

**Exploring the Dynamics of Decision-Making in an Organic Farming Cooperative
Amidst Competing Frames of Sustainability**

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Abstract

Sustainable development assistance organizations (SDAOs) are designed to help interested producers conduct market research, identify clients and more effectively manage the process of moving products to market. Producers of sustainable products are often small business owners and grassroots entrepreneurs that produce and sell natural resource-based goods and services. The broad research question this dissertation explored was whether the decision-making processes employed by producers, staff and board members in an SDAO hold implications for their collective achievement of sustainability. Data collection focused on understanding the various frames through which producers, staff and board members approach their work with, and decision making within, the SDAO as well as how they conceptualize sustainability. This research employed semi-structured, in-depth interviews with growers, staff members and board members involved in one SDAO. The analysis found that producers, staff and board members held a number of competing frames regarding the purposes and objectives of the SDAO as well as concerning the meaning of sustainability. Frames influence the ways that each stakeholder group perceived and participated in decision-making and lead to the institutionalization of tacitly supported decision-making practices. These routines, when viewed through an efficiency lens, lead to quick decision-making, avoided conflict and allowed the SDAO to make decisions with consistency and clarity. When viewed through an environmental justice lens, however, these practices proved exclusionary, favored some elements of sustainability rather than others, and supported some participants more than others. Taken together, the decision-making practices used by Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables limited the organization's capacity to develop a learning culture, created divisions among stakeholders and did not empower stakeholders with commitment to, and responsibility for SDAO decision-making. Consequently, Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables now faces organizational challenges related to the development of commitment, trust and ultimately, resilience, within the organization. The analysis concludes these concerns are potentially critical as these elements are essential for achieving sustainability, as they are also central to the organization's ability to respond to, and overcome, challenges.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

I sat with Donald Gear, the founder of Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum (BRSF), in a dingy booth at the Chickin' Lickin' café on a gray wintry morning in rural Appalachia. He explained what drives Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, the organic vegetable collective he launched a few years ago as a project of BRSF, and that I wanted to learn about:

I remember the first or second time I met Paul Preston.... He was really the first tobacco farmer to try Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. It was back in 2000, and I had made a little presentation at a watershed meeting that a friend had invited me to. A three minute presentation of what we were trying to do. I said I'd visited some supermarkets and they were interested in local organic produce and if there was anybody interested [in learning more to see me after the meeting]. And two guys came up at the end of the meeting, out of a fairly large group. Paul was one of them. And he basically said, 'I want to hear more about that. I might want to give that a try.' So then I visited Paul. He's in his mid to late 60s now, so he was in his late 50s, and he was still walking around his farm a little. And he's talking about how someone's got to do something for these tobacco farmers. 'Tobacco farmers made this community. Tobacco farmers paid for the schools.' All this kind of stuff. And he had a certain bit of resentment about him, but he also was really talking about all the wealth that they created in the community. And there was greenhouses, there was farm material and supply shops and he was naming all that stuff. So it occurred to me then, which is not a brand new lesson for me, but that we've got to figure out a way to build on the strengths of this tobacco culture. Because I think the normal environmental organizing or sustainability organizing thing would have been to rail against tobacco because it's environmentally destructive. It obviously kills people, and it's kind of really manipulated by these mega-global corporations. So it's got lots of bad things that you could speak out against. But it was very clear to me that would be completely counterproductive and that what we needed to do was start meeting with these tobacco farmers and figuring out what it was that they could offer to us. ...the guaranteed market was the big thing about tobacco. You knew what your quota was when you put your seeds in the greenhouse in the spring, exactly how much to grow. And we couldn't do that. But, I thought if we can get assurances from the buyers for specific amounts of crops, that would probably bring some of these tobacco farmers over. Of course, that's central to the Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables strategy.

Here's the reason why our farmers work together... they realize that they need each other and they need this system to work to have access to the markets. That's it. Most of the growers could not sell to Big Food or O'Connors or The Fresh Way on their own.

Either they can't grow at the scale that would make it worthwhile or they couldn't deal with the processing, which is to say the washing, the grading, the labeling, the product liability insurance, the packaging in clamshells, the delivery on a 42-degree truck or the grading lines.

Introduction

The research described in this dissertation explores a growing trend in rural community sustainable development. That trend is the development of linkages among rural producers of sustainable products such as timber and non-timber products, agricultural produce and arts and crafts, among others, and sustainable development assistance organizations (SDAOs). Sustainable development assistance organizations include non-profit and for-profit firms, government agencies, university centers and extension offices, and quasi-government agencies such as regional economic development and planning commissions. As sustainable development assistance organizations these agencies and organizations offer rural sustainable producers services related to business planning and management. Sustainable development assistance organizations offer producers support developing business plans and proposals; obtaining start-up funds; researching and developing new products; as well as with marketing, production, distribution, accounting and bookkeeping.

While partnerships among producers and sustainable development assistance organizations may be integral for producers' success, these relationships may also produce tensions when decisions that place sustainable producers and support providers at odds with one another must be made. These tensions, if left unmanaged, can threaten the performance, program delivery, longevity and the very existence of sustainability initiatives and, ultimately, the sustainability of the rural communities, economies and environments they aim to protect. This research seeks to understand how decision conflicts among and between producers and support providers are managed, and to make recommendations for improving the decision-making and conflict management mechanisms within these partnerships. In so doing, this research attempts to enhance the capacity of sustainable producers and support organizations to accomplish their work.

The underlying purpose driving the development of relationships between sustainable producers and assistance organizations is to protect natural resources from unsustainable extractive uses so that the abilities of future generations to meet their needs are not limited. The logic of this approach works like this: if local residents are dependent upon local natural resources for their incomes, and if their way of life is inextricably tied to the local environment, they will be less likely to destroy it. Conservation of the environment then, becomes about strengthening the economic and cultural ties among local producers and local natural resources. Thus, linkages among producers and sustainable development assistance organizations are about job creation and economic development in business arenas that rely on the

sustained use of natural resources and that utilize the professional skills and experiences of local residents. Ideally, the long term and overarching outcomes of linkages among producers and assistance firms are thriving businesses that provide jobs and incomes to local residents, while using local resources in ways that do not limit the opportunities of future generations to interact with the environment.

Sustainable development theory suggests that in addition to economic and environmental goals, sustainable development initiatives should also be socially sustainable. Social sustainability is an elusive term, but is often described in terms of justice for local producers and community members. The common belief regarding the social element of sustainability is that if sustainable producers and local residents are not satisfied with sustainable development initiatives, they will not support or participate in them. As a result, sustainable development thinkers suggest that sustainable development initiatives should nurture equality, fairness, respect, responsibility and ownership among local producers and community members (Gage and Mandell 1990; Hansen et al. 2002; Kallstrom and Ljung 2005; Schaller 1993). Put simply, these initiatives should empower stakeholders at grassroots levels.

The research described throughout this dissertation considers this normative assumption to be an ethical obligation by working from the premise that socially just business and organizational management practices are necessary components of, and preconditions for, success. Not only should sustainable development initiatives work to create justice as they go about protecting the environment and providing economic opportunities, but they should also do their work in just ways. This dissertation is predicated on the assumption that achieving sustainability and environmental justice are about process as much as they are about outcomes.

Justice can mean many things to many people. This research builds on conceptions of justice provided by Agyeman (2005), Agyeman, Bullard and Evans (2002), Agyeman and Evans (2003) and Moote et al. (1997) as well as on Principles of Environmental Justice provided by the First People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in 1991 (in Agyeman, 2005) and Environmental Justice Resource Center (Healthy and Sustainable Communities: building model partnerships for the 21st century 1997). The principles of environmental justice provided by these sources most relevant to this dissertation describe justice in terms of local producers' access to information, decision making processes, leadership roles and abilities to influence decision outcomes. This research explores these elements of environmental justice as they relate to decision making and conflict management processes in one sustainable development assistance organization, Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables.

Research Question

The research question at the heart of this study is:

Do the decision-making processes employed by producers, staff and board members in an SDAO hold implications for these stakeholders' collective achievement to sustainability?

This research question aims to explore the ways that decision making processes in SDAOs influence the success of the producer/SDAO/Market model of sustainable development. Recognizing that this question is a high-altitude question that explores sustainability at broad and theoretical scales, I developed a more focused question to guide data collection. The more focused question was:

How do producers of sustainable products, and staff and board members at one sustainable development assistance organization, manage decision conflicts that relate to the management of the sustainable development initiative in which they participate?

In other words, this question asks how producers, staff and board members in one sustainable development assistance organization collaborate to develop decision making processes and decision outcomes as they work to manufacture sustainable products and move them to market. "Manage" in this context refers to the implementation and ongoing development of communication, negotiation and involvement mechanisms that stakeholders in the organization use to make decisions. In other words, the processes by which decisions are made, including who is involved, how choices and variables are weighed and considered, and whether final selections are determined by consensus, voting, or unilateral means, for instance.

The term "decision conflict" refers to choices that producers, staff and board members must make that relate to product development and business operations, and about which they hold differences of perspective. Decision conflicts, in this sense, are not day-to-day management decisions. Rather, they are decisions that reflect deeper tensions within the organization that highlight the diverse perspectives held by stakeholders. The term conflict, as used in this dissertation, does not necessarily describe decision-making instances that are hotly contested or divisive, although decisions that fit that criterion certainly apply. As used here, the term decision conflict represents any organizational decision about which various stakeholders hold different preferences, and which stakeholders believe will influence the organization's success for the mid-term or long-term. Therefore, decision conflicts may be recurring and ongoing discussion and choice-making processes that have no conclusive endpoints or permanent outcomes, or they may be one-time choices with definitive conclusions. For example, of the decision

conflicts respondents in this study described, which included choices regarding the development of a new packinghouse (a warehouse for storing, sorting and shipping produce to grocery stores); the board's role in fundraising; marketing and developing relationships with new clients; hiring new staff members; and selecting which vegetables to cultivate, some reached final and conclusive outcomes and will likely not be discussed by participants again. For example, the new packinghouse is built and most respondents stated that they were satisfied with the process by which decisions regarding the construction of the new facility occurred and with the facility itself. That decision-making process has reached a conclusion. On the other hand, respondents described decisions about the board's role in fundraising and developing relationships with clients as recurring discussions during which decisions are made, only to be reassessed and modified in the future. In each of these decision conflicts various stakeholders stated that differences of frames existed among stakeholders regarding choices they faced. This research teases out those differences in an effort to understand how the different outcomes that various stakeholders support are rooted in their frames, and how the sustainable development assistance organization goes about making decisions in an environment in which stakeholders hold dissimilar frames.

During the analysis stage of the research I used the stories related to me by stakeholders in the SDAO to develop conceptual maps of the ways that various stakeholders perceive their roles and values related to decision making and sustainability. I then compared the maps and stories of different stakeholders to develop a broad scale, organizational level understanding of how decisions are made within the SDAO. Finally, I examined my understanding of decision making in the SDAO through the lenses of environmental justice and sustainability, in order to contribute to those two literatures.

Three theoretical arenas informed my exploration of the research question. First, this research builds on the concept of sustainability by exploring how tensions among the three common elements of sustainability—environmental sustainability, economic sustainability and environmental justice—are conceptualized, valued and negotiated by participants in one rural sustainable development initiative. Second, this research builds on the concept of frames. Frames can be thought of as the ways that individuals and organizations make sense of the world. Frames help individuals and organizations define, describe and place boundaries on their observations and interpretations of the world around them (Bateson 1972; Benford and Snow 2000; Gamson and Modigliani 1987; Goffman 1974; Snow and Benford 1988; Tversky 1981; Walton and Bailey 2005). This research conceptualizes the often dissimilar frames held by participants as the roots of their different approaches to participation in sustainable development as well as of their different interpretations of the meaning of sustainability. Finally, this research explores decision making within the context of sustainable development assistance organizations and therefore is founded in organizational decision making theory. These three theoretical arenas are described in detail in the literature review section of this chapter.

Research Objectives

In addition to the research question outlined above, this research addressed three research objectives. These objectives are:

- to use qualitative methods to develop an understanding of the frames held by participants;
- to explore the ways that participants' frames influence their perceptions of, and involvement in, organizational decision making and conflict management; and,
- to provide a framework, and make recommendations, for improving the decision making and conflict management practices of sustainable development assistance organizations concerning their relationships with local producers.

The Research Context

Glasmeier and Farrigan (2003) provide an excellent documentation of the economic and environmental struggles that have faced residents of Appalachia over the past several decades. Among the challenges described by these authors are those related to dependence on natural resource industries for incomes and jobs; absentee land ownership that restricts local access and decision making control of local natural resources; topographic challenges that prevent infrastructure development; public health problems related to tragic housing conditions and water contamination; racial inequality among residents; enormous income gaps between rich and poor; a lack of political influence by low-income residents, and; unsatisfactory educational systems, among others. The authors summarize the history of the region with the following statement:

The poverty so evident in Appalachia today arises from a complex history of regional economic and political exploitation. Despite 30 years of active policy intervention and billions of dollars in federal and state funds allocated to encourage economic development in the region, the heart of Appalachia remains stagnant and distinct from economic trends experienced nationally and within the more immediate urban areas of the region (p. 134).

Put simply, Appalachia is an impoverished region with a story that parallels the most tragic cases of environmental injustice in the United States and abroad.

The Appalachian Regional Commission (a governmental agency charged with assisting federal, state and local governments at overcoming the challenges listed previously) defines and describes Appalachia as:

...a 205,000-square-mile region that follows the spine of the Appalachian Mountains from southern New York to northern Mississippi. It includes all of West Virginia and parts of 12 other states: Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. Forty-two percent of the Region's population is rural, compared with 20 percent of the national population (Appalachian Regional Commission: The Appalachian Region).

The Commission characterizes the region as “one of economic contrasts: some communities have successfully diversified their economies, while others still require basic infrastructure such as roads and water and sewer systems (*Appalachian Regional Commission: The Appalachian Region*).” Figure 1 illustrates the economic diversity of the Appalachian region.

The central region of Appalachia, the site of this study, was traditionally served by three natural resource dependent industries: coal mining, logging and tobacco farming. Over the past several decades, however, these industries have struggled in the mid-south and all but closed their doors. Employment in each industry and the region in general has also declined. This research pays particular attention to transitions in the tobacco industry, since many of the respondents in the study were tobacco farmers, or from tobacco farming families, before converting to organic vegetable farming and egg production. One goal of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables is to find new crops for farmers transitioning out of tobacco so that they can continue to earn a living from agriculture.

Two important economic and cultural institutions in the tobacco industry that deserve mention are the Federal Tobacco Farm Program and the State Tobacco Commission. Many respondents in this study described the importance of the Federal Tobacco Farm Program in contributing to the “way of life” that they suggest accompanied tobacco farming in Appalachia. The tobacco program was developed in the 1960s and charged with regulating the tobacco industry (Gale, Foreman and Capehart, 2000). The program allotted volume quotas, with predetermined price contracts for harvested tobacco, to individual farmers. As a result, the program determined farmers’ incomes, and as an extension of the quota system their resource expenditures and labor needs as well as cultivation and harvesting schedules. The program was terminated in 2005 (Womack 2005).

Figure 1. The Appalachian Region.

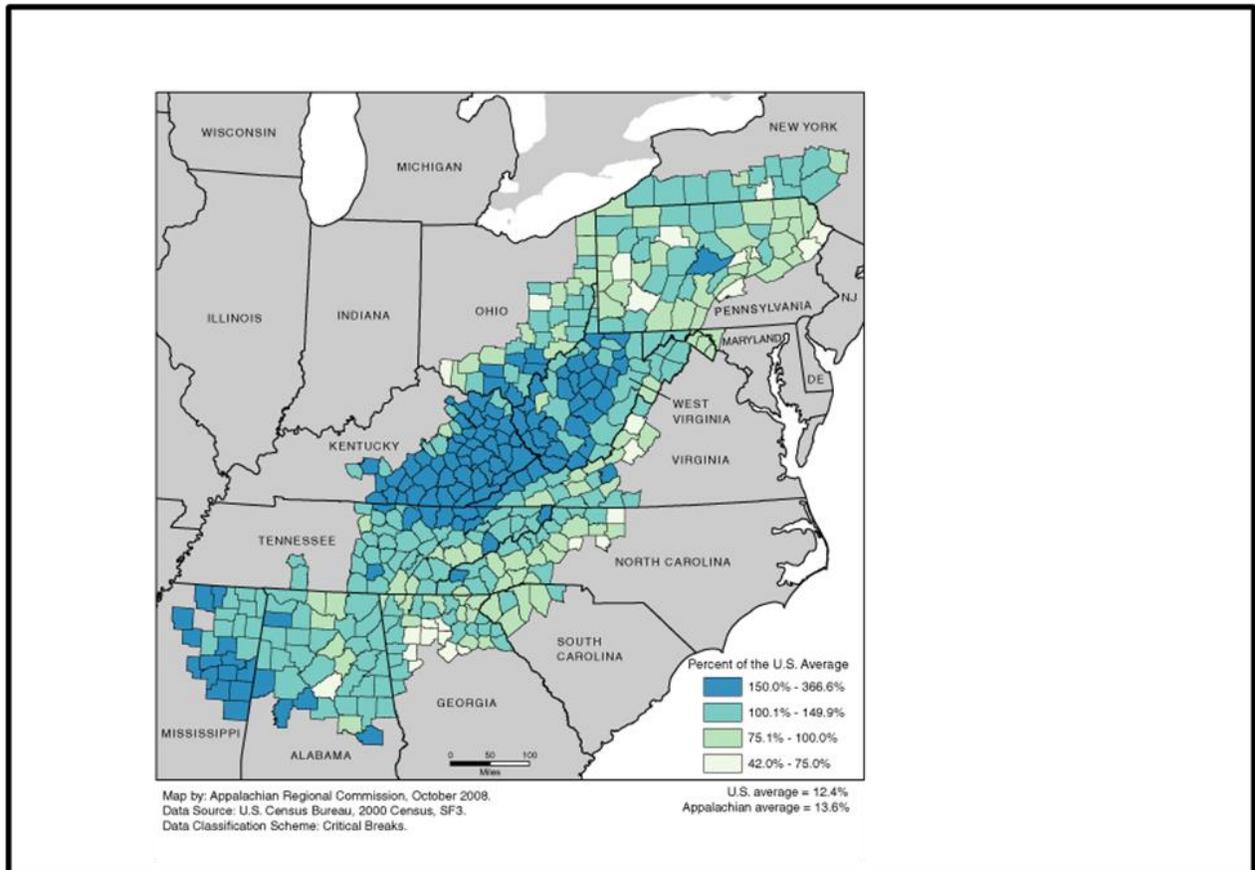


Figure 1. The Appalachian region, as defined by the Appalachian Regional Commission, covers portions of thirteen states from Mississippi to New York. This graphic highlights the differences in poverty rates across Appalachia and as a percent of the U.S. Average. Poverty rates throughout the region surpass national averages by as much as 350% (*Appalachian Regional Commission: The Appalachian Region*).

The State Tobacco Commission was created in 1999 and is still active (*The Virginia Tobacco Indemnification and Community Revitalization Commission* 2007). The commission provides tobacco farmers and industry workers with income subsidies to alleviate economic hardships and grants funds to tobacco dependent communities for the provision of educational opportunities designed to enable employees in the tobacco industry to transition into new jobs as tobacco related employment declines. Respondents in this study frequently suggested that the federal program and state commission are major structuring forces in the lives of tobacco farmers. Respondents held mixed feelings about the program and commission, but a common theme that arose throughout the study was their desire for a replacement to tobacco as a crop, tobacco farming as a way of life, and to the program and commission as structuring and stabilizing institutions in the region.

The brief description of Appalachia presented here paints a bleak picture of the natural environment, wealth, employment and opportunity in the region. It is from witnessing this impoverishment that

Donald Gear, a respondent in this study, and others decided to launch Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum in 1995 and that led to the creation of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables shortly thereafter.

Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum

Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum is a non-profit organization that addresses environmental and economic challenges in a small region of central Appalachia through the creation of natural resource-based, for-profit businesses that supply jobs and incomes to local residents. The organization fits the description of a sustainable development assistance organization provided previously. Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum was launched in 1995.

The organization's formal mission statement reads:

We come together as citizens living in and near the watersheds of the Rock and Bliss Rivers to affirm the need for development that is sustainable and beneficial for nature and people, for culture and community. Thus we pledge ourselves to work for this sustainable development:

- *By promoting the values underlying a respect for people, nature, community and culture;*
- *By enabling local communities to meet their own needs;*
- *By establishing ecologically sensitive businesses;*
- *By creating services enhancing human potential; and*
- *By utilizing strategies building upon regional strengths.*

Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum had, at the time of this dissertation, launched two businesses. The first is Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, an organic vegetable cooperative. The second is Sustainable Woods, a timber cooperative. This dissertation focuses solely on Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables although at times some respondents did mention and draw examples from Sustainable Woods during interviews.

Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables is an agricultural marketing and distribution firm that buys organic vegetables and free range eggs from local producers and sells them to grocery stores and other outlets. Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables is ultimately governed by Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's board of

directors. Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables employs six staff members, although during the growing season adds temporary employees. Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's Board of Directors has fourteen members.

Figure 2 diagrams the process by which Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables moves produce from farm to market. There are five steps to this process. First, individual growers cultivate crops on their farms. The crops and volumes that growers cultivate are collectively negotiated among growers and staff members at the beginning of each growing season. Target volumes for the collective are provided by staff members based on the needs of clients. Growers and staff members work collaboratively to divvy up the total volume into personal allotments for individual growers until the target volume is met.

Second, as farmers harvest their crops they transport them to the packinghouse. The packinghouse is a large warehouse that houses the collective's vegetable and egg sorting, washing and packaging equipment. The packinghouse also provides office space for staff members.

Once at the packinghouse, the third step of the farm-to-market process begins. In this step, each grower's contribution of vegetables is sorted. Each farmer's contribution is kept separate until after the sorting process is complete. Vegetables are sorted into two categories based on their physical characteristics. Vegetables that meet weight, size, color and shape criteria provided by clients are considered "grade A" vegetables. Vegetables that do not meet these criteria are considered "seconds." Seconds may be too small or too big, have visible scratches or scars, or be the wrong color, for example. Each grower's grade A vegetables are weighed separately from their seconds. Keeping each grower's vegetables separate, and separating grade A produce from seconds, allows individual farmers to be paid for their individual contributions as well as paid different prices for grade A vegetables and seconds.

The fourth step of the process is packaging. Once an individual farmer's produce is sorted and weighed, it is combined with the contributions of other growers and packaged into shipping boxes.

Finally, the produce is shipped to clients. Grade A produce is sent to grocery stores. Most grocery clients are located in central Appalachia, although a handful are located further away. Seconds are sent to local restaurants and schools where they are used for cooking, sold at regional farmers' markets and donated to regional food banks.

This research focuses on three stakeholder groups involved with Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. The first is growers. At the time of this study Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables had approximately 65 participating growers. There are no size requirements for farms participating in the collective and as a result a great deal of diversity exists in the sizes of the farms, and experience levels of the farmers, involved in the collective. The second group is staff members. Staff members are responsible for managing the collective on a day-to-day basis. The jobs of staff members include training farmers in organic cultivation practices as well as helping them solve problems and answer questions related to pest infestations, soil nutrients and fertilizers, and irrigation, for example. Other staff jobs focus on finding and communicating with clients, sorting and transporting vegetables, and maintaining the packinghouse. The final group of stakeholders is board members. Board members oversee the strategic development of Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum and hold ultimate responsibility for the success of Blue

Mountain Organic Vegetables. These three groups will be described in greater detail in subsequent chapters.

