sustainability?

In fact, these concepts should be considered as complementary to each other (Wilson, 2012) and it is widely accepted that despite its criticisms, the notion of sustainability should not be replaced (Bonevac, 2010; Hinrichs, 2010; Koc, 2010; Maye et al, 2007; Redclift, 1992). Nonetheless, this research illustrates the extent to which consumers are unfamiliar with the concept of sustainable food. The following chapter will, in part, further investigate this to examine the relevance of issues of sustainability in the food system to consumers in Ireland, relative to other considerations, particularly local provenance. These findings may be utilised in informing future policy which will encourage greater consumer engagement in sustainable food systems.

4.5 Reflecting on fluidity of meaning within fixedness of space

To summarise, it has been posited thus far that for most participants in this study, spatial proximity is the main parameter against which the ‘localness’ of a food is measured. It was also found that participants held multiple meanings of local food and there was a degree of fluidity to these. Participants’ understandings changed depending on the food in question and its availability, and this confirms findings from studies in other countries. However, it was also found that as consumers move from one place to another, the meaning of local food became highly elastic. It stretched or contracted according to perceived food availability, greater or lesser connections to the local producer community and the relative geographic size of participants’ locations. Analysis of findings from all three phases of this research also revealed a difference in understandings of local food among urban and rural populations: rural participants in this study were more likely to define local food according to narrower spatial limits. Finally, on the concept of sustainability, this research found that although Interested participants were highly fluent in their understandings of sustainable food, the average participant was not so.

The thread which unifies these findings is that, as social constructs, the meanings of terms such as ‘local food’ and ‘sustainable food’ are complicated and contextual. ‘Local trap’ rhetoric (Born & Purcell, 2006) argues that to avoid this trap, no assumptions beyond spatially proximity should be attached to ‘local’ and the findings
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presented thus far suggest that the majority of participants in this study therefore avoided the ‘local trap’. Participants reported that local food did not have to be associated with certain processes or practices. However, results presented in the following chapter reveal that despite these findings, participants simultaneously assumed that the character and quality of local food processes, networks and actors did in fact represent something beyond mere spatial proximity. As such, it is argued here that ‘local trap’ rhetoric is simplistic in that it ignores the complicated and contextual nature of understandings (and values, perceptions, motivations and decision-making) as they relate to local food. The complicated and contextual nature of participants’ understandings is further evidenced by the finding that, although primarily based on spatial proximity, the ‘range’ of locals changed according to the food in question and its availability. The elasticity and fluidity of how participants understood ‘local food’ suggests that although these understandings are socially constructed, they are not constructed permanently nor are they constructed rigidly.

The third key finding of this chapter, that urban and rural groups viewed local food according to wider (urban) and narrower (rural) spatial ranges, is further evidence of the complicated and contextualised nature of constructions of the meaning of local food. Rural and urban participants simultaneously inhabited the same (Ireland) but different (urban/rural) spatial and social worlds, which led to heterogeneous understandings (and values, perceptions and motivations) regarding local food. In addition, in the case of the divergent understandings of rural and urban participants, although their understandings were framed by space, it is posited here they these framing were in fact driven by social factors. As discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5, local food was underpinned by a desire to support ‘our own’ food producers who inhabited a constructed ‘local’ space. For those in rural areas, the identity of people who were ‘our own’ was clear to the point where participants actually identified them by name; for those in urban areas, the concept of ‘our own’ was broader. The complicated nature of understandings of ‘local food’ is therefore represented by the fact that not only are spatial understandings socially constructed, so too are social understandings (of ‘our own’ for example) spatially constructed and these constructions are viewed here to be mutually constitutive.

The results and discussions in this chapter are important as they represent significant empirical, practical and theoretical contributions to knowledge in the areas of
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local food, alternative food networks and sustainable food consumption. Empirically, the results offer data which are entirely novel: never before has a study offered nuanced qualitative data on the meaning of ‘local food’, whether among consumers or otherwise; this is the first study to draw a comparison between how urban and rural consumers understand ‘local food’; and the study offers the novel contribution of data which focus solely on consumer understandings of the term ‘sustainable food’. These empirical data would be of practical interest to a number of food system actors, in particular those who are interested in increasing the market share of ‘local food’, for example Bord Bia, any of the many ‘buy local food’ initiatives, or more alternative and smaller local food producers. These data could also enjoy a practical application by actors or bodies who strive for goals of greater environmental care, social justice or economic stability in the wider food system.

Finally, and most importantly, the critical discussion of data which is presented in this chapter represents a significant contribution to conceptual and theoretical knowledge on understandings of the social construction of terms such as ‘local food’ and ‘sustainable food’. Discourses of the ‘local trap’ criticise local food rhetoric; however in this discussion, ‘local trap’ rhetoric is criticised. This is because it fails to recognise the complicated, contextualised and nuanced nature of understandings of ‘local food’ (as well as values, perceptions and motivations), which became clear in this analysis. One such nuance, which emerged in this critical discussion, was that although ‘local food’ is a social construction, it is not a rigid construction. The fact that participants’ understandings of ‘local food’ can change according to certain contexts (in this case the location of participants or the type of food) is entirely novel. In addition, this analysis has highlighted the heterogeneity of social constructions (i.e. differences between urban and rural participants) within a supposedly homogenous spatial or social context (Ireland). Finally, the critical discussion of data on the meaning of ‘local food’ teased out the idea that while understandings of space and scale are socially constructed, what are also socially constructed are understandings of the nature of a segment of society. As such, the empirical, practical and theoretical contribution of the data and critical discussion which are presented in this chapter are clear.
Chapter 4: Consumer understandings of local and sustainable food
5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided a detailed analysis of what participants understood the terms ‘local food’ and ‘sustainable food’ to be. However this study aimed to go beyond probing these understandings and this chapter presents findings of the traits and values associated with local food. It explores which of these characteristics are most important and which are prioritised when making food purchasing decisions. The differentiation between what is considered to be important and what is prioritised is in recognition of the complicated nature of consumer decision-making (Nurse et al, 2010). The values of consumers may seem anomalous to the foods they ultimately choose as their values are tempered by various practical concerns (Weatherall et al, 2003). Following their presentation and cursory discussion (Sections 5.2-5.6), this chapter concludes with an in-depth critical discussion of the data and their interpretation in Section 5.7. This analysis focuses on the unifying argument which is that consumers are complex and the choices they make are also complex as they are contextualised in a wide range of temporal, spatial, social and personal factors.

5.2 Sustainability is valued but not prioritised

Sustainability is of central focus in this study, in particular how it is perceived and prioritised relative to local food. The majority of Phase 2 and 3 participants appear to associate local food with sustainability and for many this was a ready conflation based on a so-called gut feeling or is something participants ‘would like to believe’ (Laura, I28:GR). As discussed throughout this section, a smaller number explicitly denied such a conflation but implicitly associated one, some or all elements of sustainability with local food throughout discussions. However, a small number (mainly Interested groups in Phase 2) were clear in their belief that although local food could embody qualities of sustainability, these should not be automatically conflated. This minority represented those few who were not ‘trapped’ by local rhetoric (Born & Purcell, 2006), choosing to
base their assessment of local food not on assumptions of desirable traits of sustainability but on an assessment of the processes and relations involved:

Local is just about geographics, it’s about mileage... (whereas)... sustainability is about how it’s produced. So you could have very unsustainable food that’s produced locally; you could have a field of rape seed oil out the back of your house, it’s local but it’s very unsustainable... So I would think they’re two completely different issues that can overlap if you’re lucky. You can have sustainable and local but they’re very different. [Lisa, FG6:GRI]

The Interested groups existed by virtue of the value which they attributed to issues of food sustainability and commentators such as Faiers & Neame (2006) would classify them as ‘early adopters’ of pro-sustainable food attitudes and behaviours.

The next logical step in this research was to examine whether either or both the issues of local provenance and sustainability are appreciated. To this end, this research represents the first but (crucially) not the final step in unpacking the motivations of consumers in Ireland when buying food. Findings from Phase 1 suggest that local provenance (where) and sustainable production methods (how) were highly valued; just under two thirds (n=640) of all Phase 1 survey respondents (n=1000) either strongly agreed or agreed with that statement: ‘I pay attention to where and how the food I buy is produced’. The weakness of this question was discussed in Chapter 3 and this highlighted the need to explore participants’ values further using qualitative research techniques. Findings from Phases 2 and 3 suggested that local provenance and sustainability were both highly valued. Nonetheless, due to the value-action gap it should not be assumed that positive perceptions will necessarily translate into a willingness to purchase such products. In Phase 3’s choice exercises, most participants seemed to ignore these two key issues of local provenance and sustainability in favour of more pragmatic considerations. Although the nature of this investigation made this theoretical trade-off a conscious act, in the everyday reality of food shopping this may not involve a reflective thought process (Johnston & Szabo, 2011; Barr et al, 2005). Behavioural intentions are based on a variety of considerations which extend beyond values (Nurse et al, 2010) and previous studies have also found that although consumers may be interested in local foods, few actively try to buy them (Weatherall et al, 2003). In spite of the conflation of local food with qualities of sustainability, the former was both more highly valued and more likely to be prioritised than the latter. Only Interested Phase 2 groups appeared to highly value sustainability and five of six groups reported a
preference for local provenance over sustainability. This finding echoes those of previous US studies which examined consumers’ regard for local provenance and sustainability (Zepeda & Deal, 2009; Darby et al, 2008; Wilkins, 1996). In this study, some participants’ preferences for local were reported as being based on a visceral feeling while for others it was based on their greater comfort with the term ‘local’ (although these two factors are not necessarily mutually exclusive):

It’s kind of more an emotional response... (to choose local food)... whereas... (for)... sustainable ... (food) ... you actually have to think about the process... [Keith, FG2: DUN]

If I knew what their meaning of sustainable was... (I might choose it)... because sustainable is used in growth economics as well... Whereas local does have a fairly strong and tight meaning, like it’s not vague... [Carl, FG4: GUI]

This reflects Leah Philho’s (2000) finding that sustainability is considered too abstract a concept. He argues that to move beyond this problem it is necessary to highlight the specific issues and themes of sustainability. To this end, in order to gauge a more nuanced understanding of participants’ perceptions, values and motivations regarding sustainable food, this concept was examined in this study by focusing on its three core areas of concern: economy, society and environment.

5.2.1 Economy

It is widely accepted that local food systems involve fewer intermediaries and provide producers with a larger proportion of the retail price (Goodman & Goodman, 2010; Seyfang, 2005), and in this study local food was most readily associated with sustainability from an economic perspective. Its purchasing was thought to benefit those involved in local farming and food production by helping to sustain their livelihoods:

... (local food is)... very important to me... because I think you’re supporting local farmers ... They’re having a tough time of it and I think local producers probably have to work twice as hard to get into the supermarkets ......Being self-employed myself... I know how tough it can be and I sort of feel that these are people, I don’t know them personally, but they’re living in Ireland and... they’re trying to do dairy or farm or whatever that happens to be. And if we don’t support them then... they’re going to go out of business and they’re going to really struggle and I feel it’s more of a community thing than an individual thing. And... I don’t know the first thing about farming but ... when I watch the news I see farmers are... (struggling)... I don’t know weather-wise what happens to them, but they seem to have ... a lot of difficulties. [Mary-Ann, I4:DR].
Previous studies discussed the importance of building a strong local food economy which is resilient in the face of external challenges (Feagan, 2007; Allen et al, 2003; Morris & Buller, 2003; Feenstra, 1997). Participants reported the belief that this has the knock-on effect of sustaining agri-food businesses and the entire Irish agri-food industry, contributing to the local economy, and precipitating national economic recovery:

...we need...to kick start the Irish agricultural system...because, let’s face it, it’s the only thing that we’re decent at now and...(it’s particularly important)...after the banking crisis. I mean it’s the highest export market and we make good food so I think we should be promoting it more...(domestically)...[Richard, FG3:DUI]

The purchase of local food was perceived to be an act of inclusive support for ‘our own’ (Odette, FG1:DRN) who are especially in need of help since the onset of the current economic recession:

I suppose I try to buy Irish...because I was brought up...in the sixties and seventies when jobs were scarce... (and)...the campaign went out to buy Irish to keep jobs at home. I suppose that’s ingrained in me so I do like to support local and national Irish produce. I mean I hate finding a Cyprus potato in Ireland...[Carol, I7:GU]

For these reasons, local food was highly valued and this finding is consistent with those presented in research on consumer values in the UK and North America (Dilley, 2009; Seyfang, 2008; La Trobe, 2001).

However, considering the prominence of the attitude-behaviour gap in previous studies (see Chapter 2 for discussion), it is necessary to investigate whether local economic sustainability actually motivates participants in their food choices (Vermeir & Verbke, 2006). Analysis of discussions prompted by Choice Exercise 1 in Phase 3 suggests that local economic sustainability was prioritised over issues of environmental sustainability by under half (twelve of twenty-eight) of this phase’s participants:

I’d still go for the Irish one...it’s a tough decision actually because I’m tempted by the organic nature of this one but I’d still go for this one simply because...it’s...about the Irish and I’m supporting...(jobs)...I would have no problem buying the Spanish one but it’s really just that I’m...supporting the Irish producer because

24 Choice Exercise 1 was designed to elicit discussion on the hypothetical trade-off between local and less environmentally sustainable tomatoes (heated greenhouse, not organic) and non-local but more environmentally sustainable ones (grown in natural heat, organic).
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again it's good that you're putting money back in the Irish economy [Mary-Ann, I4:DR]

I would buy the Irish...(tomatoes because of)...local employment ... Because everything else on that (Spanish) side ticks so many boxes but the employment would be the deal-breaker for me [Bridget, I11:GU]

(I would choose)...the Irish...(tomatoes) ...Would I pay an Irish farmer rather than a Spanish farmer? Not that I've anything against Spanish farmers per se, but economically I think it is better to hold money within our economy [Brian, I18:DU]

(I would choose the Irish tomatoes because)... the money stays in the country. I mean I wouldn't even think any further you know. If there's Ireland or any other country, there's no difference. It would be Ireland I'd go for every time [Susan, I25:GU]

Nonetheless, slightly more (fourteen) based their choice on aesthetic qualities such as perceived taste and naturalness. It can be inferred that although economic sustainability is a priority, it was not the primary food-choice motivation for many Phase 3 participants.

5.2.2 Society

The negative impacts on both producer and consumer societies of globalised and industrialised systems of food provisioning are well established as are arguments for localisation as an antidote to these problems (cf. Hinrichs, 2003; Hendrickson & Heffernan, 2002; Feenstra, 1997). In line with this previous research, a majority of Phase 3 participants reported the belief that local producers in Ireland are naturally fairer in their dealings with food producer-workers, including especially vulnerable migrant workers, than producers in other countries are:

...Ireland has so recently been almost a third world country itself. I mean until the Celtic Tiger came along, until the EU, we were quite a poor nation, weren't we, and our workers went all over the world. So I kind of assume that anybody from here would treat other people well... [Bridget, I11:GU]

Participants articulated their confidence in the adherence of producer-employers to national labour regulations. They contrasted these positive perceptions with negative associations with non-Irish or global production, in which the social (and environmental) costs of production are hidden by distance (Feagan, 2007). The perceived economic benefits of local food transactions were described (by approximately one quarter of
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Phase 2 and 3 participants) as precursors to community vitality and sustainability. Tony (I8:GR) stated that local food ‘keeps...your town alive or even, if it comes to it, your country alive’. The reconnection of producers and consumers which often occurs in a local food transaction is thought to (re-)embed social relations in food transactions and simultaneously (re-)construct relationships which foster greater care and co-operation. The consequences of this are greater community well-being, integration and revitalisation (Kneafsey, 2010; DuPuis & Goodman, 2005; Morris & Buller, 2005; Seyfang, 2005; Allen et al, 2003). Raphael, an Interested focus group participant seemed acutely aware of these outcomes:

*The food you buy is more than... food ...If our neighbour...is producing milk, I want to buy his milk, because if he’s doing well in life, I’m going to do well. If...[my]...neighbour’s happy...(I’m happy)...It’s like sending your kid to school in...(the closest town)...or to... Seamount (College, in this village)...I send them to Seamount because if Seamount is thriving, the village is thriving. It’s good for me...(and)...it’s good for my family. That’s sustainability...I remember there used to be a little shop...in Kinvara and ...on the front of the shop...(the shopkeeper) ...wrote, ‘Life is Local’ and I always remembered that. And that’s what I do - I buy local.* [Raphael, FG6:GRI]

Discourses of sustainable food system most often discuss social care and social justice in the context of producers in the global South. Although approximately half of Phase 2 and 3 participants reported to theoretically care about the conditions of distant producers, a minority appeared to be truly socially conscious in these respects. A small number avoided produce of specific political regimes which they implied were responsible for injustices, including Israel and countries of North Africa. They expressed an appreciation for guarantees of fair trade: six Phase 3 participants were motivated by this value in choosing the non-local fair trade option in Choice Exercise 2\(^25\). Fair trade goods offer an outlet for concerned consumers. They can act upon their feelings of responsibility towards society by means of ethical purchases (De Pelsmacker et al, 2005). Consumption of fair trade produce is a reflexive act in which care is not perceived as limited to one’s ‘own’ and which results in a forging of spatially distant bonds between Southerly producers and Northerly consumers (Goodman, 2004). Nevertheless,

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\(^{25}\) Choice Exercise 2 was designed to elicit discussion on the hypothetical trade-off between local and less socially just non-fair trade teabags against non-local but more socially just fair trade ones.
many participants in this study did not appear to prioritise social justice when choosing foods, focusing instead on self-oriented issues such as affordability and taste:

... I don't really go out and think 'Is this product I'm buying sustainable?' I think about feeding my family...I don't go out of my way to buy fair trade coffee. I would buy coffee that has taste but if somebody was to sit me down and explain to me certain things I could be persuaded but...if I'm honest that would not be in my criteria...(when choosing food)... [Eimear, I9:GU]

Interestingly, both participants who did and did not express an appreciation for issues of social justice and equity were among the group who reported that issues such as fair trade were not a top priority when choosing food. A disconnection between positive attitudes towards fair trade produce and a failure to buy this is not unique to Phase 2 and 3 participants. Common barriers to the purchase of fair trade food by consumers who are favourably disposed towards these products are their perceived high price, the insufficiency of information on fair trade conditions and their perceived lack of availability in mainstream sales fora (De Pelsmacker, 2006; Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006).

Participants’ preferences for food which supports their ‘own’ was a further potential barrier to the purchase of food in which care for distant ‘others’ is embedded. They expressed opinions that it is more important to care about local communities by buying local food because ‘charity begins at home’ (Therese, FG1:DRN; Tony, I8:GR; Bridget, I12:GR). These views represent an unreflexive form of localism in which the local is assumed to be inherently preferable to the detriment of possibly more sustainable non-local options (DuPuis & Goodman, 2005). Two participants suggested that it was more appropriate to support food producers in the global South through charitable donations:

‘There’s nothing wrong with...(the food of distant producers and)... you’d feel sorry for them. You can support them charitably, wouldn’t you?...But always if you can...(you should buy)...local’ [Helen, I5:DR]

This view is ironic as the fair trade movement is founded upon an ethos of ‘trade not aid’ (Arnould et al, 2009). Nonetheless, choosing local food over non-local food which offered a guarantee of social justice was not an easy decision for some, as was the situation posed in Phase 3’s Choice Exercise 2. A small number of participants articulated a perception of a hierarchy of care in food purchasing. For them, it is important to care about non-local ‘other’ people but more important to concern
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themselves with local people who were their ‘own’ and this is evidence of a distance-decay which is said to affect one’s level of care (Morgan, 2010):

...(I would be)... standing in the supermarket going ‘guilt, guilt, guilt’... because as soon as I saw the fair trade label... I’d be tempted but my thinking...(would be about)... supporting Irish and... that’s of most importance to me...... [Mary-Ann, I4:DR]

However, participants of four focus groups and four interviewees expressed a rejection of dualistic choices between local and fair trade produce, arguing that a mutually beneficial outcome is possible due to local environmental growing limitations which necessitate the importing of goods which do not compete with local food. These views represent a reflexive form of localism which is trans-communal and open to social justice (DuPuis & Goodman, 2005):

Well you need to buy from the impoverished producers like tea... chocolate, these things have to be bought from abroad... I think like some things that can be produced in our country should be... there are two separate markets really. There’s the stuff that needs to be brought in and it should be done at fair prices and we should help the foreign producers by buying fair trade and...(foods)... that can be produced in Ireland, we should put that first [David, I4:GU]

5.2.3 Environment

As discussed earlier in this dissertation, many of the negative outcomes of the global corporate food regime have been ‘externalised’, but are in fact borne by the environment. In response, food system localisation is posited as a key element in returning the food system towards greater ecological sustainability (Sage, 2011). Participants’ acceptance of this rhetoric is evidenced by six interviewees rejecting dualistic binaries of local provenance and environmental care:

‘I think one follows the other. My perception would be...(that)... helping producers by buying locally begets a better environment’ [Ian, I16:DU]

Participants most frequently attributed ecological benefits to local food systems because of the reduced distance between farm and fork, and a perceived consequent reduction in damaging emissions. These views reflect the prominence of food miles rhetoric (Ilbery & Maye, 2005):

... when I buy mint, and it’s a crime because you see on it that it’s coming from somewhere out in the Middle East... and you’re thinking... it’s terrible... I’m
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"thinking of the amount of air miles it takes to get to here...That would be a big one for me." [Laura, I28:GR]

Going backwards from transportation, through processing, to production, many participants also considered the manner of local food production as small-scale and extensive, and thus inherently environmentally friendly. Some conveyed a perception that local farmers are natural stewards of their land and the wider environment; however, a minority questioned the conflation of local provenance and ecological care:

"...it's the financial climate. People are going to try and bring their crops quickly and cheaply. Unless they have that organic...(symbol)...on their wrapper...they're going to do it as cheaply as they can because they're in the same boat that I am'. [Susan, I25:GU]

These largely positive associations between environmental mindfulness and the local scale strengthen the value which is attributed to food of local provenance, illustrated by the quote from Laura above, as most participants were concerned about the environment: 89% (n=885) of Phase 1 participants either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement ‘I am concerned about the environment’; a minority of Phase 2 and 3 participants cited issues such as organic production, less packaging and non-GM production as being of value due to their perceived environmental benefits; many more conveyed a concern for the environmental impacts of food production more broadly and a concern for the environment in general:

"... my grandchildren's' grandchildren, I'd hope we'd be leaving them...(a healthy earth)...I don't think you...(can)...ignore the environment at all costs [Áine, I6:GR]

"...the biggest thing for me in...(this statement)...is the environment...If we don't look after the environment, we won't have anything else to worry about will we?...If I had to choose what's more important for me...(it would be)...the environment by a long punt [Bridget, I11:GU]

"...I'm very conscious about things like the environment...we'd want to leave it in a fairly good...(condition)... I don't spend every time I go shopping thinking about it but it'd be uppermost in my mind [Ita, I26:GU]"
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However despite the high esteem in which environmental care is held, if this quality was placed in opposition to that of local provenance (as occurred in Choice Exercise 1) or indeed most other considerations, environmental friendliness would not be prioritised:

Well just giving employment to people...(is why local food is appealing to me)...I’m not particularly worried about you know those air miles or whatever you call them you know. That wouldn’t really impact. No it’s just really employment of local people. [Brian, I18:DU]

...I would like to be able to say yes to...(your question of whether I prioritise issues of sustainability)...but I know that it wouldn’t be high on my list ... The environmental... (impacts of my food’s production)...would be at the back of my mind...it wouldn’t be the instant trigger that makes you decide whether to buy something or not or to pick one thing over another but it is something we’d be aware of, of course, ideally... I’ve enough going on without having to take on that minefield [Tony, I8:GR].

