

Reflective Essay #2

***Vancouver Farmers Markets* and Eating Local**

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Vancouver Farmers Markets (VFM) is an organization of farmers markets around Vancouver to support small farms and increase community access to fresh produce and local foods. They operate seven weekly markets through the summer and two weekly through the winter (*Vancouver Farmers Markets*, 2025). VFM is a non-profit which relies on donations from shoppers and tent fees from vendors to maintain their vision for “A resilient local food network that values people and the land” (*Vancouver Farmers Markets*, 2025).

I wanted to write about VFM because I have shopped, volunteered, and worked with them a lot in the past and can confidently say the organization and people who run it have had a highly formative impact on my knowledge of the food system and local eating. My mom began taking me to some markets when I was very young and we’d become some of many regulars. She was a volunteer member of the VFM board in addition to being a loyal patron. The food we’d buy from the farmers market wouldn’t occupy the majority of the products we ate each week but was still a vital pillar of our home’s food system (Klassen & Wittman, 2017).

When I was a bit older I began volunteering at some of the markets that I had grown up shopping at. Spending more time around the VFM staff and market vendors showed me how important personal relationships and community involvement are to the success of the organization. I began forming relationships with vendors and shoppers, realizing most of the people visiting the market were regulars like my mom. Other compassionate elements like returning egg cartons to egg vendors or jars to honey farmers demonstrated how buying locally had an environmental sustainable benefit (Clark & Foster, 2009; Klassen & Wittman, 2017).

In my teens I was able to get a paid job working as a VFM staff, in part helped by my previous years volunteering and connecting to the community. As an employee I gained an even

deeper appreciation for the organization and what they've been able to establish across Vancouver. I learned the value of having meaningful connections with the people who produce our food and removing the alienation that comes with a lot of shopping (Clark & Foster, 2009). I believe it's since been phased out but before every vendor had a card reader, we would sell \$5 "Market Money" tokens at the VFM Info Booth to shoppers without cash. VFM Market Money was a fair tender that encouraged economic sustainability and returning customers.

Donors to VFM's Fresh to Families Program can sponsor lower-income families, seniors, and pregnant people to shop at the market for free. Fresh to Families provides access to local food while paying the farmers directly, thus recirculating the money more sustainably than grocery stores or food banks (*Vancouver Farmers Markets*, 2025). The program is in association with the BC Association of Farmers Markets (BCAFM) which supports similar access to food insecure people with their province-wide farmers market nutrition coupon program (*Vancouver Farmers Markets*, 2025). Both of these initiatives dance around food justice but reliance on donations means inconsistent access for families seeking food security. From my experiences these coupon programs were underutilized at the markets I worked in residential suburbs but were more effective in lower-income neighbourhoods closer to downtown.

One of the biggest focuses of VFM is their commitment to "local food" which I didn't fully understand until this course. I knew buying local was about circulating wealth, goods, and services close to home instead of exporting and importing from distant communities, and was vaguely aware of some positive environmental impacts involved with minimal transportation. In reflection I recognize the complexities of buying local as more than an enticing stamp of quality (Klassen & Wittman, 2017).

VFM is an organization that allows small local farmers and artisans in and around Vancouver to sell their products directly to consumers (*Vancouver Farmers Markets*, 2025). Recirculating money in the local economy does benefit communities and producers but unless we bring every bit of our leftovers and waste back to the farmers each week to be used as fertilizer, the metabolic rift remains open and the system isn't perfectly food sovereign or environmentally sustainable (Clark & Foster, 2009; Klassen & Wittman, 2017).

I still love farmers markets and miss working with VFM. I maintain that eating local and supporting farmers directly is a net positive, but I also recognize it's not the end-all-be-all for environmental sustainability (Clark & Foster, 2009). There is a lot more work that can be done to achieve local food sovereignty in Vancouver and here in Victoria. The high-density environment of the cities makes it harder for me to give back to the food system nearly as much as I take from it (Clark & Foster, 2009). I'd love to live close enough to farmers to eat their crops and return them as my craps, but until then I'll just pay them with money.

Bibliography

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