Figure 2. Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' Field-to-Market Business Model

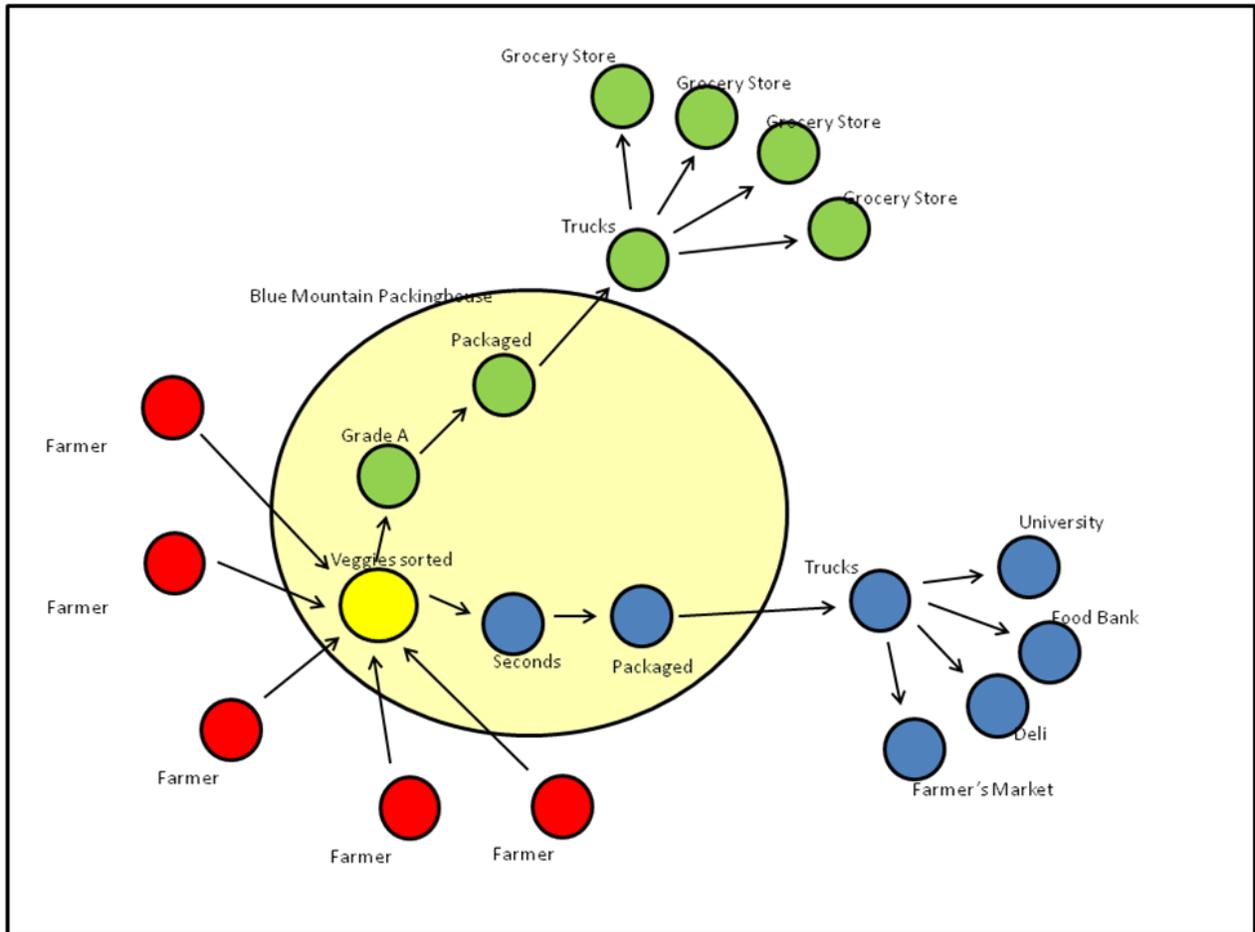


Figure 2. There are five steps involved in the process of moving farmers' crops to market. First, crops are cultivated and harvested in growers' fields (red). Second, growers transport their vegetables to the packinghouse (yellow). Third, produce is sorted into two piles: A) "grade A" produce which meets the high quality standards of grocery stores (green); and, B) "seconds," which do not meet grocery store criteria. Seconds are sold to institutional kitchens, at farmers' markets and donated to local food banks (blue). Fourth, produce is transported to grocery store clients (green). Fifth, produce is sold to consumers at grocery stores.

Literature Review

This section provides theoretical and contextual background to this research. It includes a discussion of three key theoretical topics. These are: 1) sustainability/sustainable development and environmental justice; 2) frames, and 3) organizational decision-making.

The concepts of sustainability and sustainable development provide context to the study. Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables is a sustainable development assistance organization. The purpose of the organization is to support local producers of sustainable products, in this case producers of organic vegetables and free-range eggs, develop and produce their products, find and access clients, and with other aspects of business management. Therefore, the organization acts in a similar capacity to many small business assistance firms. Yet, because the organization also carries a sustainability-oriented mission, embedded within its mission statement are additional values related to the environment and people and that may, this research predicts, create tensions among stakeholders that rank or frame these values differently. The purpose of the portion of the literature review dedicated to sustainability is to describe the roots of this movement and the foundation of its values.

Additionally, this research explicitly focuses on social aspects of sustainability. While the term “social aspects” may mean many things, in this research the social aspects of sustainability are viewed through an environmental justice lens with particular attention paid to decision making practices that foster, or limit, the achievement of environmental justice for sustainable producers.

The concept of frames provides the analytical lens for this study. This research aims to understand the various frames through which growers, staff and board members approach their work with Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables and how their frames influence the decision outcomes they support as well as the development of decision making processes. The purpose of using an analytical lens that focuses on frames is to shed light on the frame-based challenges that sustainable development assistance organizations face when making management decisions. One assumption of this research is that the dissimilar frames held by stakeholders in sustainable development assistance organizations lead to conflicts when making organizational decisions. This research also assumes that these conflicts, if unaddressed, can lead to the demise of sustainable development assistance organizations through a loss of trust and commitment among participants. In the end, the term conflict may have proved to be too strong a term for the types of decision making processes uncovered in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. The decisions uncovered did not hold high degrees of tension or threaten the existence of the organization. As a result, a major portion of this research came to address why this assumption was not realized in this case. A discussion of the findings related to this development is included in the discussion chapter of the dissertation (Chapter 6).

Following the discussion of the theories upon which this research is founded is a brief review of literature that pertains to the development of linkages among producers of sustainable products and

sustainable development assistance organizations like those among growers, staff and board members in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables.

Sustainability and Sustainable Development

Sustainability arose as a social movement in the late 20th century as grassroots and world leaders struggled to address two interrelated problems (Agyeman and Evans, 2003; Brown, 1981; Edwards, 2005; WCED, 1987). The first problem was recognition that natural resources were not limitless. The notion of environmental carrying capacities arose from this paradigm change. This shift challenged the dominant view that natural resources were unlimited, or at least plentiful enough that human's ability to harness them could not deplete them. With an understanding of ecological carrying capacities came an awareness that resources can provide for a limited number of people, or be subjected to a limited degree of use, before suffering consequences from which they cannot recover. At some point, so this understanding goes, unchecked population growth, and subsequent increased reliance on natural resources, could stress resources to the point that they would no longer fully recover (Agyeman and Evans, 2003; Brown, 1981).

This recognition was reinforced by environmental catastrophes such as the Cuyahoga River fire in Cleveland, Ohio and public health disaster at Love Canal in Niagara Falls, New York. On June 22, 1969 a stretch of the Cuyahoga River caught fire. The flames were the result of years of dumping petroleum-based industrial by-products into the river so that they could be diluted and carried downstream. The eerie images of the burning waterway at night shocked Americans. "If the capacity of a river to dilute pollution could be maxed out, what other limits to our environment had we reached and what other environmental disasters awaited us?" Americans wondered.

The second problem with which leaders at grassroots and elite levels wrestled was the recognition that humans' use of natural resources carried externalities (Agyeman and Evans, 2003; WCED 1987). Externalities, when applied to environmental matters, can be thought of as the side-effects of the use of natural resources and can be categorized into three interrelated groups: social externalities, environmental externalities and economic externalities.

Nuanced classifications of externalities exist within these three broad categories. Some social externalities stem from the dynamics of supply and demand economics. These externalities come as a consequence of the limited quantity of, and human's efficiency at acquiring, available natural resources. The story goes like this: as limited natural resources become scarce they increase in value. Consequently, with recognition that resources are limited comes an increase in the prices that people are willing to pay for them. Some people are able to purchase resources and others are not. Some people are "haves" and others are "have-nots". Haves represent those individuals, communities and nations that can afford to purchase limited natural resources. Have-nots represent those that cannot.

The dynamics of supply and demand associated with scarce natural resources creates inequities within populations of individuals, among and between community members and communities, and between nations. Problems associated with the inequities of supply and demand manifest themselves when individuals, communities and nations are unable to acquire the resources they need to sustain their populations within the limits of acceptable norms of human rights. When not everyone, for example, has access to housing, water or food.

Social externalities are also created from the ways that natural resources are used. For example, burning coal for energy degrades air quality and generating power from hydro-electric dams alters water quality, stream geomorphology and wildlife habitat. As a result, people somewhere, and at sometime, must deal with the side-effects of using coal and water as energy sources. Those who are on the downwind side of a coal power plant suffer breathing complications and those downstream of hydro-electric dams must treat water before it can be used. Often, the same people that have the capital to purchase scarce resources also have the capital to avoid dealing with the side effects of resource use. Wealthier individuals, communities and nations are able to place themselves in positions—geographically and socio-politically—so that they do not have to deal directly with these externalities. Individuals, communities and nations that do not have the resources to avoid the externalities of resource use often receive the full-force of their negative side-effects. Problems that arise from inequities created by the bi-products of resource use manifest themselves when some individuals, community members or nations suffer public health ramifications or economic burdens as a result of coping with their externalities.

A third type of social externality is not created by supply and demand dynamics, but by the relationships among people that are involved in resource use. The key problems related to relational externalities are that individuals, communities and nations hold different objectives related to their relationships with natural resources and some individuals, communities and nations have the power to make decisions regarding resource use while others do not. Inequities in decision-making control and objectives create tensions in relationships among individuals, communities and nations. Consumers want to purchase and use resources as inexpensively as possible, for example, while laborers are concerned with generating an income, employment benefits and job safety and security. As a result, the interests of workers and consumers are in tension with one another. The competing interests of individuals, community members and nations create relational inequities.

A second group of externalities are environmental externalities. Environmental externalities are felt as changes to the natural environment that arise from resource extraction, processing and use. Environmental externalities can be described broadly as the changes in the quality, health and function of natural resources and ecosystems that come as the result of natural resource use. Researchers often describe the functions that natural resources and ecosystems supply as “ecological services” (Costanza et al. 1998). Examples of ecological services are a wetland’s ability to filter and clean stormwater runoff and a forest’s ability to sequester carbon. These are functions that natural resources provide naturally, but from which humans receive benefits. There are several problems that arise from environmental externalities. Some of these have already been described in the previous section on social externalities and others will be described in the following section on economic externalities. However, the general

problem with environmental externalities is that even if the social and economic implications of externalities associated with resource use can be managed temporarily, environmental externalities compound over time and produce aggregated and persistent results. At some point they reach a point where they are no longer manageable. At that point severe and disastrous effects can occur. The Cuyahoga River, for example, was degraded to the point that it reached its assimilative capacity.

The final group of externalities are economic in nature. These externalities come as the result of financial systems that do not take the full costs of environmental and social externalities into consideration. As a result, differences exist between the revenues generated by natural resource markets and the costs associated with mitigating for the externalities created by using natural resources. For example, gasoline prices today do not consider the economic implications of managing climate change in the future. Consequently, the actions of individuals, communities and nations today place economic burdens on future generations. Upstream water polluters that do not pay for the costs of treating water downstream, boom and bust cycles associated with natural resource dependent industries and taxes on “environmental bads” are all additional examples of economic externalities. The problems with economic externalities lie not only in questions of fairness, such as who should pay for environmental bads, but also with questions about how money to pay for environmental costs should be generated, collected, saved and spent.

What these brief descriptions of social, environmental and economic externalities hint at, but that is worth stating outright, is that the externalities of resource use are often complicated by significant temporal and geographic components. Temporally, the consequences of externalities may not be felt immediately but rather at some point in the future and by those who were not responsible for creating them in the first place. Geographically, the problems described here are complicated because their implications may not be realized at the locations where resource use occurs, but rather in distant locations where residents have no say, or knowledge of, decision-making regarding natural resources. For example, a coal plant in the western United States may feed power to western communities, but the smog created from the plant is felt on the east coast. These complications raise questions about society’s need to manage for problems of which the sources are not easily identifiable and which have far reaching implications for future generations.

The Meaning of Sustainability

In the latter half of the 20th century, as individuals, communities and nations became aware of issues related to externalities and communication about them became more common, the concept of sustainability arose as a solution. The notions of living within environmental means, making decisions about environmental resources that create fairness, inclusion and equity, and taking the full economic costs of resource use into consideration gained popularity. Sustainability became a paradigm in itself; a

way of seeing the future. For a more detailed description of the players, discussions and forums that brought about this paradigm shift refer to Bell and Morse (2008) and Edwards (2005).

Sustainability is a noun, and the literature regarding sustainability presents no clear definition of what is meant by the term. Sustainable development initiatives are actions taken by stakeholders such as non-profit organizations, government agencies and private firms, to reach sustainability in a particular sector of the public sphere. What constitutes “sustainable development”, or a “sustainable development initiative”, is equally elusive. Andres R. Edwards, in The Sustainability Revolution (2005), documents the enormous variety of sustainable development efforts underway in the United States and around the world. Indeed, the fact that the sustainable development movement has so many adherents, so many definitions, and such a wide diversity of activities that are considered within its domain is considered by Edwards to be one hallmark of the movement itself.

Table 1 lists several definitions of sustainability (and sustainable development) provided or used by sustainable development governance organizations, non-profit organizations and researchers. There are two unifying themes among the definitions included in Table 1. First, most authors agree that sustainability is, at its core, a temporal concept. Second, most analysts agree that overall sustainability requires integration in three areas: the environment, economy and social/cultural arenas.

As a temporal concept, sustainability means thinking about humanity’s obligations to future generations (Norton 2005). Theorists have offered two different perspectives regarding this concept. These are called strong, or hard, sustainability and weak, or soft, sustainability.

Soft or weak sustainability is characterized by economic accounting (Norton, 2005). This perspective suggests that all resources, be they cultural, economic or natural, can be accounted for in financial terms. As a result, different forms of capital are fungible and, over time, the goal of sustainability is to make sure that there is no net loss of capital provided to future generations (Agyeman, Bullard and Evans, 2002; Bell and Morse, 2008; Norton, 2005). This means that as natural resources are degraded and natural capital is lost, economic capital or cultural capital may be generated. If this occurs it does not matter if natural resources are degraded over time because sustainability can still be attained if the rate decline in natural capital is equal to the rate of growth in financial or cultural capital. In this scenario, future populations will be left with equivalent capital, it will simply be transformed into other forms. This perspective is summarized by Solow, in his seminal 1991 speech to the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute. Solow’s perspective is termed weak, or soft, sustainability because it reduces sustainability to an economic accounting of stakeholders’ welfare and can lead to a decline in environmental and cultural capital so long as that decline is countered with an equivalent gain in financial capital (Agyeman, Bullard and Evans, 2002; Norton, 2005).

Table 1. Definitions of Sustainability and Sustainable Development

Definition	Source
The need to ensure a better quality of life for all, now and into the future, in a just and equitable manner, whilst living within the limits of supporting ecosystems.	Agyeman and Evans, 2003
...development that improves the quality of human life while living within the carrying capacity of supporting ecosystems.	International Union for the Conservation of Nature, 1991
...the capacity of a system to maintain output at a level approximately equal to or greater than its historical average, with the approximation determined by the historical level of variability.	Lynam and Herdt, 1989
...maximizing the net benefits of economic development, subject to maintaining the services and quality of natural resources over time.	Pearce and Turner, 1990
... development that meets the needs of current generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs and aspirations.	Report of the World Commission on the Environment and Development, 1987 (The Brundtland Commission)

Table 1. This table provides examples of several definitions of sustainability. It illustrates sustainability is an elusive term, although most definitions include two points: 1) sustainability is a temporal concept based upon providing for future generations; and, 2) to be successful sustainable development efforts must address environmental, economic and social considerations.

The second characterization of humans' obligations to future generations does not view different forms of capital as interchangeable and does not summarize these forms of capital in economic terms (Bell and Morse, 2008; Norton, 2005). This perspective is considered strong, or hard, sustainability. Theorists who advocate this perspective do not allow for the loss of capital in one sector in exchange for growth in another (Agyeman, Bullard and Evans, 2002; Norton, 2005). Therefore, this perspective insures no net loss of natural capital, cultural capital or economic capital and, as a result, is a stronger conception of sustainability than that described previously. Furthermore, this perspective conceptualizes welfare as separate from the accounting of capital. Welfare, from this perspective, is described as the involvement of local stakeholders in decision-making and governance, the resilience of communities, cultures and ecosystems to adapt to change and to learn, and as the continued maintenance of individual choice and opportunity related to resource use over time.

A second common theme in the literature is that sustainability is comprised of three elements. These are: ecological or environmental sustainability, economic sustainability and social or cultural sustainability (Agyeman and Evans, 2003; Edwards, 2005; WCED, 1987). Sustainability theorists generally agree that ecological or environmental sustainability means that as humans interact with the natural environment by taking part in economic, recreational or cultural activities care must be taken to make sure that the abilities of natural resources to provide ecological services are not degraded or impaired (Edwards, 2005). In a theoretical sense, environmental sustainability means operating within a closed-loop system without the leakage of environmental externalities.

Economic sustainability is generally thought to mean that the full costs of economic externalities are considered in economic systems, pricing and funding strategies so that future generations or stakeholders that are geographically distant from the point of resource extraction or use are not burdened with the costs of paying for environmental restoration (Edwards, 2005). In addition, economic sustainability means that the costs of environmental conservation, restoration and improvement must pay for themselves.

The final element, the social and cultural component, is less easily defined than the previous two. Generally, this element is characterized to mean that the social inequalities created by the use of natural resources must be overcome through attention to human rights, fair labor laws, attention to cultural values and concepts of community, as well as the equal distribution and access to environmental resources (Agyeman and Evans, 2003; Edwards, 2005). There is, however, considerable evidence that suggests that social equity is often left out or given reduced consideration by planners and managers of sustainability initiatives (Agyeman and Evans, 2003). For example, Bell and Morse list eleven conceptions of sustainable agriculture from researchers, practitioners and agricultural organizations around the world (2008). Of these, very few include social elements among their key concerns.

This research views the objective of social sustainability as the pursuit of environmental justice, meaning that in order to achieve social sustainability, as well as environmental and economic sustainability, sustainable development efforts must be environmentally just. Like sustainability itself, environmental justice can mean many things. A host of conferences, summits and organizations have developed numerous principles of environmental justice. For a more thorough treatment of these see Agyeman (2005) and Schweitzer and Stephenson (2007). Essentially, environmental justice means that all peoples should be treated equally in the distribution of “environmental bads”, such as pollution, and “environmental goods”, such as the location of wilderness and parks, among other things. Environmental justice architects maintain that environmental laws must protect all people equally, allow equal access to environmental planning processes, and that environmental decisions should not be made along racial, socio-economic, cultural or political lines.

Two of the most notable efforts to codify principles of environmental justice are the First People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in 1991, which developed 17 criteria of environmental justice that were ratified at the second summit convened in 2002 (Agyeman 2005), and the Environmental

Justice Resource Center conference in 1997 (Healthy and Sustainable Communities: building model partnerships for the 21st century 1997).

Some of the criteria included in these lists are not directly related to this research. These elements discuss objectives related to the location and development of waste treatment, industrial and nuclear facilities for example. Each list however, also includes criteria that are directly related to this research and the relationships that exist among sustainable development assistance organizations and the producers with whom they work. These factors focus on the development of participatory decision-making processes, inclusion in management, transparency in decision-making and communication, accountability among stakeholders and governance organizations, and the empowerment of producers at the local level. Table 2 highlights several principles of environmental justice directly related to the context of sustainable development assistance organizations.

Table 2. Principles of Environmental Justice that Relate to Sustainable Development Assistance Organizations

First People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit (1991)	Environmental Justice Resource Center Conference (1997)
Criterion five: Environmental justice affirms the fundamental right to political, economic, cultural and environmental self-determination of all peoples.	Criterion one: grassroots community groups want to see sustainable development that is not only economically and ecologically sound but is also just.
Criterion seven: Environmental justice demands the right to participate as equal partners at every level of decision-making including needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement and evaluation.	Criterion two: They support a sustainable economy that improves the vitality and self-sufficiency of their community and its residents.
	Criterion six: They demand that all groups are included as equal partners in development decisions.
	Criterion seven: they promote government and corporate accountability to the public for decisions about production and consumption.

Table 2. Several organizations, summits and conferences have proposed principles of environmental justice. The inclusion of stakeholders at grassroots levels in decision-making is one hallmark of these efforts.

Taken in the aggregate, the principles of environmental justice developed by these groups promote the central importance of inclusive and transparent decision-making processes that provide stakeholders at the grassroots level—who are the most vulnerable to environmental injustice—with equitable access to decision-making processes and full opportunities to influence the outcomes of decisions that affect them.

Moote et. al. (1997), sought to make the broad objectives outlined in the principles of environmental justice applicable at the ground level, developed five indicators of inclusive and participatory decision-making processes. These indicators can be thought of as the observable and measurable embodiment of the principles of environmental justice listed above. These indicators and their meanings are:

- Self-efficacy: the development of a sense of ownership, responsibility and purpose related to decision-making among stakeholders at the grassroots level;
- Representation and access: access afforded to, and the representative inclusion of, stakeholders of all perspectives;
- Information exchange and learning: equitable access to, and transparent use of, information, knowledge and data as well as sincere attempts to promote collaborative learning among stakeholders;
- Continuity of participation: the ongoing development of decision-making processes and structures that enhance the access, inclusion and participation of grassroots stakeholders; and,
- Decision-making authority: the abilities of grassroots stakeholders to affect decision outcomes through direct participation in decision-making.

This research uses Moote et al.'s. work as a touchstone for considering environmental justice in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables and sustainable development assistance organizations at-large. As a touchstone, these indicators serve as informal markers for gauging the decision practices of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. In the conclusion I return to the principles of environmental justice provided previously and to the indicators provided by Moote et al. and use them as jumping off points for considering the implications of the decision practices used by Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables for environmental justice at individual, organizational and regional scales.

Two Lenses on Sustainability

This dissertation addresses two different lenses through which sustainability theorists and planners view the concept of, and progress towards, achieving sustainability. Throughout this effort, these two

perspectives are termed *aspirational sustainability* and *attainability*. These two lenses summarize two distinct ways of viewing sustainability that are implicit in the literature, but not discussed overtly. They are related to the notions of strong/hard sustainability and soft/weak sustainability.

Aspirational sustainability views sustainable development as a journey with no destination (Bell and Morse, 2008). Schaller (1993) eloquently described aspirational sustainability:

As a destination sustainability is like truth and justice—concepts not readily captured in concise definitions (p. 91).

In other words, sustainability is not a concept that can be achieved in a climactic sense. Rather, sustainable development efforts can become more sustainable, and can reach ever higher levels of sustainability, but there are always additional levels of sustainability that can be pursued.

Viewing sustainability through a lens of attainability means that sustainability is considered an achievable destination. Advocates of indicators by which success can be declared exemplify the lens of attainability. When discussing the value of indicators of success, Bell and Morse (2008, p. 3) write:

In fact, the idea of using indicators as a means of gauging sustainability has become extremely popular, with many governments and agencies devoting substantial resources to indicator development and testing.

Viewed this way, sustainability can be measured, benchmarks can be achieved and sustainability can be attained. Bell and Morse justify this perspective:

After all, how can we do something unless we know what we are trying to do? Surely we cannot farm or develop sustainability unless we know what this implies.” (p. 11).

Viewing sustainability through a lens of attainability means explicitly identifying standards—minimum benchmarks—for defining and measuring success. From this conception efforts to enhance sustainability in the environmental, economic and social arenas beyond the predefined benchmarks are simply icing on the cake.

This lens often suggests that the three elements of sustainability are in tension with one another, and that as efforts are made to enhance environmental sustainability improvement in the social and cultural or economic, arenas may be sacrificed. Those who view sustainability through a lens of attainability support their approach by claiming that the broad and vague definitions of aspirational sustainability must be operationalized in specific contexts and that operationalizing them necessarily means defining goals and objectives and prioritizing resource allocation, which inherently places the three elements of sustainability in tension with one another (Heinen 1994).

The aspirational lens and lens of attainability are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they sit at opposite ends of a spectrum that describes how sustainability planners and stakeholders make use of indicators of success and describe their objectives as well as view tension among the three elements. Those who view sustainability through an aspirational lens use indicators to gauge progress towards an indefinable goal. From an aspirational perspective, the use of indicators is empowering because they mark progress, allow for flexibility to pursue new areas of sustainable development and encourage innovation (Bell and Morse, 2008). When seen through a lens of attainability, however, indicators can limit progress. Those who approach sustainability through the lens of attainability view indicators as goals in and of themselves. From this perspective, once these benchmarks are reached efforts to obtain still higher levels of sustainability are discouraged.

The concepts of aspirational sustainability and attainable sustainability, as well as definitions of the three elements of sustainability and the use of indicators and benchmarks in each element, are critical in this research. One major theme of this research relates to the ways that stakeholders involved in one sustainability initiative cope with the tensions that arise over their different conceptualizations of sustainability. For example, differences in the ways that stakeholders define the environmental, economic, and social and cultural elements of sustainability, and overcome conflicts in their definitions as they work to make decisions. Other tensions arise among stakeholders that view sustainability through an aspirational lens and lens of attainability. Furthermore, these differences lead to contested meanings regarding the mission of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, the organization that brings stakeholders in this research together.

Frames

The concept of frames has received increasing attention in social movement research in recent years. This is especially true in research regarding environmental issues and sustainability. Research about frames is often traced to the work of Bateson (1972), Goffman (1974), Tversky (1981), Snow and Benford (1988), Benford and Snow (2000) and, more recently, Walton and Bailey (2005). These authors describe frames as social constructions developed by observing one's environment and events, and by making meanings from those observations. Frames are the result of cognitive actions such as locating, perceiving, identifying and labeling occurrences within our surroundings, and translating those actions into understandings that can be used to situate one's self in relation to the environment and those with whom one interacts (Goffman, 1974). Frames are the result of sensemaking activities. Gamson and Modigliani (1987) succinctly described a frame as "a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning (p. 143)."