In this respect, participants in this study were similar to those who participated in Canadian, US, Italian and UK studies (Nie & Zepeda, 2011; Bellows et al, 2010; Nurse et al, 2010; Vecchio,2010; Feagan & Morris, 2009; Smithers et al, 2008; Schneider & Francis, 2005; La Trobe, 2001). Findings presented here echo those of previous studies: collectivist environmental concerns will not take precedence over collectivist social concerns, which themselves will not be prioritised over individualistic rational matters (Dagevos, 2005).

5.3 Local food is aesthetically-pleasing which is a high priority

While in the past, the consumption of food was arguably primarily a mundane practice of sustenance, in modern times it has increasingly been linked to gastronomic aesthetics (Miele & Murdoch, 2002). The majority of Phase 2 and 3 participants appeared to feel that food of local provenance was that which was aesthetically pleasing and which provided sensory enjoyment. Second only to the perception that local food provides economic sustainability, the most commonly reported perception of local food was that it is of high quality. Local food also appeared to be highly correlated with good taste and

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26 Despite not being a goal of this exercise, fourteen of a total of twenty-eight participants focused on issues of aesthetics. Of the remaining fourteen participants who actually engaged in a trade-off of local and sustainable attributes, just two chose the environmentally sustainable non-local option.
healthiness. These three qualities were perceived as connected to and contingent upon seasonality and freshness, and the latter was thought to result from the short transportation time and distance between field and fork in local food systems, echoing the findings of Wilkins’ (2010) study on consumers in upstate New York. Nonetheless, participants in all six focus groups reported that they would be unwilling to eat only local foods because of the perceived austerity of this. Such a diet was thought to be unpalatable and unhealthy, and also overly restrictive and unrealistic:

...in Ireland, everyone has vitamin D deficiencies, there’s no sunlight here so if you’re going to eat traditional good local honest stuff, you’re probably not going to be getting all the vitamins...(you need)...But if you vary your diet...(you will)... [Eanna, FG2:DUN]

I suppose I don’t like the way...(Mark, vignette character #5) ...dismisses... new... types of food that maybe are assumed to be foreign ...(because) ...they enrich our diet...(for example)...sun-dried tomatoes, they’re very nice [Carl, FG4:GUI]

Although many participants (just under half of interviewees) reported strong associations between organic food and health benefits because of the use of fewer synthetic chemicals, some (eight interviewees) doubted these claims. The same number also doubted the associated rhetoric of the good taste of organic food, as other studies have found to be the case among non-buyers of organic food (Padel & Foster, 2005).

Not alone were many aesthetic qualities perceived as being present in local food, they were also important for consumers; participants in all six focus groups and twenty-five of twenty-eight interviewees reported to value one or a combination of aesthetic qualities, echoing the results of similar consumer studies (Dilley, 2009; Seyfang, 2008; Winter, 2003; La Trobe, 2001). In Phase 1, health and taste were ranked first and third respectively in terms of importance when choosing foods (Figure 10). The following aesthetic qualities were reported to be key drivers in Phase 3 participants’ food choices: taste (twenty-three interviewees), quality (twenty interviewees), health (sixteen interviewees) and freshness (six interviewees). However, in order to investigate participants’ buying motivations, local provenance and sustainability were contrasted with issues of aesthetics. This yielded the finding that aesthetics tends to be a stronger motivation:
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*Well we wouldn't buy something local just because it’s local. It would have to be up to the standard that we require... It has to be...of a good standard, a high standard...* [Nicholas, I3:DR]

![Factors influencing food purchasing decisions (accumulated top three rankings)](chart)

Figure 9 Phase 1: Factors influencing food purchase decisions

This is illustrated by data from Phase 1 (Figure 9) which shows that participants were more likely to prioritise the issues of health, price and taste than the matter of where and how their food is produced. In addition, data from all three choice exercises in Phase 3 suggested that most participants were driven in their choices by the self-oriented issues of aesthetics (and other issues to be discussed in the following sections of this chapter) rather than by assurances of organic production methods, fair trade terms, or greater environmental care. These qualities were certainly valued but were a ‘bonus’ which applied to foods which participants already preferred due to their aesthetic qualities:

*I’d say I’d go for...(the artisan non-local cheese in Choice Exercise 3)...because I am a real cheese fanatic, so I’m already wanting to go find that...(cheese)...because it looks gorgeous but also because in...(the other option, although)...it’s Tesco...as far as I’m concerned Tesco make plenty of money when they’re in Ireland...{(so they don’t need my help. But I’m also bothered by the fact that)...the farmers are losing money. That would annoy me.*
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That would make me not want to buy... (the artisan cheese)... I don’t think that’s fair really... the big conglomerate making money out of the poor local farmer and that really is a... terrible shame. So for that reason... (I would like to buy the artisan cheese) ... although... (it does)... look gorgeous, I’d like to try it... [Mary-Ann, I4:DR]

Mary-Ann and participants with similar opinions could be classified as ‘alternative hedonists’ (Soper, 2008) who occupy the grey area between activism-orientation and self-orientation. They are citizen-consumers who reflexively consider issues such as environmental care and local economic sustainability as well as their own personal pleasures (Johnston & Szabo, 2011).

5.4 Familiar local foods and brands are important but not prioritised by most

Direct food sales fora such as farmers’ markets are often cited as benefitting from the familiarity between producers and consumers which can be built up over time, leading to increased local food sales (Smithers et al, 2008; Hinrichs, 2000). However, local food more generally, and in particular local food which is sold through conventional retailers, was not often discussed in this context. In this study, participants focused on the familiarity of the foodstuff, rather than on the person from whom they procured it. Participants in two ‘Not Interested’ focus groups reported that they perceived local food to be familiar to them, both the type of food and how it tastes. It is food which had traditionally been eaten and was thus ‘proper’ (Cara, FG1:DRN) in contrast to unfamiliar imported foods. For these reasons, they did not value imported foods as highly as local Irish foods and this is illustrated by the extract of dialogue below from Focus Group 5 (GRN):

What’s your opinion of these imported foods which have come to Ireland in the last fifteen years or so? [Researcher]

They’re fine... in moderation [Angela]

(They are)... treats [Patricia]

So you wouldn’t often eat food like that? [Researcher]

No [All]

We’d prefer something wholesome [Angela]
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And by ‘wholesome’ what do you mean? [Researcher]

...your nice bit of meat and potatoes and your veg... [Mona]

These participants classified food according to a hierarchy in which local food was superior, and imported or ethnic foods were considered inferior. It would appear therefore that this hierarchy inverts hierarchies which are found in countries which lack the means to procure food imports. In such a situation, non-local or imported foods are rarefied and as a consequence are often considered desirable (Wilk, 2008).

Participants reported that they associated local food brands with their preferred tastes and also because of the familiarity of these foods. Participants felt connected to certain local food brands because of their associations between these and childhood memories:

...(buying Irish brands of food is not about)...loyalty to the country... it's...(loyalty to the brand)...If it’s stuff you remember...always seeing in the fridge, then you’re always going to buy it in your adult life...like that’s the brand of sausages we always get or that milk that we get...[Keith, FG2:DUN]

This reflects previous research which discussed the role of childhood memories in consumer preferences and ‘intergenerational patterns of product use’ (Olsen, 1993, 575; Braun-LaTour et al, 2007). Since the onset of economic recession in Ireland, local food has increasingly been positively associated with tradition and nostalgia, and for this reason there has been a renewed interest in simple local Irish food (Bord Bia, 2012d). However, for young adults or newcomers to Ireland, an interest in local food may not be renewed but simply new. Similarly, an interest in local food could be sustained rather than renewed as was the case with Focus Group 5 (GRN) (illustrated by the above dialogue). Therefore, familiar local food and familiar local food brands are valued by many participants in this study:

you would stick to the Lyons or Barry’s...(tea)...or stuff you know. I wouldn’t...start... (drinking)...fair trade tea because I’d be... going, ‘is it going to taste nice?’...[Aoibheann, FG3:DUJ]

Despite this, familiar brands did not appear to be a high priority for most. 32% (n=321) of Phase 1 participants (n=1000) reported to prioritise ‘brand’ when choosing food (see Figure 9). In Choice Exercise 2 (Phase 3), approximately one quarter of participants
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chose the local and theoretically less socially sustainable option based on a preference for the taste of the brand of tea.

5.5 Local food, especially local meat, is traceable and trustworthy

As the food system has become increasingly globalised and industrialised there is less and less knowledge available to consumers on the manner of their food’s production (Friedberg, 2004). With the proliferation of food scares and scandals in the past twenty years as a result of these conditions, a preference for localised and sustainable food networks has arisen and these are often thought to precipitate a re-embedding of trust in food transactions (Ulvila et al, 2009; Roininen et al, 2006). A majority of participants in Phases 2 and 3 of this study explained that they believed local food was traceable, trustworthy and safe and these qualities were appealing. This finding concurs with previous studies of consumers in Ireland (Bord Bia, 2010a). Participants reported particularly strong associations between traceability, trustworthiness and safety, and local meat27 because of their beliefs that the farming and food production industries in Ireland were heavily and successfully regulated. For these reasons, participants prioritised local food and especially local meat over non-local imported foods:

...organic aside, you look at the meat Ireland produces...our lamb and our beef is very high quality ... compared to how it might be produced in other countries... If you go beyond Europe, we’re not familiar with the set ups of each country. You can’t guarantee that they’re not using some really bad mega-nasty spray that we’ve banned or medicines or whatever. [Lisa, FG6:GRI]

...I know, well I think I know, that the standards...(in Ireland)...are much stricter...(Farmers)...stick to the rules, the various things they are allowed to give the animals or not give the animals, as opposed to the US where they pump them full of all sorts of things. [Scott, I17:DU]

Consumers in Ireland are acutely aware of food safety issues and are exacting about their food choices for this reason. Amongst other things, the BSE scare of the 1990s was of particular concern and this perhaps accounts for the views of participants in this study (O’Donovan & McCarthy, 2002).

27 It should be remembered that the primary research in this study took place prior to the horsemeat scandal of January 2013.
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Alternative sales fora have become popular in recent years. Rhetoric argues that food products which are sourced through these different channels are trustworthy because they are embedded with information about how and where they are produced, and by whom (Moore, 2006). Despite this, participants in two Not Interested focus groups (FG1:DRN; FG2:DUN) expressed their lack of trust in the accountability of alternative sales fora, such as farmers’ markets, and in people who sell there. This view is illustrated by the below dialogue which took place between Focus Group 1 (DRN) participants:

A supermarket can’t be selling you something that’s not...(safe)...they have grades, they have standards [Adele]

There probably aren’t as many standards in a farmers’ market, as...(there are)...in a supermarket [Odette]

Like, how do you get licensed to sell at these farmers’ markets? [Adele]

Exactly, that’s what I mean...there are no standards...there are standards, obviously, that need to be met in a supermarket [Odette]

...Tesco are really strict [Evelyn]

This belief is perhaps surprising given much food system localisation rhetoric which argues that when a local food transaction involves a face-to-face interaction between producers and consumers, assurances as to the place and method of production can be given directly. Such foods are therefore most often considered to be more trustworthy than that which is available in large multinational supermarkets (Seyfang, 2006). In these conventional sales fora, local food transactions involve many intermediaries and consumers can only be assured as to the place or manner of a food’s production through the use of labels. Although participants in this study valued the comfort which an ‘Irish’ or ‘local’ label might provide, a minority were also doubtful as to the veracity of such labels. As a result, they reported that this could sometimes inhibit their purchasing of local food:

...(misleading labelling)... sort of harms the others that are ... actually local or Irish produce. Because there’s so many of them pretending to be that...you sort of give up on them all, unfortunately [Raymond, FG2:DUN]

Bord Bia (2011b, 2010) has also found this to be true. This may be an issue which is particular to Ireland due to the flexibility of the term ‘Irish’, that is, it may be taken to
mean something from within the Republic of Ireland while others apply it to anything which is of the entire island of Ireland. This of course includes Northern Ireland whose systems are governed by UK legislation (Carroll, 2012).

In addition to labels of local or national provenance, eco-labels are another response to the problems attendant to the conventional global food system. These labels offer guarantees to consumers of the ethical network through which these foods moved or environmentally friendly methods of production (Loureiro et al, 2001). Although 69% (n=686) of Phase 1 participants in this study agreed that they trusted eco-labels, a minority of participants in subsequent phases voiced their mistrust in foods with labels such as ‘organic’ or ‘fair trade’, with more doubting the claims of the former’s proponents than those of the latter’s. They suspected that organic foods were not always produced in strict adherence to organic regulations and that fair trade produce did not always adhere to the letter or indeed the spirit of its guiding principles. This lack of trust in eco-labels is therefore often a barrier to the purchase of such foods:

...‘fair trade’ is another term that’s completely abused by corporations...(for example)...Starbucks call themselves fair trade and that’s kind of a travesty of the idea because of the way they treat their workers. But again, it’s just stuff I’ve seen on the internet... [Louise, FG4:GUI]

... I’m not quite sure, because organic... definitions can be...played with...I mean there are a lot of organic pesticides that still do a hell of a lot of damage so even though it’s organic, it’s still reducing the biodiversity of that field in the way that it’s cropped or planted... I think it’s a bit of a buzz word, it’s the same as Fair Trade, Forrest Stewardship ... (and)... Marine Stewardship... they’re ... marks of approval that increase sales...I would say. [Ian, I16:DU]

...the fair trade thing, I’m not going to say it scares me away but it makes me sceptical because it’s a very easy...(logo)...to have on your product nowadays. And I’ve seen coffee plantations in Rwanda that claim to be fair trade and ... the people aren’t treated well and they’re not being paid enough. They’re certainly not making a dollar a day which I think is the limit. So I mean I wouldn’t buy into the fair trade thing... [Ian, I16:DU]

I’m...not sure that anything really is organic...I saw my father growing cabbage... (and)... carrots...in an organic setting you could say. They didn’t look the same as what you see in a supermarket; slugs were an issue and all that. So these perfect, perfectly grown, perfect everything ...(organic foods)...I don’t know...(how true their claims are)... [Colin, I27:GU]
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It is often assumed that the provision of eco-labelling will automatically lead to shifts in consumer choice towards these eco-labelled goods because of the extra information which consumers are provided (Czarnezki, 2011). But if consumers do not positively perceive an eco-labelled food, it follows that they will not value that label (Hoogland et al, 2007; McCluskey & Loureiro, 2003).

5.6 Pragmatism is prioritised over local provenance and sustainability

Although local food and sustainable food were perceived by participants as embodying several positive characteristics and were valued because of this, they were not necessarily always prioritised when traded off against other, more pragmatic considerations. Almost two-thirds of Phase 1 participants reported that the ‘how’ and ‘where’ of their food’s production was important but less than half (n=445) prioritised these same issues when faced with other competing considerations such as health (prioritised by 736 survey respondents), price (prioritised by 730 survey respondents) and taste (prioritised by 454 survey respondents) (see Figure 9 on page 129). This finding was analysed further in Phases 2 and 3, yielding results which mirrored those in Phase 1: although many participants valued local provenance and sustainability, these were not their primary concerns:

... at the end of the day you drift into a routine where you buy based on price... For me, I probably skip between... (being conscious and not being conscious of buying local and sustainable food)... depending on my money situation and how stressed I am in work...but definitely I would always like to...(buy local and sustainable food)... [Scott, I17:DU]

I think that the type of person who would veer towards the local produce and have all these considerations can afford to do that...when I look at my outgoings, I don't have the luxury of paying more for environmental considerations or for Irish producers considerations [Colin, I27:GU]

Participants traded different considerations off against one another which accounts for this attitude-behaviour gap (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). For many, it is thought that the process of trading off different competing values is an unconscious one (Barr et al, 2005). However, it can also be a conscious act for some consumers who feel torn between their activism-orientation and their self-orientation (Johnston & Szabo, 2011).
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Tony (I8:GR) was judged as being in this category; he repeatedly returned to the theme of a conflict between sustainability values and family-oriented values:

Certainly in the past before we had kids...(we)...would have...(bought)...much more fair trade produce...

...in times when we had a bit more money we probably would have been more conscious of...(buying local and sustainable foods but these issues)...get whittled down over the years...our priorities have changed....

... in an ideal world...we would shop like that but we don't...

...I suppose life has taken over particularly when it comes to food...(Considerations of local provenance and sustainability)...wouldn't come into it that much...

I think that intellectually we would have had an awful lot of values and it was easier to go with those from an intellectual point of view before...(but)...you end up having to drop some of those...

The financial pressure created by having had a family, coupled with other dietary needs and the preferences of his children meant that no matter how strongly Tony felt about the importance of buying local and sustainable food, he considered himself to have no option to purchase them. Although the value-action gap caused by a prioritising of one’s family’s needs has been discussed in the past in more general terms (Devine et al, 2006), the tension between preferred local or sustainable food choice and the needs of consumers’ families has yet to be explored and may be a novel insight of this study. Due to the prominence of the theme of affordability throughout both Phases 2 and 3, this alone will be discussed in the following sub-section. Other issues of practicality are explored in the following sub-section and these include the matters of accessibility, convenience, family needs and family preferences.