As social constructions, an individual's frame informs and reinforces their social beliefs, values and ideologies. Consequently, frames influence an individual's actions and behaviors. Reciprocally, one's actions and behaviors also reinforce their frames. Thus, the construction of a frame is a structuration

process in which the process of generating a frame leads to further and subsequent frame construction (Lewicki et al. 2003). Generating a frame is first a cognitive step. This involves the observation of one's environment, the interpretation of observations and the generation of meaning from these interpretations. Once the cognitive step is complete (recognizing that as a structuration process it is never complete) it results in behaviors. These hold consequences for future occurrences within the environment. New occurrences spur a new round of observation, interpretation and meaning making that modify and reinforce the original frame. If, for example, an individual views the world through a frame that draws on their religious beliefs he/she will often act in ways that correspond to their spiritual orientation. As a result, they will generate religious meanings from their observations of the environment and their religious frame will be reinforced, further validating and strengthening it. As their religious frame is reinforced the outcome will encourage them to interpret subsequent situations in a similar manner, reinitiating the process.

This dissertation addresses the frames held by participants in one sustainable development organization. It focuses on how participants' frames influence decision-making within an organization. Lewicki, Gray and Elliot (2003) suggest that one source of conflict regarding decision-making in environmental contexts may stem from clashes among stakeholders' frames. These authors suggest that the foundational role that frames play in determining an individuals' interpretations of the world makes them central to the decision-making processes individuals use when making choices about their environment. Furthermore, these authors suggest, frames are central to the types of solutions to environmental problems that individuals perceive as available and appropriate for use.

Researchers describe a number of different types of frames. Frame types can be thought of as common themes of meaning that individuals draw from observations made in particular contexts. Five types of frames are related to this dissertation. These are: collective action frames; master frames; value frames; identity frames and; characterization frames. While this analysis does not explicitly focus on these types of frames, they arise as terms and themes throughout the text. This effort examines how frames, in a general sense, interact in decision-making processes and how participants overcome challenges to decision-making that arise from frame clashes.

Collective Action Frames

Specifically within the context of social movements, Snow and Benford (1988) suggest that frames help individuals condense observations and interpretations of "the world out there (p. 198)" in ways that inform and reinforce their belief systems and ideologies, and that allow them to mobilize themselves and others to act when they are compelled. For instance, if one views health care policy through a frame of social injustice, they will view actions and occurrences within the health care arena as the result of, or further entrenchment of, social inequalities. As a result of their propensity to interpret events through the frame of injustice, they will be encouraged to behave in ways that advance their

beliefs, values and ideologies related to social justice and that align with the interpretations and meanings attached to the events and occurrences they observe. This may mean using rhetoric from the field of social justice when communicating with others about health care, taking part in activities that advance health related social justice causes and encouraging others to participate in those activities. When framing is performed collaboratively by numerous interacting individuals, the result is the creation of a collective frame founded upon the integration of all members' individual frames. As one individual acts in a way that reflects and reinforces their frame, they alter the environment that informs the frames and actions of others. When this occurs in a way which supports the values, ideologies and beliefs of those within the network, frame alignment occurs (Snow et al., 1986; Walton and Bailey, 2005; Zavestoski et al., 2004). That is, an agreed upon framing of a particular issue or event among participants, or set of issues and events, that encourages the continued use of the frame as well as actions and behaviors that promote progress towards realizing beliefs, values, ideologies and goals associated with the frame (Benford and Snow 2000). These authors argue that frame alignment is critical to the development of social movements. In the absence of such alignment participants in a social movement would not be unified toward a common goal.

Researchers identify three steps to the creation of collective action frames (Pellow 1999). The first step is the diagnostic stage. In this step, movement participants diagnose the problem they aim to address and attribute blame for the circumstances surrounding that problem (Snow and Benford, 1992). Often this step includes coalescing participants around the notion of injustice (Gamson, 1987). The second stage is the prognostic step. Here, movement participants identify solutions to the problems they observe and identify strategies and tactics for reaching them. The final step is the identity component (Gamson, 1987). In this step participants define who is included in the movement and who is not, and identify the core beliefs of movement participants.

The notion of the collective action frame, and the three steps in particular, plays an important role in this dissertation. Collective action framing provides a logical framework for understanding many of the decisions made by participants in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, especially related to the service frames of staff and board members.

Master Frames

A second type of frame important for understanding this research is the master frame. Master frames provide an overarching framework to the framing processes in which participants in social movements take part (Pellow, 1999; Snow and Benford, 1992; Zavestoski et al., 2004). As master frames guide framing processes they place boundaries on how events and actions that take place within the environment are interpreted by participants and, as a result, bound what interpretations of events and actions are acceptable for participants to make. Master frames are, therefore, epistemic in nature. That is, they define how individuals place or categorize events, issues and occurrences within their

sensemaking activities. By extension, master frames dictate acceptable actions in which participants can take part. To continue with the public health and social injustice example used previously, master frames dictate the limits of what are, and are not, considered health care and social justice issues. Master frames, by extension, determine the kinds of policy alternatives participants in the health care debate will, or won't, accept.

Value Frames

A third type of frame important in this research is the value frame.

Brewer and Gross (2005) define a value frame as, "a particular sort of frame that draws 'an association between a value and an issue that carries an evaluative implication: it presents a position on an issue as being right (and others as wrong) by linking that position to a specific core value (Brewer 2001, p. 46).'" Individuals use value frames to justify priorities when faced with competing values and to gain support for issues by appealing to the values of those whose support they seek.

This research explores stakeholders' sustainability frames, which are value frames that describe how individuals' define and prioritize the concepts of sustainability. Sustainability frames are, more accurately, the integration of three value frames which pertain to the three elements of sustainability. Stakeholders hold individual value frames regarding their prioritization of economic, environmental and social sustainability, and integrate these frames to form an overarching conception of the meaning of sustainability. Because many decisions within Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables can be viewed through a sustainability frame, value frames hold important implications for the decision-making processes used within Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables as well as for the specific decisions that individuals support.

Identity Frames

Identity frames, as described by Lewicki, Gray and Elliot (2003), provide an individual's answers to questions like, "Who am I? What defines me? What do I believe?" People may define themselves through their religious beliefs, professional positions, family status or community relationships, for example. Identity frames intersect with this research because the ways that stakeholders in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables define their identities have implications for the ways that they participate in decision-making. For example, some growers see themselves as inexperienced farmers with little value to add to decision-making. As a result, they don't often participate in decision-making and defer involvement to more experienced growers. Not only does this set up an interesting dynamic among stakeholders, but it could hold long term implications for Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' success.

Characterization Frames

Characterization frames are the ways that individuals perceive and describe others based on observations (Lewicki, Gray and Elliot, 2003). Characterization frames provide an individual's answers to the questions, "Who are they? What defines them? What do they believe?" Stereotypes and resulting prejudices are the outcomes of characterization frames. It should be noted, however, that characterization frames do not always result in negative characterizations. Individuals can be framed as charismatic leaders, for example. Characterization frames allow individuals to locate themselves in society by defining their identities in relation to the identities of others (Stets and Biga 2003). For example, this research frames three groups of farmers in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables: legacy tobacco farmers, returning farmers and lifestyle farmers. These groups, however, hold little meaning in and of themselves. It is only when members of each group develop characterizations of other growers that the terms "legacy tobacco farmer", "returning farmer" and "lifestyle farmer" take on meaning. For instance, defining lifestyle growers as individuals who have turned to organic farming because they hold idyllic visions of what it means to be a farmer, has little meaning by itself. This statement however, takes on additional significance when the characterizations that lifestyle growers make about legacy farmers are contrasted with the lived reality of those in the legacy group that lifestyle growers hope to emulate.

Characterization frames have implications for this research because they are used by stakeholders to inform their perspectives on who should be involved in decision-making and why, as well as the decision choices they support. Staff members, for example, make frequent judgments about what they believe to be the goals of growers. These beliefs are based on characterizations made by staff members and they inform the decisions that staff make on behalf of growers as well as their beliefs about how growers should be involved in decision-making.

Organizational Decision-making

A third area of theoretical inquiry that guides this research is organizational decision-making. Noordhaven (1995) has defined decision-making as "the process of selection of and commitment to a purpose or plan of action" (p. 8). Mesut Akdere and Brian Altman (2009) view decision-making as the process by which organizational change occurs. These authors state that "No change can occur without involving some sort of decision-making—be it at the individual, group, or organizational levels." These authors, among others, identify a number of processes by which decisions are made in organizations including brainstorming, action research, consultative decision-making, unilateral decision-making, consensus decision-making and voting decision-making (Mack et al. 2004; Morcol 2007). Other researchers acknowledge that even with such delineations among decision-making processes, decision-making is often a haphazard process of incrementalism rather than an isolated moment of weighing and

choosing options as the processes identified by Akdere and Altman suggest (Beach 1997). This dissertation takes the position that decision-making is truly a process of learning about individuals' frames regarding organizational purposes and integrating them into a common organizational frame and making choices that suit this perspective.

The research discussed in this dissertation views decision-making as a process of learning about and integrating individual members' frames regarding participation in the organization, other stakeholders and sustainable development. This research views decision-making at the individual and organizational levels as reflections of the frames held by individuals as well as the process of constructing shared frames among many people at the organizational level. This view of decision-making builds on Bell's work (1985).

Bell explored tensions that arise when individuals within an organization hold frames that are different than those held at the organizational level, such as when scientists in pursuit of scientific integrity and truth are employed by industry groups concerned with generating profits (Kornhauser 1962). Bell suggests that value differences among members of an organization, and between individuals and the organization itself, can threaten the integrity of values held by individuals as well the organization's achievement of its purpose. Individuals with values divergent from those held at the organizational level can sidetrack organizational progress towards objectives, undermine organizational values, and cause organizations to neglect their responsibilities. Organizations can, on the other hand, encourage individual members to compromise their personal values in pursuit of organizational success (Nonet 1969).

This research explores decision-making in a mission-driven sustainable development assistance organization. More specifically, this research examines the interplay between and among individuals' frames of participation and sustainability, when engaged in organizational decision-making processes. Tensions such as those discussed by Bell, Kornhauser and Nonet are heightened in this case because the organization under focus is a program operated by a mission-driven non-profit organization as well as being concerned with generating profits for stakeholders. These dual objectives add an additional layer to the tensions of decision making that organizations with singular focuses may not feel. Organizational stakeholders often see these two objectives as competing. Thus, the roles of frames are especially important in the development of sustainable development assistance organizations because these organizations hold social, environmental and economic missions that evidence suggests stakeholders prioritize differently. As a result, members may be involved in sustainable development assistance organizations for many reasons and seek to achieve a diversity of objectives. Thus, participants may carry competing frames concerning the purpose of organization itself and meaning of sustainability.

Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables is a hierarchical organization with clear boundaries of decision-making authority. These govern who is involved in decision-making and the processes by which decisions are made. In this case, organizational leaders at the board and staff levels are in control of who is involved in decision-making as well as the processes by which decisions are made. Therefore, the frames regarding sustainability and the organization's purpose reflected in decisions made at the organizational level most clearly reflect the frames of participation and sustainability held by

organizational leaders. Decision-making in this research is seen as a reflection and indicator of organizational frames regarding the organization's mission, purpose and conceptualization of sustainability.

Sustainability theory, as described previously in this chapter, includes notions of environmental justice and social equity in decision-making and governance. Sustainable development is meant to be empowering to stakeholders at the grassroots level and thus should, in theory, incorporate decision-making processes that allow for involvement from all stakeholders and that reflect the frames of all stakeholders. In short, decision-making processes in sustainable development assistance organizations should look and feel differently than decision-making processes in organizations that do not hold sustainability-oriented missions.

This research studies how one sustainable development assistance organization wrestles with and incorporates the diversity of frames held its stakeholders regarding organizational participation and sustainability in its decision-making practices. This research also examines how the organization strives to achieve cohesion among members around unified purposes, objectives and decisions when faced with a diversity of interests.

Contextual Literature Review

The context for exploring the theoretical concepts of this research is supplied by one cooperative of sustainable producers and their relationships with a sustainable development assistance organization that offers it guidance, training and other support. Hansen describes cooperative ventures as an “inter-firm arrangement that involves the utilization of resources from autonomous organizations for the joint accomplishment of individual goals (Parkhe , 1993 p. 795. adapted from Parkhe, 1991).” In the case selected for this research, independent vegetable growers and egg producers collectively produce, package, market and distribute their products under a unified brand name. For the purposes of this study, sustainable development assistance organizations are defined as organizations such as non-profit organizations, for-profit firms, university cooperative extension offices, and quasi-government agencies that hold sustainability-oriented missions and that conduct market research, provide business management services and training, and perform general accounting duties for sustainable producers as well as organizations that coordinate and recruit new producers for sustainable development initiatives. The sustainable development strategy described here—linking producers of sustainable products with sustainable development support organizations—is common in the field of rural sustainable development.

Bebbington documents the importance of linking producers to support organizations in rural development initiatives (Bebbington 1997). Bebbington's research reveals two critical roles that support organizations may play. The first is to build social capital among local producers so that they are

empowered to make decisions, seek resources, and implement plans that will lead them to their objectives. The second is to link producers with significant actors and institutions that regulate, govern and influence markets and resource use. In other words, Bebbington observes that support organizations serve as mediating structures that link sustainable producers to larger economic and professional institutions with which connections may be otherwise unattainable, and, as a result, enhance producers' opportunities for success.

Nel further illustrates the importance of external support from support organizations in local development initiatives (Nel et al. 2001): "The reality is that even initiatives that are characterized by high levels of resources and capacity face very real barriers to their ongoing development, and varying degrees of external support and guidance are frequently necessary (p. 11)." Nel outlines five core competencies in which local producers often exhibit weaknesses that external support organizations can help local producers overcome. These weaknesses are a lack of finance, equipment, technical expertise, organizational skills and knowledge of the market. In addition to helping local producers overcome deficiencies in these areas, Nel suggests there are three critical ways that support organizations can enhance local development efforts. Assistance providers must support local leadership so that critical organizational decisions are made locally and supported by local community members; provide adequate training in each of the five core competencies so that locals' capacities in these areas grow; and ensure that local producers do not grow dependent on external support.

Research by Bhuyan (2007), and Jesse and Rogers (2006), highlights that the trend of linking support organizations with producers can create tensions between stakeholders. Bhuyan writes that cooperative members often complain that they "feel disconnected from their cooperative, or that their voices are not being heard by management (p. 276)." Jesse and Rogers reveal how missteps by a cooperative's management team led to a crisis in confidence regarding management, which eventually led members to revolt. These studies document that if members are not satisfied—if members' frames do not align with the frames of those providing them management support—the cooperative will suffer.

These observations lead Bhuyan to outline the importance of communicative decision-making processes among members and support providers, and for support providers to accurately interpret—and make decisions that accurately symbolize—producers' frames, if cooperatives are to succeed. Bhuyan writes:

Given the importance of members' participation and commitment, successful cooperatives generally have management and organizational leadership that understand the unique nature of the role of members in a cooperative and use their management skills and leadership effectively to foster the success of their cooperative business (Cook 1993). Therefore, better managers and directors try to understand their members' characteristics, values, needs, satisfaction, and goals, among other factors to improve their management skills (Bhuyan and Leistriz 2001; Bhuyan, p. 277).

Hansen builds from the notions that managers and members of cooperatives may hold different frames (Hansen et al. 2002). In farming cooperatives specifically, Hansen suggests that managers primarily hold

frames that value financial outcomes while producer-members may hold frames that value social goals in addition to financial concerns.

The analysis presented here seeks to build on previous work by exploring the processes used by sustainable producers and support organizations to manage decision conflicts at individual and organizational levels. In other words, this research seeks to understand if, and how, individuals and organizations involved in rural sustainable development work together to reach the delicate balance between adequate support and independence described by Nel; if, and how, participants in these networks manage conflicts in ways that create the high levels of cohesion and awareness that Bhuyan describes as necessary for cooperative success; and if, and how, members of cooperatives and support organizations, and the organizations at large, overcome their divergent frames as described by Hansen, Lewicki, Gray and Elliot.

Summary and Forthcoming Chapters

While partnerships among sustainable producers and sustainable development assistance organizations may be integral for producers' success, these relationships may also produce tensions when decisions that place the frames of sustainable producers and support providers at odds with one another must be made. These tensions, if left unmanaged, can threaten the performance, program delivery, longevity and very existence of sustainability initiatives and, ultimately, the sustainability of the rural communities, economies and environments they aim to protect. This research seeks to understand how decision conflicts among and between producers and support providers are managed, and to make recommendations for improving the decision-making and conflict management mechanisms of these partnerships so that they include just decision making practices and better achieve the promises of environmental justice. In so doing, this research seeks to enhance the capacity of sustainable producers and support organizations to accomplish their work as well as to make environmental justice and just decision making processes a core component of the work those groups accomplish.

While this research focuses on one sustainable development initiative in Appalachia it is truly about building capacity within the sustainability movement at large. The decision conflicts that occur among farmers, staff and board members in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables are likely to be found in other sustainable development assistance organizations in different regions and other arenas of sustainable work. This research works from the position that many initiatives within the rural sustainability movement are short-lived as a result of decision management processes that fail to effectively manage conflict among partnering individuals and organizations. Decision-making processes that fail to recognize the frames held by stakeholders, and during which stakeholders feel that their voice is not heard, threaten the success of those organizations and partnerships. This research posits that if the

sustainability movement is to be successful, sustainable development assistance organizations must overcome destructive conflicts related to decision-making.

The remainder of this dissertation is organized in six chapters. Chapter two presents the study's methodology. Chapters three, four and five describe the membership and sustainability frames of growers, staff and board members in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. Chapter six describes the decision-making and conflict management mechanisms stakeholders in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables use to overcome decision conflicts within the organization. The final chapter presents overarching conclusions and draws relationships among those conclusions and the three theoretical arenas upon which the research was founded. The final chapter also provides a framework and several recommendations for improving decision-making and conflict management within partnerships among sustainable producers and assistance organizations.

Chapter 2: Methods

Methodology

This chapter describes the overarching methodology used to conduct this research as well as specific methods of site selection, data collection and analysis. This chapter has two main sections. The first describes how I selected Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables as my case for this research and gained initial access to the organization as well as the guiding methodological approach, critical incident analysis, that this research employs. The second describes how I chose the sample of growers, organizational staff members and board members that participated in this research. In this section I also describe the semi-structured interview format that I used to collect data. This description includes the initial interview questions that I used to launch my discussions with respondents as well as the improvisational way in which I guided interviews as they occurred. Included in this description are techniques that I employed to insure reliability and validity in data collection. Finally, this second section includes a description of the data analysis techniques that I used to develop findings and conclusions for this research. In this portion of the chapter I acknowledge the influence of Jonathan Lear's, Radical Hope (2006), which not only influenced the ways that I analyzed interview data for this research, but also how I wrote about that data.

Case Selection and Access

The roots of the research described in this dissertation were planted two years before the effort formally began when, for a class titled "Community Sustainability," I contacted and interviewed five staff members and growers involved in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables for an assignment. Some of the interviews I conducted for that project were with respondents who also participated in the research presented in this dissertation. The interviews I conducted for the class assignment were not integral to this later research effort, but the relationships I built were. The ties developed with staff members and growers in the fall of 2007 for the class assignment paved the way for my dissertation field work, which began in earnest in the winter of 2008 and ended in the summer of 2009.

Two relationships in particular, those with Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' business manager, Sherri Baker, and operations manager, Frances Dolan, were vital to gaining buy-in for the project from other staff, board members and growers. Thanks to Sherri and Frances I was able to obtain a high level of

access to the organization. In many cases stakeholders in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables were initially wary of my project until I mentioned that these two individuals were providing assistance, and that the results of my research might allow them to enhance the work and success of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables.

Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables was selected for this research because the early interviews I conducted with Sherri, Frances and other organizational leaders in 2007 suggested that Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables offered clear examples of the issues at the heart of this study. That is, Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables fit the context of rural sustainable development assistance organizations that I aimed to study and, during my early experience with the organization, I observed a variety of decision conflicts like those that I sought to understand. Second, the Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables packinghouse and most of the growers were within convenient driving distance from my home in Blacksburg, Virginia, making the organization a convenient case for study.

Critical Incident Analysis

This research is a critical incident analysis of decision-making conflicts experienced by growers, staff and board members in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables (Flanagan 1954). Critical incident analysis allows the researcher to investigate an event or series of events which they think are important indicators of social processes, or influential moments in the experiences of study subjects. Critical incident analysis involves identifying an event to examine; observing the incident, talking with people that participated in the episode or reviewing texts and artifacts that concern it; and then piecing together what occurred, how and why the event occurred and the consequences of the incident for those involved and/or other stakeholders.

In this study, the critical incidents I aimed to examine were the decision conflicts and decision-making processes in which growers, staff members and board members of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables participate. My intention was to understand the ways that individual members' frames influenced their personal decisions related to their involvement with Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables as well as the broader decision-making processes that occur at the organizational level in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. As a result of these dual objectives, there were two units of analysis. First, I aimed to study individuals' frames to better understand how individuals in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables viewed and approached the organization and decision-making about the organization. Second, I aimed to understand how the frames of individuals interacted to form organizational decision-making process.

Through my previous interactions with staff members of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables I identified several incidents to investigate. However, I decided to offer respondents the opportunity to identify critical decisions themselves rather than to ask them about those I identified previously. I made this decision because I intended to examine the roles of respondents' frames on decision-making, and I felt

asking respondents to identify critical incidents themselves, rather than using my preconceived ideas, would reveal important information about their frames. Therefore, the first interview questions sought to allow respondents to identify decisions and decision-making processes they considered important. If, after my probing and encouragement, respondents were unable or unwilling to identify critical decisions I would inquire about those I had identified.

Respondents identified and described a number of critical incidents during this study. Some of these were only mentioned by a few participants or only briefly described while others were raised by many respondents and described in greater detail. The following table is not meant to provide an exhaustive list of the critical incidents uncovered by this research. Developing such a list would prove difficult, as respondents held differing views regarding what constitutes a decision and made choices about what decisions to divulge during interviews. As a result, critical incident decisions are described throughout where appropriate to the analysis. The following table is only meant to provide examples of the kinds of decisions that were raised by respondents during interviews. While I did not count explicitly the number of times respondents mentioned a particular decision, or seek to gauge the level of concern respondents felt over the decisions they mentioned, those included in the table below were frequently described.

Table 3. Examples of Critical Incident Decision Conflicts in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables

Critical Incident	Description
Raising the Marketing Fee	Growers pay a marketing fee to BMOV to cover some of the costs of operating the cooperative and packinghouse. At the time of this study, staff salaries and operating costs were paid in part through this fee, with the remainder covered by private donations and foundations. The choice facing the organization in this case was whether to reduce, maintain or raise this fee in an effort to bring more economic stability to the cooperative.
Rebuilding the Packinghouse	In 2007 the BMOV packinghouse suffered a fire and burned to the ground. In the aftermath of the fire, participants in BMOV had to decide whether to rebuild the packinghouse in its existing location, or to sell the original property, relocate and rebuild elsewhere.
Complying with Voluntary Good Agricultural Practices Regulations (GAP)	The GAP regulations represent a voluntary set of farm management practices promoted by a grocery store trade association. The GAP program is designed to reduce the chances and threats of bacterial contamination in commercial produce. The decision BMOV faces in this case was whether to comply with the voluntary rules.
Selling Produce to a Large, National Chain Store	Board members described a recent and ongoing discussion concerning whether to begin selling BMOV produce to a local grocery franchise owned and operated by a large chain store.

Table 3. Common decision conflicts described by participants in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables.

Methods

This section describes the specific methods used to collect data for this research, including the purposeful sampling, semi-structured interview format and reflective data analysis process.

Data Collection

Data for this research was collected principally through semi-structured interviews with growers and staff members of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables and board members of Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum, the non-profit organization that launched, owns and operates Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. I also collected data through participant observation and document analysis. My use of these methods will be discussed later in this section.

My intention with each interview was to ask six questions that sought to understand each respondent's frames and the ways that their frames influenced the decisions they made or supported. The key frames the questions aimed to uncover were respondents' identity frames, social control frames including knowledge frames, whole story frames and the characterization frames through which they viewed other stakeholders in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables.

These six questions were:

- How did you become involved in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables (or Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum)?
- When you look back at your experience, what are you most proud of?
- What was the first major decision-making process in which you were involved in your capacity as a grower, staff member or board member?
- What was the most challenging decision-making process in which you were involved?
- What was the most contentious decision-making process in which you were involved?
- What was the most recent decision-making process in which you were involved?

As the respondent described each decision I intended to ask a series of probing follow-up questions to understand better the ways that their frames influenced their decisions as well as the broader decision-making processes that occur at the organizational level in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. I developed a data collection form to identify relevant concepts quickly as they were mentioned by respondents and to minimize my note taking (Appendix A). I recorded each interview on two digital recorders.

In the field, however, I rarely stuck to the six scripted questions and used the data sheet infrequently. Each interview evolved into a conversation about frames and decision-making, but this information came in circuitous and unpredictable routes. Interviews often bounced around, between and among the six questions; I sometimes asked questions that were misunderstood or that did not yield productive information; I was forced to back out of unfruitful paths and steer respondents down new ones, and; we

sometimes got off track talking about the weather, my interest in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables and organic vegetables, among other topics. These moments, while seemingly unproductive, were critical for developing a rapport with respondents that was vital for having open and honest discussions about their experience with Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables later on.

The highest value information for addressing my research questions came when respondents told stories about specific decision-making processes in which they participated. As a result, I learned quickly and subtly to encourage respondents to tell stories rather than answer the questions in the abstract or as I laid them out in my interview protocol at the outset of the research. I accomplished this in a variety of ways. For example, most interviews with growers took place on their farms. Therefore, I frequently asked growers to walk me around their farms and tell me about their fields, barns, and equipment. These tours soon evolved into storytelling sessions. I urged growers to tell stories about the topics I hoped to uncover by asking questions like, “How did you decide to grow zucchini and corn?”, “Was it a big decision to decide to build a hoop house (a small greenhouse for growing plants before frost season is over)? Did other growers or staff members at Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables help you make this decision?”, “Is there a story about your barn that makes you really proud or puts a smile on your face?”, and “You must have some great stories about growing up on this farm as a child. Can you tell me your favorite childhood story?” These questions directed growers towards stories about the topics in which I was interested without making them feel like lab rats. As growers told me stories I asked clarifying and probing questions that required them to reflect deeply and reveal information about their frames and thoughts regarding decision-making in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables.

Interviews with staff members frequently took place at the packinghouse, where a flurry of activity was often underway. Vegetables were being sorted and loaded onto trucks, equipment was being assembled, growers would stop by to chat with staff, and salespeople came and went. This activity often interrupted our interviews and provided distractions, yet it also provided context for our discussions. For example, while interviewing Susan Goren, Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables’ marketer, a salesperson from a farm equipment supply store stopped in to talk about how his company may become one of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables’ suppliers. Observing Susan’s discussion with the salesperson allowed me to see her frame the organization’s work, make decisions, and characterize Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables’ growers in practice, rather than in the abstract. Once the salesperson left the office I was able to ask her questions about their conversation, and these questions revealed critical information about her frames and their relationships to decision-making.

Likewise, I interviewed Frances Dolan, another staff person with the organization, while he walked around the packinghouse fixing the large conveyor belts that sort vegetables as growers drop them off. As Frances worked I asked questions about the machine’s construction, which led to a story about deciding to purchase the machine, which led to a story about the fire that destroyed the previous packinghouse, which led to a fruitful conversation about decision-making in a time of crisis.

Interviews with board members took place over the phone. Without a farm to tour or the distractions of the packinghouse to provide context to our discussions, I focused my questions on a current decision with which the board was wrestling: how to replace Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum’s founder and

executive director, who had recently announced he was stepping down from his post. By using this decision-making process to provide context to our discussion, I was able to ask questions like, “is this the way decisions are always made among the board?” and, “can you tell me a story about a time when decisions worked differently?”

I sometimes asked respondents to draw me pictures or diagrams to accompany their stories. For example, Sherri Baker, Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables’ business manager, described several different types of growers that she sees make up the network of growers. She described these types as a playwright might describe the cast of characters in a play. So that I could understand her characterizations I asked her to sketch a diagram of each type of grower and the distinguishing characteristics of each.

In addition to conducting interviews, I collected data through participant observation. I visited and participated in several growers’ meetings and workshops about organic vegetable production alongside Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables’ growers. We discussed soil types, techniques for irrigating and laying drip tape, organic fertilizers and bug control, among other topics. My presence at growers’ meetings was not unusual; these meetings, which are run by Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables’ staff as public workshops, often have participants who are interested in growing organic vegetables, but not participating in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables.

I also attended staff meetings where staff discussed management decisions regarding the packinghouse; logistics of meeting the demands of grocery store buyers; marketing; growers that needed assistance with planting crops or obtaining their organic certifications, and; new organic vegetable regulations from the US Department of Agriculture, among other items. Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables’ staff was gracious about letting me attend these meetings and allowing me to ask questions as if I were a member of the staff. These opportunities gave me an inside look at decision-making among staff and the ways they characterize growers, board member, and other stakeholders, such as grocery store buyers.

In all interviews and events I consistently focused on the critical incidents—decisions and decision-making processes—that I intended to study at the outset of the research. When hints of a decision arose during a respondent’s story I invariably glanced at my digital recorders to make sure they were working and then asked probing, specific and challenging questions that urged respondents to tell me more details about the decision and to reflect on their experience. I asked respondents about the ways they formulated views about particular decisions, the reasons they supported particular choices, the ways they communicated with others during decision-making processes, and the results and consequences of the decision-making processes in which they took part, for example. During participant observation opportunities, I paid particular attention to decisions as they were made in real-time, and the processes used to make these choices.

During interviews I used two tactics to ensure that respondents had ample opportunities to describe their experiences accurately and tell their stories about decision processes.

The first tactic was triangulation. I asked respondents about the same event or experience in several ways and from several different angles to ensure that they told me their story completely and

accurately, as well as consistently over time. For example, as Sherri told me about the ways that she characterizes growers I asked her to A) draw a diagram; B) describe how she came to see each different characterization and the importance of her characterizations for her job, and; C) later in our interview I returned to her descriptions to see if she described them in the same way. I also triangulated this data by asking other respondents if they made similar characterizations.

The second tactic I used to make sure I had the complete story was to seek counter-examples. When a respondent described an experience or told a story I followed their discussion by asking questions like, “does it always happen this way?”, “are there times when you have thought differently about this event?” and, “are there people that feel differently than you?”

During the eight months over which I collected data I was able to record almost every interaction I had with Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. I also took many notes and photographs during these experiences and occasionally journaled about them afterward.

Sample Selection

I interviewed stakeholders with three different roles in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables: growers, staff members and board members. The following subsections describe the roles of these stakeholder groups in general terms and how I developed a sample of respondents from each.

Growers

Growers are those stakeholders responsible for producing the vegetables and eggs that Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables sells to grocery stores, restaurants, food banks and other buyers. Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables’ growers are scattered throughout southwest Virginia (a few farms lie in nearby regions of Tennessee or North Carolina), but are concentrated around Duffield, Virginia where the Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables packinghouse (the warehouse where growers bring their produce and where the produce is cleaned, sorted, packaged and loaded on trucks to be shipped to buyers) is located.

I developed a sample of growers through two means: 1) by attending monthly growers’ meetings and asking attendees if they wanted to participate in an interview and 2) from a list of individuals that grew produce for Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables in the 2008 growing season provided to me by Sherri Baker.

Throughout January, February and March, 2009 I attended three growers' meetings at the Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables packinghouse. At each meeting, I was introduced to growers by Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' business manager, Sherri Baker, and allowed to give a two-minute presentation about my research project. During my talk I told the audience that I was a graduate student at Virginia Tech interested in organic farming and non-profit management and that I wanted to learn about the successes of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables so that I could help similar organizations learn from their great work. At the conclusion of my presentation, I asked for volunteers who were willing to be interviewed and passed around a contact list on which I gathered growers' names, phone numbers and email addresses. I then contacted those growers who volunteered for an interview as well as those who filled-out the contact sheet.

I contacted every grower that volunteered to participate at growers' meetings and on the list by email and phone. I conducted interviews with those who volunteered. I made the decision to remove several growers from those I considered eligible for my study, because when I contacted them they reported that they were not planning to participate in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables in the 2009 season. Nearly all of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' staff members also grow vegetables. I opted to exclude staff members from my sample of growers, so that I could focus on the staff roles that these individuals play. Therefore, to be considered an eligible grower, an individual had to have grown vegetables for Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables in 2008, plan to grow in 2009, and not play a staff role.

Once initial invitations for volunteers were made it seemed that those most willing to participate were farmers with smaller gardens and whose incomes did not depend on their vegetable production. Growers of this nature are described in detail later in the dissertation. Most of these growers had not been practicing farmers for very long, and were not operating tobacco farms that had been converted to organic vegetable production. After conducting several interviews with these smaller, less-agriculturally dependent growers, I purposefully shifted my sampling focus to obtaining interviews with financially dependent farmers, so that my sample represented the diversity of growers in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. To make this shift, I asked staff members and growers who had already volunteered to be interviewed for assistance in identifying financially dependent farmers on my list of growers so that I could concentrate my recruiting efforts on that group. I then made repeated visits to growers' meetings, additional phone calls and sent repeated emails to these growers. In the midst of data collection I viewed these efforts as only moderately successful, because I still felt that I was not adequately reaching this group of farmers.

However, the more growers I interviewed the more I realized that financially dependent farmers were not numerous among Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' cohort of growers. Additionally, I came to see the character I hoped to find—the conventional tobacco farmer who had converted their farm to organic vegetable production—as an elusive one, who existed as an ideal image in my imagination but one that I could not find in the field. I certainly interviewed growers that came close to fitting the character I imagined, but these farmers held a number of complex and interwoven identities that did not always match my imagination, and their farms—while an important element of their livelihoods—were often not their sole sources of income. The identities of these and other growers, as well as descriptions of their farms, are described further in subsequent chapters of this dissertation. The

realizations described briefly here did, however, have important implications for the development of my sample.

It was the realization that Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables is not the homogenous group of legacy tobacco farmers that I imagined it was and that legacy tobacco farmers are a relatively small part of the organization that allowed me to conclude the data collection phase of my research. Reaching the conclusion that Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' population of growers was not as I imagined at the outset of my research allowed me to recognize that my sample did include a representative sample of the diverse group of farmers in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. The organization simply did not have the membership of growers I imagined as I began the research effort. The reasons underlying my misconceptions are integral to many of the findings described later in this report and will be discussed in later chapters.

In short, the conclusion of data collection came when I reached a point that I felt I had a sample of growers that represented the diversity of growers in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, as well as an understanding of each type of grower in the organization and felt that I had uncovered as much information about frames and decision-making from this sample as I could. The sample of growers with which I conducted interviews included small, hobby growers with organic gardens that depend very little on the incomes their gardens generate; farmers that cultivate mid-size farms and depend on income from their farms to supplement that earned from other full or part-time jobs, and; farmers with large farms who very much depend on the incomes from their fields, but who sometimes supplement their farm incomes with part-time work elsewhere.

Additionally, throughout the data collection effort respondents often characterized and the growers of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables in a variety of ways. I worked hard to make sure that I interviewed several growers that fit each of the different characterizations that respondents described. These characterizations are outlined and described throughout the remaining chapters of this dissertation. As a result, I considered my sample complete when it represented the diversity of growers in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables based on the sizes of their farms and their dependence on their farm income, as well as on the diversity of grower identities described by the growers, staff and board members themselves. In the end, I interviewed 14 of the 32 growers that I considered eligible for the study.

Staff and Board Members

Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' business manager also provided me with contact lists for the organization's staff and board members. I used these lists to contact all staff members (with the exception of the packinghouse facility maintenance worker) and board members via email and telephone.

Staff members are those individuals holding paid positions within Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' operational structure. Because Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables is a program of Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum, a non-profit organization, the board members interviewed were the board members of Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum. These individuals are volunteers with experiences in fundraising, organizational management and community economic development, among other areas. Board members provide long-term guidance, define organizational missions and objectives, and offer financial support to Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum and Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables is not the primary focus of board members' attention, although it is generally the program for which Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum is best known.

I conducted interviews with five of six staff members (I did not interview the maintenance worker) and six of fourteen board members. The board members I interviewed were those that responded to my email and phone invitations. Again, highlighting my relationships with Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' business manager and operations manager, and emphasizing my intention that my research provide Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables and similar organizations with feedback that may help improve their work, were critical to gaining interviews with board members.

I considered my sample of staff members complete when I had interviewed all staff members except the maintenance worker. I considered my sample of board members complete when I had interviewed those members who volunteered after I emailed and telephoned all board members several times.

I also reviewed documents such as marketing brochures, informational materials designed to help growers improve crop yields, and planning documents that the collective uses to determine its expected crop volumes and set customer expectations about crop availability, among others. I did not systematically collect or analyze these documents. I read them to gain a thorough knowledge of the organization's inner-workings, and to understand its background and context. Reading these documents greatly influenced the questions and topics I was able to address during interviews and enhanced my understanding and interpretation of respondents' stories as I analyzed their comments afterwards.

Data Analysis

This section describes the reflective data analysis process used in this research. Jonathan Lear's book Radical Hope (2006) was especially influential in this process.

Radical Hope

Data analysis for this research was greatly influenced by my admiration of Jonathan Lear's book Radical Hope. In Radical Hope, Lear explores the frames through which Plenty Coups, the Crow Indian chief, approached leading the tribe through the transition from nomadic to reservation life. I found Lear's book moving because he successfully takes the reader to the point of understanding that I hoped to achieve with my research. That is, to the point of understanding another person's frame at the ontological level.

Plenty Coups died in 1932. Yet, through exploring anthropologists' notes and other documents Lear takes us into Plenty Coups' mind by *imagining* what the great leader might have thought or felt as he led his tribe through the transition to reservation life. Generally, Lear's thesis is that Plenty Coups possessed *radical hope*. Radical hope, Lear explains, is the ability to hope when you do not know what it is you are hoping for. In Plenty Coups' case, radical hope meant hoping that his tribe would better retain the core of what it means to be Crow by partnering with, even embracing, the United States Government and reservation life, than by resisting. Plenty Coups, Lear explains, did not know what "better retaining the core of what it means to be Crow" might mean, but nevertheless was able to hope for it and convince others in his tribe to hope for it as well. By gaining an understanding of Plenty Coups through historical documents, Lear is able to understand Plenty Coups at the ontological level, and from this understanding Lear is able to imagine how Plenty Coups might have developed his radical hope for the Crow.

Lear's book influenced my data analysis in three critical ways. First, by teaching me that qualitative data analysis is an act of empirically-guided imagination and by giving me the confidence to imagine. By reading Lear, I came to understand that I cannot *know* the frames through which stakeholders in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables approach their work and the organization in a definitive sense, just as Lear could not *know* what Plenty Coups thought as he led his people through the transition to reservation life. Yet, Lear showed me that, through the thoughtful interpretation of an enormous amount of data, I could credibly *imagine* what the frames of those involved in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables may be, and I could use the products of my imagination to develop possibilities regarding how those frames might influence decision-making within the organization just as Lear outlines how events in Plenty Coups' life shaped the Chief's frame of radical hope and influenced the decisions he made as he led his tribe.

The second way that Lear's book influenced my research was by illustrating the way that one might depart on a journey of imagination from statements made by a respondent. Lear launches his journey of imagination from one seemingly simple statement made by Plenty Coups: *After this nothing happened*. From this statement Lear asks, "what could Plenty Coups's utterance mean?" and thus begins Lear's journey. The author breaks this simple statement into individual words and word pairs, and plays with the way that each word is emphasized, searching his imagination for plausible meanings like a hound dog on the trail. Lear repeats this method throughout the book and with numerous portions of journal entries and interview transcripts taken from the archives of various anthropologists

and government agents who corresponded with Plenty Coups. While reading Radical Hope I began to approach interview transcripts from my research in much the same way. That is, by perpetually asking myself, “what could this utterance mean?” and then embarking on a series of imaginative exercises that would allow me to understand their variety of meanings.

The third way that this book influenced my work was by exemplifying how one can write about another’s frames at the ontological level while retaining research validity and scholarly credibility. Lear openly admits that his primary method of understanding Plenty Coups’s frames at the ontological level is through his imagination. Lear tells his readers that another researcher might interpret Plenty Coups differently, or that he may have it wrong, and that his only goal is to present *plausible possibilities* for explaining how Plenty Coups developed his frame of radical hope and used this frame to guide his people. Lear’s writing is infused with phrases such as, “This interpretation has the merit of making sense (p. 4)”; “I cannot pretend to say with confidence what Plenty Coups really meant (p. 5)”; and “so *might* Plenty Coups have thought (emphasis included in original text, p. 94).” These statements are not simply cop-outs, or a researcher’s way of saving face when they are unsure how to interpret respondents. Rather, they are the reality of qualitative research that carries the goal of understanding people at their deepest—and *most unknowable*—levels, including those levels at which frames lie. As a result, Lear frequently reminds readers that he is *imagining* and *surmising* what Plenty Coups may have thought, yet by directing us to specific words, stories, and events within the data he uses, Lear develops *plausible possibilities* regarding Plenty Coups’s frames. When writing about another’s frames, as Lear does and as I intended to do in this research, *plausible possibilities* are all one can hope to develop and write about, and for that I used Lear’s book as a model. Thus, writing this dissertation was an exercise in imagination, and as a result my writing is peppered with phrases similar to those used by Lear. Throughout this book I “imagine”, “surmise” and “wonder” about the frames of stakeholders involved in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables and how they influence decision-making.

Interview Transcription

Midway through the data collection phase of my research I hired two transcriptionists to transcribe the recordings of interviews and meetings. Each recording was transcribed verbatim, with the exception of small-talk unrelated to the research and the “uhms” and “ahs” that pepper people’s conversational styles.

I used NVIVO 8 qualitative analysis software to code the transcriptions. Data analysis was completed in three phases.

Phase 1. Initial Coding

Once an interview or meeting transcription was imported as a word document into NVIVO I performed content analysis on the transcript. First, I read the transcript and placed respondent's statements into topical codes. That is, I coded statements based on the topics they discussed, not the deeper meanings I interpreted behind the statements. For example, the following story in which a grower explains the fees that Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables charges growers was placed into a code titled, "marketing fee".

Last year [a friend asked] 'how is the financial end of this done?' And I was explaining that they sell our produce, it ships... and then they send us a check, and out of that check they take, what was it, 33, 33 or 35%. So I said, you know, every dollar they send us, for every dollar that's sold they keep 33 or 35 cents, whatever it was. And their eyebrows went up, like 'wow, that's a lot, isn't it?' I said 'well, considering what they are providing for us in terms of teaching us, what they are providing in the way of support, what they provide in that they have a shipping point that we can take it to, they grade it, they package it, they market it, a third of every dollar is really not that bad for me.' Now, maybe it is for a big organization, a big group, but then again, if we were big and knew more about it, or more experienced, then we might be pre-grading ourselves, in which case they don't charge as much. If we're doing more of that ourselves they charge less because that's less they have to do. But for someone who's just starting out or doesn't have the infrastructure to do it, that to me was very fair, and they were right up front about that at the very beginning. So that didn't come as a shock that all of a sudden, 'whoa, where's my other 33 cents out of this dollar?'

Once a transcript had been coded topically I coded it again, this time searching for deeper meanings underlying the respondent's statements. During this step of coding I asked myself "What does that story mean?" "What does this statement show about how this respondent sees the world?", and "Why is seeing the world like this important?" For example, the previous story about marketing fees was coded into codes titled, "justifying paying the marketing fee" and "growers seem unconcerned about economic success". These codes did not make explicit appearances in the respondent's story like the topical codes did, but rather are implicit and based on my interpretations. This coding required me to interpret respondent's stories based on my experiences with the respondent, understanding of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, and interpretation of the literature.

Throughout this first phase of data analysis I used the "annotation" feature of NVIVO to make notes about respondent's statements and the codes I created. My annotations described my initial interpretation of a statement, justification for a coding decision, comparisons to other statements and codes, and reminders to return to a code or statement at a later time to reflect and refine it.

Additionally, the notes, drawings and journaling that I performed during and after interviews were important for this phase of data analysis. These documents spurred my memory about an interview,

reminding me of a respondent's tone and body language, and informed my interpretations of their statements.

Phase 2. Developing Themes

Once I had coded several interviews I examined the statements that I had placed in each code for overarching relationships, similarities and differences. Through this reflection I developed several themes that described important elements of frames and decision-making in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. Some of the themes I developed had been in the back of my mind since starting the project, and I expected to see them in the data and to write about them. Some of these preconceived notions were: "identity frames", "characterization frames", "frames that influence decision-making", and "tension about different visions of sustainability."

Other themes, however, emerged unexpectedly through my method of coding and reflection. Examples of these themes are: "ways that stakeholders validate their role in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables" and "perpetuating growers' dependence on Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables". Over time, as I iteratively cycled back and forth through phases one and two of data analysis, an unwieldy number of themes emerged. I realized that there was simply no way I could discuss all of them in one dissertation (although admittedly sometimes it seems as if I tried). As a result, I identified those that most directly related to my research questions and that I found most interesting and useful for exploring the problem I wanted to address. I focused phase three of data analysis on those themes.

Phase 3. Refining the Themes and Drawing Conclusions

Once I had developed and selected themes for further examination I returned to the codes and interviews on which each theme was founded to identify statements by respondents that best exemplified, supported and explained the themes. I also searched other interviews and codes for counter-examples that refuted my interpretations and explanations of the themes. This step, searching for counter examples, is a key step for ensuring internal validity and reliability in qualitative research (Office 1990; Hesse-Biber 2006). Often this step encouraged me to reformulate my thinking about the themes into more accurate representations of respondents' experiences and Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables as a whole.

My overarching goal in this final step of data analysis was to "get inside the heads" of growers, staff and board members in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. This process was an imaginative one. Using the

stories related to me by respondents I used my imagination to interpret how they made meaning from their experiences. Frames are sense-making devices, so I needed to learn to make sense of the world as respondents did. Not being able to read their minds or understand the world as they do, my imagination—guided and informed by an enormous amount of data, was the only tool I had.

In the end, three types of frames emerged from the data. These were: membership frames, service frames and sustainability frames. Each of these frame types, and the elements I used to construct and describe them, emerged from the data rather than from the literature. Membership frames describe the ways that growers in the collective view their participation in the organization. The concept of membership frames emerged from three interrelated parts of my conversations with growers in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. The first component emerged from discussions about what it means to be a farmer and growers' farming related aspirations. The second emerged from discussions about growers' feelings for, and relationships to, Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's sustainability-oriented mission. The final element of growers' membership frames emerged from conversations about growers' relationships to other stakeholders in the collective. I used these three topics to formulate a picture of growers' membership frames.

Service frames describe the ways that staff and board members approach their roles in the organization and arose from the data in a similar fashion as growers' membership frames. Through my data analysis I found four common activities that staff and board members use to construct their feelings for and about their roles in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. I term these four activities "enactments" and view them as performative elements of service frames. In my view, it is the act of carrying out these four enactments that constitutes service frames. Approaching one's work through a service frame means, essentially, that one views oneself as a service provider. These four enactments are: characterizing the target beneficiaries one aims to serve; characterizing the threats that face those beneficiaries; characterizing the source of one's legitimacy and authority to act as a service provider; and, characterizing the actions that one takes to serve target beneficiaries as appropriate responses to the threats one observes.

Lastly, sustainability frames describe the ways that growers, staff and board members view and approach the concept of sustainability. In examining stakeholders' perspectives regarding sustainability I focused on three main elements. First, I focused on how stakeholders defined the concept of sustainability. In other words, what the concept means to them. I did not specifically ask respondents to define the term, but rather have pieced together stakeholders' conceptualizations of sustainability by examining comments made throughout their interviews and reflecting on these notions in light of the three elements of sustainability identified in the literature; environmental sustainability, economic sustainability and social sustainability. The second element I considered as I pieced together stakeholders' sustainability frames was the scale at which they consider sustainability. I focused on stakeholders' consideration of sustainability at personal or individual scales, the organizational scale, and as a regional concept. My consideration of the scales at which one perceives sustainability asks, essentially, if within the context of relationships among sustainable producers and sustainable development assistance organizations, does sustainability mean that individual producers must produce their goods and services in sustainable ways, if the sustainable development assistance organization

itself is to meet standards of sustainability, or if sustainability means focusing efforts at the regional economy and environment.

As I progressed through the third phase of data analysis, I occasionally called respondents on the phone to ask clarifying questions or to dig deeper into their perspectives and experiences. This step was key for increasing my confidence that my assessments and understandings of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables were accurate, because I identified examples that both supported and refuted my initial conclusions. Throughout this process, I also returned to the literature upon which my study is founded to find further support, and counter-examples, for my conclusions. This step helped develop the study's external validity.

I documented my developing understanding of each theme using the "memo" function of NVIVO. The memos I wrote during this phase of data analysis became the early versions of the chapters that appear throughout this dissertation.

Finally, I massaged these memos by refining and merging them, integrating stories from respondents that provide clear examples into them, and supporting them with evidence from the literature. Slowly the memos became polished responses to the research question that I set out to examine, and in turn they became the subsequent chapters of my dissertation.

Chapter 3: Growers' Frames

It was a warm spring day in March—one of the first exquisite days of the season—when I interviewed Mitch and Julie Spiegle on the porch of their log cabin. The cabin, a dream-home on a small rise that overlooked a wide and picturesque Appalachian valley, was built for mornings like this. The sun-drenched front porch was as wide as the crystal clear sky and the mid-morning sun was warm. As we spoke we drank coffee, watched Mitch and Julie's children chase chickens in the yard, admired the newly painted antique Ford tractor that Mitch hoped to sell with a "for sale" sign at the end of the driveway, and surveyed the Spiegle's half-acre garden in which they grew peas, spaghetti squash and peppers for sale through Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables.

The Spiegles represent a group of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables growers I was not prepared to find when I began this study. They represent a group of farmers that are unconcerned about the money their farms generate. The Spiegles, and other farmers like them, grow produce for the collective because they hold a deep admiration for farmers and the lifestyle that they imagine comes with farming as a full-time profession. The Spiegles hope to lead a lifestyle that includes the activities, values and ideals that they imagine full-time farmers perform and hold, and that they believe operating a farm helps instill in farmers. Mitch and Julie also described their desire to teach their children about farm work and bring their family closer together by working as a family unit in their fields.