5.6.1 Affordability

The most common negative perception of food of local provenance is that it was not affordable and previous research suggests that the participants in this study are not unique in this view (Weatherall et al, 2003). Many based this opinion on their experiences but also, as per previous studies, many simply assumed that local food was unaffordable (Khan & Prior, 2010). Organic food is commonly assumed to be more expensive than non-organic food (Hoogland et al, 2007) and in this study, food which could be classified as sustainable had similar negative associations. Over two-thirds of
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Phase 1 participants reported the belief that organic and fair trade food was not affordable and Figures 11 and 12 on pages 138 and 139 illustrate that the more price sensitive participants were, the more likely they were to hold this perception\textsuperscript{28}. Twelve (of twenty-eight) Phase 3 interviewees expressed the belief that organic food was too expensive and two of these elaborated to explain that as they considered organic food to lack longevity, it was thought to offer poor value for money:

...I don’t buy much organic food even though now and again I say I should. But it doesn’t last as long and I know it’s because the chemicals aren’t in it and I know I should be thinking that way but...when you’re rearing a family...(and)...there’s six to be fed...(it is not)... economically viable...(to buy organic food)...[Carol, I7:GU]

A minority of Phase 3 participants expressed the view that a sustainable food system was a ‘lovely sentiment’ (Scott, I17:DU) and something which they theoretically valued. They were however sceptical of its practical achievability and affordability for the average consumer in Ireland:

*I like the sound of...(a sustainable food system)...but I’m not sure whether or not you could actually produce food which families could actually afford on that sort of system* [Eimear, I9:GU]

(A sustainable food system)...sounds like it's a lovely idea. And it's somewhere where we have to go but I don’t know if it’s ever going to be...(possible)...or if it’s feasible at the moment. But it's how it should be done [David, I14:GU]

...is... (a sustainable food system)...cost efficient? ... I come from a farm background...and I remember...(when I was)...growing up my father always ... had a garden and the cabbage that he grew that he didn’t shake some chemical on was always eaten by slugs and...I wonder if he was growing to feed a market whether it would have been viable...A sustainable food system, I think...(as)...described...(in the given definition)...is a bit idealistic...In theory... it would be nice if we could do that of course. [Colin, I27:GU]

\textsuperscript{28} Phase 1 survey respondents were asked a number of questions relating to their personal circumstances. Question 11a asked participants’ to state their level of agreement with the statement: ‘My overall quality of life has been affected by the recent economic downturn’. Those who answered in the affirmative (n=672) were asked Question 11b parts i-v which probed how exactly their quality of life had been affected. Q11b.iv asks participants to answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to the question of whether their quality of life has been affected to the extent that they cannot always afford to buy a weekly food shop: 374 answered ‘yes’; 298 answered ‘no’.
Perceptions and Priorities Regarding Local and Sustainable Food: Cross-tabulated with data on the extent to which participants' lives had been affected by the recent economic downturn

Figure 10 Phase 1: Perceptions and priorities towards local food cross-tabulated with extent to which recession affects participants
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**Perceptions and Priorities Regarding Local and Sustainable Food:**
Cross-tabulated with data on household income

- **Figure 11 Phase 1:** Perceptions and priorities towards local food cross-tabulated with extent to which household income

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It is clear from Carol’s statement on page 137 that not alone did she believe that organic food offered poor value for money, but affordability was an issue which she prioritised. In fact, affordability was among the highest priorities for the majority of participants at all stages of this research: 730 Phase 1 survey respondents ranked price in their top three food buying considerations (just behind health, n=736); discussants in all six focus groups cited price as an issue which they prioritised; as did fifteen Phase 3 interviewees. In spite of the fact that local and sustainable food were positively perceived and valued, the belief or experience that local and sustainable food were expensive could inhibit their purchase. This finding is consistent with those of Vermeir & Verbeke (2006) who established an attitude-behaviour gap regarding sustainable food among Belgian consumers, attributed to price-sensitivity amongst other things. Many participants in this study were unwilling to pay more for a local or sustainable product than for a comparable non-local or non-sustainable food:

*If there were two... *(different foods)...*in front of me and they were a similar price and one was Irish and one was something else, I’d pick the Irish one... *(Local provenance is)...* a bonus but I’m not going to pay double for it.* [Raymond, FG2:DUN]

... up to a year and a half ago we used to buy... a veg... bag... from... an organic farmer... and it was great... but it ended up just not being... financially... *(viable)*... we couldn't afford it. At the time... *(I was)... unemployed and we had to give it up but we were really into the idea of it being local, but... *(when)... it came down to... *(it)... Lidl was cheaper...* [Tony, I8:GR]

.... say... there were two coffees and one was branded fair trade I would... go towards that. But if there’s a large price difference in it then economic considerations would come into mind... I would go for the cheaper option... *(and if the cheaper option happened to be fair trade I would)...* console myself with the fact that there’s a fair trade stamp on it [Brian, I8:DU]

This findings is supported by previous research which suggested that between 7-20% of (samples of) consumers are willing to pay a price premium for local, organic or fair trade food (Yang et al, 2012; van Doorn & Verhoef, 2011; Carpio & Isengildina-Massa, 2009; De Pelsmacker et al, 2005; Krystallis & Chryssohoidis, 2005; Brown, 2003).

Over a third of Phase 1 survey respondents (n=374) reported that since the onset of the current recession, they could not always afford to go shopping for food on a weekly basis. This group were less likely than those whose quality of life had not been
affected to pay attention to ‘where and how’ their food was produced and they were also less likely to rank ‘where and how’ in their top three food purchasing priorities. Those with lower household incomes were also less likely to pay attention to and prioritise the ‘where and how’ of food’s production (Figures 10 and 11; for more detailed statistics related see Appendix 11). Just 6% (n=55) of the sample population in Phase 1 had total net household incomes in the lowest bracket of €0–€18,999. In Ireland, the average household disposable income is €18,166\(^{29}\) which suggests that the actual percentage of the Irish population in this lowest given income bracket in the survey is much higher than the 6% proportion of Phase 1’s sample. Considering the findings presented in the preceding paragraphs, it could be deduced that a significant proportion of consumers in Ireland are unlikely to value or be motivated by local provenance and qualities of sustainability when choosing foods because of their price-sensitivity.

In Ireland, as in other nations, food shopping is a gendered activity with women more likely than men to have responsibility for this (NCA, 2013; Dholakia, 1999). Findings from Phase 1 of this study indicate that the women in the sample were more likely than the men to pay attention to and to prioritise where and how food is produced (Figure 12; for more details see Appendix 12). If this research had been conducted using shoppers rather than eligible householders, the sample would have contained more women with a higher percentage likely agreeing that they valued and prioritised the ‘how’ and ‘where’ of their food’s production. This result concurs with previous research which finds that women are more likely than men to purchase organic food (Davies et al, 1995) and to pay a premium for local food (Gracia et al, 2012).

\(^{29}\) According to the OECD’s Better Life Index (2012) the average household net disposable income in Ireland is $24,104 (US dollars) which as of July 30\(^{th}\) 2013 equalled €18,166. [Available at: http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/countries/ireland/].
Valuing and Prioritising of 'where and how' food is produced
Crosstabulated with gender

Figure 12 Phase1: Valuing and prioritising of ‘where’ and ‘how’ food is produced cross-tabulated with gender
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5.6.2 Other personal circumstances

Pragmatic shoppers perceive local and sustainable food to be of value but they are faced with competing pressures which include but also extend beyond price-sensitivity. Focus group participants (in five of six groups) in this study presupposed that local food was not available in mainstream retailers and this finding is consistent with previous studies (Brown et al, 2009; DEFRA, 2008). Although they did report to expect such foods to be available in alternative sales fora such as farmers’ markets, these were considered to be inaccessible and inconvenient. Because of this, alternative sales fora were not considered to align with participants’ lives and even those who are identified as interested traded off their desire to purchase local and sustainable food with these personal priorities:

(You want)...to...buy local and you want to support the community but when it comes to practicalities, do you have time? Like the farmers’ market is on once a week and if you’re not free at that time or on that day...(and)...you’re in the supermarket...(you tend to)...just get whatever else you need when you’re there... [Flora, FG3:DUI]

I never make it into the market on the weekend because I’m like sleeping and then...(I’m having)...brunch and then it’s like four or five o’clock, and then the market’s closed [Sabir, FG4:GUI]

...(regarding)...inconvenience I’d...(like to discuss)...parking. If you’re trying to go to the market - of course we shouldn’t be in cars we should be in bikes - but what about parking? [Louise, FG4:GUI]

(Imagine)...all year round...(bringing)... all your veg home on your bike! [Trish, FG4:GUI]

We don’t have a farmers’ market here... You’d have to go to Portumna or Ballinasloe...(which are approximately 30km away)...and then you’d have to go very early... [Olga, FG5:GRN]

Previous studies have also found that consumers are dissuaded from shopping at farmers’ markets if they are not open at convenient times or if there is no parking or insufficient parking (Alonso & O’Neill, 2010; Lillard, 2008) and this has implications for the growth of such alternative sales fora (Hardesty, 2008). Participants in Focus Group 6 (GRI) communicated their belief that the lifestyles of most people in Ireland are inconsistent with a lifestyle in which one can consume sustainable food:
... I’m not a conservative person but I think if you have a household one person should stay at home and look after the children and cook and do the shopping for ten years or fifteen years, that would solve a lot of food problems. If you have two parents working eight or nine hours, it’s hard to be sustainable... I’m not saying the woman should be back in the kitchen... a husband can go and do the shopping the cooking, cook the food for the kids. The wife arrives home, she’s happy, dinner is ready... My mother she stayed at home, I had a great life. My neighbours, they have more money than us but they are eating shite food... (it’s)... not sustainable [Raphael]

... modern lives aren’t sustainable... but people have the time to watch all the... soaps on TV... People who’ll say ‘oh I’ll sit for an hour and watch TV’ or ‘I’ll sit for two hours and I’ll watch TV, but I don’t have time to cook a stew’. [Avril]

Do you think modern life, and sustainable food and eating are inherently incompatible? [Researcher]

Certain elements of modern life. [Lisa]

Yes, it’s a philosophy. It’s a way of living. [Ursula]

The views of these focus group discussants echo sustainable consumption discourses of voluntary simplicity and downshifting (Vanni & Taggart, 2013). In the context of food this entails eating less red meat, raising or hunting one’s own food, eating local and organic produce, but it also involves the time-consuming process of cooking from scratch (Schreurs et al, 2012). Convenience did not appear to be a priority for the participants of Focus Group 6 (GRI) or for the majority of participants across the three phases of this study; just 9% (n=94) of Phase 1 respondents ranked convenience in their top three food buying considerations.

Nonetheless, the issue of convenience did appear to be relevant to participants with families, especially those with young children and in this study it was found that participants with children living at home were often motivated in their food choices by their families’ needs and preferences. These vied with and often won out when faced with competing considerations such as taste, brand, price, local provenance and the sustainability of a food’s production or network:

... the children are going to go: ‘why you didn’t bring me my dinner? I don’t care if it came from Holland... (and is produced in an environmentally damaging way’)

[Frances, FG6:GRI]
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If it’s anything that is for...(my son)...I usually don’t really look at the price. I just kind of look at quality and that he actually likes it. If he likes it, whether it’s cheap or expensive, I just go along with it... [Julie, I13:GR]

In Phase 3, approximately one quarter of interviewees chose the mass-produced cheese in Choice Exercise 3\(^\text{30}\). Their decision was not based on issues of economic sustainability or environmental care but on the better valued offered by their choice and the knowledge that their family would approve of this choice (or conversely, that they would not approve of the alternative choice), even though it was thought to be of poorer quality. Many of these participants reported that they would like to choose the artisan cheese but were afraid that as it was made from unpasteurised goats’ milk, it would be wasted and this was a particular worry due to cheese’s high price. The comments above, and those of Tony earlier in this chapter (page 136), reflect the notion that consumption patterns change over one’s lifetime, altering with specific life events, such as having children (Jaeger-Erben, 2013). There has yet to be a study which examines the sustainable consumption of food as it relates to life-stages more broadly and having children more specifically and the findings presented here suggest that this is a topic which is ripe for further exploration.

5.7 Reflecting on the complexity and social-embeddedness of consumer choices

Data presented in this chapter illustrate that although both local food and sustainable food were valued by participants, local food would almost always take precedence over food which embodies qualities of sustainability. In turn, more practical and personal considerations were prioritised over food of local origin. With this being said, participants reported a ‘gut feeling’ that local food embodied qualities of sustainability, as well as other important issues, such as good taste and quality. These findings therefore demonstrate a sophistication and complexity of consumer values, perceptions, motivations and decisions as they relate to food. This complexity was discussed in Section 4.5 in the context of consumer understandings of the concepts of ‘local food’ and ‘sustainable food’ and will be probed further here.

\(^{30}\) Choice Exercise 3 was designed to elicit discussion on the hypothetical trade-off between local and less economically sustainable mass produced cheese against non-local but more economically sustainable artisanal cheese.
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These findings reflect theoretical debates on the nature of consumer choices and the most relevant of these models were reviewed in Section 2.3.1. To summarise this review, rational choice models of the past were critiqued for their dualistic visions of consumers as either ignorant or knowledgeable. This critique is especially relevant in the context of food choices as, due to the global nature of food systems, consumers are often prevented from ‘knowing’ about their food because of the spatial and social distance between them, at the site of consumption, and the processes, networks and relations involved at all other stages of the food system. This information-deficit model was therefore built upon and strengthened, by incorporating issues such as attitudes and other variables such as demographics and subjective social norms (for example, in the Theory of Planned Behaviour). This was applied in Bellows et al’s study (2010) which found that in choosing foods, participants were affected by personal values, as well as issues such as social standing and membership of a social group. However, values can be further problematised by highlighting their nature: either self-oriented (functional (e.g. health); hedonistic (e.g. taste)); or other-oriented (ethical (e.g. animal welfare); environmental (e.g. food miles)). As such, it is now accepted that processes of consumer choice are complex and difficult to explain or predict. To describe consumers as individualistic is simplistic and fails to recognise the fact that understandings, values, perceptions, motivations, and behaviours are all tied to social and institutional norms. Consequently, the findings in this study reflect the complicated and complex nature of food consumption in Ireland, as embedded in the unique times, spaces, places, institutions and social practices of this study.

In the area of sustainable or alternative food consumption, binary visions imagine a dualism of individualistic consumers who are only concerned with their own health, sensory enjoyment or budget; and altruistic consumers who are oriented by concern for the environment, and social and economic justice for food producers. Findings presented in this chapter illustrate the misleading nature of such a dualism; although participants reported that, given the choice, they tended to prioritise idiocentric issues, that was not to say that participants could not conceivably embody both idiocentric and allocentric concerns, depending on the context. To facilitate a critical discussion of this apparent conflict, two issues will now be focused upon here: the ethics of care; and alternative hedonism.
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It could be argued that all consumer decisions are motivated by care: consumers caring for themselves and their family, caring for their local and wider community, and caring for the environment. Care is often conceptualised as a rigid hierarchy in which one cares for oneself and one’s ‘own’. However, the level of care is thought to diminish as the object is further away, in either a spatial or social sense. By extension, it is thought that the subject only has the capacity to care about ‘others’ and the environment (Fisher & Tronto, 1990). Therefore, a preliminary assessment of the data in this study would suggest that participants adhere to this understanding of care, actively caring for themselves and their family by prioritising issues such as taste, health and affordability while appreciating, but not prioritising issues such as environmental care or social justice.

However, as mentioned above, this conceptualisation reflects rigid scalar hierarchies which see each scale as fixed, nested and bounded, with no emphasis on fluidity and interactions between and among scales (ibid.; Marston et al, 2005). The ‘local’ and the ‘global’ are seen in binary terms, just as ‘us’ and ‘ours’ are in opposition to ‘others’ and the environment. In reality, between both different scales and different levels of care there is a degree of fluidity and interconnectedness (Feagan, 2007). A consumer can in fact care for a distant ‘other’ or the environment through an ‘instrumental task’ (Abel & Nelson, 1990, 4) and not just care about them with ‘affective relations’ (ibid.). In the context of food, such tasks might include the purchase of organic or fair trade produce and this represents flexibility among consumers to be able to care for those both ‘here’ and ‘there’. Nonetheless, few participants in this study appeared, whether consciously or not, to ‘jump’ scales of care to reach those or that (i.e. the environment) which are perceived as being socially or spatially distant.

Therefore, a tension exists between participants simultaneously ‘caring’ and ‘not caring’ and this reflects the complex and contextualised nature of consumption. This contention is borne out in Soper’s theory of ‘alternative hedonism’ (2008) which she argued is embodied by simultaneous motivations to support alternative modes of consumption, for example fair trade, while also seeking to maximise the pleasurable aspects of consumption. Alternative hedonism is intimately connected to the idea of the consumer-citizenship whereby while the limited power of creating change through consumption is recognised, this power is exerted nonetheless (Soper, 2004). This concept therefore recognises the co-existence of supposedly conflicting private and
public concerns and this recognition, it has been argued, is important for harnessing consumer power. Given its focus on aspirations for the ‘good life’, alternative hedonism may not be the most apt label to describe the complexity of consumer values in this study. Nonetheless, this conceptualisation is useful in that it legitimates the notion of food consumption being driven by a range of (often conflicting) motivations. This was certainly found to be true in the unique social, spatial and temporal context of participants in this study.

So far in this chapter, it has been argued that participants had mostly positive perceptions of local food, attributing to it a number of positive characteristics including sustainability, and they therefore have fallen into the ‘local trap’ (Born & Purcell, 2006). Many proponents of localisation aim to make the origins of food opaque, thus defetishising it and creating an alternative supply model (Roos et al, 2004). It could be argued therefore that as consumers (and indeed sellers) fall into the trap of conflating what is simply one ‘means’ to the ‘ends’ of sustainability, they actually (re-)fetishise local food (Eden et al, 2008a; 2008b). As such, to further expand on the argument that consumer perceptions and decision-making are contextualised and complex, the notion of the ‘local trap’ will now be critiqued from two key perspectives. Firstly, the notion of the ‘local trap’ fails to recognise the complications and contextualised nature of values, perceptions, motivations and decision-making. That is, to envisage participants as simply falling into what is presented as an easily-avoidable trap fails to take into account the various competing and complementary issues with which participants are faced when choosing food, as discussed so far in this section.

A second specific critique of local trap rhetoric is that it fails to reflect on the normative goals put forward by the food system localisation movement. Granted, this study is based on a number of assumptions in the area of food system localisation, namely: that food system change must happen; that this change will be most effective if brought about by a movement-oriented form of localisation; and that the desired changes include a reduction in food miles, shorter and less corporate food chains, and smaller-scales of production. However, it is argued here that it is erroneous to assume that anyone has fallen into a ‘trap’ which they themselves do not perceive to be a trap. That is, it is important to consider the contextualised nature of desired outcomes of food system localisation. If, in Ireland, consumers hope that a localised food system will
Chapter 5: Consumer perceptions & priorities: what motivates or inhibits purchases of local and sustainable food?

Economically support producers and the wider economy, and these are the traits which they then assume local food to embody, have they really fallen into any trap?

The final issue to be addressed in this section is that of the ‘value-action gap’ or the ‘attitude-behaviour gap’ which was critically discussed in Chapter 2 and highlighted in this chapter as being present in this study’s participants. To review, a gap has been identified between participants’ positive attitudes towards local food (and some participants’ positive perceptions towards sustainable food) and their actual buying behaviour. This reflects a well-worded tension, discussed in much sustainable consumption and moral geographies literature between, amongst other things, value-for-money and values-for-money, as ethical considerations are traded off against functional ones (Lang, 2010). However, to assume that values or attitudes will or should translate into certain actions or behaviours is to again fail to recognise the complexity of the consumer situation. It also fails to recognise the fact that all consumer choices are made within a unique context of society, space and time. As such, it is posited here that the idea of a normative correlation between values and actions, or attitudes and behaviours is fallacious.

As such, the principle message here is that consumers and consumption are complicated and complex, being influenced by a wide array of institutional, regulatory, institutional, environmental, social, financial and personal factors. Explanations of consumer choices and behaviours more broadly, and local, alternative and sustainable consumption choices more specifically have, to date, largely failed to recognise this complexity. This is evidenced by the language used to describe the ‘problems’ in this area: the ‘local trap’; a ‘value-action gap’; and ‘circles of care’. These expressions cause consumers to be seen as hemmed in by rigid barriers beyond which they cannot or do not proceed. However, it has been argued here that, just as when engaging in alternative hedonism, participants can and do in fact work within blurred lines and fluidity of values and actions.

The findings and discussion presented in this chapter represent a significant contribution to empirical, practical and theoretical knowledge. The empirical data provides a snapshot of the complexity of consumers in Ireland in this era: what their core values were in relation to food; how they perceived local food and sustainable food; what they were motivated by in choosing foods; how they prioritised when faced with considering their values, perceptions and motivations; and what their ultimate food
choices were. This data would be of practical interest and relevance to those who are involved in, or are interested in, food system issues. In particular, bodies such as Bord Bia or Teagasc may find these data useful, considering their recognition of the importance of gaining a nuanced understanding of consumer perspectives.

However, the single biggest contribution of this chapter is to conceptual knowledge on debates on local food, alternative food networks and sustainable food consumption. This contribution is useful both within this thesis (i.e. the following chapter draws on the findings and discussion which is presented here) but also to knowledge more broadly. Specifically, it offers unique insights into the complex and contextualised nature of consumer choices. It does this by critiquing a number of previous theories in this area, namely the ethics of care, the local trap and the value-action gap. It argues that their rigid perspective on consumer choices are reflected by the use of language which describes defined and bounded spaces which are difficult to break out of (circle), break free from (trap) or climb out of (gap). This critique therefore offers a new perspective on previous debates on consumer choices and hopes to drive scholarship in this area in new and fruitful directions.
Chapter 5: Consumer perceptions & priorities: what motivates or inhibits purchases of local and sustainable food?
Chapter 6: Localist typologies and reflexivity

6.1 Introduction

Findings presented in the preceding chapters illustrate the attributes which participants in this study perceived local food to embody, the value which local food held for them, and the extent to which it was prioritised. Considering these findings, it is thought that most participants could be described as food ‘localists’: they favoured local food; they held various positive perceptions of local food; and these perceptions resulted in it often being prioritised over other considerations, including issues of sustainability. However, despite a majority of participants both liking and buying local food, their motivations and how exactly they chose to engage with local food differed. McEntee in his 2010 study recognised the heterogeneity of intentions and manifestations among local food consumers in creating his dichotomous typology of food localists. His framework was comprised of traditional localists and contemporary localists. The former is signified by a desire to source affordable fresh food and to continue and/or sustain a local food tradition. The latter localism is represented by emergent ideological ‘buy local’ movements which promote the intrinsic quality of local food products, their fewer food miles and consequent lesser environmental impact, and their local economic and social benefits. Although the act of procuring local food ties these two localisms together, the differing motivations of contemporary and traditional localists means that this procurement can manifest itself in different ways. Contemporary localists engage with AFNs and are most likely to source local food in places such as farmers’ markets and co-operatives; traditional localists, being most oriented by affordability, grow their own food or source it through reciprocal food exchanges.