What surprised me during my chat with Mitch and Julie was the role of their imagination in their farming operation. Mitch and Julie did not grow up on farms and had little experience in agriculture before making the decision to grow produce for Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. What I learned was that they held a powerful perception of what it means to be a farmer. As a result, their farm and farm work was, in effect, the tangible product of their imagination and of their decision to pursue an idealized identity. Mitch told me a story about the time farming became real to him:

I was out here on the porch one day last early summer, right after we'd gotten the peppers in and the well had silt in it, so we were having trouble with the irrigation, and we were hand watering 2200 pepper plants and we were exhausted, and one morning we got up and we were sitting out here having coffee and I stood there and looked out and said, now, if we lose all of those pepper plants, we'll lose about I think \$660. So we'll probably be OK. But can you imagine the sense of somebody standing on their front porch and looking out over a field in a drought saying, you know, if we lose this, we lose everything. That's an important lesson for these guys [*my children*] to learn, and

farming seems to do it. I mean, we realized at some point we actually, I think it was this year when we actually ordered seeds, and when you push the button on the menu when you call the seed company and we pushed the number that corresponds with commercial grower instead of home garden, that was like a watershed moment to suddenly realize hey, we're actually farmers. Part-time at best, but farmers.

The realization that he was a commercial grower was a watershed moment for Mitch. It meant that he and his wife were succeeding in creating the lifestyle and identity they intended to achieve. By performing specific farming practices, such as watering plants and ordering commercial quantities of seeds, Mitch imagined that he was "actually a farmer" meaning that not only did he participate in farming activities, but that these activities had allowed him to transform his identity. He now possessed the identity, or at least some portion of it, that he imagined full-time farmers possessed. This is a common and unifying feature of lifestyle growers, the category of growers who, like the Spiegles, joined Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables as a way to pursue the lifestyle and identity that they imagined corresponded to professional farming. Yet, the Spiegles didn't depend on the money they earned from participating in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables for their livelihood. In fact, they often didn't think about the money they invested in or earned from their farms. Instead they focused on performing elements of farming that matched their vision of what it means to be a farmer.

A few weeks later on a cold, wet and blustery day in June I found myself in a very different place. I drove down Tom Carpenter's driveway wondering if I was in the right spot. The night before, when I called Tom to confirm our appointment, he warned me that he might need to reschedule. Scott County was under a tornado watch, and if the storm was bad enough he would need to spend the morning clearing fallen trees from his property and patching up his house.

I brushed his concerns aside when I hung up the phone. I hadn't interviewed a grower in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables for a few weeks and as my newborn son approached his first birthday he demanded more of my time, which meant less spent on my dissertation. Needless to say, with my wife able to watch Jacques for the day I was excited at the prospect of conducting another interview. I crossed my fingers that Tom and his trailer would weather storm undamaged.

The dirt road that was Tom's driveway was pocked with muddy potholes and littered with fallen branches. I pulled around the bend. In front of me was a urine-colored, single-wide trailer patched with sheet metal. It resembled a cubist era Picasso. "Is this the place?" I wondered, hoping it wasn't. I grew up in tornado country and knew that

riding through summer thunderstorms in homespun trailers was not fun, or safe. I hoped Tom was alright and still able to do the interview.

The door of the trailer slammed shut with a tinny clang. Out limped a small man with a graying and mussed beard. Tom waved, and I climbed out of my car. After a bit of small talk about the weather (the storm had taken a different path than expected and left Tom's farm windblown but undamaged), we buckled our shoulders against the spitting rain and strolled through Tom's farm to the fields in which he grew organic vegetables for Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. Tom Carpenter, I learned, represented the opposite end of the spectrum of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' growers from the Spiegles.

Tom grew up farming tobacco and dairy cattle in southwest Virginia. As a young man he spent several years building houses but was forced to quit when he fell off a roof and crushed his leg. He returned to farming because he had no choice. Aside from framing houses, farming was the only trade he knew; so he and his wife sunk their savings into the small farm I now visited, and they hoped for the best. The best had not yet arrived. For the next 90 minutes Tom described a farming lifestyle that sounded a lot like the way the Spigle's hens foraged for food: scratching through the dirt, hunting and pecking for any seed of hope they could find. Even Tom's small herd of sheep, handful of cows, and single pig looked forlorn and desperate on that gray and wet day.

Tom lived the lifestyle, and possessed the identity, that Mitch and Julie Spigle described their admiration for, yet his home and farm looked a long ways from theirs, and I got the feeling that it did not match the image of a full-time farm and farm life that Mitch and Julie held in their imaginations. As a result, I asked myself a question: how does one organization allow for, make decisions that include, and overcome such broad differences in the ways that members approach their work and participation, and see one another?

This chapter describes the membership frames of growers participating in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. Membership frames are a particular type of frame that describes the overarching ways that growers approach their farm work and participation in the collective. This chapter has three main sections. In the first section I document and describe the membership frame of legacy tobacco growers. In the second section, I document and describe the membership frame of returning growers. In the third section, I describe the membership frame held by lifestyle growers. The characteristics of the membership frames that accompany each of these groups contain several elements. These relate to their concern for making money, interacting with other growers and staff members, and participating in organizational decision-making. Some of these are unique to each group while others are common among them. At the end of each description of growers' frames I describe how these frames influence growers' involvement in, and perceptions of, decision-making within Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. In these sections I pay particular attention to how growers use their membership frames to justify their positions regarding specific decisions as well as involvement in decision-making processes.

An Introduction to Growers' Membership Frame

Through interviews with growers in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables I came to see that they approach their work and relationships to the organization through a common frame, which I termed the membership frame. All growers that I interviewed view themselves as holding membership in the Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables collective. Yet, the meaning of membership is different for various growers, and the different ways that growers interpret the meaning of membership influences the ways that they make decisions regarding their farms as well as relate to Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables in general. The remainder of this chapter introduces three general versions of the membership frame that are held by growers.

Throughout this study I use three enactments to describe the membership frame. It is through operationalizing these enactments—that is, by performing them—that the act of approaching one's work through the membership frame is achieved. In other words, the membership frame is not simply a lens through which growers see farming and Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables; it is also performative. And, by observing the ways that growers perform the three enactments of the frame its influence on the ways that growers make decisions and participate in decision-making processes at the organizational level can be observed.

The first enactment includes growers' reasons and objectives for participating in farming in general, and Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables in particular. This enactment includes growers' aspirations for their farms, such as growers' feelings regarding the importance of the money they earn from the sale of produce to their economic livelihood as well as growers' thoughts and reflections on their "farming identity", or, what it means to "be a farmer". The second enactment considers the attachment growers have for, or importance they place upon, Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's sustainability-oriented mission. Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables is one program created and coordinated by Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum. The third enactment is relational. This enactment considers the ways that growers characterize Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables at the organizational level as well as view their relationships with other stakeholders, such as growers and staff members, within the organization. The following section provides an example of each enactment as performed by Art Applebee, a Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables farmer.

An Example of the Membership Frame: Art Applebee

Art Applebee owns and operates a farm with his sister. They have been growing produce for Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables for two years. In the following three interview excerpts he provides examples of the three enactments of the membership frame. First, he describes how he and his sister perceive their effort:

We both wanted to have some way for the land to sort of pay for itself. We both have day jobs and we inherited our farm and we did divide it up, somethin' to make the land generate some income. It hopefully has a means of growing a business as something to do after retiring, retirement from day jobs.

When attempting to understand Art's relationship to the farm he shares with his sister, three elements of his discussion stand out. First, Art says that he and his sister hope the land will "pay for itself." It is plausible that what Art means by this is that he and his sister believe the land upon which their farm sits should be financially productive and that it not place a financial burden on its owners. It seems Art's intention for participating in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables then, is that he and his sister grow and sell enough produce that the earnings cover the cost of the farm's property taxes and maintenance, among other expenses that accompany land ownership. The alternative to the land paying for itself is that someone else—in this case Art and his sister—pay for it, but this doesn't seem to be a satisfactory outcome for them. If this outcome becomes a reality it is plausible that Art and his sister will have to ask themselves if performing the work of farming and participating in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables is worthwhile. If they decide that it is not, they will have to decide if owning the land is worth paying the costs associated with land ownership or if it is better to sell the property. Second, the segment shows that Art and his sister view their land as a source of income. Art gives the impression that he and his sister would like the farm to accomplish more than simply paying for itself; they want it to pay profits that will supplement their incomes and someday support them in their retirement. This view suggests that they are willing to depend on their land for their economic livelihoods. Land, from this perspective, bears a great deal of responsibility. It should not only support itself, it should support people as well. Third, Art speaks about his farm in hopeful terms. He and his sister have big plans for their land; they intend for it to support them far into the future. Yet, embedded in Art's hopefulness is the reality that his hope may not be realized. The farm represents both opportunity and risk. Art and his sister hope the farm will grow and be productive for many years, but they are aware that it may not. The opposing notions of hope and risk return to Art's perception that the land be productive. If their hope does not become reality—if the farm cannot be productive enough to pay for itself and support them in retirement—it may cease to be of significant interest to them. It is imaginable that if this day comes, Art and his sister will question their ownership of the farm.

Art, in the following segment, describes the second element of the membership frame: his relationship to Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' mission:

[Our farm], because of the position of it not being a primary source of income... I don't have to be as bottom dollar oriented. Having said that, [Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' mission] does have more of that meaning to us. Having sustainable practices; having to take care of the land so it doesn't become unusable; and to practice good organic methods. I don't think it's anything that's really big, it just all comes full circle.

In this segment Art explains his moderate connections to Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' mission as it relates to environmental sustainability. Two statements stand out. The first is that Art suggests that because he does not rely on his farm as a primary source of income he has the luxury of being able to consider elements of farming outside of those that are directly related to the cultivation of crops and crop yields, such as sustainability. He "doesn't have to" be entirely concerned with money, he admits. As a result, he can think about sustainable practices. Art seems to be admitting his awareness of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' mission, yet dismisses it as a playing a central role in his relationship to his farm or the organization. The second statement that stands out reinforces this point. Art acknowledges that the sustainability-oriented objectives of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables has meaning to him, but backtracks to say that meaning is not a big part of his decision to farm. Later in his interview Art acknowledged that his primary reason for growing organic vegetables is because they are more lucrative than conventional produce. It seems Art is aware of the value of achieving sustainability, but admits that his primary motivation for joining the collective is financial.

At this point, Art's membership frame begins to become clear. His membership in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables is, primarily, about keeping his farm productive so that it can, at the very least, pay for itself and hopefully even provide a source of income for him and his sister far into the future. This frame is reinforced in the final interview segments provided below, in which Art describes the third element of the membership frame, his relationship to other growers and staff members in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. In this segment Art describes business relationships that allow him to purchase equipment inexpensively and to rely on more experienced growers and staff to make management decisions that he feels unequipped to address:

One large grower is Donny Potts. He orders [plastic to cover his crops] and because he orders in such large quantities for his particular farm... he also will include orders for other members of the Harvest. That way you don't have to have extra shipping. Get everything together, make one order, and things work out real well that way.

[Decisions are] generally made by the staff, the senior staff there. I think they ask for input from the growers. I think they ask. They probably consider strongly input from the growers. Then they make decisions based upon the input, and I think that's the way it should be. They're experts. That is what they do for a living so to speak. And the good thing about it is they're growers themselves. ...Not only are they staff members, but they're producers too. And I think that makes all the difference in the world.

In the interview segment presented above, Art connects the three elements of his membership frame to describe his perception of how decisions are made in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables as well as to justify his involvement in decision-making. Two elements of Art's description are important for understanding how his membership frame influences his view of, and involvement in, decision-making. The first is that he is unsure about how decisions in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables are made. Art states that he "thinks" that staff "probably" ask for, and consider, input from growers, but he doesn't

actually know. It's easy to gather the impression that Art is simply not that concerned with how decisions are made in the collective. The second point that illustrates the role of his membership frame in determining his role in, and perception of, decision-making is that he advocates that decisions should be made by staff members because they are experts in both the business aspects of running an agricultural collective as well as in the farming aspects, because they are farmers themselves. Art's relationship to staff then, is one of trust and dependence. He is comfortable relying on staff because they are growers as well as administrators, and "that makes all the difference in the world." It seems that for Art and his sister, who have careers that limit their time and provide them with financial security, convenience and making sure the farm pays for itself are primary concerns. As a result, avoiding taking part in decision-making processes and relying on staff members is preferable, because this level of involvement does not impede on their free time and still allows them to meet their financial aspirations.

By examining these three elements of Art and his sister's membership frame—their relationship to their farm; their relationship to Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' mission; and, their relationships to others involved in the organization, Art and his sister's approach to Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables comes clear. Their relationship to the organization is based on the collective's ability to help their land pay for itself. They understand, but share little attachment to, the organization's mission. Finally, they relate to other growers involved in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables for largely instrumental reasons and are satisfied to allow staff, whom they view as experts and trustworthy, to make decisions regarding the organization for them. This membership frame aligns Art and his sister with other growers who, like them, are financially concerned—but not dependent—on their farms.

An Introduction to the Three Membership Frames

There are three general variations on the membership frames that are held by Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' growers. Each grower approaches their membership in the organization through one of these variations, although there is gray area among them. Many growers evidence characteristics from one, two or three variations, and there are characteristics that are shared among all three categories. These three variations on membership frames carry a host of implications for the ways farmers who employ them view their work, make decisions and relate to others in the organization and the organization itself. The three variations of the membership frame are those held by legacy tobacco farmers, returning tobacco farmers, and lifestyle farmers.

One of the starkest differences among these three groups is each farmer's level of financial dependence on their farm. This difference plays a large role in determining how farmers within each group view, and are involved in, organizational decision-making within Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. Generally speaking, legacy tobacco farmers are almost entirely dependent on their farm's income for their economic livelihoods. Returning farmers are less concerned about the financial success of their farms

although they intend for their farms to at least break even. Lifestyle farmers, on the other hand, generally suggest that their income is entirely independent of their farm and that they are unconcerned about the financial success of their farms. However, because growers' reliance on their farm income varies and is not black and white, it is more effective to talk about growers' frames and financial dependence as a spectrum from complete reliance and a high level of concern for their financial success to very little reliance and no concern about the financial success of their farm. Figure 3 illustrates this spectrum, and where each farmer included in this study fits on it.

The following three sections describe the membership frames of legacy tobacco growers, returning growers and lifestyle growers in detail. In each of these discussions I use three enactments to describe their membership frames. These are: farmers' relationships to their farms, farming identity and aspirations; relationship and attachment to Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's mission; and, relationships to other stakeholders, primarily growers and staff members, within Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. Following each description of the membership frame is a discussion of how each contributes to farmers' involvement in decision-making. A flow chart illustrates how the frames through which farmers view their work contribute to their involvement in decision-making in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables.

Legacy Tobacco Farmers' Relationships to their Farms, Farming Identities and Farming Related Aspirations

As Tom Carpenter and I splashed down the mud path from his trailer home to the small fields where he and his wife grow organic vegetables for Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, he told me about his farming legacy. Tom pointed out the ridgeline across the valley to the tobacco farm on which he grew up as a child. As the crow flies, it looked to be about half a mile from where we stood. I got the impression that Tom was reluctant to share deeply about growing up on that ridgeline farm as he gazed across the valley and talked about his youth. He casually explained his upbringing, downplaying the significance that his family's farm played in shaping his identity. As Tom explained it, that farm was just a common hillside farm that could have belonged to anyone. Yet, as his story began to unfold, that hillside farm and the role of farming in his childhood took on increasing significance:

Tom Carpenter: I was raised on a farm, me and my 2 sisters, and I've got 2 boys, and it's, farm life is, there's nothing like it. It's hard work before daylight till after dark, most days, and it's the only way to raise children. We've got 2 grandchildren that spend a lot of time with us, and they love it. They live in the city, well, over at Kingsport, and they can't wait to come to mamaw and papaw's. They've got jobs when they come. They feed the chickens, and they feed the pigs and the ducks, and they help in the field. 'What can we do, mamaw? What can we do, papaw? I want to help. Can we ride the motorcycle after we get done?' Yep.

CG: Does it put a smile on your face?

Tom Carpenter: Puts a smile on my face, yeah.

CG: So, will you stick with farming?

Tom Carpenter: I don't know. I'm getting to the age, I turned 62 in March. My wife's 62. And it's, we've worked ourself to death all of our life. And as long as our health will stand it we'll stay with it. But you know, I'm crippled, and of course I don't let that slow me down. I know a lot of people that's been in the shape I was in, and they'd have sat down and wouldn't have got back up. And see that little tractor sitting right there? It'll be 3 years in October, right back there in the field, it turned it over on me. I was under it. Broke my pelvis and 9 ribs all at one whack. The middle of March I throwed my cane away. I was determined. I ain't ready to give up.

Three points from this portion of Tom's story stand out as integral to the farming identity that is common among legacy tobacco farmers and that serves as the foundation for their membership frame. These are: pride in one's farming heritage; an understanding that being a farmer is more than an

occupation, it includes life lessons and cultural values; and a commitment and dedication to living a farming way of life.

At superficial levels, when Tom says, “I was raised on a farm...” he is simply stating a fact about where he grew up. He is illustrating that during his childhood his family owned a farm. This is the first common element among legacy tobacco farmers.

Tom’s pride, however, does not come from simply being raised in a particular location. It comes from the way of life he learned while he was being raised. In other words, the meaning Tom intends to convey when he tells us that he was “raised on a farm...” and “there’s nothing like it” doesn’t stop at letting us know that his childhood occurred in a place where crops and livestock were cultivated. Rather, as Tom talks about being raised on a farm he is talking about growing up in a way that taught him a series of lessons which shaped his identity, and are still at the core of his identity at 60+ years of age. Tom talks about hard work, determination and responsibility. These traits are apparent in Tom’s identity when he tells us about working from “daylight until after dark,” the regularity of tasks that he assigns his grandkids and that they are only allowed to play when those tasks are completed, as well as his commitment to continue farming even when others might quit. It is these characteristics that Tom learned growing up, and which he still holds and values today, in which his pride resides. These traits hint at the second common element of legacy tobacco farmers’ identity: shared values related to, and internalized during, the performance of farm work.

For Tom, being “raised on a farm” does not simply mean that he was nourished and cared for in a way that allowed him to reach adulthood in a farm setting. Being “raised on a farm” means that as a child, Tom was taught lessons, skills and values through the acts that one performs while carrying out farm tasks. In other words, for Tom, being raised on a farm means learning and internalizing lessons, skills and values regarding a strong work ethic, sense of responsibility and determination, among others, through performing the work that is required to keep a farm afloat. Being a farmer then, does not only mean owning a property on which crops are grown and/or livestock is raised, it means internalizing and carrying out the lessons, skills and values that come with farm tasks. In other words, farming is not just a series of chores; it is a way of life.

The question at this point becomes, how do the acts of farming shape a farmer’s identity? Tom has led a difficult life by almost anyone’s standards. He has suffered two work-related accidents that have left him crippled. After the first accident, in which he fell from a roof while building a house, he returned to farming because he was no longer able to perform the work his employer asked. He sunk his savings into purchasing the farm on which we now walked, and he has struggled to make that farm profitable. A few years after purchasing the farm, a small tractor that Tom owned sunk in a muddy ravine and flipped over on him while he was driving it, crushing his pelvis and ribs. He explains that he only recently gave up the cane that he was forced to walk with after that accident. Additionally, throughout our discussion Tom discussed the long hours he and his wife spend in their fields battling heat, humidity, rain, bugs and scorching sun, among other challenges, while they work to keep their farm viable. While Tom’s story is difficult, it is not unique. Clearly, farming is hard work. Every legacy tobacco farmer I interviewed had similar stories to those recounted by Tom, and a similar reverence for overcoming these challenges.

The idea of hard work and its association to farming had several meanings for Tom Carpenter and others in the legacy tobacco farming category. At one level, performing hard work is simply the practical and necessary reality of making a farm successful. This kind of difficult labor is simply what farmers do if they intend to make a living through farming. At a second and deeper level, however, the work that Tom performs to keep his farm afloat represents an extension of the lessons he learned while young and therefore represents the enactment of farming as a way of life. The longer a legacy farmer works on a farm, the stronger their sense of responsibility and dedication become. As these feelings grow they reinforce one another. Thus, for Tom Carpenter, performing farm chores deepens his investment in his farming way life. By their very nature, instilling one with a strong work ethic and sense of responsibility implies that one will continue to work hard in the future and, in so doing, will further instill in oneself those values. As a result, the act of farming can be seen as not only carrying out farm-related tasks, but as strengthening one's commitment to a way of life.

Throughout this dissertation I use two terms—legacy and heritage—to describe the ways that farmers perceive their role in carrying out the farming lifestyle of their ancestors. I use the term legacy to describe farmers like Tom Carpenter, who farm because they have an unbreakable commitment to and dedication for the farming way of life. For legacy growers, the more they farm the deeper farm values become instilled in the core of who they are and the more difficult it becomes to picture themselves in other professions. I use the term heritage to describe farmers like Sue Mason, who will be discussed in the *returning growers* section. Heritage growers farm as a way of honoring their family's participation in farming activities, but these growers do not hold and live the same farming-related values as legacy farmers. As a result, heritage growers are less committed in their pursuit of the farming way of life.

Now, it is fair to assume that not all farmers have a strong work ethic and sense of responsibility, among the other character traits that Tom and other legacy tobacco farmers cherish. Certainly there may be tobacco farmers who do not possess these traits. My claim regarding legacy tobacco farmers and these traits is simply this: Tom and the other legacy tobacco farmers in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables are *proud* of their upbringing, lifestyle and profession and of their possession of the associated character traits. These traits are at the core of their identities. As a result, when other farmers who do not possess these traits find that that they are no longer satisfied with the farming lifestyle and profession, or that farming is no longer profitable, they are able to quit because they do not share the same desire and commitment to live the farming way of life as legacy tobacco growers. In other words, these individuals are more flexible and more willing to shift the core of their identities away from farming and to define themselves by alternative elements of their identities. When farming grows tough these farmers quit rather than seeking out opportunities that allow them to maintain this lifestyle and identity. Tom Carpenter and other legacy tobacco farmers in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, however, cannot imagine living another way. Hence they find themselves participating in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables when it is no longer possible to support themselves by growing tobacco.

Likewise, it is also fair to assume that legacy tobacco farmers are not the only farmers in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables who possess a strong work ethic and sense of responsibility, among other values related to farming, or that professionals outside of the field of farming cannot possess these traits. My claim regarding these traits is simply that for those farmers involved in Blue Mountain Organic

Vegetables who grew up on tobacco farms and have continued to farm throughout their lives, these traits are central to their decision to participate in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. They participate because they must; the very core of who they are and how they perceive themselves depends on it. Therefore, they refuse to stop farming even if it means facing additional challenges.

It is at this point that the third and deepest level of the meaning of hard work for legacy tobacco farmers originates. At this level Tom says that he “ain’t ready to give up.” The cyclical and reinforcing relationship associated with the performance of hard work and development of a strong work ethic and a sense of responsibility have instilled in Tom a deep sense of commitment to the farming way of life. Being a legacy tobacco farmer means being determined to play out that role for as long as one is physically able. It also means understanding that there will come a time when one can no longer carry out that role and, as a result, vigorously working to help others to understand what it means to be a farmer so that they can take on the responsibility of carrying on the way of life. This level of determination is visible in Tom’s statement when he declares that he isn’t ready to quit farming, and when he talks about his grandchildren’s role on the farm.

“[farming is] the *only* way to raise children,” Tom declares. As Tom speaks these words it is easy to imagine him firmly planting a flag in the earth or drawing a line in the sand. The line that he draws divides the kind of upbringing he had, and that which he intends for his grandkids to have, from those upbringings that Tom feels are not conducive to teaching kids the values, lessons and character traits he believes are associated with farming. The values Tom associates with farming are salt-of-the-earth values and, Tom believes, they can only be learned as he learned them. Tom’s grandkids, he explains, live nearby but in the city. As a result, Tom perceives that they live a different life than that which he knew growing up and, as a result, they may not learn farm values. Therefore, Tom takes it upon himself to make sure that they still learn the lessons that he believes they should learn as children by having them perform farm chores when they visit.

Another key element of legacy tobacco farmer’s relationships to their farms, farming identity and aspirations is their shared perception that they hold limited employment options outside of farming. In other words, these growers share the feeling that if farming were no longer to be a possible source of income for them, they would have few alternatives for making a living. Legacy tobacco farmers perceive the end of earning a livelihood from farming as a very real possibility, and as a result the notion that their career options are limited is salient. The decline of the tobacco industry in the 1990s made the possibility of no longer making a living from farming especially real. I asked Rhonda Madison, another legacy farmer, about her decision to continue farming with Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables after the tobacco industry crashed:

CG: Why keep farming once tobacco was no longer profitable? Why not move on to something else? Why organic vegetables?

Rhonda Madison: Cuz you know that’s all we’d ever knowed. That’s all our parents and grandparents had ever done was grow tobacco, and of course tobacco got cheap, I mean most of it’s gone now. You know you had to, you have to have somethin’ to go back to.

And cattle is an up and down market. When you're at a high, next they'll be dirt cheap, you never know. You can't depend solely on them.

From Rhonda's short remarks the frustration and fear that might come from viewing one's employment options as limited, especially when you know the profession you're in is declining, are apparent. Rhonda suggests that she is a farmer because her parents and grandparents were farmers. When tobacco declined to the point that she had to quit growing tobacco she couldn't consider another profession: "that's all we'd ever knowed" she urged me to understand. There is a critical distinction to be made here: it is not that Rhonda didn't consider alternative careers because she didn't want to, it is that she felt she *couldn't* consider other jobs because of her legacy in tobacco farming.

Three elements of Rhonda's statement lead to this conclusion. The first is her emphasis on the word "all." The "all" that Rhonda refers to in her remarks refers to farming as a practice, not to tobacco. "Farming is all we'd ever knowed," she stresses. In fact, throughout our interview Rhonda expressed her dislike for tobacco in no uncertain terms as well as her satisfaction with growing organic vegetables. Other legacy tobacco farmers expressed the same sentiments. It is easy to see from Rhonda's remarks that, when read this way, she can't imagine working in another profession because she can't imagine that she has skill sets or experiences that will transfer to other work. In other words, farming is 'all' Rhonda knows how to do.

Tom Carpenter's stories also make this point. Tom has tried to work other jobs outside of farming. In fact, he took on work as a homebuilder for a short time, but an accident left him unable to climb ladders and frame houses. After the accident he was unsure how and where to find other work. Because he perceived himself as not having additional skill sets that allowed him to work in other arenas he returned to farming because he viewed farming as the only profession he was equipped to perform. Now, after his more recent accident with the tractor, he truly feels that his physical abilities and professional skills leave him with limited employment options. This perception is common among legacy tobacco farmers. In terms of employment, and when thinking about generating an income and making ends meet, farming is "all" these individuals know.

There is also an element of finality to the way that Rhonda uses the word "all". Farming, with this emphasis, is "all" there is. After farming there is nothing else. This is the second portion of Rhonda's statement that leads to the conclusion that legacy tobacco farmers such as Rhonda and Tom view themselves as having limited employment options. Not only does Rhonda feel that she can't switch professions because she doesn't have transferable skills sets, she feels she can't switch professions because she can't imagine a life without farming. During her interview Rhonda expressed profound pride at this facet of her identity. As farming grew more and more difficult with the decline of tobacco, she took it upon herself to learn new farming skills associated with growing organic vegetables and she found a way to be successful. Yet, underlying her pride I caught glimpses of desperation. It seems clear to Rhonda that the list of crops she can try growing, or new methods she can use, is not infinite and that when she reaches the end of that list she will be forced to question the very core of her identity as it

relates to farming. Rhonda perceives farming as the only skill she has, and farming is so central to her identity that she can't see herself in another job. As a result, if the point where there are no longer alternative crops to grow or continuing in farming is impossible for another reason becomes a reality for Rhonda, she must ask herself, "Who am I if I am not a farmer?" At this point, when she is forced to find a way to make ends meet outside of farming she will, quite literally, have to learn to see herself as a different person.

The final element of Rhonda's statement that makes the point that legacy growers view themselves as having limited employment options apart from farming is her emphasis on the word "knowed." At a superficial level when Rhonda says, "[Farming is] *all we'd ever knowed*" it is fair to assume that she is referring to her knowledge of the practices that accompany farm work. In other words, she "knows" how to plow a field, plant seeds, prevent weeds and insects from damaging her crops and how to harvest and sell her crops at the end of the growing season. At this level her view that she holds limited employment options apart from farming comes from knowing how to do farm work, and her perception that she does not know how to perform the tasks associated with other professions. In other words, she can't become a banker, or a doctor or an auto mechanic because she doesn't "know" how to do these jobs. As a result, she will do whatever it takes, including switching crops as she suggests, to maintain her farming way of life.

At another level, however, "knowing" can be interpreted as a statement of comfort and confidence in the permanence of the farming way of life. To "know" something as Rhonda knows farming is to have confidence that it will occur as she expects. For legacy tobacco farmers, to know tobacco farming is to know the farming life in a way that gives them stability and security.

To know something as Rhonda knows farming is to be comfortable with more than just practices such as farm tasks. It is to be aware of cultural norms and values and how to perform and abide by them. It is to know how to fit in and be comfortable doing it. From this perspective Rhonda's statement can be read to mean that as she grew up her parents and grandparents taught her how to fit in to the farming way of life. Farming is all her parents and grandparents knew before her, she tells us and, as a result, farming is the only way of life they knew and were able to pass on to her. They were unable to prepare her to fit into other ways of life because they were unfamiliar with the cultural norms and values that are associated with them. Not only does Rhonda view herself as having limited professional skills that make it impossible for her to switch professions, but she also views the way of life that accompanies farming as the only one that she is prepared to lead.

As a result, when tobacco prices dropped as Rhonda alludes, her knowledge of tobacco farming—the elements of tobacco farming and culture with which she was comfortable—changed. She was forced to make decisions about how to continue farming and how to lead the way of life with which she was most comfortable when the crop with which she was most familiar was no longer a viable option. As a result, she made a decision that kept as many elements of the future as knowable as possible. She began growing organic vegetables for Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. Rather than change professions to a life that she did not know, she decided to continue farming with new crops and methods. This decision kept many things knowable for Rhonda, thus maintaining a certain level of comfort, confidence and

permanence for her. Other legacy tobacco farmers in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables were faced with the same decisions when it became clear that tobacco was no longer viable and they made the same decision. Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables offered a solution which kept many elements of farming knowable, while sacrificing a few. The question that legacy tobacco farmers faced at this time was determining if the elements that were to be sacrificed—tobacco as a crop and some particular farming techniques particular to tobacco—were worth it for the maintenance of the farming lifestyle as a whole.

The final element of legacy tobacco farmers' farming identity and relationship to their farm is their aspirations for their farms. Even after explaining their pride in farming, their commitment to the farming way of life and their desire to pass their farming legacy on to their children, farmers in this category still maintain that their sole reason for farming is to make money. This facet of these growers' identities is critical to the ways they are involved in and view decision-making in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables.

For these farmers, there is pride in being able to support themselves from the land, in family farm ownership, hard work and the other elements described throughout this section, but conversations with these growers always return to discussions about the economic viability of farming. These growers believe that without maintaining their farms' economic viability it will not be possible to maintain the other elements of farming life they cherish. As a result, these farmers are faced with difficult decisions about what elements of the farming life may be sacrificed in order to maintain their farms as sources of economic livelihoods.

When talking to legacy tobacco farmers there is an element of desperation in their voices and stories. It's easy to see why. If Rhonda, for example, is committed to farming as a profession and way of life, feels she must keep farming in order to maintain her core identity, and maintains that she doesn't have skill sets that allow her to earn a living outside of farming, it is only natural that at least part of her emotional reaction when she comes to the realization that tobacco farming is in decline includes fear. It is likely that she fears what the future may bring, fears what lifestyle changes she will have to make, fears what job she may turn to and fears how she will pay bills, put food on the table, and support her children, among other things. As a result, legacy tobacco farmers have come to develop a unique relationship to farming that allows them to view parts of what it means to be a farmer as sacrificial, while holding on to those elements that they feel are critical. Two elements that legacy tobacco farmers have come to see as sacrificial are the crops that they grow and the land that they farm.

The legacy growers I interviewed expressed a love-hate relationship with tobacco farming. For example, they expressed an appreciation for the consistency and predictability in income that came from the tobacco program's price supports and quota system. This system involved the program's agents informing farmers about the volume of tobacco they would be allowed to grow and sell at the beginning of the growing season as well as the prices they would receive for that volume. As a result, farmers knew exactly what to expect from their efforts, and how much money to invest in tobacco seed and equipment, among other things. They also knew how much time and energy to put into their tobacco crop in order to make their efforts worthwhile. At the same time however, the prices that the program

offered were quite a bit lower, and declined further over time, than those to which farmers were accustomed. The legacy growers I interviewed expressed their distrust of the program's intervention in the marketplace.

It would be fair to assume then, after understanding the intricacies of tobacco farming that tobacco itself—the crop at the center of the way of life that is tobacco farming—would hold a degree of symbolic value for legacy tobacco farmers that makes the very thought of growing a different crop a difficult one for these growers to imagine. Yet, at least in the context of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, it seems that for legacy tobacco farmers, tobacco is interchangeable with other crops. “You have to have something to go back to,” Rhonda points out. In other words, she is willing to give up growing tobacco in order to stay in farming. This willingness underscores the focus that legacy tobacco farmers place on the economic viability of their farms. Their farms are, above all, intended to make money and they are willing to sacrifice one of the core elements of their way of life to meet that goal.

Legacy tobacco farmers' ordering of financial success over their need to grow tobacco is at the center of their decision to grow vegetables for Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. At one point or another each grower in this category was faced with a decision: “do I stick with tobacco and the way of life that I know but risk losing the farm or, do I switch to organic vegetables and Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, a crop and that I do not know, but keep the farm?” In the end each of these growers made the decision to switch crops, and found enough in the system of farming that Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables offered that carried over from the tobacco way of life to feel a similar level of comfort and confidence to that which they were accustomed when they grew tobacco. For example, legacy tobacco farmers found that the system used by Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables to determine what volumes of various vegetables farmers should grow, and the negotiation process the firm uses to set prices with grocery store clients, to offer a similar level of consistency and predictability in income as the tobacco program's system of quotas and price supports. Additionally, these farmers suggested that the work involved with growing organic vegetables is an improvement over that involved with tobacco. As a result, they reported that Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables has allowed them to maintain a hold on the values they cherish as well as an avenue for maintaining the farming way of life.

The second component of farming life that it seems legacy tobacco farmers are willing to sacrifice in order to continue farming is the land upon which their farms sit. In other words, for these farmers, just as tobacco is interchangeable with organic vegetables as their primary crop, one farm is interchangeable with another as long as the land is available at the right price and is productive.

Of the three legacy tobacco farmers I interviewed for this research, only Rhonda Madison is still farming the property she grew up farming. And, while she still farms her family's property, she has also purchased large tracts of additional farmland throughout the county where she lives. Tom Carpenter and Henry and Dina Marrow, on the other hand, had sold their original family property and purchased new property elsewhere.

When legacy growers speak about the land they currently farm they speak about it fondly, but it is the way of life associated with farming where it seems that their deepest sense of identity occurs, not in

their attachment to a particular piece of soil. The land itself, for these farmers, is a key ingredient in their economic livelihood, but not the key to their identity. Identity, for legacy growers, seems to be detached from the land, instead embedded in their work ethic, sense of responsibility, determination for and commitment to the farming way of life. This dissertation however did not attempt to explore deeper meanings and senses of place among participants in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables and further exploration in this area may reveal deeper connections among growers and the landscape.

The financial aspirations of legacy growers are evidenced in their responses to the question: what about your farm and involvement in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables are you most proud? The responses to this question that I received from legacy growers are similar to that offered by Henry Marrow:

Well, if I grow a good crop, now, I'm proud. I come out here and I see a big old beautiful pea patch that's bloomed, blossomed out and about that tall, I'm proud because I know I'm going to make some money (laughter) Yeah. That's what...

When responding to this question, legacy growers did not mention their continued use of their childhood farms or ability to maintain the productive capacity of the Earth. Notions related to land, soil, Earth and family farm ownership, which could be indicators of farmers' attachments to their farms or land, simply did not arise with legacy growers. While this in itself may not mean that these growers do not hold symbolic attachments to their childhood farms, or the farms they currently operate, their answers to this question are very different from those offered by returning farmers, who suggest that they have very strong attachments to their family farms. The previous statement by Henry Marrow is much more typical of the types of themes that did arise in conversations about aspirations with legacy growers. While it is clear that there are personal, emotional and symbolic drivers to legacy growers' farming operations, their outward focus and concentration is on the financial productivity of their farms. These growers are willing to sacrifice their symbolic attachments to a specific parcel of land for the ability to continue carrying out the farming way of life.

It is this perception of crops and land that may allow legacy tobacco farmers to shift from one farming context, such as from tobacco farming, to another, such as organic vegetables. If their attachment were to tobacco in particular or to particular pieces of land such as those they farmed in their youth, they might not be able to make the shift from growing tobacco under the tobacco program to growing vegetables for Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables smoothly.

Legacy Tobacco Farmer's Relationships to Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's Sustainability-Oriented Mission

The question this element of understanding legacy tobacco farmers' membership frame seeks to understand is if, and how, legacy tobacco farmers relate to Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's mission. Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's mission is reprinted on page 8. This question asks whether growers see themselves and their farm work as advancing values of respect for people, nature, community and culture? Do they see their work as one piece of a puzzle that, when complete, will allow local communities to meet their own needs? Do these growers perceive their businesses as ecologically sensitive or working to enhance human potential and build upon regional strengths?

The short answer to these questions is: no, they don't.

In each conversation I had with legacy tobacco growers they did not mention any attachment to these elements of Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's mission. While I don't believe that this means that legacy tobacco growers don't value this mission, it simply does not seem to be a cornerstone of their motivation to participate in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables or a key to the way that they approach their farm work and membership in the organization. This is distinctly different from the ways that returning and lifestyle growers see their membership in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables.

Legacy Tobacco Farmers' Relationships to other Stakeholders

The final aspect of legacy tobacco farmers' membership frame is their relationship to, and characterizations of, other growers and staff members within Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. When considering other growers, legacy farmers expressed doubt about the expectations of growers that are new to farming and skepticism of the motives of growers who do not share their focus on financial success. When considering staff members, legacy farmers expressed a limited perception of the roles that staff play, considering them as technicians whose purpose is to market, sell and transfer growers' produce to grocery stores and other clients, and to see that growers receive payment for their produce.

Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables staff members, returning growers and lifestyle growers all tell stories that indicate their shared perception that Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables is a network of interdependent staff members and growers in which all members work together to make the collective successful. Within this perception, these stakeholders describe Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables as an organization that serves many inter-related purposes and supports growers in varied ways. Additionally, these stakeholders describe their relationships as multi-layered and founded upon trust, respect and shared values concerning environmental sustainability and community. Staff, returning and lifestyle growers speak of the Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables 'family.' Legacy tobacco farmers, on the other hand, present a very different perspective of the organization. Legacy tobacco farmers describe their

doubt about the expectations less experienced growers hold regarding the simplicity of farming and the potential for success. Legacy growers suggest that they believe less experienced growers think that farming is relatively simple and that making a profit will be easy. Additionally, legacy growers suggest they are skeptical of less experienced growers who hold farming objectives that are unrelated to financial success. Furthermore, legacy tobacco growers describe Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables as holding a single and technical purpose. That is, to serve as an intermediary between farmers and clients. As a result, these growers do not share the interdependent views regarding relationships within the organization that are common among other growers and staff.

Henry and Dinah Marrow offered an example of the common perception legacy tobacco farmers hold of those growers that are new to farming and who they view as holding different objectives for their farms. In this story recount a story about two inexperienced farmers who quit the collective after only one growing season when they did not make the money for which they hoped:

Dinah Marrow: They kind of jumped in and got, tried to get too big too fast without considering what their costs were going to be at the end of the year. They just, I don't think they foresaw what the possibilities were as a farmer that your crop might not do well. You might get pests come in or a disease come in and then their labor costs also, and if you don't have great labor, then you might not get it picked as quick or as effectively as what you'd like to, the quality, and then when you go and take it in and grade it, if they lost 50% of what they took in because it wasn't effectively treated before it got there, it was all scarred or mushed or overripe or too big, then they weren't going to get what they needed to out of it.

Henry Marrow: Yeah, and they went out of business.

Dinah Marrow: Part of the reason the 2 big growers fell out, is that they weren't really farmers either, and they didn't realize, well, they should have, because they were intelligent men, but somehow or other it didn't equate in their head that you're going to have a really good year, which is what got them growing real big in the first place, is they had a really good year with small cherry tomatoes, and then they decided to buy all this equipment and go big, buy land . . .

Henry Marrow: Get rich at it. (laughter)

Dinah Marrow: You just can't with that kind of overhead costs right off the bat. You're not going to get rich right away, if ever.

Two elements of the Marrow's story evidence the unique view that legacy tobacco farmers hold regarding other growers. The first is the Marrow's claim that these growers "weren't real farmers." It seems that by this remark the Marrows mean that they do not believe these growers possessed the elements of the farming identity that make one a farmer. For the Marrows, real farmers are those that

learned the values of work ethic, responsibility, determination and a commitment to farming while working on their family's farms as children. From the Marrow's perspective, they didn't see these values in the new growers who dropped out of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables after only one growing season. As a result, the Marrow's perception is that while these growers performed the actions of farmers—they plowed fields and cultivated crops—they didn't hold the foundation of values that come from farming since childhood. As a result, they did not know how to live the life of a farmer, which if lived like legacy tobacco farmers suggest it is lived, reciprocally reinforces itself and generates renewed dedication for the farming way of life over time. As a result, when farming became difficult and the expectations held by these less experienced growers were not met, they did not have a foundation of work ethic, responsibility and commitment to farming to keep them going. These farmers quit when legacy tobacco farmers would not. By demonstrating their ability to quit farming, the Marrows claim that these growers aren't "real" farmers and they draw a line between themselves and other growers who they observe holding different values and objectives regarding farming.

Interestingly, however, the Marrow's do suggest that they believe that the growers in their story did share legacy tobacco growers' views of the economic roles of their farm, land and crops. The new growers about which Henry and Dinah spoke purchased land and grew crops with which they shared little symbolic attachment, and for which their primary concern was to generate income. Yet, these elements of the legacy tobacco farmer's identity alone were unable to allow these growers to be successful. In other words, while money may be an objective of legacy growers it does not form the entirety of their identity. To be a real farmer, as the Marrows suggest they are, requires one to hold all of the elements of the legacy tobacco farmers' identity, including the social and personal elements. And these elements, the Marrows suggest, are unattainable if one did not grow up in such a way that they developed this identity and approach to farming in childhood, and if they have not reinforced this identity throughout their adult life.

The second element that stands out in Henry and Dinah's story supports the first. This element focuses on the importance that the Marrows place on the cognitive nature of farming, rather than the practice of farming itself. As the Marrows tell it, the inexperienced growers about which their story focuses failed because they didn't foresee and plan for unexpected challenges, and they held unrealistic expectations about the potential of their farm. This perception of new growers, and of growers who hold objectives for their farm that go beyond generating an income, seems to be a common feature of the way that legacy tobacco growers relate to other growers. Legacy growers hold a level of skepticism regarding the seriousness and commitment with which these growers approach farming. For example, after a growers' meeting Rhonda Madison described her disappointment that many long-time growers were not present, and that she didn't recognize the newer growers who were in attendance. The message that underlay her story was that few "real farmers" were present. She referred to the growers that were in the audience as "new members." As we discussed these new members, Rhonda expressed skepticism at their ability to make a living in farming without having an agricultural background. From Rhonda's perspective, the cost of entering the profession, she felt, was high enough that without having inherited farming equipment from family members it was nearly impossible for new farmers to gain entry into the field. Through interviews however, I came to learn that many of the new members at the

meeting, and about which Rhonda showed skepticism, held entirely different objectives for their farming operations than Rhonda holds for hers. These growers were lifestyle growers and returning growers whose expectations and objectives were not entirely concerned with generating income. Rhonda recognized this feature, describing these growers as seeking a “better life.” What she meant was that these growers want to live in the countryside, away from the hustle and bustle, crime and noise of the city and where they can be closer to nature. Yet, even though Rhonda recognized that these growers had alternative objectives to her own, she was skeptical that they would reach these objectives through farming and skeptical that they would stick with farming over the long term.

At this point it is unimportant whether Rhonda’s characterization of these growers is accurate. The point is that Rhonda cannot fathom why anyone would enter into farming for reasons other than generating an income. For Rhonda farming is a job, and the work entailed is so difficult that it is not worth doing for other reasons, unless it is all you know. As a result of these perceptions legacy growers like Rhonda and the Marrows set themselves apart from other growers and take a different perspective on the notions of interdependence and networks among other growers and staff.

Legacy tobacco farmers acknowledge the presence of a network within Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, but suggest that they rarely participate in it. When these growers do participate, they suggest that it is at the request of newer farmers, such as when newer farmers ask to borrow equipment or for advice on managing insects, among other things. As a result, legacy growers describe the relationships they hold with new growers and staff as one-way ties in which they see themselves assisting other growers by providing them with equipment and knowledge, but receive little in return.

Legacy tobacco farmers also hold unique perspectives regarding the roles of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables’ staff members and of the services that Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables provides. Essentially, legacy tobacco farmers view individual staff members as holding specific technical expertise in key professional areas, such as marketing and accounting. Accordingly, they tend to view Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables as an intermediary firm that serves an entirely instrumental and technical purpose. The sole purpose of the organization, legacy tobacco farmers suggest, is to market farmers’ produce to, and negotiate transactions with, clients as well as to manage the accounting that goes along with this process. Rhonda Madison exemplified this perspective:

They’re more like a broker, in my opinion. We take our product there, if it needs to be graded, it’s graded and shipped; they sell it; we get paid. If they don’t sell it, we don’t get paid.

This limited view of the organization’s purpose and relationship to growers is in stark contrast to the perspectives offered by returning growers and lifestyle growers, as well as by Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables’ staff members.

Summary of Legacy Tobacco Farmers' Membership Frame

The identity of legacy tobacco farmers is wrapped up in farming-related values such as work ethic, responsibility and commitment. These values are instilled in them by family members through the performance of farming-related activities. Legacy tobacco farmers' parents and grandparents were farmers and these growers have been farming their entire lives. As a result, legacy tobacco growers describe farming as more than a job or way of making a living. To these growers, farming is a way of life. These growers claim that their aspirations for financial success overshadow other reasons for participating in the collective, though their dedication to farming and desire to continue living a way of life with which they are comfortable and confident play key roles as well, even if only in the subconscious of the farmers that hold them.

Legacy growers rarely describe themselves as holding personal attachments to the mission of Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum. These growers give passing reference to the environmental and health benefits of organic produce, but they do not seem concerned with supporting or furthering organic agriculture in the region for reasons other than meeting the volume demands of clients. These growers share the perception that recruiting more farmers to Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables will benefit themselves personally because the collective will be better able to meet clients' needs, but they do not show an interest in promoting organic farming for environmental or social reasons. Additionally, legacy farmers do not share stories about changes in their personal health that come from eating organic food, or allude to strong feelings about the environmental benefits of organic farming, as other growers do.

Growers who view their work through a membership frame of legacy tobacco farming explain or justify their decision to participate in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables by claiming that organic produce offers a higher monetary return than other crops, including conventional vegetables and tobacco. Talking with these growers one gets the impression that if ever conventional crops begin to out sell organic crops or if the tobacco industry picks up once again, they will drop the organic portions of their farming operations for those with higher monetary returns.

Table 4 summarizes the key points of legacy tobacco farmers' membership frame.

Table 4. Summary of Legacy Tobacco Farmers' Membership Frame

	Framing
Relationship to Farm and Farming Identity and Aspirations	Legacy growers hold “farming” values and dedication to farming way of life; Motivation to farm comes from financial aspirations and desire to pass way of life to children.
Relationship to Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum’s Mission	Legacy growers have little attachment to mission.
Relationship to other growers and Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables’ staff members	Primarily instrumental and technical perspective of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables’ role. Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables is a brokerage firm. Skeptical of motivations and commitment of other growers.

Table 4. The left column lists the three key components of legacy growers’ membership frame. The column on the right provides a summary of the ways that legacy growers’ frame each element. The table shows that these growers are primarily interested in generating income from their farms; have little attachment to Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables’ mission; and view the organization as an intermediary to the market.

Legacy Growers’ Sustainability Frame

A second contributing factor to the ways that stakeholders in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables approach their work with the organization and participation in decision-making is their sustainability frame. Stakeholders’ sustainability frames help define what individuals understand sustainability to mean, how they define sustainability and it’s components, the scales at which they think about sustainability, and how they believe sustainability should be implemented or pursued in practice and as a member of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables.

Legacy tobacco farmers view sustainability at the individual scale. This means that their primary concerns regarding sustainability sit at the level of their individual farms. Sustainability means, to legacy growers, that they are able to generate enough income from their farming practices to continue farming for their main source of income. As a result, when considering their relationship with Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables these individuals tend to focus their attention on the financial aspects of sustainability. This approach aligns with their instrumental view of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables,

which encourages them to view the organization as an intermediary between their farms and the marketplace. While legacy tobacco farmers do have social and cultural concerns that relate to their farms, such as the maintenance and reinforcement of the cultural values that they associate with farming, they do not view Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables to play a large role in supporting these values. Subsequently, when considering their work with Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, they view cultural values as secondary to generating enough income to make a living.

Legacy growers showed little concern for the environmental elements of sustainability beyond the use of the practices required by the US Department of Agriculture's organic certification standards (Organic Foods Production Act 1990). I interpret two elements of legacy growers' sustainability frame as critical to this perspective. First, they consider their farms to have achieved environmental sustainability because they use organic farming methods. In other words, meeting the US Department of Agriculture's standards for organic farming serves as an environmental benchmark for these growers. Once they have reached this benchmark, which they regard as a pinnacle achievement, they believe it is unnecessary to pursue higher levels of environmental excellence. Second, legacy farmers expressed that their interest in organic farming is economically motivated. These growers stated that they have chosen to cultivate organic vegetables because organic produce brings a higher monetary return. These growers suggest that they would likely return to using conventional methods, which they claim are less labor intensive than organic methods, if conventional vegetables sold at competitive prices.