McEntee’s typology represents a theoretical contribution to investigations of food in society. He posits that these food localists inhabit the same geographical but different social spaces. Understanding the contextualised nature of the meanings and values which are attached to foods is important. The particular context of McEntee’s research was that it was carried out with consumers and food system actors, in rural New Hampshire, USA. McEntee contends that in this location, ‘(a)griculture and food production are important parts of the social and historical ethos...’ (797) and he deduces that the food localist framework which he has devised will also be applicable in similar areas in the USA. Although a geographically separate place, Ireland too has strong social and cultural connections to agriculture and it is therefore possible that food localists in
Chapter 6: Localist typologies and reflexivity

Ireland could be classed according to McEntee’s traditional localist/contemporary localist framework. However, because critical discussions have highlighted differences between North American (emphasise processes, networks and relations) and European (emphasise origins and materiality of food) approaches to AFNs (Watts et al, 2005), this was thought to be unlikely. Nonetheless, this analysis attempted to further McEntee’s theoretical contribution by probing the nature of food localisms in the following geographical and social context: consumers, who were both interested and not interested in issues of food system sustainability (Phase 2), in both urban and rural areas, in two locations in Ireland (Phases 2 and 3).

As such, the research presented in this thesis builds on McEntee’s work in two key ways. Firstly, it develops a new binary typology of food localists (for the specific geographic and social context of participants) but in contrast to McEntee’s dualistic binary, the two forms of localism which emerged in this study share a number of intersecting food localist intents. Therefore, this new binary is arguably more nuanced than McEntee’s. Secondly, whereas McEntee’s work is framed as a description of food localist typologies, this study goes beyond the application of a framework to incorporate a theoretical evaluation of these forms of localisms. Specifically, it applies the conceptual tool of reflexivity to aid in assessing participants’ values and priorities as they relate to local food (i.e. their food localisms). It probes the extent to which the two localist tribes which emerged in this research are defined by a fetishisation of local spaces and the food therein, to the detriment of more reflexive approaches which focus on the relations and processes involved. It also discusses the implications of the creation of such localist typologies and the value of critiquing them from the perspective of reflexivity.

6.2 An emergent dichotomous framework of food localisms

Not a single Phase 2 or Phase 3 participant in this study fitted squarely into McEntee’s traditional localist category. By contrast, many participants were classified under McEntee’s label of contemporary localists: ten interviewees and three focus groups (all Interested: FG3:DUI; FG4:GUI; FG6:DRI) reported that they were motivated to buy local food because they considered it to be healthier and fresher, and also because they valued the economic, social and environmental benefits which they perceived it to provide. However, the largest single localist group which was identified was that which
Chapter 6: Localist typologies and reflexivity

satisfied all but one of the contemporary localist category’s ‘intent’ criteria. This group of fifteen interviewees and two focus groups (FG1:DRN; FG2:DUN), similar to the contemporary localists, prioritised issues of social and economic sustainability primarily as they were concerned with farms, farmers and food producers. In addition, they valued the aesthetic qualities of local foods. However, the main difference between these two groups was that while contemporary localists were also motivated to buy local food due to the perception of embedded environmentally-friendliness, this emergent third group were not concerned with this issue. Although different in just one respect, it is argued here that the absence of environmental care from the list of food localist intentions is significant enough for this third group to be differentiated from contemporary localists. It appears therefore that McEntee’s dichotomous framework is insufficient in this context as it does not accurately reflect the food localist intentions of participants in this study. As such, a new emergent localist typology is established here, which builds on McEntee’s previous framing (Table 5).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food Localism Intent</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>McEntee’s Localist Typology</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Traditional localism</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus Groups: 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewees: 0</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Affordability</td>
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<td>• Accessibility</td>
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<td>• Preservation of local food tradition</td>
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Table 5 Food localism intent. Adapted from McEntee (2010, 790)

McEntee’s framework is based on food localist intent (i.e. why local food is preferred) as well as on how these values manifest themselves (i.e. how people choose to engage with local food). As such, this emergent group differs from contemporary localist in more ways than their failure to value and prioritise environmental care when
Chapter 6: Localist typologies and reflexivity

choosing local foods; they also differ in how their version of localism manifests itself. McEntee characterises contemporary localism as manifesting itself through engagement with alternative sales fora such as farmers’ markets or community supported agriculture schemes. In contrast, the form of localism which has emerged in this study manifests itself through local food purchases in mainstream sales fora such as multinational retailers (Table 6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food Localisms</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contemporary localism</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Intent</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Healthier and fresher products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Preservation of rural character</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Support of local economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Supports farmers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Environmental sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Manifestation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Farmers’ markets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Community supported agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Co-operatives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 Emergent food localism framework. Adapted from McEntee (2010, 790)

Therefore, while contemporary localism is based on a movement-oriented ethos of alternative networks of provisioning, the emergent form of localism manifests itself by engagement with more mainstream sales fora, which are often implicated in unsustainable food processes, networks or interactions. Echoing Watts et al’s 2005 classification of strong and weak AFNs\(^\text{31}\), contemporary localism could be classed as ‘stronger’ and the form of localism which emerged in this research could be labelled as ‘weaker’. The ‘strength’ of contemporary localisms lies in its emphasis on economic, social and environmental sustainability as well as its manifestation through engagement with alternative (and potentially more sustainable) networks. The ‘weakness’ of the emergent form of localism lies in its neglect of environmental care in its intent. Its weakness also lies in its constituent members’ preference for sourcing local food.

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\(^{31}\) Watts et al (2005) based their classification of strong and weak alternative food networks on the extent to which their proponents emphasised the network, that is, the social justness and equity which it imbues (strong), or the materiality of the food in such a network (weak).
through sales fora which have long been implicated in a number of detrimental food system consequences which the localisation movement seeks to remedy.

6.3 Reflecting on degrees of reflexivity

Both the emergent localism (weaker) and contemporary localism (stronger) could be classified as ‘defensive’. Defensive localisms are driven by a sense of solidarity with farmers and food producers who are from a spatially proximate place. They are not concerned with a desire to build broader (unbounded) community cohesion, or to encourage justice and equity in the food system (Goodman & Goodman, 2010; Feagan, 2007; DuPuis & Goodman, 2005). In this study, participants’ food localism tendencies were driven by intentions to serve the interests of those from a bounded local space (in this case, Ireland: see Section 4.1) and as a consequence they exclude from their range of concern those from ‘outside’ (Seyfang, 2007; Born & Purcell, 2006; Ilbery & Maye, 2005; Watts et al, 2005; Morris & Buller 2003; Winter, 2003; Allen, 1999). However, according to Goodman et al (2012), it is important when making consumption choices to also consider distant ‘others’ because ‘(t)hose we buy from are not the only...people worthy of our thoughts’ (31). Nevertheless, it could be said that there are degrees of defensiveness. The emergent form of localism manifests as the procurement of local food in corporate retailers which are widely held to engage in unfair trading practices. Therefore, true to its ‘weaker’ nature, this type of localism seems to be more defensive than contemporary localism. This is because contemporary localisms, in engaging with (potentially) more transformative sales fora such as farmers’ markets and community supported agriculture schemes (possibly) prioritise issues such as community and equity.

Arising out of critiques of prevailing (defensive) forms of localism are suggestions of a preferable approach to food system localisation, that is, reflexivity (Goodman et al, 2012; Donald et al, 2010; Harris, 2010; Morgan & Sonnino, 2010; Lockie, 2009; Feagan, 2007; Goodman & Goodman, 2007; Seyfang, 2006; Sonnino & Marsden, 2006; DuPuis & Goodman, 2005; Hinrichs, 2003). Reflexive localism is not concerned with a singular vision but rather is process-focused and is open to any food production processes, networks or interactions which encourage its core goals. These are greater environmental care, social justice and community cohesion for the majority, rather than for just a homogeneous (white, middle-class) few (Goodman et al, 2012). Mindful of the contextualised nature of these goals, it is accepted that processes of reflexivity will differ
Chapter 6: Localist typologies and reflexivity

according to circumstances, for example the geographic and social context. As such, reflexive approaches do not favour the local scale, or any other scale, as a site for the achievement of its goals. As reflexivity is a relative and context-based process, it is difficult to prescribe exactly what a reflexive localism is. In fact, Goodman et al contend that ‘...theorists see reflexivity as a way to escape a politics of perfection that both hides and perpetuates hegemony’ (2012, 30). Yet, it is argued here that although reflexivity does not espouse a singular process, practice or scale (means), it does proffer an idealised view of the outcomes of this process (end). These outcomes are greater economic, social and environmental sustainability in the globally-integrated food system. What is important to remember is that these outcomes will manifest themselves in different ways, according to the particular context. Nonetheless, in spite of consensus on the process-based nature of reflexive localisms, there has yet to be a study which takes this obscure concept and attempts to apply it to engagements with localisms, by consumers or otherwise. As such, this analysis endeavours to assess the dualistic food localist typology which emerged in this study, while bearing in mind that visions of reflexivity are context-specific.

Reflection upon the ‘stronger’ (contemporary) and ‘weaker’ localisms suggests that as both are identified as embodying some degree of defensiveness, they cannot be reflexive localisms -defensive localism being the antithesis of reflexive localism. To review, the defensive label was applied in this study when an absence of certain social and environmental concerns, and an engagement with particular sales fora were recorded. However, the blanket application of the negative defensive or unreflexive label is to ignore the complicated and nuanced nature of consumer choices in which a number of competing considerations and values work together to create a decision. As consumers’ temporal, social and personal contexts change, it is therefore conceivable that they could at times be classified as unreflexive and at other times, reflexive. It could also be argued that even if consumers merely consider or reflect upon processes and practices, as opposed to focusing solely on scale, this may be indicative of a degree of reflexivity. This contention is important as a small number of participants described a ‘gut feeling’ that local food embodied a number of positive characteristics and was therefore preferable. Although emotions undeniably have biological bases, the gut feeling in question is founded upon socially constructed sentiments of, amongst other things, local and national solidarity (Fisher & Chon, 1989). For consumers to recognise this may precipitate their critical reflection on this ‘gut’ feeling and a consequent move towards greater reflexivity.
Chapter 6: Localist typologies and reflexivity

A final point on the complexity, and thus difficulty, in testing for reflexivity is that this requires a normative understanding of what reflexivity is. The reason this is problematic is because proponents of reflexivity argue that its essence lies in a lack of foundation in prescriptive ideals (DuPuis & Goodman, 2005). To explain, evaluating reflexivity in consumers requires evaluative criteria, the choice of which will be based in normative assumptions of what does and does not constitute reflexivity. In Phase 3’s choice exercises, this is precisely how an attempt was made to test for reflexivity: participants were asked to choose between products in which were embedded local scale/‘bad’ process and outcomes, and non-local scale/‘good’ processes and outcomes. Despite the now obvious weakness of this method, it is thought that the findings arising from these exercises, as well as other questions in this study, are in some way indicative of reflexivity among consumers (as presented in Section 6.2). Nonetheless, this discussion aims to highlight the difficulty of applying the formerly esoteric concept of reflexivity to consumers. The methodology used here was neither objective nor free from assumptions and ideals. However, it cannot be said that any research is truly free from subjective bias and as such, the methodology which was utilised here produced imperfect but nonetheless useful findings.

Assessing the nature of consumer food localisms is of practical importance given the power which has been attributed to consumers to contribute to food system change (Johnston & Szabo, 2011; Lockie, 2009). The critical discussion presented in this chapter may inform the development of tailored policies and marketing strategies (and/or future research which also leads to these goals) which focus on the creation of greater democracy and environmental care in the food system. This study is of particular value due to gaps which exists in research on the consumer perspective of alternative and local food networks (Tregear, 2011). However, the value of the critical discussion presented in this chapter does not lie solely in the potential practical application of these findings; it also lies in its theoretical and conceptual contributions. Assessing motivations and manifestations as they relate to local food is conceptually novel with only McEntee (2010) attempting this in the past. This research builds on this conceptual contribution by critically analysing McEntee’s framework and building a new one from it, based on the particular context of this study. Herein lies the second major conceptual contribution of this study: that consumer choices are complex and contextualised and this is also true for choices as they relate to local and sustainable food. This argument has been the unifying thread through Chapters 4, 5 and 6, and has been strongly made throughout. Finally, the theoretical contribution of this chapter is also manifest in
Chapter 6: Localist typologies and reflexivity

Section 6.3 with the assessment of the degrees of reflexivity present in the emergent food localist typologies. This represents the first ever attempt to take the concept of reflexivity out of the esoteric realm and to ground it. Although this study has found that testing degrees of reflexivity among consumers is extremely difficult, this does not amount to a failure. Rather, this represents an important contribution to knowledge which had previously been unknown. In fact, it is hoped that future studies may build upon this finding to create a more effective tool for testing reflexivity among consumers of local food.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Review of the research

Food provisioning worldwide is thought to have become so embroiled in global capitalist relations that a singular food system prevails. Although not homogenous, this food system is largely characterised by corporate control, neo-liberal free trade and industrial processes. This system is also characterised by its many problems, environmental, social and economic. These include a lack of sovereignty over food supply chains in the global South, and indeed among communities of the global North; unhealthy and dangerous working conditions for food producers, the affects of which are often hidden from spatially distant consumer communities; and environmental degradation which results from intensive agri-food processes and ‘food miles’ emissions (Sage, 2011). Not surprisingly, both policy-makers and academics agree that the status quo cannot continue and suggestions for change follow one of two approaches. The first of these involves the increased use of innovations to improve efficiency of production and to allow ‘business as usual’. The second is the creation of (or reversion to) an alternative mode of food provisioning which may involve different production processes, utilise spatially and socially shorter supply chains, and be represented by non-economic values and priorities (Murtagh, 2010).

This latter ‘alternative’ approach aligns with the key principles of sustainability and there are numerous movements which have emerged as a means to the end of food system sustainability. However, the three which have emerged most prominently are organic production, fair trade and localisation and as a consequence, these have garnered the most academic attention to date (cf. Johnston et al, 2009; Barrientos & Dolan, 2006; Wilkins, 2005). However, a disproportionate amount of attention has been paid to sustainable production (both in the field of food production and more generally) relative to sustainable consumption. Consumers, in exerting their buying power, can affect change and the paucity of research in this field represents a gap in knowledge which has only begun to be filled (Tregear, 2011). Studies carried out with North American, British and continental European consumers analysing their local and sustainable food perceptions have found that the term ‘local food’, although understood fluidly, is largely defined according to spatial proximity (Dunne et al, 2010). They have also found that although characteristics such as local provenance and the sustainability
which is embedded in food products are high on the list of consumer priorities, they are not at the top of this list (Svensfelt & Carlsson-Kanyama, 2010).

The lack of similar consumer investigations in Ireland highlights a significant gap in knowledge, in particular on the topics of how consumers in Ireland understand the terms local food and sustainable food. Indeed, there are very few studies worldwide which analyse what consumers (or any others) take the term sustainable food to mean (cf. Kloppenburg et al, 2000)), and how they perceive, value and prioritise certain food characteristics. In addition, existing studies have failed to directly address the tension which often exists for consumers (whether in Ireland or elsewhere) between local food and food with qualities of sustainability, for example organic food. Nor has there been a study which explores the possible conflation of these two characteristics in the minds of consumers. Although theoretical discourses of a new and more productive form of localism, reflective localism, have begun to emerge, there has yet to be a study which examines how this may be applied to the consumer context (Goodman & Goodman, 2012). McEntee (2010) critically constructs two food localist neo-tribes according to consumer motivations but he fails to utilise reflexivity as a tool in this analysis. This study therefore attempted to address these gaps in knowledge, exploring the views of consumers in Ireland with regard to the local food system, particularly in the context of sustainability. It drew on discourses of sustainability research to:

1. analyse consumers’ understandings of the concepts of ‘local food’ and ‘sustainable food’;
2. test the hypothesis that local food is conflated with a number of positive characteristics, in particular sustainability;
3. provide a nuanced understanding of the values of consumers, and by extension, the relative importance of local provenance and sustainability when faced with competing considerations;
4. develop a conceptual framework of how these understandings, perceived attributes and values may motivate or inhibit consumers’ purchases of local and sustainable food.

As such, using a theoretically grounded methodological approach, the role of this project was to empirically investigate the relationship between scale and sustainability in consumer food choices and to explore if and what type of localism participants subscribed to.
Chapter 1 introduced the dissertation by contextualising its academic and policy foundations before setting out its rationale, purpose and approach. Chapter 2 further contextualised this study by examining literature which justified the use of a sustainability paradigm. It reviewed previous international studies on how consumers understand, perceive, value and prioritise the characteristics of local provenance and sustainability. This chapter closed with a critically engaged analysis of consumer food localisms. All three sections in Chapter 2 cumulatively highlighted particular gaps in knowledge which this research aimed to address. Chapter 3 provided an in-depth exposition of the methodological approach employed in this study. It detailed the processes involved in the selection of participants, in the conducting of this multi-phase mixed methodology study and in the analysis of data which had been generated. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 presented and comprehensively discussed the findings of this study, which were thematically divided across these three chapters. Chapter 4 focused on data which related to participants’ understandings of the terms local food and sustainable food. Chapter 5 was dedicated to exploring findings on participants’ perceptions of local and sustainable food and the nature of their food choices. Building on these findings in particular, Chapter 6 discussed the exact nature of participants’ food localist tendencies.

Chapter 7 began by setting out the importance of this study by providing a contextual and theoretical overview, highlighting gaps in knowledge and justifying the choice of aims and objectives (Section 7.1). Next, it examines whether these aims, which were stated in Chapter 1’s introduction, have been achieved. This section synthesises empirical findings of this study to show how they converge to answer the questions which underpin this thesis (Section 7.2). Section 7.3 contains a clear statement on how this research contributes to existing knowledge. It does not attempt to undermine existing research but instead presents an exposition of how this work builds on and breaks into novel areas of scholarship. Evidence of reflection on the limitations of this research is presented in Section 7.4 which details the findings of this careful analysis and the ways in which this thesis might have been improved with such hindsight. The insights provided from this analysis feed into the next substantive section which highlights possible future directions of research in this field. Not alone are recommendations for other scholars and researchers made but this researcher’s future plans (which build on this study) are outlined (Section 7.5). This chapter closes with a brief reminder of the significance of this study and of how the goals of this research have been achieved (Section 7.6).
7.2 Overview of the results

The study has been successful in its first aim: to explore consumers’ understandings of the terms local food and sustainable food. The majority of participants – as Not Interested – appeared uncomfortable with the concept of sustainable food. In contrast, all participants seemed to be familiar with the term local food. Although most insisted that they characterise local food according to close spatial limits alone (a majority delimited this to ‘from within Ireland’), a nuanced reading of data revealed that how participants understood this term was highly dependent on context and was therefore socially constructed. Most participants rejected the assertion that local food must be produced using specific (small scale) processes, must be derived from certain (short) networks or must be embedded in particular (community-oriented) relations. It appears therefore that participants have fallen into the ‘local trap’ but to assume this is too simplistic as it ignores the complex and contextual nature of understandings as they relate to food. This complexity is further evidenced by the fluidity of understandings both within and across participants. To summarise, it is argued that although understandings of ‘local food’ are framed by spatial factors, these are in turn driven by social factors. Because these social factors are contextualised within space (amongst other things), they are in part constructed by space. The mutual constitution of space and society are highlighted to emphasise the complexity of consumer understandings of ‘local food’ and ‘sustainable food’.

In addition to analysing understandings of local and sustainable food, this study also investigated participants’ perceptions of local and sustainable food, in particular whether local was conflated with characteristics of sustainability and the achievement of this aim was evidenced in the findings presented throughout this thesis. Participants associated local food with many positive traits, including characteristics of sustainability, apparently falling into the ‘local trap’ by attributing qualities to local food beyond simple proximity. However, the fallacy of binary understandings of ignorant/uncaring or knowledgeable/caring consumer is highlighted, within the context of discussions on the everyday complications which participants must contend with when choosing their foods. Local trap rhetoric is critiqued, as is rhetoric of value-action gap, due to the rigidity of bounded ‘trap’ and ‘gap’ conceptualisations which fail to reflect the fluidity, complexity and contextualised nature of consumer values, perceptions, motivations, priorities and choices as they relate to local food and sustainable food.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

The study then undertook a critical analysis of the reported and implied values of consumers, particularly the relative importance of local provenance and sustainability when faced with competing considerations, and the provision of a nuanced understanding of how these understandings, perceived attributes and values may motivate or inhibit consumers’ purchases of local and sustainable food. Results which were presented and discussed in Chapter 5 showed that an attitude-behaviour gap existed in relation to local and sustainable food. Participants reported to trade off their different values with pragmatic issues such as affordability prioritised over arguably more other-oriented considerations, such as local provenance and sustainability. Despite local rhetoric appearing less persuasive than first thought, it was found that local food would almost always take precedence when set in opposition to food which embodies qualities of sustainability, for example organic food. This was not surprising due to the assumption that local food embodies qualities of sustainability (in addition to other positive traits). However, participants’ fetishisation of the local space and food therein could be characterised negatively in the context of creating greater food system sustainability through consumer action. The evidence presented throughout the results indicates that their form of localism was not founded upon principles of reflexivity: participants were not primarily motivated by democratic ideals of social justice or care for environmental stewardship. Instead, the localism which they adhered to was more defensive and rigid with the majority motivated by a diluted (and consequently weak) version of what McEntee (2010) dubs ‘contemporary localism’. However, the notion of reflexivity must also be reflected upon and this thesis argues that it is also a fluid and complicated term, and as such to conclude that participants either are or are not reflexive is erroneous. It is more useful to understand reflexivity as being present sometimes and in some ways rather than as either being present or absent from consumer food localisms.

7.3 Contribution to knowledge

The results and discussions in this chapter are important as they represent significant empirical, practical and theoretical contributions to knowledge. The empirical contribution of this thesis is perhaps its most obvious. This is because this study resulted in the collection and analysis of a large amount of data on understandings, perceptions, values, priorities and motivations as they relate to local food. This collection of data is
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however particularly notable as it contributes significantly to existing (scant) data on how the concepts of ‘local food’ and ‘sustainable food’ are understood and viewed. The Irish context of this research is also entirely novel and represents a significant contribution to knowledge in this respect.

In addition to gathering a large amount of empirical data, another contribution of this study is that it has produced findings which are policy-relevant. The subject of the sustainable consumption of food is of interest to policy-makers as it offers a potential solution to issues which have emerged on a national and international scale, such as the growth of animal-based diets, predictions of widespread food insecurity in the near future, and the difficulties which food producers worldwide face in maintaining their livelihoods. Specifically, findings on consumers’ understandings of the meaning of local food may inform policy-makers who, following recent UK and US efforts, may wish to regulate food system localisation by codifying the meaning of local food. In addition, the contention that participants are concerned with the sustainability of food producer/worker livelihoods is also relevant to those in a policy-making role. This is especially true within Europe where the EU’s CAP has a large and tangible impact on rural communities. This study concludes that participants do not prioritise the environment or distant ‘others’ in choosing food and this may inform future policies for sustainable consumption which are driven by Millennium Development Goals, specifically the eradication of food insecurity, and sustainable development. Broadly speaking, the consumer insights garnered in this study should also be considered valuable from a policy perspective; national and international policy documents (e.g. *Pathways for Growth*: Bord Bia, 2012c) which discuss the future of food systems cite the importance of gaining the consumer perspective.

However, the most important contribution of this thesis is to theoretical and conceptual debates in the areas of local food, alternative food networks, and sustainable food consumption. The key theoretical concept which runs through all three results and discussions chapters is the finding that the views of consumers as to local and sustainable food are difficult to measure and explain. This is because they are complex and contextualised within specific spaces and places. In line with this, this thesis offers the first explicit critique of the notions of the ‘local trap’ as it fails to recognise the fluidity and multiplicity of consumer understandings of local food. Rhetoric on the ethics of care and the value-action gap are also critiqued from the
perspective that these issues are conceptualised too rigidly (especially in their use of restrictive words such as ‘trap’, ‘gap’ and ‘circles’) which fails to recognise the fluidity, complexity, multiplicity and heterogeneity of the concepts of local food and sustainable food, and how consumers interpret them. Another significant theoretical contribution of this thesis is the systematic classification of consumer food localisms; this resulted in a novel dichotomous framework which may be applicable in similar contexts. These localist typologies were then assessed according to their degree of reflexivity and the removal of the concept of reflexivity from the esoteric sphere to this applied setting is innovative and has produced findings which were entirely original. The critical discussions put forward in this thesis therefore represent a significant contribution to relevant knowledge and debates and it is hoped that these help to drive future research in this area in new and fruitful directions.

7.4 Limitations and recommendations

A number of limitations to the methodological approach taken are discussed throughout Section 3.3 of this thesis. However, this section reflects upon the limitations of the entire research process and will discuss how, with hindsight, it could have been approached differently. Nonetheless, what is felt to be the most significant methodological limitation of this study (the wording of Phase 1’s survey questions) is also reiterated here.

Following analysis of Phase 1 data, the limited number of questions used and the problematic language of one particular question emerged as problematic. This led to frustration over how potentially more useful this phase of research could have been. Nonetheless, the five questions which were relevant to this thesis were used in the large scale survey of Phase 1 and results provided invaluable and insightful data. These data can stand alone but also provided a useful basis for subsequent phases of investigation.

Upon reflection on the sampling strategy which was employed, those used in Phases 1 and 2 are thought to have been effective. However, in hindsight if it is felt that clustering the sample in Phase 3 according to interest and non-interest in issues of food system sustainability would have provided more data for a comparison of these two groups, than that which data from Phase 2 alone provided.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

Reflection also brings to mind the notion that alternative methodologies could have been employed to (better) achieve the research goals. To date, social scientific consumption studies have focused on measures predominantly based on self-reported pro-environmental behaviour. To enhance research on food consumption studies, it would be useful to identify dependent variables that influence the actual environmental impact of consumer food behaviour, that is, research which amalgamates impact-oriented studies. In this context, within this study, in addition to the qualitative phases of this study, the innovative methodology of shadowing participants during their shopping trips could have proved fruitful. A key assumption of this study is that consumers are honest in their reporting of their food consumption behaviours and although this is not doubted, actually being present in shopping fora with participants may have negated any possible Hawthorne effect. In addition, in studying the real world issue of food choices, conducting research in the physical and temporal presence of these choices may have bolstered the accuracy and nuance of these findings.

This research is not isolated and exists in a continuum of previous studies which it was founded upon and future studies which it may influence. Considering the direction which future researchers may take in this area, a number of recommendations can be made to build on this research. Of course, using the methodology suggested in the third and final reflection above in a similar study would likely provide new insights into the issue of consumer perceptions and motivations in relation to local and sustainable food. In addition, certain insights arising from this study were so interesting that they merit further exploration. Suggested avenues for further inquiry include the fluidity and elasticity of consumers’ understandings of local food; the importance which is attached to the local provenance of meat products (this would be especially interesting considering the horsemeat scandal which took place following the collection of data in this study); and the implications of demographic issues such as gender and the presence of children in the household on attitudes and behaviours towards local and sustainable food. There are a number of other areas in academia which future research might link with. For example, the importance of the concept of resilience in food systems studies is set out in Section 2.2.1 and this area represent an exciting opportunity for future studies. In the context of this research, this may involve expanding studies which probe consumers’ perspectives on local food into those which are underpinned by a resilience paradigm.
7.5 Conclusion

It could be argued that the subject areas of alternative food systems and sustainable consumption suffer from a lack of sufficient academic attention, in particular from social scientists. The mundane nature of food and its consumption perhaps account for it being overlooked in favour of more novel, innovative and (supposedly) exciting subject matter. However, the everyday nature of food is exactly the reason why it is deserving of academic, and indeed policy, focus. As one of the, if not the, most fundamental materials of life, food is relevant to everyone, everywhere. The problems which attend the increasingly globally integrated and industrially transformed food system means its nature and form should receive particular attention. The environmentally damaging and socially and economically unsustainable nature of the prevailing food system, as well as predictions for future population growth combine to present a worrying scenario. Sharp increases in food prices in the period from 2007 to 2008, although not attributable to food shortages, have brought to the fore the prospect of future food insecurity. Consequently, it is widely accepted in policy circles that food system change is necessary and the dominant rhetoric to this end is that of ‘sustainable intensification’. This involves increasing yield to meet growing demand while utilising knowledge and innovations to create efficiencies in production. However, many doubt the true sustainability of such an approach and instead espouse a radically alternative method for food system transformation. This involves the use of production processes and food networks which eschew conventional capitalist ideals and instead are embedded in a wholly different -some would say traditional- way of ‘doing’ food.

This study focused on emergent alternative food movements and it is therefore of critical importance. Although much attention has been paid to encouraging sustainable food production, research which analyses the role of consumption and consumers still lags behind. In addition, research which investigates the views of consumers in Ireland in relation to alternative foods is noticeably absent. This is therefore the first study to explore the topic of how consumers in Ireland understand, perceive, value and prioritise the qualities of sustainability and local provenance in food consumption. Findings overwhelmingly support the thesis of this study, that is, that indicative (but not representative) of consumers in Ireland, participants attribute a number of positive associations to local food. Although it could be argued that they fall into the ‘local trap’ as they conflate local food with sustainability, this contention would fail to recognise the complicated and contextualised conditions under which food
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choices are made. In fact, this is the key message of the thesis: that food choices are
based on a number of often competing considerations which are difficult to predict
given the social and spatial embeddedness of these issues. In attempting to gauge the
level of reflexivity in consumer food localisms, the issues of context, complications and
fluidity again emerge. As such, this finding runs consistently throughout this thesis and
represents a novel empirical and theoretical insight which is of practical and conceptual
importance.
References

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Appendices

Appendix 1


Title: Rhetoric of ‘Buy Irish Food’ campaigns: speaking to consumer values to valorise the ‘local’ and exclude ‘others’?

Abstract:

Drives to (re-)localise the system of food provisioning have arisen and proliferated in recent times, chiefly in response to the negative consequences of the prevailing global food system. Due to this, but also since Ireland has begun to experience economic difficulties, many ‘Buy Irish Food’ campaigns have emerged and although not a new phenomenon, their recent (re-)emergence and abundance are notable. Drawing on discourses of sustainability, sustainable consumption and geographical scales, this paper aims to critically analyse the nature of these campaigns and the persuasive arguments upon which these promotions are based. Following a review of the literature on values of consumers in Ireland towards Irish and local food, a thematic analysis is employed to determine the key rhetorical discourses which are common to three case study ‘Buy Irish Food’ campaigns. The research revealed instances of conflating ‘Irish’ and ‘local’ by consumers and more commonly by those involved in the promotion of Irish food, in addition to a reliance on local food rhetoric and spatial valorisation to the detriment of ‘others’. Drawing on these findings, the paper concludes by proffering a future research agenda which highlights the need to investigate the effects of such exclusions as well as a need for comparative research to potentially consider the Irish case study in the context of patriotic purchasing rhetoric from places considered to be geographically similar to Ireland.

Keywords

Ireland; local food rhetoric; spatial valorisation; sustainability; patriotic purchasing

Introduction
Food is arguably the best example of the interaction between nature and society, fitting squarely in the jurisdiction of human geography topics which include sustainability, consumption, political economy, culture, nationalism, agriculture, communities, commodities and globalisation (Atkins and Bowler 2001). The globalisation and industrialisation of the prevailing agri-food system has caused negative effects on human health, the environment and developing world communities and livelihoods (Kimbrell 2002, Sage 2011). Partly in reaction to this, the positive value of localised food systems over industrial ‘placeless’ foods has been recognised and seen as offering something alternative: an environmentally friendly system of production with less food miles and (often assumed) less industrialised production; a necessarily safe and equitable labour environment due to the opaqueness of the food chain; stability of income and livelihoods for producers and their families and consequent community resilience; and traceable food which comes embedded with information about the place and manner of the food’s production (Johnston et al. 2009, Morgan et al. 2008, Seyfang 2005). As a result, there has been a drive recently towards reducing the distance between consumers and the origins of their food, spurred by consumer demand and bolstered by promotions of local food, originating from the realm of production (Goodman et al. 2012).

The nature of local food promotion varies and can be signified by labelling schemes, oral information provision and the use of signage and other promotional material, all of which differentiate a place or territory and thus allow agents or citizens to exploit the attributes of that place. These promotional methods often use narratives of place to highlight conventions of quality, authenticity or provenance about a product (Goodman and Goodman 2007, Seyfang 2009). In Ireland, these promotions often take the form of ‘Buy Irish Food’ campaigns, and especially since the inception of current national economic difficulties, these campaigns have emerged in force. Over the past decade research has begun to emerge from social scientists in the United States examining this emerging topic of ‘Buy Local Food’ promotions, exploring a variety of themes including economic sustainability, social justice, community vitality and nostalgia (cf. Allen and Hinrichs 2007, Hinrichs and Allen 2008, Thornburg 2007). Drawing on discourses of sustainability, sustainable consumption and geographical scales, this paper aims to examine the rhetoric of these ubiquitous and significant ‘Buy Irish Food’ promotions and will do so following an initial review of the literature on values of consumers in Ireland, particularly as to Irish and local food.

Emergence of ‘Buy Irish Food’ campaigns
Since the slowing of economic growth in Ireland beginning in 2006 and 2007 (see Figure 1), many negative consequences have arisen such as a sharp increase in unemployment leading to emigration (amongst other things), reduced exchequer returns necessitating a drop in public expenditure and the scaling back of core public service such as health and education, and financial pressure for all areas of society including businesses, community groups and households (ESRI, 2011). Considering this, the significant role which the agri-food industry plays in the Irish economy\(^{32}\) cannot and has not been ignored (Sage 2010). Bodies responsible for food and agriculture development in Ireland (e.g. Bord Bia, Teagasc) have attempted to increase the value of the agri-food industry internationally and there is evidence of a twin economy, one in which domestic demand is suppressed and another with growth in exports, which holds great potential for economic gain in Ireland\(^{33}\) (Bord Bia 2012). However, promoting Irish food to a domestic market has not abated and although ‘Buy Irish Food’ campaigns have multiplied since 2007, this is neither a new nor an original phenomenon. Patriotic purchasing promotions in Ireland can be traced as far back as the 18\(^{th}\) Century, at that time also springing from economic depression, but were more politically motivated in their attempts to sway consumers away from goods of the ruling colonial power (Foster 1997). Following the Great Famine in the 19\(^{th}\) Century, calls for self-sufficiency and future food security drove renewed promotions of Irish goods and this evolved into (internationally common) protectionist political policies in the early 20\(^{th}\) century (D’arcy 2010, Kinealy 1994, O’Rourke 1989). These policies gave way to more open agendas of free trade from the 1950s onwards (Collins 1999, Neary 1984) and in an effort to gain an international reputation for high quality food produce, various organisations were founded throughout the ‘60s and ‘70s to do just that, e.g. Irish Goods Council (Fanning 1983). Yet promotions by these organisations were deemed to contravene EU anti-competition laws which prevented member states and their representatives from promoting produce of their own as better than that of another state (Commission v Ireland 1982, Plunkett 1994). Following this ruling, private brands such as Guaranteed Irish emerged and primarily at times of economic hardship, such as in the 1980s. The prosperity of the 1990s was attributable to a number of factors including a strong brand of quality Irish food (Henchion and McIntyre 2000) and despite this reputation persisting, competition from often cheaper EU and non-EU food imports has forced consumers in Ireland to pragmatically prioritise when deciding

\(^{32}\) The agri-food industry employs 150,000 people in Ireland (10% of total employment, 60% of which is employed in primary agriculture) and consists of 600 food and drinks firms. Last year, this industry contributed €24 billion to the Irish economy which amounts to 8% of GDP (3% of which is from primary agriculture and this figure is twice the EU average), a significant proportion of which (€8 billion) comes from exports (Teagasc website, accessed May 2011).

\(^{33}\) Irish agri-food products are exported to 140 markets worldwide, contributing €8 billion to the Irish economy which is 25% of net foreign earnings and 8.5% of total exports. Agri-food exports grew by 11% last year (to €8 billion) and the government aims for this to have grown to €12 billion by 2020 (Teagasc website, accessed May 2011).
which foods to buy. This has been notably so since the inception of the current economic recession and in consequence, ‘Buy Irish Food’ campaigns have emerged in the hopes of swaying consumers (back) towards produce of Irish origin (Duram and Cawley 2012).

Contesting the local

The geographical concept of scale is familiar but often taken for granted and it is widely held that rather being ontologically fixed, it is in fact a social construct (Delaney 1997, Marston 2000, Lefebvre 1991). It cannot be said that any qualities can automatically apply to food produced at the local scale or any other scale and this effectively de-fetishes the local (Johnston et al. 2009, Winter 2003). In rejecting the notion that the local, regional, national or global are ontological givens, it is acknowledged that these framings are man-made, making them relational and contingent on the agendas of those involved (Sayre 2009). The promotion of Irish as ‘better’ by these campaigns is to engage in simplistic binaries which see local or Irish as ‘good’, and global, foreign or non-Irish as ‘bad’ (Marston et al 2005). Consequently, it can neither be said that there is anything inherent about any scale, nor that Irish food is essentially ‘better’. Irish food production, just as food produced on any scale, is not necessarily conducted in ways which are notably mindful of labour conditions or environmental stewardship, it does not automatically produce food which tastes good, is high quality or safe, and there is no guarantee of a (re)connection between producers

Figure 1: Republic of Ireland Annual Growth in Real GDP and Real GNP: 2000 – 2011(ESRI, 2011)
and consumers in this system (Born and Purcell 2006). On the production side, to promote these foods as only ‘good’ is to make their origins opaque and it is recommended that food system actors ‘...let go of a local that fetishizes emplacement as intrinsically just...’ (DuPuis and Goodman 2005, p.364).

Values of consumers in Ireland as they relate to local food

Emerging research has indicated that consumers (and other food system actors) understand what local food is, although it is a highly contested term. In contrast to this, there is a low level of comprehension of the term ‘sustainability’ among consumers in Ireland (Reference omitted for anonymous review). It is due to the contestation and the social construction of the local scale that this paper does not (and cannot) say that ‘local food’ and ‘Irish food’ are one and the same. Nonetheless, for many consumers in Ireland they are conflated and for others Irish food is taken as at least more local than foreign food (ibid.). Other food system actors engage in such a conflation including Bord Bia (the Irish Food Board) who report that Irish food is thought to help local producers and economies (Bord Bia 2009a, 2011c), that Irish food is ‘practically local’ or ‘quasi-local’ in Britain (Bord Bia 2011a) and that confusing labelling of Irish food was a barrier to the purchase of local food (Bord Bia 2010c). The Irish food brands under examination in this paper similarly conflate the terms: Truly Irish claim their produce comes from ‘your local producer’, ‘supports your local Irish pig farmer’ and other ‘local jobs’ (Truly Irish (TI) no date); Love Irish Food state that in buying these ‘local and Irish’ brands which use ‘local ingredients’, consumers can help ‘support local producers’ (Love Irish Food (LIF) no date); the National Dairy Council, Farmed in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) brand claims that in buying their produce consumers can support ‘local jobs’, ‘local dairy businesses’ and ‘local farm families’ (National Dairy Council (NDC) no date).

For consumers in Ireland, taste, quality and healthiness are among the most important considerations when choosing foods and these attributes are certainly thought to exist in Irish and local food (Lavelle et al 2012, Reference omitted for anonymous review). However, value for money is equally as important and Irish and local foods are held to be too expensive by the majority of consumers in Ireland. Irish or local provenance as qualities by themselves, and as indicators of economic and social benefits are important for consumers as are other qualities (e.g. traceability, trustworthiness, freshness, familiarity and environmental care) which are also attributed to Irish and local foods (ibid.). As such, it would seem that the traits which are ascribed to these foods somewhat match up with factors which consumers prioritise when making food purchasing decisions. The only anomaly here is the perceived high price of Irish and local food, and the

34 The concepts of local scale and local food can be, in certain contexts, conceptually uncontested while in others they are contested terms. For the purposes of this paper, when ‘local’ is under discussion as a contested term, it is written with inverted commas.
importance of value for money. Recognising these findings, one could suggest the most effective rhetoric upon which to base ‘Buy Irish Food’ campaigns and this is a finding which can be applied in practice. Furthermore, in critically examining the persuasive arguments of sample ‘Buy Irish Food’ campaigns, this paper will establish the extent to which proponents of these campaigns utilise rhetoric of local food and exclusionary spatial valorisation and the implications of this. This is of specific interest in light of how commonly Irish brands emphasise their origin from within the ROI, as opposed to from the entire Ireland including the politically separate Northern Ireland, and the fact that many consumers find this distinction irrelevant (Bord Bia 2011c).

**Methodology**

Following a review of the literature on the topics of historic patriotic purchasing promotions in Ireland, discourses of the social construction of scale and spatial valorisation, and the values of consumers in Ireland as they relate to local and Irish food, the remainder of the paper focuses on examining three case study ‘Buy Irish Food’ campaigns in detail. For the purposes of this study, the three campaigns selected for critical analysis are the Love Irish Food brand, the National Dairy Council’s Farmed in the ROI promotion and the Truly Irish brand. These three were chosen on a number of grounds: they all emerged relatively recently, being launched since the recession (established 2008-2009) and as commentators have argued that other patriotic purchasing campaigns have emerged in response to recessions (Tsai 2010) it is conceivable that the three case study campaigns have come about because of the recession or at least that their marketing strategies are somehow be informed by this. It should be noted that there are some other ‘Buy Irish Food’ campaigns, e.g Bord Bia’s Quality Assurance Scheme and the more generic Guaranteed Irish brand, but the three selected cases all utilise a branded logo, are all industry led and all enjoy nationwide visibility through in-store promotions, and nationwide radio, TV and print advertising.

This analysis chose to focus on campaign rhetoric as it represents the persuasive arguments of these three promotions and is of great practical and theoretical relevance to those interested in the emerging fields of sustainable consumption and the geographies of consumption more generally. A range of texts were utilised to explore these rhetorical arguments including all website material, press releases, TV, radio (transcribed) and print ads, and Facebook postings which were available between April and June 2012; bringing together a variety of media for critical analysis is commonplace (Hammett 2011, Mayes and Pini 2010, Smeltzer and Lepawsky 2010). Although the discourses contained in these media were not only aimed at consumers, information which was clearly not intended for a household consumer audience was not included for analysis. An analysis of website text and semiotics is useful as it provides a comprehensive account of
company information and brand image. According to Johnston et al. (2009, p.516):

‘...websites are a part of integrated marketing platforms that construct a coherent and consistent narrative for corporate brands...that is highly amenable to empirical study. While not all consumers access websites to learn about products, websites provide a way to identify and interpret elements of the discourse associated with...brands – the narratives, ideas, and images that the purveyors...seek to associate with their products.’