Legacy tobacco growers view sustainability through a lens of attainability. These growers treat planning for sustainability as a business management process. By modifying and adapting their business practices these growers believe they can find the optimum business model that allows them to generate maximum returns from the sale of vegetables while achieving secondary goals related to the cultural foundations of farming and maintaining their organic certifications. These growers, additionally, tend to view the economic and environmental elements of sustainability in conflict with one another. From their perspective, investing additional resources in environmental practices eats into the revenues their farms can generate. Thus, for legacy growers sustainability means finding a balance between the economic, cultural and environmental aspects of farming. Once the correct balance has been struck they are able to place additional focus on the economic success of their farms.

Figure 4 illustrates both the scales at which legacy growers view sustainability and their prioritization of the three elements of sustainability.

Figure 4. Legacy Growers' Sustainability Map.

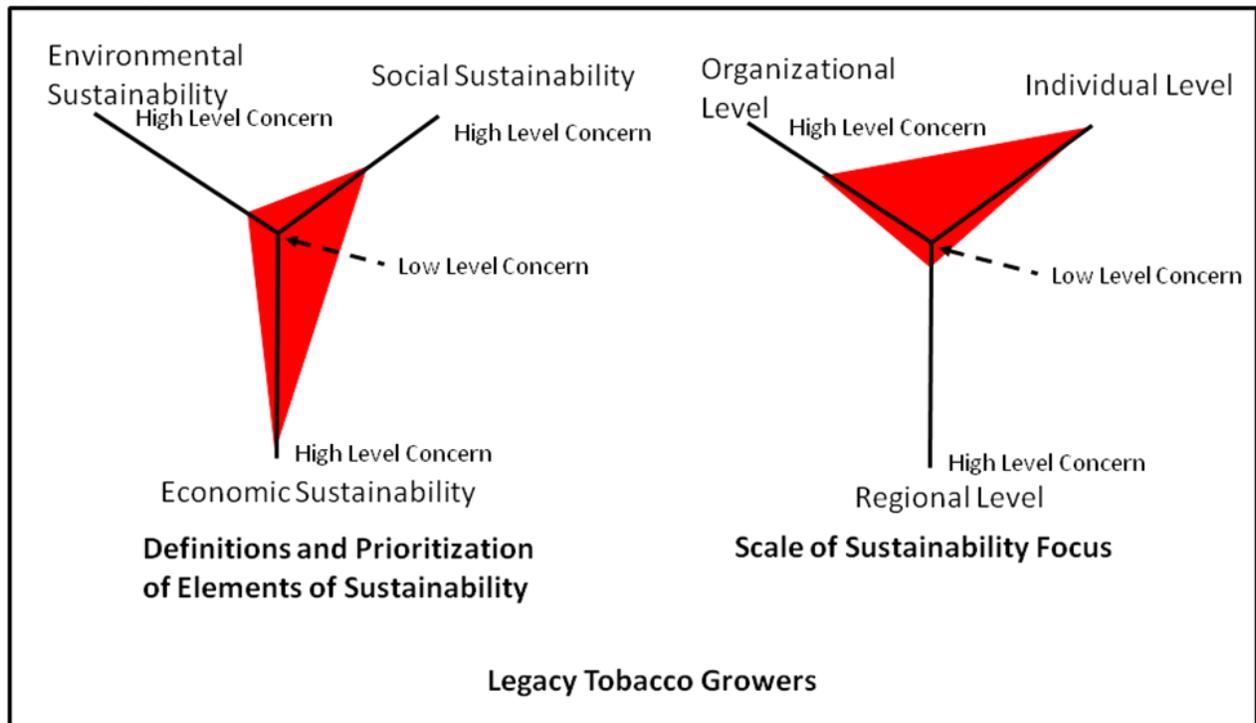


Figure 4. Legacy growers define environmental sustainability as the achievement of organic certification. While these growers use organic methods, this element of their practice is of limited concern to these growers. Legacy growers define social sustainability as the ability to pass on the farming way of life to their children, although they do not see the need for Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables to play a supporting role in accomplishing this. Legacy growers' primary concern is in maintaining the economic viability of their farms. The illustration also shows that legacy growers view sustainability at the individual scale, meaning that their primary concerns are associated with the success of their individual farms.

Legacy Tobacco Farmers' Membership Frame and Approach to Decision-making in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables

For the most part, legacy tobacco farmers suggest that they are uninterested in the ways that Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables makes decisions, or in specific decisions that the organization has made. For these growers, as long as management decisions made at the organizational level do not impede or reduce their ability to earn a living, they are unconcerned with how the organization is managed. These growers did, however, describe specific instances in which they questioned or were unsatisfied with staff members' management decisions and that these events motivated them to become more involved in organizational management.

Tom Carpenter, Rhonda Madison and Dina and Henry Marrow share the view that Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' purpose is to find buyers for their produce, negotiate sales, move their organic produce to market and make sure that they receive payment for the vegetables they produce. In other words, for legacy tobacco farmers Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables is the broker between farmers and the market. As a result, these growers have little concern for the ways that decisions are made in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables and seem happy to leave management to the organization's staff members as long as they get paid and are able to earn a living in agriculture.

This perspective does not mean that these growers hold Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables above reproach. It simply means that they don't attempt to influence or be involved in decision-making within the organization. For Tom Carpenter and the Marrows especially, farming for Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables has been a difficult and losing proposition. They simply haven't turned the profit they hoped to turn. Still, however, neither has taken much of an interest in the way that Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables is managed or in challenging decisions that have been made. It seems that these growers simply accept the decisions Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables makes as a condition of their involvement with the organization.

Figure 5. The Influence of Legacy Tobacco Farmers' Membership Frame on Organizational Decision-making

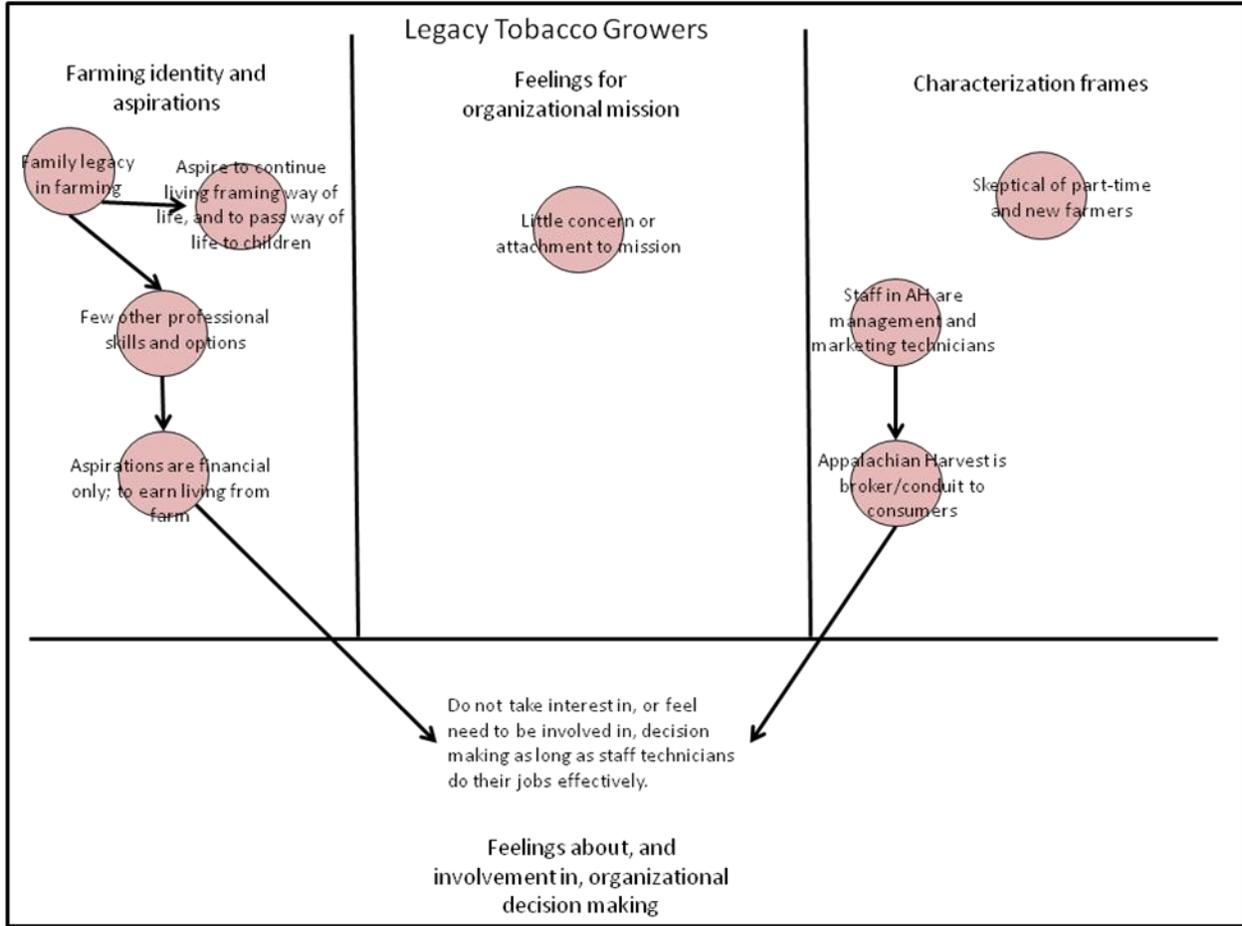


Figure 5. This figure illustrates the ways that legacy growers' membership frame develops their viewpoints toward, and level of involvement in, decision-making in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. The three vertical sections of the graphic correspond to the three components of the membership frame. Key elements of each component described throughout this section are included in circles, and their contributions to the overall development of the membership frame and role in growers' perspectives on decision-making are illustrated through arrows that link these ideas. At the bottom of the graphic is a summary of legacy growers' perspectives on decision making. The chart illustrates that legacy growers' farming identity and relationships to other growers and staff members play primary roles in developing these growers' viewpoints regarding organizational decision-making.

Returning Tobacco Farmers

Returning tobacco farmers were raised on tobacco farms, but disliked farming. As a result, these individuals left their families' farms when they were young adults to pursue other careers. They have now returned to their families' farms with renewed vigor for farming and appreciation for their families' agricultural heritage. These growers do not rely on their farms for their economic livelihoods and farm part-time and by choice.

This section describes the frames of returning growers using the same enactments previously used to describe the frames of legacy growers. These enactments are: 1) growers' relationships to their farms, farming identity and farming-related aspirations; 2) their relationship to Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's mission; and, 3) their relationships to other growers and staff members. However, returning growers perform these enactments differently than legacy growers, which, in turn, influences the ways that these growers view and participate in decision-making in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. I classified five farmers (and their families) in this category. These are: Rachel and Dennis Jackson, Sandy and Richard Klein, Art Applebee, Lyle Carmichael, and Sue and Kent Mason.

Returning Farmers' Relationships to their Farms, Farming Identities and Farming Related Aspirations

Four elements shape the farming identities held by returning farmers. The first is that these farmers, like legacy tobacco farmers, were raised on farms. However, while the acts of farming instilled in legacy tobacco farmers a deep appreciation for farm work and the farming way of life, returning farmers disliked farm life and, as a result, left their families' farms when they were young. These growers have now, as adults, inherited their families' farms from elderly or deceased relatives and have returned to farming with vigor. The second element that shapes these growers' relationships to their farms and farming identity is that they farm part-time and by choice. Each of these growers has a full-time job and income, or is recently retired from a career outside of farming. Therefore, these growers do not depend on their farms for their economic livelihoods, although each uses the resources generated from their farm as supplementary income. The third element that shapes these growers' relationships to their farms and identities is that they derive a large part of their identities from areas of their personal life that are disassociated from farming. Since returning to farming these growers have integrated their farm work into other elements of their identity, but in secondary ways. Unlike legacy tobacco farmers, returning growers do not consider farming the touchstone of their identity. The final element of these growers' relationships to their farms and identity is their financial aspirations for their farms. These growers do not rely on their farms for their financial well-being. In fact, all farmers in this category have other sources of income upon which they rely. While this group of farmers expresses an interest in

generating money from their farms, their primary aspirations are simply to break even. That is to, at the very least, have the produce that they cultivate from their farms pay for the costs associated with farm ownership.

Sue Mason grew up in the farmhouse where we chatted. She recounted her dislike for tobacco farming and her decision to leave her family farm as a young adult. Recently retired from a career in the local school district, she has returned to farming with a renewed appreciation for farming and her family's heritage. The following interview excerpt expresses these facets of Sue's relationship to her farm and farming identity:

CG: Do you feel differently about raising chickens and eggs for Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables than you did about tobacco farming and the kind of farming you did as a child?

Sue Mason: I hated tobacco.

CG: You hated tobacco?

Sue Mason: I hated tobacco.

CG: Why is that?

Sue Mason: ...Have you ever worked in tobacco?

CG: No.

Sue Mason: Never been around it? If you ever have, now my daddy loved to raise tobacco. He loved, and he loved all of his products. He talks a whole lot like I do about being proud of your produce. He was so proud of his hands, you know, whenever you tied your tobacco leaves together and took it to market, he always wanted to have the prettiest basket on the floor. He took great pride in that. But from the time we put the tobacco seeds under a bed, and you always did that in February or March, and I think about it every year. For 18 years I was free labor. All my brothers were. We were all free labor. We would work in, you cleaned up your beds and you got them ready and you planted your seeds. You covered it with the canvas, and then you gassed them, and you went through all this. We were killing the soil with that gas. And then before school was out in the spring, you went through this planting process, and dad already had the ground ready. Of course, that was part of his heavy work too. You pulled the plants and you planted the plants and you transplanted the plants and then you chopped the plants and then the kids had to go through and pull the bugs off, and then you had to go spray, and then you had to go through it and pick the suckers off, which were the little things that grew out of the corners. And any time you touch tobacco, that gooey nicotine sticks to everything. By the end of the day whenever I'd work in the farm in the tobacco, chopping or whatever, and the rows were close and the leaves overlap and you walk through and you're covered. Your head, you're covered with nicotine gum, tobacco gum.

I hated that smell. I hated that feel, that, ooh, it just, I can still to this day, it just makes me sick. And we did that so, we didn't have a choice because that was the cash. That's what enabled all the other stuff to happen. And we just, and then you had to chop it in the fall. You had to cut. I have toted and toted, and a two-story barn, you have to stand on a wagon and push the whole stick that has 8 stalks of tobacco on it. I did that all my life. And when Jerry came, we moved here, he did the, he helped out here and I didn't have to work it anymore, and I told dad I was never going to, and I left and I went to Radford to college when I started out. And I said, I will never work in tobacco again. I was 18. If there's some way, and we were talking about getting married, I said, 'if there is nothing else that I have to do, I don't care what it is, I will never raise tobacco again.' And I hate it to this day. I hate the smell of it. I don't want to have anything to do with it. It's a nasty, hard job. And anybody that's raised tobacco will tell you the same thing. It's a hard, nasty job. And the chickens are just maybe a little different in their nastiness, but it's still, they're not as bad as tobacco. My mother says she can't stand to be around the chicken house because it reminds her of what she had to do a lot when she was a child. So I guess we spend our whole adult life getting over our childhood.

Sue's memories of working on the farm are vivid. She quite effectively brings us into the world of tobacco farming. Through her words it is not difficult to imagine the smell and feel of the tobacco barn that give her a visceral reaction. It is also possible to imagine Sue, as a small child, disgustedly pulling insects off tobacco leaves and the odor of escaping methyl bromide gas as it is pumped into the soil (methyl bromide gas is a dangerous but odorless chemical that was used by tobacco farmers to help manage weeds and pests. It was often laced with smellier gases that held irritating effects so that farmers were quickly aware of gas leaks). From Sue's story, it is easy to imagine the tedium of planting seeds in the cold and rainy days of early spring. And, it is easy to see Sue as a child, disgusted and dirty at the end of a long day, working in the barn.

The elements of working tobacco that Sue described, those elements that to this day make her sick to think about, lead her to make decisions about the kinds of farming she will and will not perform as an adult. It is understandable that she will not grow tobacco, for example. We also understand that her dislike of the tasks associated with tobacco mean that she will likely make decisions not to grow crops that have similar cultivation requirements. As a result, she has decided to raise free-range chickens for their eggs rather than crops. Sue doesn't describe the differences between raising chickens and cultivating tobacco, but hints at their dissimilarities. These influences on Sue's current farming operation, however, occur at a relatively superficial level. The heart of her new farming practice is found at deeper levels of her story. Digging deeper into her story is evidence of her relationship to family and place, and their connection to her renewed spirit for farming.

The renewed appreciation for farming that Sue feels is deeply connected to her childhood. It was her dislike for farming as child that prompted her to make the decision to leave home and attend college as a young woman, removing herself from a career path that would keep her in agriculture. It is also this

decision that allowed her to, later in life, return to the farm with fresh vigor. Indeed, Sue could not return to her family farm with fresh vigor if she had never left. And, if she always felt vigor for farming, the energy she feels now would not be new. On this point Sue's story stands in stark contrast to those of legacy tobacco farmers who exemplify a profound desire and need to continue farming, and who cannot imagine a life apart from farming.

Sue's story is also about her relationship with her mother and father. Sue doesn't indicate much about her personal relationships with her parents—she doesn't say whether their relationships were loving or strained, for example—but it is evident that Sue remembers, in great detail, what it was like to work on the farm with her father and she still talks about these experiences with her mother. It is clear that her early experiences on the farm were significant for her. She returned to this point later in our interview when describing her decision to return to the farm as well as her newfound excitement for farm work:

[I] feel blessed to have the opportunity to do something with the land. My dad farmed this place, my great-grandparents, then my grandparents, and my dad and mom...

"I feel blessed..." Sue begins. Her wording strikes importantly at multiple levels. First, carrying out the heritage of her parents, grandparents and great-grandparents is an honor and point of pride for Sue. Since her childhood she has made a complete reversal of position regarding her interest in farming, and turned what she once despised into a spiritually significant component of her life. Feeling blessed alludes to a perception of a spiritual calling to act, and to feelings of spiritual fulfillment when actions are carried out. For Sue, and other returning growers, making the decision to return to farming is more than an occupational or financial decision. These growers return to farming because returning to their agricultural and familial roots is a point of personal fulfillment for them. This is the rejuvenation of spirit that farmers in this category share.

On a second level, Sue's use of the word "blessed" indicates that she does not feel forced to farm. She recognizes that she is not obligated to farm for financial purposes or because her employment options are limited, and so, in this sense "blessed" can be interpreted as a form of "luck." "I feel lucky to have the opportunity to do something with the land," Sue might say. Feeling that the variables of life such as one's job, family, income and location among others, have aligned in fortuitous ways so that returning to one's family farm to carry out the family heritage is a possibility is common among returning growers.

Additionally, Sue's statement emphasizes her attachment to place. She feels blessed to be able to farm, because she is farming a particular place, "this place," which refers to her family farm. For Sue, the way that her father looked and acted on the farm as well as specific elements of farming, among other memories, are deeply embedded in place. As a result, her renewed spirit for farming is connected to being able to farm her family's property. It is likely that Sue would not have returned to farming and would not possess her renewed spirit for farming if she did not have the opportunity to farm on the land where she grew up. Legacy tobacco farmers, on the other hand, expressed detachment from any particular landscape. One gets the impression that keeping their families' farmland productive and

carrying out their families' heritage is as vital to returning growers as carrying out the farming way of life is for legacy tobacco farmers.

A second key element of returning tobacco farmers' farming identity is their financial aspirations for their farms. Whereas legacy tobacco farmers aspire to make a living from farming, returning farmers hope only to break even. That is, to earn enough income from their farms to pay property taxes on the farm and for necessary maintenance. As a result, the economic well-being of these growers is not tied to their farms' productiveness. The membership frame of Craig Hartl, who grows vegetables for the collective and works as a guard at a nearby prison, most closely aligns with the frames of lifestyle growers. However, in terms of his economic aspirations he clearly exemplifies the viewpoints of returning farmers:

I [told Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables] that my goal is, if I can raise enough stuff to sell it to pay for all my seeds and plants, and break even, I've done well. And basically with the water bill and stuff last year, that's what I done.

Other returning growers, such as Art Applebee and Sue Mason, maintain that at a bare minimum they intend for their farms to break even, but that they hope to reach higher levels of economic success. The key element of growers' relationships to their farms in this context is that the farms themselves represent hope for their owners. In statements provided previously in this chapter, Art Applebee demonstrated the hope he holds for his farm when he explained that he and his sister would like their farm to be productive enough to provide them with a source of income through their retirement.

It is easy to get the impression from these growers, although they are not the only growers to feel this way, that the cultivation of crops in general is a hopeful affair. Growing vegetables is not like manufacturing products on a factory assembly line, in which you know that as long as the machines don't break down, the machines will produce the same items at a constant rate and quality for as long as you command them to continue working. When it comes to farming, one does not know what the outcome will be. Farming is an exercise in hopefulness. In farming, farmers plant seeds and water them, and from that point on hope that a number of other variables interact favorably to produce a good crop. Yet, at no point along the way from planting to harvest is a farmer granted any assurance that the process will continue as planned. Farming is a gamble, and part of farming is learning to live with and manage this gamble. As a result, as much as farming is a hopeful affair, it is also about doubt. Sue Mason's egg producing operation, at the time I visited her farm, had not yet achieved her financial aspirations to break even. Her hope, and doubt, are evident in her remarks:

I went into this with open eyes knowing that probably we'd have to carry it for a while. And we are. I told my son, I'll give you till June and we'll see how, when the weather turns or if the eggs pick up, what happens. And we'll see how it does.

Sue doesn't finish her thought, but it's clear what she means. She has given her farm an ultimatum. Sue's doubt, and hope, raises an interesting point when considering her desire to continue the heritage of her ancestors. Sue reiterated the point that her parents, grandparents and great-grandparents all depended on their farm for survival:

I grew up on a farm and we produced every bite that we ate. Vegetables, eggs, lamb, pork, beef, chickens, we had it. I mean, we were just self-sustaining. That's the way I grew up. And we would take our eggs to market and we would, in those days they called, we would trade them for things in the store that we might need. And a real treat was we got something special that we didn't raise on the farm. We'd get a can of soup or we'd get something that was kind of unique to us. But we all were so healthy, and it was just the way of life. And I've always appreciated that...

Yet, now that Sue has returned to working her family's farm as an honor to her parents, grandparents and great-grandparents, she must consider what she will do if her farm does not make enough money to pay for itself and if she is unable to carry out the honor she intends to grant her family. This question was fast becoming a reality for Sue:

Do you understand the dilemma that if you have all of those eggs that are 1/8 of an ounce from the acceptable weight, what do you do with them? You make angel food cakes? You can only make so many. You know, it's, that part is discouraging, because that's not profitable at all, but you've got money in it.

Sue's remarks are significant on two levels. First, Sue gives the impression that she can't afford, or doesn't intend, to continue farming if it is a losing proposition. Yet, if she quits farming she faces the reality that she failed to maintain her family's heritage.

At the same time, Sue's parents, grandparents and great-grandparents were full-time farmers who depended entirely on their farms for survival. As a result, it is imaginable that they likely held some of the same values and views shared by legacy tobacco farmers. For example, it seems likely that Sue's father held a strong work ethic and sense of responsibility as well as commitment to farming. It is likely that he believed that farming is not an activity to be performed symbolically. Furthermore, he likely believed that farming was both a way of life and profession, though he focused on financial success and would make sacrifices to the symbolic elements of his farm in order to meet his monetary concerns. Therefore, it seems likely that Sue's father, if faced with the prospect that his farm was not financially viable, would have modified his farming practice to find ways to make the farm productive and meet his goals. He may not have quit farming as Sue indicates she may, but might have found alternative crops or more productive land, as other legacy tobacco farmers have done. Sue is faced with a dilemma. While her father is likely to have approached farming through the frame of legacy tobacco growers, she carries a different frame. For her, farming is a largely symbolic act. Now, after returning to farming she

is face to face with the reality that farming may not be an activity that can be performed symbolically. As a result, she is faced with a difficult choice. It seems that she must decide whether to farm more intensively, quit entirely, or subsidize her farm with other resources. Yet, none of these options seems to fit her frame. Sue gives the impression that farming intensively is an idea she detests. At the same time, quitting does not fulfill her desire to honor her ancestors and subsidizing her farming operation with additional resources doesn't meet her financial goals.

As a result, just as legacy tobacco farmers come to make decisions about which aspects of the farming way of life they are willing to sacrifice in order to continue carrying out that way of life, returning farmers make decisions about which aspects of the farming way of life they are willing to sacrifice in order to achieve their aspirations for honoring their families' heritage and breaking even. Returning growers, when faced with this dilemma, often sacrifice the financial success of their farms. In other words, in order to maintain the farms that their parents, grandparents and great-grandparents farmed, these growers are willing to lose money. Legacy farmers on the other hand, find ways to meet their financial aspirations and dedication for the farming lifestyle, which often includes sacrificing their attachment to places and crops.