Facebook is ubiquitous in modern life and academia has just begun to engage with the debate surrounding its use and potential. This being said there is some established research which has utilised an analysis of Facebook postings and activity (cf. Baltar and Brunet 2012, Gerolimos 2011), and discourse and rhetorical analysis specifically (cf. Fife 2010, Rambe 2012, Smeltzer and Lepawsky 2010, Yawson 2011).

A rich database of text was available for analysis in order to identify the rhetoric of ‘Buy Irish Food’ campaigns. All relevant textual information was thematically analysed, without preconceived categories, inductively allowing for the researcher to openly search for themes (Braun and Clarke 2006). The coding of these arguments allowed for implicit messages to be included and discussed explicitly (as per Johnston et al. 2009), and for statements to be classified under more than one heading. These codes were then revisited and refined to form broader thematic headings, for example, the theme ‘Spatial Valorisation’ was arrived at by merging three codes which all relate to the automatic attribution of desirable traits to place (Born and Purcell 2006), as described here:

1) Farmed/produced/processed/packed/manufactured in Ireland (as a stand-alone positive) e.g. ‘...farmed and processed in the Republic of Ireland...’ (NDC no date);
2) Products and their purchase relate to pride
   e.g. ‘...Good foods, Irish foods, names we’re proud of...’ (LIF no date);
3) Better than opting for imports
   e.g. ‘...Irish family pig farms are still in crisis due to cheap imported foreign pork passed off as Irish...’ (TI 2011)

These themes were then tabulated (see Figure 2) to establish their frequency across all campaigns and those which were addressed by all three campaigns were considered the ‘prominent’ rhetoric of these ‘Buy Irish food’ campaigns and shall be discussed later in this paper (see shaded rows in Figure 2). Even though there was no formal quantitative analysis of the frequency of each of the prominent rhetorical arguments, there was an inherent comprehension held by the researcher and the greater prominence of some of the identified themes is referred to at times in the paper. The findings of this analysis are described below, followed by a more in-depth analysis of the latent meanings and implications of this rhetoric.
### Rhetorical arguments: Themes

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<td>Consumers have agency</td>
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*Figure 2: Themes of rhetoric in case study ‘Buy Irish Food’ campaigns*

### Results

#### Constitutions

All three campaigns were established within eighteen months of each other with TI incorporated in April 2008, LIF registered as a company in July 2009 and the NDC mark launched in September 2009. While all are private organisations, their constitutions vary: LIF is a privately funded independent organisation with food and drink manufacturing industry members; TI is a cooperative business with pig producer shareholders; and the NDC is a (dairy) industry funded body, while the NDC mark is utilised on packaging of members (dairy farmers, cooperative dairies). These campaigns each are signified by a brand mark: the LIF logo (See Figure 3); the NDC mark (See Figure 4); and the TI label (see Figure 5) and these markers have each been used in a variety of recent promotions to encourage the purchasing of selected food products. These promotions have consisted of advertisements on nationwide television, radio and print media sources, consumer events and through in-store promotions. LIF promotes the widest array of foods with over 90 food and drink brands which are manufactured in Ireland licensed to use this mark; the NDC mark is used only on milk (various different types) and...
cream; and the TI label is used on certain pork products which currently includes rashers, sausages, white pudding, black pudding, cooked ham and pork goujons.

The criteria which members must satisfy in order to be able to market their products under these brands also vary. LIF has two core requirements, the first being that the food and drinks must be manufactured (80% of the brand’s value must be derived from the manufacturing process) and this manufacturing must be done in ROI. The second criterion is that the primary ingredients for these products must be grown in Ireland (ROI), where possible. If they do not grow in Ireland, are out of season or are not available, imported ingredients are acceptable as is made clear on their website: ‘Take your chocolate bar for example. Now, the cocoa can’t be grown in Cavan, but the milk used can certainly come from cows in Kerry!’ (LIF no date). Products with the NDC mark must be farmed and manufactured or processed in ROI. Truly Irish can be utilised only by producers of pork, but these producers can be from anywhere in Ireland (Northern Ireland or ROI). The LIF brand is marketed on a national scale while the NDC claim its Farmed in the ROI label is aimed at Irish consumers and it could be surmised that the limits of these promotions aim to reach no further than Ireland. However, as Irish consumers do not necessarily reside in Ireland, the NDC mark could be similar to TI; TI produce is mainly aimed at the domestic Irish consumer but also expressly hopes to drum up support internationally, chiefly appealing to Irish people in the UK (TI 2011).

![Love Irish Food logo](http://www.adworld.ie/news/read/?id=09df8671-2294-437f-b1c8-c7c0aa35ef33)

![National Dairy Council mark](http://www.shelflife.ie/article.aspx?id=906)

![Truly Irish label](http://www.marketplaceinternational.eu/wpbdm-directory/truly-irish/)

### Missions & rhetoric

These promotions have various aims, which arise from the *raison d’être* of each of these bodies. LIF was established to safeguard the future of food and drink...
manufacturing in Ireland, by protecting livelihoods and businesses. They aim to do this by helping shoppers make informed choices when they presumably want to buy Irish manufactured food and drinks, claiming ‘Our research...shows that Irish shoppers are unsure as to what constitutes a truly Irish brand’ and in turn encouraging consumers to buy more of these, utilising the tag line ‘One more makes all the difference’ (LIF no date). The NDC exists to drive a sustainable dairy industry in Ireland by, amongst other things, ‘educating consumers on the role of dairy in their lives’ (NDC no date). In turn, the NDC Farmed in the ROI mark was established in order to give consumers the assurance that the milk or cream products they are purchasing have been farmed and processed in ROI and to allow them to instantly identify these products. TI was incorporated with the goal of helping the pig industry on the island of Ireland as it is deemed to be ‘in crisis’ due to cheaper imported pork being passed off as Irish. The TI label and promotional campaign aim to highlight the true ‘Irishness’ and quality of their products, in the face of poor quality imitations and misleading marketing which confuses consumers, utilising the tag line: ‘Not just a name. Our guarantee’.

The rhetoric of these ‘Buy Irish Food’ campaigns differs to some extent for each of the three case studies and these persuasive arguments include those based on practical and personal benefits (e.g. affordability), intrinsic and tangible qualities (e.g. good taste), claims of credence which cannot be confirmed even after consumption (e.g. traceability) and altruism (e.g. helping producers).

The rhetoric of LIF promotions certainly follows this pattern but primarily highlights those qualities which are extrinsic to the product itself. They are marketed as being already on one’s shopping list – familiar, trusted and loved, we need only buy more of that which we already buy. The food is simply proclaimed as Irish and by virtue of this, better than opting for imports. The LIF logo is presented as helping consumer to identify ‘real’ Irish products. The main beneficial claims of LIF are the economic and consequently the social sustainability which arises from purchasing these foods.

‘Don’t forget that you could help retain up to 230,000 Irish jobs by putting two more Irish food or drink products in your trolley each week rather than opting for imports. Such a move would help generate €300 million a year for the economy’

and

‘...Love Irish Food members play a vital role in helping Ireland’s economic recovery’ (LIF no date).

The NDC Farmed ROI mark differs in that it largely highlights qualities which are extrinsic to the milk and cream it promotes and for the most part, economic and social sustainability are also promised.

‘In these times of economic challenge we are asking consumers to show their support for local jobs on dairy farms and in the dairy sector in an
active way, when they decide what milk or cream they are going to buy’ (NDC no date).

and

‘...products are supporting over 4676 local jobs, contribute to our own tax returns and contribute to our economy... ’ (NDC no date).

The rhetoric argues that this mark provides for traceability and trustworthiness due to the clear ‘Irishness’ which the NDC mark provides and the guarantee that these products are produced and processed in Ireland is presented as beneficial. The NDC mark claims to alleviate consumer confusion as to this quality and also states that consumers have the power to affect change in the food system by purchasing products with this mark.

TI promotes its food products based on a wide array of rhetorical arguments, encompassing almost all of those of the previous two case studies combined. They highlight the intrinsic qualities of their food saying it has a good taste and texture, is natural, high quality and healthy. It is also said to be traditional and authentic and made using old fashioned recipes and good value for money. The Irish and ‘local’ production of these foods are stated, implying a suggestion of value in this quality per se.

‘100% Irish. 100% locally produced...; ‘...an all Irish product...’; ‘...traceable and local produce...’ (TI no date).

It is claimed that TI foods are traceable and trustworthy, and as the name says, it is truly Irish as opposed to those products which misleadingly claim to be so (see Figure 6).

‘...we are highlighting the mislabelling of foreign pork and bacon products as Irish which is harming the Irish pig industry’ (TI 2011).

TI claims that these same consumers, in buying products with this label can drive change in the food system and these changes generally relate to the economic and social sustainability which it is claimed are provided by the success of these products

‘You can be confident whenever you purchase a Truly Irish product...You are...helping to save over 8000 Irish jobs...’ (TI no date).

Figure 6: Truly Irish advertisement available at corkbilly blog
http://www.corkbilly.com/2012/03/beware-of-undercover-bacon.html
Discussion: Dominant themes in ‘Buy Irish Food’ campaigns

The rhetoric utilised to promote these three brands follows a broad trend of highlighting the secondary and less personal benefits of purchasing these products (Grunert 2002). Primary qualities are mentioned here and there, albeit they do not form the basis of these campaigns and it appears that they aim to appeal less to the hedonistic and more to the conscientious tendencies of consumers as citizens (Tsao and Chang 2010). Qualities such as familiar brands or recipes, value for money or intrinsic food qualities of taste, texture, naturalness, quality and healthiness are not the focus, even though the TI brand does highlight these qualities along with those more altruistic and indirect traits which it seems are assumed to be more important. For the purposes of this study, only those persuasive arguments which are identified as present in all three case study ‘Buy Irish Food’ campaigns are identified as ‘dominant’ (See shaded rows in Table 1).

The dominant rhetoric of these campaigns is based on arguments which, it could be said, hold neither direct nor personal benefits for the consumers who partake. The first key rhetorical argument which has been identified is simply the ‘Irishness’ of these foods’ origins which stands alone at times without further explanation. This spatial valorisation sees only positive traits assumed to exist within these places. The second argument highlights the traceability and trustworthiness of their products, by pointing out that they can be ‘traced’ to Ireland with their labels ‘trustworthy’ indicators of (Irish) origin. Leading on from this, ‘Irishness’ is explicitly said to support jobs, farms, businesses, industries and the local and wider economy and communities. Finally, in case those to whom these campaigns are aimed were in any doubt, the power which they as consumers have to affect positive change with their purchases is consistently emphasised.

The following sections discuss these four prominent themes in detail and in the context of the emerging literature concerning the values of consumers in Ireland.

1. Valorisation of the ‘Irish’ space

The simple rhetoric of ‘Irishness’ is common to all three ‘Buy Irish Food’ campaigns. Despite qualities which this trait are said to represent often being made explicit, such as high quality, traceability and good taste, a product’s Irish origin is habitually presented as a stand-alone benefit in need of no more qualification and this is indeed the case in the three examples at hand.

The value of local food has been recognised in recent times in negating the detrimental consequences of a distanced food supply chain in which producer societies suffer socially and economically, and the environment experiences damage through resource extraction and pollution necessary to fuel the long distances which foods must travel (Feagan 2007, Kloppenberg et al. 1996). Although this paper does not conflate ‘Irish’ and ‘local’, a move towards
nationwide production systems could easily be regarded as a move towards localisation if not the ‘local’ itself, particularly in light of the small size\textsuperscript{35} and population\textsuperscript{36} of Ireland and the findings set out above as to conflations of ‘Irish’ and ‘local’ from all quarters of the food chain (\textit{Reference omitted for anonymous review}). Consequently, it is proferred here that these ‘Buy Irish Food’ campaigns, in highlighting the ‘Irish’ aspect of their produce, are in fact implicitly attributing the assumed benefits of local foods, along with other traits such as quality, trustworthiness and patriotism (Duram and Cawley 2012). But as local is (like any other scale) a social construct, to attribute these qualities can be little more than an assumption (Marston et al. 2005). Granting some of these benefits may actually exist, as they likely do in the Irish food brands under discussion in this paper, to assume only positive traits in the local (or Irish) scale of food production is to fall into a trap of spatial valorisation (Winter 2003).

The rigid boundaries imposed by traditional scalar conceptualisations and the assumption of desirable traits only within these boundaries can have negative consequences when those from without the scale are designated as the ‘other’ (DuPuis and Goodman 2005). Excluded from support and assumed to embody binary opposite negative qualities, those foods from outside the stated boundaries of these campaigns are, by implication, not what ‘Irish’ foods are. The ‘other’ is quite often distant, either in a physical or social sense, but it can also be otherwise with those closer to home being excluded, such as producers from Northern Ireland. ‘Irish’ is here in inverted commas as its meaning is contested: for some this designation encompasses only the ROI, stopping at the border of Northern Ireland, while for others it is more a geographic than political designation, describing that which hails from the entire island of Ireland. The politically contentious (and socially constructed) boundary which divides the island into two jurisdictions makes promotions of ‘Irish Food’ and unquestioned rhetoric of ‘Irishness’ all the more complex. While the TI brand represents pork producers from the entire island, LIF and NDC implicitly preclude Northern Irish food, farmers, producers and manufacturers from their certification by their express inclusion of only ingredients from ROI and processing within ROI. These exclusions may serve as examples of both defensive and exclusionary ‘localist’ practices but also of how a socially constructed boundary may itself begin to have material effects (DuPuis and Goodman 2005, Marston et al 2005, Winter 2003). In the case of Ireland, the result could be an island on which producers are divided and pitted against each other in the marketplace, leading perhaps to feelings of exclusion in those who reside north of the border (Leontidou 2005). This may be especially so for those who consider themselves Irish and rather than fostering

\textsuperscript{35}The ROI’s land area is 70,280 kilometres squared which is 29% of the UK’s (244,820 kilometres squared) and 0.7% of the USA’s (9,626,091 kilometres squared) (DK, 2011).
\textsuperscript{36}The ROI’s population is 4.3 million which is 7% of the UK’s population (60 millions) and 1.4% of the USA’s population (304 million) (DK, 2011)
much needed cross border cooperation, the exclusivity of such ‘Buy Irish Food’ campaigns may in fact act as a deterrent. Alternatively, a reflexive localism is widely advocated in the attempt to avoid such defensive xenophobia (Goodman and Goodman 2007). This would involve supporting the local scale when it is felt most appropriate and only in some situations, while in other cases it may be more efficient or just for food provisioning to be organised on a regional, state or international scale (Johnston et al. 2009).

Notwithstanding criticisms of local rhetoric, consumers in Ireland value Irish and local provenance and it is highly relevant when deciding which foods to buy (Lavelle et al 2012). From the existence of this attribute, they infer the existence of a plethora of positive traits; these foods are believed to be of high quality, safe, traceable, healthy, natural, fresh, tasty and patriotically helpful to their country’s local and national economies and communities (Reference omitted for anonymous review). As the rhetoric of the three case study campaigns is to a great extent based on arguments which assure Irish provenance, it is clear that this would appeal to consumers in Ireland and may foretell the success (albeit market-based) of these ‘Buy Irish Food’ promotions (Weatherall et al. 2003).

2. **Traceability labelling: a consumer service or marketing ploy?**

In conjunction with promotions of ‘Irishness’ as an independent value, these ‘Buy Irish Food’ campaigns also spell out other qualities which they claim their foods embody. These brands are said to represent a trustworthy and traceable product, in contrast to other (non-Irish) foods which are said to mislead consumers, specifically regarding food provenance (Pope 2010).

Intensification of the food system coupled with increasing distance between producers and consumers has resulted in food safety crises for which there is little accountability (Friedberg 2004). The disconnection between production and consumption has increased to a level where food’s origins, the hands it has passed through and the processes which it has undergone are generally unclear or unknown (ibid.). This lack of traceability has caused some concern regarding the trustworthiness and safety of food which originates in the conventional globalised food chain, with a reported 40% of people fearing their foodstuffs (Banati 2011). To establish trust, the authenticity or integrity of a food product (and the hands it has passed through) should be established, either through face-to-face interactions or where this is not possible (or more commonly, where the implications of this are not desirable) the information can be provided on product labels (Chen 2008, de Krom and Mol 2010, Eden et al. 2008a, 2008b). Theoretically, these assurances erase distance, assuaging doubts by offering the ‘full story’ (Milne et al. 2011, Popper 2007). Nonetheless, the assumption that the provision of traceability knowledge will change consumers’ attitudes or behaviours has been

According to Popper (2007) ‘traceability is an art that marries different objectives –information and sales promotion’. Consumers in Ireland have somewhat lost confidence in foods which pretend to be Irish but are not (Bord Bia 2010c, 2011c) and while the rhetoric of all three case examples claims that they are providing much demanded assurances of true ‘Irishness’, it is clear that this is secondary to the objective of increasing sales. Admitting that there is a widely held desire among consumers in Ireland to purchase produce which is ‘Irish’ or ‘local’ (Lavelle et al 2012) does not mean that the drive for sales through traceability claims should be left unexamined. Traceability labels which aim to unveil the true nature of foods should de-fetishise them as commodities and make the places and processes from which they originate opaque (Roos et al. 2004). In the case of the three case study brands under discussion in this paper, they are presented as guarantees of provenance and traceability amongst other things, effectively asking consumers to suspend their own judgement and place their faith in the assurances provided by these logos. This leads to a re-fetishization of these foods and the ironic loss of reconnection which these labels aim to achieve (Eden et al. 2008a). Johnston et al. (2009) in their paper on corporate involvement in organic food state: ‘The point of defetishization – of the corporate foodscape as well as of capitalist relationships more generally- is not to posit another pre-given, essentialized understanding of the nature of social reality, but rather to open the constitution of that social reality up to question’ (p. 526).

This may not sound problematic in a practical sense until one concedes how easily consumers could be misled once they put their trust in brands which claim their function is to provide assurances of traceability and trustworthiness. The TI brand provides a case in point, consistently emphasising the traditional and old fashioned nature of its products to consumers while simultaneously claiming to producers that the superior taste and texture of their products is down to ‘…many years of investment in genetics, quality and modern production systems...’ (TI no date). LIF promotions primarily highlight the Irish manufacturing of their foods and are open about their acceptance of primary ingredients which have been sourced abroad due to lack of seasonality or availability. Be that as it may, this may not be clear to consumers who could mistakenly believe that such a strongly branded ‘Irish’ food was made from only Irish ingredients.

Assurances of traceability can be so wide as to connect food to a region rather than a specific farm, such as in the examples at hand, and if a place has a reputation for superior food product characteristics there is great enthusiasm for food which can be traced to that local, regional or national place (Carcea et al. 2009, Carter et al. 2006, Eden et al. 2008a, Loureiro and Umberger 2007, 2005). However, just as valorising a place as ‘good’ or ‘better’ for no specific reason can
lead to negative consequences, so too can highlighting a precise quality, such as traceability. According to Carter et al. (2006) traceability labelling risks becoming exclusionary and the more tightly defined the geographic area of designation, the more likely it is that the certifying body can restrict new participants. In the case of Ireland, bounded physically by the sea and politically by the border with Northern Ireland, it is clear that the potential for such insularity is high and evidence of this can be seen not only in the constitutional but also in the geographic limitations set out for those who wish to participate in the example ‘Buy Irish food’ brands.

Even with these criticisms of traceability and labelling rhetoric, it is necessary to contemplate whether such an argument is of relevance to consumers in Ireland. Traceability and trustworthiness are most certainly important for some but they do not represent the most prominent considerations for consumers in Ireland (Lavelle et al 2012). Furthermore, even without such promotions, local food is already highly correlated with that which is traceable and safe (Reference omitted for anonymous review). Therefore, this rhetoric is effectively ‘preaching to the converted’ and may be wasted on them, especially since this quality is not among the most important for consumers when they engage in a trading off of values when making food purchasing decisions.

3. Sustainability, but not in so many words

Even though the pragmatic benefit of traceability is prominent in the rhetoric of the campaigns under examination, it is secondary to claims of the economic and social sustainability which buying these products are said to offer. It is widely held that the prevalence of the global and industrial food system puts increasing economic pressure on producers, mainly those who are smaller and cannot benefit from economies of scale to the extent that larger producers can (Page and Slater 2003). The increasing power of supermarkets to dictate delivery times and quality standards impacts producers financially while increasing competition from cheaper foreign imports can culminate in a poor situation for producers and their industries (Barrientos and Dolan 2006). When livelihoods cannot be maintained, communities also suffer and in the case of food production this can mean a vicious circle of less money to be spent in local economies, rural flight and the loss of community facilities (Goodman and Watts 1994). Again, moving towards more connected and localised systems of food provisioning is thought to counteract these consequences and this is exactly what the three ‘Buy Irish Food’ campaigns at hand argue.

These campaigns hope to support and strengthen livelihoods, industries, local and national economies and communities in Ireland but it may be a worthwhile exercise to reflect upon who or what has been left out of this rhetorical argument. Firstly, just who has been neglected are the ‘other’ producers of food who are
implicitly excluded by these campaigns. In switching support to these Irish products from those produced elsewhere, the economic and social sustainability of livelihoods, industries, economies and societies elsewhere, preeminently in developing countries which often rely heavily on agricultural exports, are forgotten and may suffer (Garside and Vorley 2007). Secondly, what has also been ignored is the issue of environmental sustainability. Drawing on discourses which argue against the assumption of desirable traits in the local or any scale (Kneafsey 2010), it cannot be said that consuming Irish food in Ireland is necessarily better for the environment. But, the reduced distance between producers and consumers requires less transportation of food and less emissions of green house gases compared to food travelling from further away (Coley et al. 2009, Edward-Jones et al. 2008). In spite of this, rhetoric of environmental sustainability is entirely absent from these promotions which begs the question of why this might be and it is possible that proponents of these brands chose to focus on the attributes which they anticipated as consumer priorities, to the neglect of environmental sustainability rhetoric.

Notwithstanding the most prominent rhetorical arguments being for economic and social sustainability, the term ‘sustainability’ appeared only once in this analysis and was utilised by the NDC. To allow the dairy, pork, and food and drinks manufacturing industries of Ireland to continue and thrive are clearly the goals of these campaigns but the absence of discourses of sustainability within the frame of this study is notable and possible reasons for this are manifold. Sustainability is often used as shorthand for environmental care firstly and social justice secondly, with some believing economic sustainability as the weakness of conceptualisations of sustainability (Cabeza Gutés, 1996). Protecting incomes, livelihoods and industries could be seen as less worthy of support than the former ‘bigger’ issues, due to the fact that many of the problems which drives for sustainability wish to remedy have come about as a result of the market and profit driven nature of the prevailing food system (Neumayer, 2003). Much as profiteering is touted as contemptible, in both the developed and developing world, food producers are finding it increasingly difficult to receive fair wages and prices and sustain their livelihoods, and hence, the prominence of economic sustainability rhetoric in the three cases should not be dismissed out of hand (Barham et al. 2011, Cherni and Hill 2009). Another possibly simpler explanation for the avoidance of the word ‘sustainability’ is due to the fact that many consumers in Ireland do not understand this term: despite awareness of this term having grown over the past five years, only 47% of consumers in Ireland truly comprehend its meaning (Bord Bia 2011c) with many unsure as to how it may relate to food (Bord Bia 2011c, 2009b, 2007, Reference omitted for anonymous review). Research conducted with food retailers across Europe found that consumers relate sustainability with issues of local food, animal welfare, fair trade, organic and packaging waste and leading on from this these were the issues
which were most relevant to them. In addition, even if they want to do ‘the right thing’, consumers are not actively deliberating the environmental impacts of food products (Bord Bia 2009c). Granted, sustainability is a goal, but it is likely not expressed as such for the sake of effective communication.

This perhaps esoteric discussion of sustainability should not mark the end of a critical engagement with this concept and it is important to also discuss how sustainability rhetoric has been utilised in promotions of Irish food. Irish and local foods are mostly associated with ‘supporting our own’, providing for social and economic stability and sustainability, and in the minds of consumers these foods are also correlated with a lesser environmental impact than comparable foods which come from far away (Lavelle et al 2012). Consumers prioritise economic and social sustainability, but only after they are satisfied that other more practical priorities have been met, such as taste, quality and good value (environmental sustainability is only relevant for ‘green’ consumers) (ibid.). As the campaigns at hand are largely speaking to the highly prioritised economic and social sustainability and ignore environmental sustainability which is not important for the majority of consumers, these promotions could be deemed appropriate or successful from this perspective. Nevertheless, given the importance of encouraging environmental sustainability in the food system, one could argue that it is only right that consumers be made aware of the environmental impacts of their foods, though it is rare that this responsibility falls to those involved in production (McGregor 2005). Moreover, as Irish and local food are already judged as kinder to the environment, utilising this rhetoric would surely only help in increasing sales and doing so may set a trend which it is anticipated is imminent. It has been found that whereas consumers in Ireland currently prioritise (and understand) local traits, it is predicted that will change towards a greater weight being given to issues of sustainability (Bord Bia 2008b).

4. **‘Don’t forget that you can help...’**

Consumers are widely held to have the power to affect change in markets by ‘voting with their dollar’ (Spaargaren and Oosterveer 2010). The argument that consumers in Ireland can ‘make a difference’ by buying Irish food is common to all three example cases. The ‘difference’ which it is claimed can be made is in the area of economic (and social) sustainability and it is clear that this rhetoric differs from its predecessors in that it does not relate to benefits of these food’s purchase but serves to convince consumers that the previously set out benefits will definitely manifest themselves. As this claim cannot possibly be guaranteed, one could concur with Marxist critiques which see consumers deceived regarding their power in the marketplace (Goodman et al. 2012). These discourses are firmly embedded in a political economic system and claim that consumers and the arena of consumption are passive, and this is in contrast to the realm of production which is seen as wielding power (Johnston et al. 2009).
Yet just as all other aspects of social life are relational and reflexive, it is more likely that consumers are a mixture of manipulated and fully aware (Clarke 2010). In addition, if as Cohen and Murphy (2001) argue, consumers are rational actors who only care about their own personal welfare, it follows that rhetoric which does not speak to personal and pragmatic benefits may not find resonance with them (Weatherall et al. 2003). As discussed previously, consumers in Ireland prioritise practical considerations such as taste, price and healthiness over food provenance and altruistic claims of economic and social sustainability. It is possible therefore that the rhetoric of these campaigns and that of the agri-food lobby in Ireland may in fact be ineffective to a certain extent. Although Irish food is inferred by consumers to be high quality, tasty and trustworthy, the (perceived or experienced) cheaper price of imported food is commonly identified as an important barrier to the purchase of Irish or (more) local food.

The power which consumers and their choices wield is criticised not only from the Marxist perspective of consumers being passive and manipulated but also as it is seen as a manifestation of neoliberalism, with responsibility devolved from the top down to the individual consumer (Friedberg 2004, Goodman 2004, Guthman 2007). Relying on expressions of citizenship through buying commoditises manifestations of solidarity which would otherwise be expressed in more traditional ways such as through direct action or community initiatives (Seyfang 2006).

Notwithstanding these criticisms, it cannot be denied that consumers do certainly have some agency, however small, through the effect of their consumption decisions. 48% of consumers in Ireland accept it is their citizenly duty to support Irish food (Bord Bia 2011c) and segments believe in their own power to influence reform of the food system towards more sustainable practices; it is thought that this can be done by withholding or providing support for a particular food or food company by boycotting or buycotting (Lavelle et al 2012, Neilson 2010). Rather than questioning the neoliberal paradigm, it may be more effective to take a critical realist approach and recognise that with their de facto agency, some change through consumption is possible and consequently, engagement in rhetoric of consumer agency by these ‘Buy Irish Food’ campaigns could be considered to be not only wise and but also effective.

**Success of rhetoric**

‘Buy Irish Food’ campaigns, in matching rhetoric to actual consumer priorities may enjoy success, but due to the value-action gap, this is not necessarily the case. Consumers report a certain attitude but their behaviour might not actually correspond to this (Barnett et al. 2005). However, this may not be the case in Ireland with 83% of consumers reporting that they buy local food (up from 67% in 2009) (Bord Bia 2010c) and 51% of all consumers claiming to do so several
times a week (Bord Bia 2011b). In spite of price being a barrier to its purchase, 67% will buy Irish food if it is up to 50c more expensive, while 18% will buy Irish if it is more expensive again, and 90% of those who do buy more Irish food (since last examined in 2009) do so as they want to support the local economy and Irish jobs (Bord Bia 2011c). As such, it may be that not only are these campaigns and their rhetoric speaking to consumer priorities but perhaps they having some tangible effect in terms of increased sales. To establish this is not the aim of this paper but the potential which these campaigns have to actually change consumer values cannot be ignored; are these promotions appealing to consumer values or are they setting an agenda which consumers have begun to adhere to?

**Conclusion**

*Campaign rhetoric: exclusionary and perpetuates protectionism*

Given the key and critical nature of discourses of scale, sustainability, commodities, national identity and consumption within the discipline of geography, it is clear that these campaigns provide for an interesting and innovative study within the field of geography. This results presented here have highlighted that the rhetoric of the campaigns explored in this paper is for the most part founded upon spatial valorisation, attributing implicit and explicit positive characteristics to the Irish space and food produced there. Nonetheless, that a place or a food of it is only ‘good’ is an assumption, not only mistaken but also potentially unfair to that or those who are exterior to this place or space (Goodman et al. 2012). These promotions, in attributing traceability, trustworthiness, economic stability and prosperity, and community support and cohesion to Irish Food, aim to exclude these ‘others’ from embodying the same qualities, at least in the imaginaries of consumers in Ireland. These ‘others’ may suffer because of this; if consumers withdraw their support for a ‘foreign’ product, in favour of switching to an Irish one, this may affect livelihoods, industries and communities (Born and Purcell 2006, Edward-Jones et al. 2008). Rather than these promotions tapping into the current zeitgeist for ethical consumerism (Lewis and Potter 2011) and moves towards more sustainability in food systems, it is more likely that these campaigns aim to feed off a more insular type of support for ‘our own’, manifested by the many and varied calls to ‘Buy Irish’ which have emerged in tandem with economic recession. This perhaps represents a distasteful outcome of current economic difficulties, supposedly encouraging selfless patriotic purchasing but in reality perpetuating protectionism. A fairer alternative might be a reflexive localism: spatially local food is favoured where it can easily and has traditionally been produced in close proximity; food from further afield is supported when it can be established that it is produced in a fair way, offering reasonable prices to producers and more easily grown there than in Ireland (DuPuis and Goodman 2006).
How unique is this rhetoric?

An examination of the rhetoric of similar campaigns elsewhere may offer some insight into the uniqueness of campaigns to ‘Buy Irish’ (as a type of local food promotion). Patricia Allen and Clare Hinrichs in their 2007 and 2008 examinations of local food promotions in the USA find a strong emphasis on economic benefits, also springing from a desire to support workers based on ethnocentric and patriotic values. The intrinsic quality of the product is emphasised in the USA but appears to feature more commonly in Irish campaigns. Local food movements in the USA tend to stress the social justice and environmental sustainability benefits of their foods whereas this rhetoric is neglected in US local food promotions. Accordingly, it seems that a desire to ‘support our own’ and their jobs may not be so unusual, especially at times of economic hardship. Irish brands’ emphasis on the intrinsic quality of their produce may represent one of or a combination of things: Irish people’s demand for quality produce; the actual high quality of Irish produce which it is felt should be emphasised; or an aversion to promoting produce solely based on altruistic benefits. Neglect of social issues in US campaigns compared to a great emphasis on this in Irish campaigns may suggest that concern for communities may find more resonance with consumer-citizens in Ireland than in the USA, advancing the theory of marginally more individualistic tendencies in community relations in the latter than the former (Hofseted 2001). While understanding of the term ‘sustainability’ is high in many countries, including France (89%) and New Zealand (84%), the USA and Ireland show comparatively lower levels of comprehension (64% and 47% respectively) and a neglect of environmental sustainability rhetoric in both countries may therefore not be surprising (Bord Bia 2011b, 2010a, 2010b, 2008a).

From here...

This study has answered many questions but it has proposed many more. How do those who are responsible for these campaigns perceive those ‘others’ who may lose out due to such promotions? Are they at all contemplated in the formulation of such campaigns? Although a brief international comparison has been carried out by examining the patterns of engagement in ‘Buy Local Food’ promotions in the USA, a more discriminating comparison might be beneficial, specifically with other more geographically similar countries, such as European nations, small countries, island nations and geographically peripheral ones. To what extent did these campaigns act as ‘interventions’ and change the attitudes of consumers as to Irish and local food? How might these campaigns evolve in future and have these changes begun (this can be seen with the NDC’s move towards the ‘Obey your body’ campaign, in conjunction with the Farmed in the ROI mark)? There is of course scope for extending this study in many different directions by amongst other things employing more than three examples and comprehensively
examining the range of ‘Buy Irish’ promotions (not only food) which have proliferated since 2008. Furthermore, as this study centred on those engaged in mainstream food production, a focus on the rhetoric employed in more alternative localisation efforts which utilise small scale production and face-to-face transactions may provide rich fodder for a comparative study.

References


Appendices

Appendix 1


Louden, F.N. and MacRae, R.J., 2010. Federal regulation of local and sustainable food claims in Canada: a case study of Local Food Plus. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 27, 177-188.


Appendix 2

Consensus Fact Sheet: Food Consumption

Lifestyle Survey  
*Carroll, Fahy & Lavelle, 2012*

**Factsheet 4: Food Consumption/ CAITHEAMH BIA**

Food has been identified as one of the key areas for consideration in the challenge of sustainable consumption due to the increased debate over the impact of the prevailing food system on the environment, local communities, and social justice. The OECD estimates that food consumption constitutes one third of household’s consumption impact and between 10-35% of household consumption expenditure. These problems manifest themselves in Ireland with effects on agriculture, public health and planning, and there is a dearth of information that examines how consumers in Ireland contribute to this or may be instrumental in solving these problems. This factsheet highlights the priorities of householders in Ireland with regard to food shopping, specifically their perceptions and considerations of food origins and production methods.

**Influences on food choices**

Respondents were asked to rank their top three considerations when making food purchasing decisions and these findings are based on the accumulated number of top three rankings. For people in Ireland the following factors proved to be the most influential when buying food (see Figure 4.1):

- Price 73% (n=1101),
- Health 73% (n=1097),
- Taste 47% (n=712),
- How and where the food is produced 43% (n=639),
- Brand 33% (n=502),
- Convenience of foods 11% (n=169).

**Trust of eco-labels**

Approximately two-thirds (n=988) of all respondents agreed with the statement, ‘I trust eco-labels’.

**Regard for food’s origins and production methods**

Respondents were asked if they agreed with the statement: ‘I pay attention to where and how the food I buy is produced’ and a majority (66%, n=987) agreed with this assertion. In the Republic of Ireland, a trend of increasing income correlating with increasing agreement with this statement is evident (see Figure 4.2), while in Northern Ireland, a similar link does not seem to be apparent.

**Avoidance of meat products**

33% (n=495) of all respondents agreed that they tried to avoid eating meat as much as possible.
Perceptions of expense of organic and fair trade food

When asked if they agreed that ‘food which is organic or fair trade is too expensive to buy’, just over two-thirds of all respondents concurred (n=1,007).

Meaning of ‘local food’

The majority of respondents across the island of Ireland consider ‘local food’ to be:
- ‘Food which is produced within my country’ 44% (n=664)
- ‘Food produced within 30km of where I live’ 21% (n=313)
- ‘Produced within my county’ 19% (n=290) (see Figure 4.3).

Implications

Irish householders largely base their food purchasing decisions on tangible and pragmatic issues rather than on the more abstract and altruistic considerations of food sustainability. It is clear that most respondents are unaware of the environmental burden caused by meat production with just a third making efforts to avoid meat. Not only does the livestock industry contribute significantly to greenhouse gas emissions at all stages of production, it is comparatively inefficient using significantly more water and land to produce equal quantities of crops. A further conflict is evident between respondents’ regard for eco-labels and the perceived expense of organic and fair trade food. This suggests a gap between the esteem in which sustainable food is held and actual food buying, caused by issues of sustainability losing in the trade-off of various values against one another. This research is clearly important but further research on how to bridge this value-action gap would be useful.
gap is necessary. The respondents’ perceptions, regarding the expensive nature of organic and local food, reflect the results of a recent OECD survey of over 10,000 households across ten OECD countries and noted that high prices appear as the most important factor restricting market share of organic goods.

A significant majority of respondents concurred on the meaning of ‘local food’, but other understandings were also popular, showing a lack of consensus. As the given definitions were mainly limited by spatial parameters, the extent to which ‘local food’ could be defined by the social interactions involved in its sale should be examined further to provide a more nuanced understanding of ‘local food’ and aid in the more effective marketing of this potentially sustainable food product.

References

Appendix 3

Consensus Fact Sheet: Food Waste

Lifestyle Survey

Carroll, Fahy & Lavelle, 2012

Factsheet 5: Food Waste/Dramháil Bídh

Within the sustainable food movement, a particular concern is the large amount of waste occurring at every stage of the food chain and its ecological and social repercussions. Many factors contribute to food waste and recent reports estimate that wasted food costs each Irish household approximately €700 annually (EPA, 2011). The findings outlined on this factsheet highlight public attitudes and behaviour towards food waste in Irish households.

Efforts to reduce household food waste

A significant majority of respondents (89%, n=1333) agreed with the statement ‘I try to reduce the amount of food waste my household produces’.

Reasons food is thrown away

Just over a third of all participants (n=535) claimed to never throw food away. As indicated in Figure 5.1, the most common reasons for throwing food away are:

- ‘Too much is bought’ and it expires 27% (n=396)
- Food goes off because of ‘a change in plans’ 21% (n=305)

Incidence of household composting

- Less than half (46%, n=685) of all respondents reported that their household composted.
- With regards to housing tenure, 50% (n=537) of those who are owner occupiers compost their food waste, compared to 38% (n=112) of those who rent (See Figure 5.2).

What are the reasons why your household throws food in the bin?

- We don’t throw food out 36%
- Bought too much/expired 27%
- Change of plans 6%
- No space to conserve food 6%
- Other 6%
- Supermarket offers 4%
Figure 5.1: Reported reasons for why participants threw food in the bin.

Figure 5.2: Levels of composting in relation to housing tenure.

Encouraging composting

Of the 54% of the sample (n=804) who are not currently engaged in composting:

- 11% (n=89) agreed that there was nothing which would encourage them to start composting in the future.
- Just under one third (n=247) said that the availability of ‘more information’ would encourage them to start.
- A further 22% stated ‘better facilities’ would encourage them (n=177)
- 17% reported that the availability of ‘more space’ would encourage them to compost (n=137) (see Figure 5.3).
Figure 5.3: What would encourage respondents to start composting?

Implications
Although a significant proportion of respondents claim that they try to reduce the amount of food which their household produce, it is clear that there is still an unacceptable level of food waste in Ireland, with only one third claiming that they never throw food away. It appears respondents on lower incomes are less likely to try to reduce their food waste and this possibly merits further investigation. Of the food which is thrown away, it could be argued that the reasons are mostly avoidable and could be averted through better planning and household efficiency. Furthermore, of the food which is wasted, the results show that too few respondents attempt to close the waste loop by composting. The incidence of household composting is clearly influenced by housing tenure, with perhaps the degree of permanency influencing respondents composting habits. A notable percentage of householders who do not already compost, appear to be unwilling to even start for any reason. This suggests that mere measures of encouragement may not be enough for the implementation of more sustainable household waste practices.

References
- Environmental Protection Agency (2011). Stop Food Waste. Available at: www.stopfoodwaste.ie
Appendix 4

Phase 1, Survey: formulation of research design and content

Following a review of the relevant literature, the core research questions of this study were established. Due to the nature of the survey, it was accepted that this stage of research would not provide all of the answers to these questions but it would provide a foundational database of information upon which the following phases of research could be built. As such, five questions were inserted into the survey which spoke to the aims of this research and that of the Consensus project. These questions were drafted, feedback was obtained, the questions were redrafted and put forward to a steering committee which offered further feedback.

As local food is a key concept in this study, Question 23 was designed with the goals of establishing what consumers in Ireland take this to mean:

Q23. What do you consider 'local food' to be? (Please choose one option)
   1. Food available at a farmers’ market
   2. Food produced within a 30km radius of where I live
   3. Food produced within my county
   4. Food produced within my country
   5. Food produced within Europe
   6. Other (please specify)
   7. Don’t know

Modelled on previous survey studies by Bord Bia (the Irish Food Board, cf. PERIScope 1-5, 2001-2009) which measured this in a similar way using a closed set of responses, the responses chosen for this study differed slightly. ‘Produced within my country’ was added to the list of options as it was anticipated from preliminary investigations that ‘local’ was most likely to be equated with Ireland; an Other option was provided to allow for survey respondents to offer an alternative to the five given answers or a combination of these; produced was used rather than made in order to more expressly include food which is not manufactured. It was decided that the more conceptually difficult topic of sustainable food would not be broached in this phase of research. Surveys neither structurally nor time-wise allow for the explanation or discussion of topics and as such, questions which related to consumer understandings of sustainable food were reserved for subsequent qualitative stages of research.
Questions 22 and 24a go to the heart of this research with the latter question examining the relevance of local origin and sustainability characteristics and the former questioning this relevance relative to other considerations which could be construed as more pragmatic:

Q22: What is the most important issue for you when you buy food? (Please rank top three)
1. Price
2. Health benefits or nutritional content
3. Where/how food is produced (i.e. fair trade/organic/Irish etc.)
4. Taste or flavour
5. Brand
6. That it’s easy to cook (i.e. convenience food or frozen food)
7. Other (please specify)

Q24. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (On a scale: Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Don’t know)
a. I pay attention to where and how the food I buy is produced

Although these questions were clearly preliminary in nature and conflate the origins and methods of production into one characteristic for consideration (Q22, option 3; Q24a), they allowed the relative importance of these factors to be broadly contextualised. Furthermore, they provided data upon which to base lines of inquiry at subsequent focus group and interview stages. The closed responses offered in Question 22 were based on previous similar studies on consumers’ food choices (cf. Prescott et al, 2002; Steptoe & Wardle, 1995; Weatherall et al, 2003). Allowing respondents to prioritise their top three considerations to some extent reflects the real world consumer decision-making process where a number of factors influence choices. Question 24 offered a range of statements on food and issues of sustainability and a six-point Likert scale from which respondents chose their level of agreement. Question 24a investigated how aware participants were of how their food was produced and its provenance. Although these two questions to a certain extent examine the same issues, it is common for questions to be asked of respondents in a variety of ways, to test consistency and provide clarification.

Questions 24e and 24g respectively explored the perceptions of respondents of the reliability of eco-labels, including labels such as organic, Fair Trade and local, and the relative expense of organic and Fair Trade produce:
Q24. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (On a scale: Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Don’t know)

   e. I trust eco-labels
   g. Food that is organic or fair trade is too expensive to buy

These questions aimed to gauge the extent to which these foods may have some negative connotations attached to them which could in turn act as barriers to their purchase. The barriers of misleading labelling and high price were chosen following a review of the relevant literature which suggested these issues to be two of the most prevalent (De Pelsmacker et al, 2005; Galarraga Gallastegui, 2002; Lockie et al, 2002; Padel & Foster, 2005).

In summary, these questions were designed with the goal of providing baseline data in answer to the key aims of this research, namely analysing consumers’ understandings (Q23), values (Q22, Q24a, Q24g) and perceptions (Q24e, Q24g) as they relate to local and sustainable food.
Appendix 5

Phase 2, Focus Group: formulation of research design and content

This second phase of research involved two distinct strategies: posing direct questions and using character-based prompts in the form of vignettes to more indirectly elicit discussion. The questions in the focus group schedule remained faithful to the main goals of this research and sought to probe consumers’ understandings (Questions 2 and 3), perceptions (Questions 4 and 6) and values (Questions 1 and 5) as they relate to local and sustainable food. Question 2 aimed to build on the findings of Question 23 in Phase 1 but without limiting respondents’ choices to a fixed set of alternatives, thus broadening the scope of possible answers:

2. Different people have different definitions of ‘local food’. What do you think it is?

Past investigations into the meaning of local food for consumers in Ireland were lacking from this perspective and in order to truly understand how they perceive and value local food, first understanding what they actually take the phrase to mean is fundamental. Follow up questions were asked in order to clarify whether local food related to either or both a fixed place or a manner of production (Whitehead, 2007). Unlike local food, how consumers define sustainable food was not investigated in Phase 1 and consequently, Question 3 aimed to explore participants’ understanding, again, by providing an open platform for responding:

3. It is argued that the current food system has many problems and can’t last – that it’s unsustainable. What do you think ‘sustainable food’ is?

It was thought that a focus group format was particularly appropriate for such a discussion due to the complexity of and, as it emerged, confusion surrounding this concept. Furthermore, as it was hoped that the quality attributes of sustainable food could be investigated in this study, it was seen as fundamental to first discuss participants’ comprehension of the term sustainable food.

Questions 4 and 6 asked participants about their perceptions of local and sustainable food, again investigating whether the two concepts are conflated in the minds of consumers in Ireland:

4. What do you think are the similarities and differences between local food and sustainable food?
6. All things considered, do you think local food is the same as sustainable food?

The two questions examine the same issues but asking multiple questions related to the same topic is beneficial as investigations of beliefs or attitudes are difficult. Such questions are often complex and thus asking them in a number of ways can often yield more fruitful responses (Robson, 2002). Questions 1 and 5 aimed to investigate consumer priorities when making food purchasing decisions and more specifically how qualities of local provenance and sustainability fare when juxtaposed against one another:

1. Which things are most important to you when choosing food?
5. If offered a choice between a ‘sustainable food’ and a ‘local food’, which would you prefer and why?

Both questions were open-ended, allowing participants to offer a spontaneous answer and to elaborate on this. Because of the complicated nature of consumer values and prioritising, it was thought that unstructured or semi-structured research methods (the latter being used here) were most appropriate in order to provide a nuanced understanding of these concepts. Although previous evidence showed a high degree of support for local food in Ireland (Bord Bia, 2010a), it was important to investigate whether this support would withstand a trading off of different and perhaps more pragmatic considerations.

Rather than probing the same topics using only a variety of questions, the focus groups also used vignettes in order to more indirectly address key issues (see Vignette 3 (Liz) below as an example):

Liz wants to support local farmers, jobs, and the local community, especially since her husband was made redundant last year, so she tries to buy local food. However, with the inconvenience of the local farmers’ market and how little time she has, she does most of her shopping in the local Tesco.

It can be beneficial to investigate conceptually difficult topics and values in a variety of ways, not only to actually generate responses but also to test the consistency of these (Frey & Fontana, 1991). In the case of this research, these vignettes were in the form of short texts which depicted characters and their attitudes and behaviours in relation to food and food purchasing. Either generally or specifically in relation to the types of food which are of interest to this study that is, local and sustainable foods, participants were asked to discuss their level of agreement or identification with the vignette characters.
Due to the numerous themes which were identified in previous literature on consumer decision-making, it was felt that directly asking questions on all of these would be both overwhelming for participants and time-consuming. As such, the vignette characters were imaginary and their stated attitudes and behaviours were constructed using a composite of themes which had emerged upon examining this literature. Vignettes were also valuable as they allowed participants to relate to a character’s perhaps socially undesirable opinions or behaviours, without expressly laying claim to the values which these may represent.

To illustrate how a vignette character was constructed, the example of Liz will be used. This vignette was designed in the hopes of eliciting discussion on as many of the following themes as possible: local economy and jobs; community; recession; inconvenience/lack of time; trading off different values; the meaning of local food. These topics could have been addressed using the following questions:

- I know it may seem a bit obvious to you, but would you be able to explain a little further why you think local food is better/worse quality/ supports local producers/provides employment/________?
- How much do you think about sustainability when choosing food?
- (If you think local food is a good thing), Why don’t you buy (more) local food?

However to do this for each of the seven vignettes while also asking participants to discuss their answers to preliminary and concluding questions would possibly have resulted in information overload for participants and/or boredom, and ultimately a lack of engagement in the discussion.

The focus group vignettes were drafted and redrafted after receiving feedback from experts from both academia and industry.
Appendix 6

**Phase 3, Interview: formulation of research design and content**

The interview schedule of this third phase of research comprised of four questions and a three-part choice exercise, utilised to more indirectly prompt a discussion of key topics. The interview started by getting to the core of consumers values and local food, centring local food in the first question and examining the extent to which localness factors in their decision-making process:

1. When you’re choosing which foods to buy, how important is the fact that it is local or not?

This question also tests the consistency of focus group findings related to consumer prioritising which were arrived at following the use of a more generally-worded question. Interviewees were also invited to state what they understood local food to be if it did not become implicitly clear in the course of the discussion of their answer.

It became apparent following analysis of Phase 2 data that the term sustainable food was one which many participants were not familiar with. Therefore, it was felt that the provision of a definition might be helpful. This definition allowed for Question 2 to stimulate a fruitful and a meaningful discussion of values and perceptions as they related to sustainable food:

2. *A sustainable food system is one which produces food in an environmentally sound, socially responsible and economically viable way, allowing for good food to continue to be produced into the future.* Considering this definition, how important is it for you that a food is sustainable or not, when choosing which foods to buy?

Despite being highly contested, it was necessary to find a definition of ‘sustainable food’ which was generally held to be acceptable. The definition of a ‘sustainable system’ which is utilised by the University of California’s pioneering Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems was deemed to be a good starting point and was modified for ease of understanding by the lay audience who would be presented with it (see Allen, 1995; 1994a for discussions on sustainable food systems). The original definition reads: *Sustainable systems are environmentally sound, economically viable, socially responsible, nonexploitative, and serve as a foundation for future generations* (Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems, no date). In the amended definition, the term *good food*, although vague, was purposively used due to its all-encompassing
nature; indeed many interviewees questioned its meaning which allowed for a further discussion on what they considered sustainable food to be. Interviewees were first asked if they had any understanding of the term ‘sustainable food’ before being presented with definition and asked their opinion of, and agreement with the given definition. Just as in Question 1, this question goes straight to the core of this research, expressly asking respondents to situate sustainability within a hierarchy of other considerations.

Question 3 hoped to measure the degree to which a conflation of local food and sustainable food existed in the minds of consumers in Ireland:

3. Some consider local food and ‘sustainable food’ to be the same thing. To what extent would you agree with this?

Although this question was asked in another format at the focus group phase of this study, it is worded in a more direct way in Phase 3. Although Questions 1 and 2 are valuable in themselves, they simultaneously provide foundational information for Question 3 to be answered in a more meaningful way. Therefore, it was hoped that asking this question in this context could result in more robust data.

Findings from the focus group stage suggested that local food is often preferred over possibly more sustainable non-local food for reasons which largely ignore equity and environmental stewardship and valorise ‘supporting our own’. Therefore, both Questions 4 and 5 aimed to test the acceptability of food which would be considered to be reflexively local (DuPuis & Goodman, 2005) and ultimately more sustainable over those which fall in the category of rigid (and less sustainable) local food (Goodman, 2002). Just as in Phase 2 of this study, it was thought that the use of a strategy of investigation which involved something other than direct questions would help to keep participants’ interest but also act as more effective tools in achieving the core aims of this study. Question 4 used three choice exercises:

4. I’m going to show you some pairs of foods and tell you some details about them. Please tell me which you’d prefer to buy and why?
   a. Here are two packets of tomatoes. Both packets of tomatoes are the same price and look, and taste the same. Which would you prefer to buy and why?
   The one on the left is grown outdoors in Spain and grown organically – this way of growing can be better for the environment as it doesn’t use synthetic pesticides and fertilisers which can damage the soil and habitats, and pollute
the water table, and they don’t need energy to heat greenhouses. However, they are flown to Ireland and then trucked to distribution centres and supermarkets which causes a lot of pollution. The tomatoes on the right are grown in Ireland in greenhouses and are not organic – this way of growing is not very good for the environment as it uses pesticides and fertilisers which can be environmentally damaging, as is the carbon produced in the heating of the glasshouses. However, the transportation distance between the producer and the end consumer is much shorter and perhaps less environmentally damaging than the Spanish tomatoes’ journey.

b. Here are two boxes of tea. The tea on the right has won good taste awards and is 30c cheaper than the tea on the left at €3.19. Which would you prefer to buy and why?
The one on the left is a well known Irish brand which is part of the Love Irish Food brand, which guarantees a product’s ‘Irishness’. The tea obviously isn’t grown in Ireland (it’s grown in East Africa and South Asia) but it is processed and packaged here. This product doesn’t have Fair Trade certification which means the tea in this product is traded conventionally; the developing world producers of the tea in this product may not get a fair price or have decent working conditions. The tea on the right is a lesser known British brand which processes and packages its tea in Britain, although it is also grown in East Africa and South Asia. This product does have Fair Trade certification which guarantees that those involved in the production of its tea are provided with a fair price for their labour and product and have decent working conditions.

c. Here are two cheeses. Which would you prefer to buy and why?
The one on the left is made in Ireland, for Tesco and sold there and in other large multinational supermarkets. The milk used to make this cheese is sold by Irish farmers to Tesco’s manufacturer for less than the cost of production. It is a cheddar cheese made from pasteurised cow’s milk and costs €2.95. The cheese on the right is made in the Cotswolds in England by farmer, Henry Brown. The cheese is sold directly by Henry to specialty shops where it can be bought. It is a cheese made from unpasteurised goat’s milk, was Supreme Champion at the British Cheese awards in 2010 and costs €5.20 for a comparable amount.

Each exercise offered interviewees a ‘local’ and a ‘non-local’ choice of food, with local here referring to a spatially proximate place, giving them information about the sustainability of the food and asking them to choose which food they would prefer to buy. From previous findings it was established that many consumers favour local either without considering why it may be preferable or because they often mistakenly attribute positive characteristics to it. As such, these choices were supposed to
challenge these automatic assumptions by explicitly setting the non-local option out as more sustainable in certain aspects of its production. Although the choices were designed to create internal conflict for participants, it was to be expected that no such conflict would exist for many. The themes which each choice exercise was designed to elicit discussion of are set out in the table below. Furthermore, the exercises were designed to allow discussion of foods with certain characteristics: fresh and processed food; food which is manufactured locally but their raw ingredients are not grown, and cannot grow, locally; non-local food which comes from relatively close by.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tomatoes</th>
<th>Tea</th>
<th>Cheese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Environmental care</td>
<td>• Social justice (fair trade vs.</td>
<td>• Economic sustainability and livelihoods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(food miles vs. life</td>
<td>conventional trade)</td>
<td>(conventional vs. alternative supply chains)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cycle analysis)</td>
<td>• Economic sustainability and livelihoods</td>
<td>• A responsibility to support ‘our own’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Economic sustainability and</td>
<td>• A responsibility to support ‘our own’</td>
<td>through patriotic purchasing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>livelihoods</td>
<td>through patriotic purchasing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A responsibility to support</td>
<td>• Charity begins at home (NB because</td>
<td>• Mass production and small-scale artisanal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘our own’ through patriotic</td>
<td>both Ireland and Spain’s</td>
<td>production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>purchasing</td>
<td>economies are depressed)</td>
<td>• Price</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| • Charity begins at home (NB    | • Healthiness                            | • Taste, familiarity & safety (cow’s cheddar vs.
|   because both Ireland and      | • Freshness                              |   raw goat’s cheese)                            |
|   Spain’s economies are depressed) |                                       |                                                 |

The final question was also designed in an effort to further examine the findings of the previous stage of research, namely the strong support for local and Irish produce and producers, often in spite of rather than because of qualities of sustainability:

5. ‘People should look after their own local and Irish producers by buying their food before they start to worry about things like the environment or poor foreign producers’. Do you at all agree with or identify with this statement?

‘Supporting our own’ and ‘charity begins at home’ were commonly cited by participants as reasons for an unwavering support for local and Irish produce, and this seemed
particularly resonant due to the present economic difficulties with which Ireland as a country is faced. The question was framed as a provocative quote to stimulate discussion. By positing an extreme version of patriotic attitudes towards purchasing, it allowed interviewees to position themselves and their views in relation to such an opinion.
## Appendix 7

### Phase 3, Interview: choice exercise visual aids

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4a: Tomatoes</th>
<th>4b: Tea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Grown outdoors in Spain</td>
<td>- UK company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Organic</td>
<td>- Tea grown and processed in South Asia and East Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Flown to Ireland and then trucked to distribution centres before being trucked to supermarkets</td>
<td>- Fair Trade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- €2.69</td>
<td>- Has won taste awards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- €3.19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**4b: Tea**

- Tea packaged in Ireland by Irish company
- Part of the Love Irish Food brand
- Tea grown and processed in South Asia and East Africa
- Not Fair Trade
- €3.49

**4c: Cheese**

- Made for Tesco in Ireland
- Sold in multinational supermarkets
- Farmers sell their milk to be processed at a loss
- Pasteurised cows’ milk cheddar
- €2.95

- Made in the Cotswolds in England by farmer Henry Brown
- Can be bought at specialty shops
- Unpasteurised goats’ milk cheese
- Won Supreme Champion at the British Cheese Awards in 2011
- €5.20
**Appendix 8**

*Phases 2 & 3: Participants’ demographic information, listed alphabetically by pseudonym*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Phase &amp; Number</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>Town/ Country</th>
<th>Interest in food issues</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>National origin</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Household Income</th>
<th>Employment status</th>
<th>Job type</th>
<th>Children under 18</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adele</td>
<td>2 (FG1)</td>
<td>Dublin</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Not Interested</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>20-29 (est.)</td>
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<td>Employed</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agnes</td>
<td>3 (I19)</td>
<td>Dublin</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>38,000-75,999</td>
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<td>Ireland</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>19,000-37,999</td>
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<td>Service</td>
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<td>Áine</td>
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<td>Galway</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<td>76,000-113,999</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>Professional</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Alice</td>
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<td>Urban</td>
<td>Not Interested</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>30-39 (est.)</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age Group</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Rural/Urban</td>
<td>Interest Level</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>Salaries</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Employment Status</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Age</td>
<td>Income</td>
<td>Status</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Partner Status</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sabir</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Galway Urban</td>
<td>Interested</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>20-29 (est.)</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>Student</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sabrina</td>
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<td>Galway Rural Not Interested</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>60-69 (est.)</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>Man</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>€19,000-€37,999</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Siún</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Dublin Rural Not Interested</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>20-29 (est.)</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sophia</td>
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<td>Ireland</td>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>€19,000-€37,999</td>
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<td>Susan</td>
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<td>Ireland</td>
<td>40-49</td>
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<td>Employed</td>
<td>Homemaker</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Therese</td>
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<td>Dublin Rural Not Interested</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>20-29 (est.)</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Galway Rural Not applicable</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>€0-€18,999</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>Managerial</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Trish</td>
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<td>Galway Urban Interested</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>20-29 (est.)</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ursula</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Galway Rural Interested</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>50-59 (est.)</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 9

*Phase 2 & 3 Consent Forms*

**Informed Consent Form**

This focus group is being conducted as part of research for a doctoral study which aims to investigate the perceptions of consumers in Ireland with regard to the economic, social and environmental sustainability of food systems, across scales.

This meeting should last between one and two hours and will involve a group discussion on topics to be provided throughout the duration by the moderator.

Notes will be taken throughout the duration of the discussion and the entire discussion will be recorded and later transcribed verbatim. A record of participants’ names and details will be kept but pseudonyms will be used in all discussions and dissemination of research findings. As such, all opinions and views expressed throughout the duration of this study will be considered to be anonymous and confidentiality of participants’ personal details can be assured.

If participants have any queries either prior to or following this meeting, they can be directed toward the researcher, Brídín Carroll by email at XXXXXX@nuigalway.ie or by phone on 086-XXXXXXX.

**Participation in this study is entirely voluntary.**

If you consent to taking part in this study, please sign your name below.

_________________________________
Informed Consent Form

This interview is being conducted as part of research for a doctoral study which aims to investigate the perceptions of consumers in Ireland with regard to the economic, social and environmental sustainability of food systems, across scales.

This meeting should last for approximately half an hour and will involve answering questions and discussing topics which will be provided throughout the duration by the interviewer.

Notes will be taken throughout the duration of the discussion and the entire discussion will be recorded and later transcribed verbatim. A record of participants’ names and details will be kept but pseudonyms will be used in all discussions and dissemination of research findings. As such, all opinions and views expressed throughout the duration of this study will be considered to be anonymous and confidentiality of participants’ personal details can be assured.

If participants have any queries either prior to or following this meeting, they can be directed toward the researcher, Bridín Carroll by email at XXXXXX@nuigalway.ie or by phone on 086-XXXXXXXX.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary.

If you consent to taking part in this study, please sign your name below.

__________________________
### Appendix 10

**Demographics of participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Urban/Rural dwelling</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Have children under eighteen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban 520 50%</td>
<td>Women 637 61%</td>
<td>Yes 372 36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galway</td>
<td>Rural 522 50%</td>
<td>Men 405 39%</td>
<td>No 665 64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Total 1042</td>
<td>Total 1042</td>
<td>No data 5 0.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>18/19</th>
<th>20s</th>
<th>30s</th>
<th>40s</th>
<th>50s</th>
<th>60s</th>
<th>70s</th>
<th>80s</th>
<th>90s</th>
<th>Refused</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6%</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1042</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household income</th>
<th>€0–€18,999</th>
<th>€19,000–€37,999</th>
<th>€38,000–€75,999</th>
<th>€76,000–€113,999</th>
<th>€114,000 and above</th>
<th>Don’t know/NA/Refused</th>
<th>Missing data/No data</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>55%</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Please note:** All percentages are rounded to the closest whole number, except in the case of a percentage below 0.5%. In this case, the percentage is rounded to one decimal point. Because of this percentages may not total 100% exactly.
Appendix 11

Disposability of income cross-tabulated with perceived affordability, importance and prioritising of ‘how’ and ‘where’ food is produced

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total household income:</th>
<th>Food that is organic or fair trade is too expensive to buy (Phase 1, Question 24e)</th>
<th>Pay attention to ‘how and where’ (Phase 1, Question 24a)</th>
<th>Rank ‘how and where’ in top three (Phase 1, Question 22)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>€0-€18,999</td>
<td>n=55 80%</td>
<td>n=44 53%</td>
<td>n=29 42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>€19,000-€37,999</td>
<td>n=213 71%</td>
<td>n=151 62%</td>
<td>n=132 43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>€38,000-€75,999</td>
<td>n=280 64%</td>
<td>n=179 64%</td>
<td>n=178 47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>€76,000-€113,999</td>
<td>n=118 63%</td>
<td>n=74 69%</td>
<td>n=81 55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>€114,000+</td>
<td>n=17 35%</td>
<td>n=6 82%</td>
<td>n=14 41%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 12

Gender cross-tabulated with importance and prioritising of ‘how’ and ‘where’ food is produced

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pay attention to ‘how and where’ (Phase 1, Question 24a)</th>
<th>Rank ‘how and where’ in top three (Phase 1, Question 22)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Women</strong></td>
<td>n=605 68%</td>
<td>n=412 48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Men</strong></td>
<td>n=395 48%</td>
<td>n=189 38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>