Two justifications that returning growers use to describe their ability to make the sacrifice described here is that they are first, less reliant on their farms for their economic livelihoods than legacy growers and, second, that they draw the cores of their identities from other places in addition to farming. In other words, being a farmer is not the only way that these growers define themselves and where they achieve personal fulfillment. Therefore, these growers feel that if they are forced to quit farming they are not faced with the same questions about personal identity with which legacy growers are faced. For example, returning growers recounted their deep attachments to family, religion and their full-time professional work as the foundations to their identity. While legacy tobacco farmers tended to answer the question, "what about your farms are you most proud?" by describing the productive abilities of the farms, returning farmers answered this question by describing other elements of their identities. Dennis and Rachel Jackson, for example, described their farming practice as one element of their broader environmental ethic and desire to protect the family property from more destructive land uses:

Just the fact that [our farm] has been in the family for so many generations, being able to preserve it even if we're just mowing off [hay] from it and selling [the hay] to local horse farmers. I'd rather see this done than see a subdivision in here or a stinking trailer park. This day and age I don't know how we're ever gonna stop it. There's here's probably no way of stopping it. Especially living in California, I've seen hundreds of acres of good farmland turned into strip malls. Being a construction worker myself, I went into one strip mall area and the people that leased this particular building wanted us to [modify] their floor plan, and we go in there and cut up the concrete that had been poured for a couple of months, pick up a piece of concrete and there's fresh vegetables still growing that haven't even started to rot yet. Like celery and broccoli and stuff. All across the nation there's so many farmlands, even small farmers as well as the large ones are just getting teed up by development. We're not going to be able to feed our nation if we don't stop doing it.

Dennis's discussion raises several issues, but a critical point that is subtly embedded in his statement is that his farming operation is not about making money. It is about protecting his family's farmland and heritage from what he sees as a general, nationwide trend of converting agricultural landscapes into urban and suburban settings. It is this trend that the word "it" refers to when Dennis says "*This day and age I don't know how we're ever gonna stop it.*"

Richard and Sandy Klein revealed a deeply spiritual element to their farming operation:

Well, it goes back to really the dominion man made that God gave Adam, to tend the garden. And that's kind of what we're seeing. We're tending the garden. Taking dominion over the earth, and we really see that as a calling.

The purpose of my analysis related to the statements made by Dennis Jackson and Richard Klein is not to create a list of different reasons or objectives that returning farmers grow organic vegetables, nor is it to create a list of different areas of one's personal life from which returning growers draw their core identities. Instead, the purpose is to highlight the broader point that these growers draw the cores of their identities from other areas of their lives, and integrate their farming operations into this identity. Dennis and Richard illustrate this common feature of returning growers' attachments to their farming operations. Dennis explains how his farming operation supports his broader environmental ethic while Richard explains how his farming fits into his spirituality. In both cases farming is secondary to, but integrated into, their identities which were established long before they made the decision to grow vegetables for Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables.

This is different from the way that legacy growers go about identity formation. Legacy growers, view themselves as farmers first, and incorporate ideas and activities from other aspects of their life into their farming identity. Tom Carpenter, for example brings his grandchildren to the farm and involves them in farm work. In short, for legacy tobacco farmers, carrying out the actions of farming plays a pivotal role in the formation of identity while for returning farmers carrying out farming activities contributes to the strength of their identity outside of farming.

Returning Farmers' Relationships to Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's Sustainability-Oriented Mission

The next key element of understanding returning farmers' membership frame is understanding their relationship to Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's sustainability-oriented mission. Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's mission statement is provided on page 8.

Returning farmers suggested that they do consider elements of Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's mission as they conduct and think about their farm work. Growers discussed two interests in this mission in particular. Sandy and Richard Klein, in the following discussion present both of these interests:

Sandy Klein: Because of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables we are allowed to be part of something bigger. ...knowing we're part of that, and we've made that possible whereas otherwise we couldn't have, that's the great thing about it.

CG: And what do you see as the "something bigger" that you're part of?

Sandy Klein: Being able to keep farmers on their farms. Making a living from that, which is like the most basic living you can do that has been here since the creation. Having your hands in the soil. And like Mike said, taking dominion and just being a part of a group that's doing that and representing better food, healthier food, a better way of life...

Richard Klein: And on the other side, people that eat Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables produce get good stuff. That should be a guarantee. And they should be healthier for eating it. Because it's grown locally, it's not been trucked for 2 weeks to get there, and so a shorter time between the field and the table, and they're getting, they're just getting more nutrients and antioxidants. Every way you can measure it, it's better.

Several portions of this discussion with Sandy and Richard stand out. The first is their feeling that they belong to something larger than themselves—that is, to a movement that works to make the world a better place. At this level of attachment, the focus of returning farmers is on legacy tobacco farmers: “being able to keep farmers on their farms,” they say. Sandy uses the term “farmer” in the same way that Tom Carpenter uses the term “real farmer” previously. Throughout their interview, the Kleins referred to their farm as a garden, rather than field, and to the work they perform in their gardens as gardening rather than farming. In short, the Kleins don't use the vocabulary of legacy tobacco farmers and, as a result, create a boundary between themselves and legacy farmers. When I asked them about the difference between their gardens and gardening activities and the fields and farm work of legacy growers, Richard and Sandy explained the differences as matters of scale. On the surface they mean that the areas in which the Kleins plant vegetables are small relative to the areas that legacy growers have under cultivation. Therefore, they are gardens, whereas farmers plant larger fields. Yet, as the Kleins continued to talk it became clear that they were talking about scales in other ways as well. The differences these growers revealed have cultural elements as well, and these elements aligned with the description of “real farmers” presented by Henry and Dinah Marrow and Rhonda Madison previously. Real farmers live the farming way of life, and this is embedded in their identity. Returning growers, on the other hand, perform the tasks associated with farming but do not carry out the farming way of life in the same way. Returning growers lack the commitment and dedication to this way of life, do not feel their identities or professional opportunities are limited by their involvement in agriculture, draw their

core identities from areas of their personal lives that are apart from farming and feel comfortable with life ways that are not only associated with agriculture. Yet, the Kleins' statements show that they consider their involvement in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables as providing a contribution to the protection of a way of life that is not their own. It seems that returning farmers hold an altruistic purpose for their farm work that relates to supporting other members of the collective in which they participate. These growers participate in order to help support legacy tobacco farmers, for whom they hold a deep appreciation and admiration.

There are two other aspects to returning farmers' attachment to the mission of Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum. The first is their identification with, and interest in, the need to provide healthy, nutritious local food to regional residents. The second is their desire to demonstrate a better way of living to residents in the area.

Growers within the returning category often described the way that, after beginning to raise and eat their own organic vegetables, their personal allergies and other health ailments became less severe. These growers draw a direct causal relationship between their new farming and eating habits, and restored health. They then suggest a desire to share this benefit with others, and Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables provides them with an avenue to accomplish this goal.

The second element stretches a bit deeper. When Sandy suggests that she hopes to demonstrate a better way of living to local residents, she means that she believes residents of the area live a way of life that is lacking and that she understands how their lives can be improved. She also believes that her actions demonstrate the pathway to reform. Harkening back to Richard's previous statements it seems that the better life that the Kleins refer to represents a more "basic" way of making a living. That is, a way of life that is free from the distractions that keep us from what truly matters: perhaps family, religion, community, nature and sustainability among other things.

Returning Farmers' Relationship to other Stakeholders

Several elements of returning growers' relationships with Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' staff stand out as significant when compared to those of legacy growers'. First, returning growers suggest that staff members are deeply invested in, and attached to, the mission of Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum and to the growers of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. Second, returning growers take a very different view of staff members from the technical and instrumental perspective held by legacy tobacco farmers. Returning farmers describe staff as playing important roles in educating and assisting growers as well as building growers' confidence in agricultural skills and decision-making.

As shown previously, returning growers hold strong attachments to Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's mission. This allows these growers to believe their work is valued by staff and that they are not alone in

their beliefs in the mission. Holding the perception that staff members also share in these beliefs not only gives growers the confidence to return to farming because they know there is a support system in place to guide them, but also to know that their efforts and resources are valued by staff members who depend on them. Sandy and Richard Klein exemplified this point:

CG: How do you see that staff at Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum and Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables share a commitment to the mission, organization and growers?

Sandy Klein: Well, I don't know if it's been just one moment, but just everything in this --- ----- that they've encouraged, they made themselves available. They've encouraged small families like us. They've not been discouraging at all, thinking you're too small or really this is an entity for a larger farm kind of thing. They've been very encouraging, and all of them, even Sherri, yeah, are growing, and participating and doing it. It's not like they're just in the office.

Richard Klein: It was really funny with Sherri, because I never pictured her ever growing anything, and then last year she ended up growing some stuff, and I think she enjoyed it, had a blast.

Sandy Klein: So it's not just them, a group up here in the offices running the farmers. They're doing it too. So of course they want to see it be successful, because they're involved in it too.

In the quotation provided here, Sandy Klein describes the commitment to the organization and mission that she sees staff members hold. Sandy suggests that she sees staff members' commitment through the ways that staff members interact with growers and by watching staff members grow and contribute produce to the collective just as growers do. Sandy's observations have important implications for the ways that she perceives staff members' commitment to the organization's mission as well as commitment to growers.

Seeing staff members grow vegetables allows Sandy to believe that staff are invested in the success of the organization because they stand to gain, or lose, just as she does. Furthermore, seeing staff members invest the money, time and sweat equity that growing vegetables requires illustrates to Sandy that staff members believe in the organization's commitment to environmental and agricultural sustainability. Returning growers are rediscovering the hard work that is associated with agriculture and, at times, suggest that they question their decisions to participate. Observing staff members go through this process provides growers with an important degree of emotional support by letting them know that they are not alone in their efforts. In other words, that they are in fact part of a network that is working collectively to achieve more than any single member could achieve on their own. Sandy also suggests that it is important to know that staff members grow vegetables, because it increases the level of trust that she places in the education and assistance that staff members provide. In other words, the

fact that staff members also participate in vegetable production raises their credibility in the eyes of returning growers.

Sue Mason, in the following quotation describes her observations of staff members' commitment to the organization and growers:

I think they're very committed to sustainable agriculture. I think every person that works for them works not just for a salary, but they work for an ideal. They believe in what they're working for. I believe that truly. They come across very sincere; they do more than they have to. They really are hard working people. And they work day and night. And I'm sure that they don't get that much pay. And they're always going somewhere trying to get a grant, and I understand that. So I think that they are very sincere, very serious people.

Sue's remarks illustrate that she has confidence in staff members' commitment to sustainable agriculture. Over time and many observations, Sue has developed the impression that staff members share a common and strong commitment to their work and organization. Yet, Sue's belief is not knowledge in the factual sense. It is based on trust. This is a critical point: it is important to Sue and other returning growers to believe—that is to trust—that staff members share a deep and passionate commitment to Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's mission. Growers alluded to the importance of trust in this context for two reasons. First, because these growers are returning to farming, a profession in which they have not been involved for many years, they suggest that they feel inexperienced and, as a result, that they need a great deal of educational and technical support. Second, because it allows these growers to perceive staff members as sharing their commitment to Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's mission, which is critical for growers to feel in order to trust that their efforts and risks related to returning to farming after long absences, and the organization which supports their return to farming, will be worthwhile and sustainable over the long term.

Trusting that Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' staff members are passionate and knowledgeable about their agricultural work is vital to helping returning growers manage the perception of risk that they feel as they return to their family farms. Sue's observations and subsequent interpretations of staff members working approach—including her perceptions that staff members don't make much money, work far beyond the call of duty to serve growers needs and are wholeheartedly vested in the organization's mission and ideals—provide growers like Sue with evidence that allows them to hold trust in staff members. As a result of holding trust in staff members, returning growers suggest that they have confidence that staff members hold a level of concern for growers' farms that makes growers comfortable in trusting staff members' educational and technical advice. Thus, for returning growers, trust in staff members brings confidence in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables and, as a result, self-confidence in their own farming abilities. Sandy Klein exemplified this point:

But I mean, their training, the information they've provided has been priceless . . . they just made it very easy. And it wasn't as scary for us to just venture out and do it and so

the first year we grew for them, even though we only did this one side the first year it was great, and we were reaching markets that on our own would have been impossible. And because of that and the confidence they had given us, just like Richard said, now we're thinking about expanding, maybe doing some farmers' markets along with Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables.

Sandy alludes to the fear that she felt when first beginning to farm. Not having farmed for before (the farm that Sandy and Richard have returned to is his family's farm), moving to her husband's family property to honor the life work of his parents and grandparents, and sinking significant savings into the equipment and other materials necessary for farming without knowing the outcome is certainly a daunting task. As she describes the process, her use of the term "venture," which has roots in the word adventure is justified. Surely the experience upon which she and her family set-out is an adventure. And like all adventures, they do not know what the outcome will be and if their hopes will be realized at the conclusion of their journey. Yet, she credits Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables staff members with building her family's confidence enough that their hopefulness has been transformed. No longer is their hopefulness blind faith associated with fear, but now it is warranted hopefulness that is founded upon experience—both their own experience that they have gained through the process of farming, but also on the experience of staff members.

This perspective is critical to the work of returning growers, especially when considered in relation to the hopefulness with which these growers approach their farm work. These growers hope their farms break even and hope that their farms can supplement their incomes or provide them with income throughout retirement. Yet, these growers suggest that their inexperience makes them unfamiliar with many farming practices that could help them improve the odds that their gamble pays off. In other words, legacy growers suggest that they are knowledgeable in techniques that reduce the risks of farming while returning growers feel unfamiliar with these strategies. As a result, returning farmers rely on staff to not only provide technical expertise, but also to provide emotional support that helps these growers reduce the levels of risk and fear that they feel.

It is clear from these perspectives that returning growers view staff members in very different roles than legacy tobacco farmers do. Legacy tobacco farmers view staff members as providing necessary technical skills that allow them to serve as a broker between growers and clients. Returning growers, on the other hand, see staff members as teachers and coaches, whose primary roles are to build confidence and educate growers.

A second element of returning growers' relationships with stakeholders in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables is their relationships to other growers, primarily legacy tobacco farmers.

It is clear that returning growers hold a great deal of admiration for legacy tobacco farmers. Returning growers see legacy farmers as holding and living the ideals which they associate with farming, and that, as Sandy Klein suggested, they hope others in the community can adopt.

In addition to their admiration for legacy tobacco farmers, returning growers suggest that these growers play a role in teaching them the ways of farming. Growers like Sandy and Richard Klein, Sue Mason, Lyle Carmichael and Art Applebee, for example, suggest that they frequently ask questions of legacy tobacco farmers and look to them as mentors. As a result, these growers see themselves as participating in a tightly linked network of growers and staff members that is quite different from the ways that legacy growers view their relationships to other stakeholders.

Returning growers view their relationships to legacy growers and staff members as two-way linkages. While returning growers see legacy growers passing them information and equipment, they see themselves, through their commitment to the Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum mission, helping to maintain the institution of agriculture in the region. Put another way, they see their participation in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables as a key element of legacy tobacco farmers' ability to continue farming and living a farming way of life. Returning growers see their small contributions to Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' volume as critical to meeting client's demands. Without their contributions, returning growers surmise, the entire organization may fail and legacy tobacco farmers would no longer have an avenue to support their farming practices.

Summary of Returning Farmers' Membership Frame

Growers in this grouping grew up on farms and spent their childhoods doing farm chores, but left their families' farms as young adults. Individuals in this category frequently described their dislike of farm work as children. Once old enough, most attended college and took professional jobs outside of agriculture. Now, however, farmers in this class are returning to their family farms after inheriting them from parents no longer able to maintain their upkeep. As a result, growers in this group are returning to farming by choice.

Returning growers do not rely on their organic farms as their sole source of income, but emphasize their desire that their farms, at the very least, produce enough income to cover the costs of farming. The level of dependence that growers in this grouping have for their farms varies and some growers emphasize objectives that reach beyond this basic level of financial success.

Returning growers do not describe farming as the defining component of their personal aspirations as do legacy farmers. To the contrary, returning farmers often describe their decision to return to farming as a liberating one. Growers in this category gain enjoyment from a number of aspects of farm life including time spent with family working in the fields, spiritual fulfillment, and the satisfaction of using the land and producing their own food. Growers in this category often suggest that one motivating factor to sell produce to Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables was to be able to maintain their families' farms, a proposition that would, without a market for selling some produce, be too expensive for them to accomplish.

Returning growers hold stronger attachments to Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum’s mission than legacy growers. Members of this classification often tell personal stories about feeling health improvements arise after making changes to their dietary habits to include organic vegetables. Returning growers then extend their discussions of the health benefits of organic vegetables to broader levels, and connect those benefits to what they see as regional or societal problems such as a floundering local economy and regional unemployment, as well as a lack of food choice in regional supermarkets and entrenched food insecurity among many families. Yet, these growers do not discuss these regional and societal issues with the same level of passion as the lifestyle growers, or as the driving motivation for their involvement in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables.

Farmers that are returning to agriculture after long respites from farm life infuse their characterizations of the organization at-large, its staff members and other growers with references to the organization’s sustainable development mission as well as talk of shared trust and values. These growers describe Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables’ staff members as trusting, sincere and committed to organic farming and to the growers that participate in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. This characterization is shaped by the high level of commitment that growers observe in staff members, as evidenced by their willingness to educate and assist participating growers. Returning growers frequently commented on staff members’ willingness to go above and beyond the call of duty in answering questions and responding to requests for assistance. This characterization serves an important function for many returning growers; it gives these growers confidence, an important gift for growers who feel that they lack farming experience and perceive their decision to return to farming as a high-risk endeavor.

These points are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5. Summary of Returning Tobacco Farmers' Membership Frame

	Framing
Relationship to Farm and Farming Identity and Aspirations	Motivated to farm to honor family heritage. Financial aspirations are limited to breaking even.
Relationship to Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's Mission	Hold an attachment to Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's mission and suggest that the organization allows them to achieve their objectives related to honoring family heritage, the environment and community.
Relationship to other growers and Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' staff members	Perceive staff as having multiple roles related to education and confidence building, in addition to technical roles as intermediaries to clients; perceive trusting relationships with staff and meaningful and interdependent relationships among themselves and legacy growers.

Table 5. The three elements of the frame explored in this research are located in the left column. Returning growers' framings of these elements are summarized on the right. The table illustrates that returning growers hold moderate financial aspirations; strong connections to Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' mission; and trusting relationships with staff members.

Returning Farmers' Sustainability Frame

Returning growers view sustainability, primarily, at the individual scale. Their primary objective is to honor their families' heritage in farming, which they aim to accomplish by keeping their families' farms in working order. Returning growers view participating in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables as a key mechanism for meeting that goal. Through their participation, these growers intend to generate enough income to meet their goals without investing their personal savings in their farms. They also view Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables as a source of knowledge and information about farming.

Growers in this group have stronger attachments to sustainability at the organizational level than legacy growers. Returning growers describe their close ties to staff members and shared values and ideals. Additionally, these growers see Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables as one medium through which they can achieve their objectives related to the environment and community. They also see the organization as serving important community needs related to food security.

These growers exhibit high levels of concern for both the economic and cultural elements of sustainability. Economically, their goal is to break even. When considering their goals related to cultural aspects of sustainability, these growers focus their attention on maintaining their families' values related to farming. They do not view Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables as playing a large role in this process, but do suggest that Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables plays other important social roles. For example, these growers suggest that the network of growers that Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables has developed is a critical source of knowledge about farming that allows them to increase the economic success of their farms. These growers also suggest that their farms provide them with ways of staying in touch with other cultural values that they find important, such as their spiritual connection to the landscape or connection to the broader community. Cultural aspects of farming such as these are often as critical to these growers as economic goals.

Returning growers do not place the same level of concern on environmental objectives as they do on economic and cultural objectives. Like legacy growers, returning growers consider their farms to be environmentally sustainable because they have met minimum standards of organic certification. These growers did describe the health benefits they felt they received from eating organic produce, though these benefits were secondary concerns for these growers.

Returning growers view achieving sustainability through farming from a lens of attainability. They view reaching success as a balancing act between investing in the environmental, cultural and economic elements of sustainability. In practice this means modifying their farming practices over time until the right balance is struck.

Figure 6 illustrates returning growers' priorities when considering sustainability as well as the scales at which they focus their perceptions of sustainability.

Figure 6. Returning Growers' Sustainability Map.

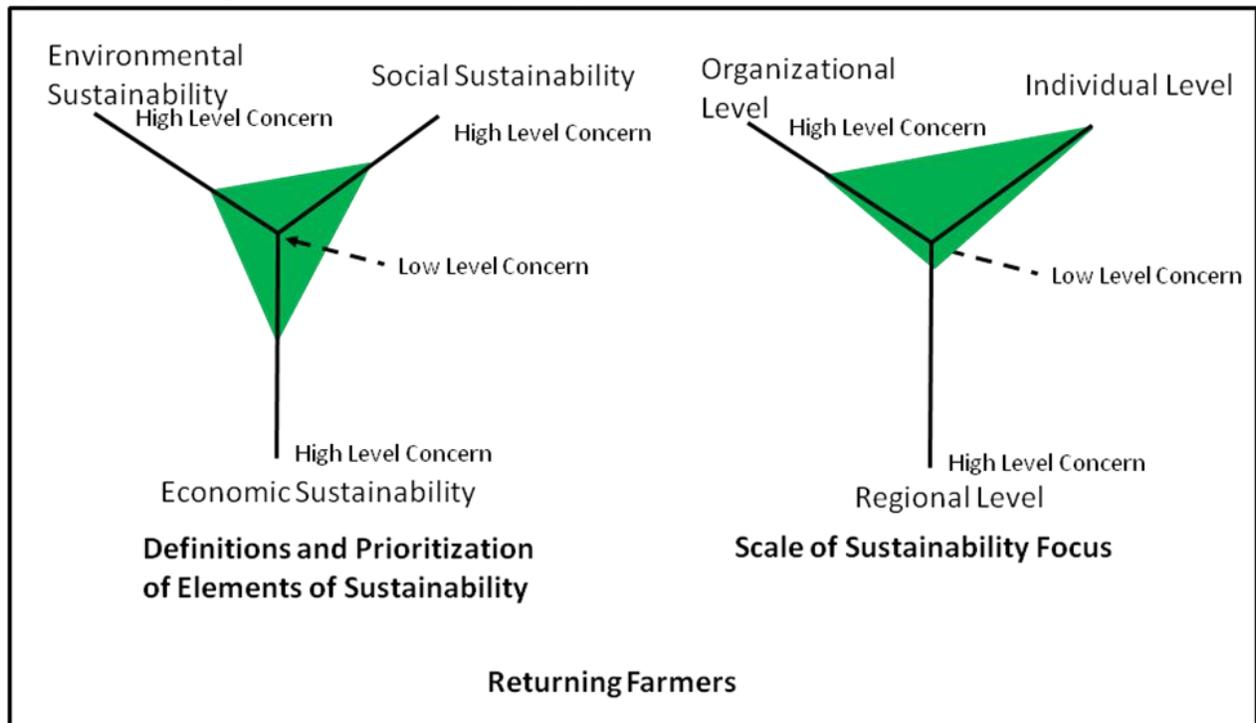


Figure 6. This illustration highlights returning growers' moderate financial, environmental and social concerns. These growers define social sustainability in terms of their abilities to honor their families through farming; environmental sustainability through the use of organic practices as well as health benefits from eating organic produce; and, economic sustainability based on their desire to break even. The primary focus of returning growers is on individual scale sustainability, although they hold secondary concerns at the organizational level.

Returning Farmers' Membership Frame and Approach to Decision-making in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables

Lyle Carmichael, the Kleins and Jacksons, and Art Applebee exemplify a stronger interest in decision-making than legacy tobacco farmers. Yet, while these returning growers show a greater interest in decisions they do not illustrate more active involvement in the ways that decisions are made. In short, it seems that their relationship to Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables takes on more meaning for farmers in this group, and as a result they observe decision-making with more interest, although there is no evidence that members of this grouping are any more active in decision-making than other growers. When it comes to decision-making, these growers share the view with legacy growers that Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables is their broker and conduit to consumers. This group accepts management decisions made within Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables as final, and only questions or challenges them privately, without making inquiries of staff members.

Yet, members in this category justify their decisions to refrain from involvement in decision-making in different ways than those growers more reliant on their farms. Returning growers justify their decision in two ways. First, out of convenience. Growers in this group contend that they do not want to be involved in decision-making because they are busy with other activities and concerns, apart from their farms and partnership with Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. Second, by suggesting that they are too inexperienced to participate in decision-making and that they trust staff members to make decisions on their behalf. These growers suggest that because they have not been involved in farming for many years they are unaware of the level of involvement that they may have in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables and the range of ways that they may be involved and communicate with staff members. Returning growers also suggest that because of their inexperience they do not have a level of knowledge or agricultural wisdom that allows them to make effective decisions. As a result, they would rather decisions be made by those with both business and farming experience. Thus, these growers provide Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' staff members, who they view as trustworthy experts, with a high level of freedom regarding decision-making.

Figure 7 illustrates the ways that returning farmers' membership frames influences their involvement of, and perspectives on, decision-making in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables.

Figure 7. The Influence of Returning Tobacco Farmers' Membership Frame on Organizational Decision-making

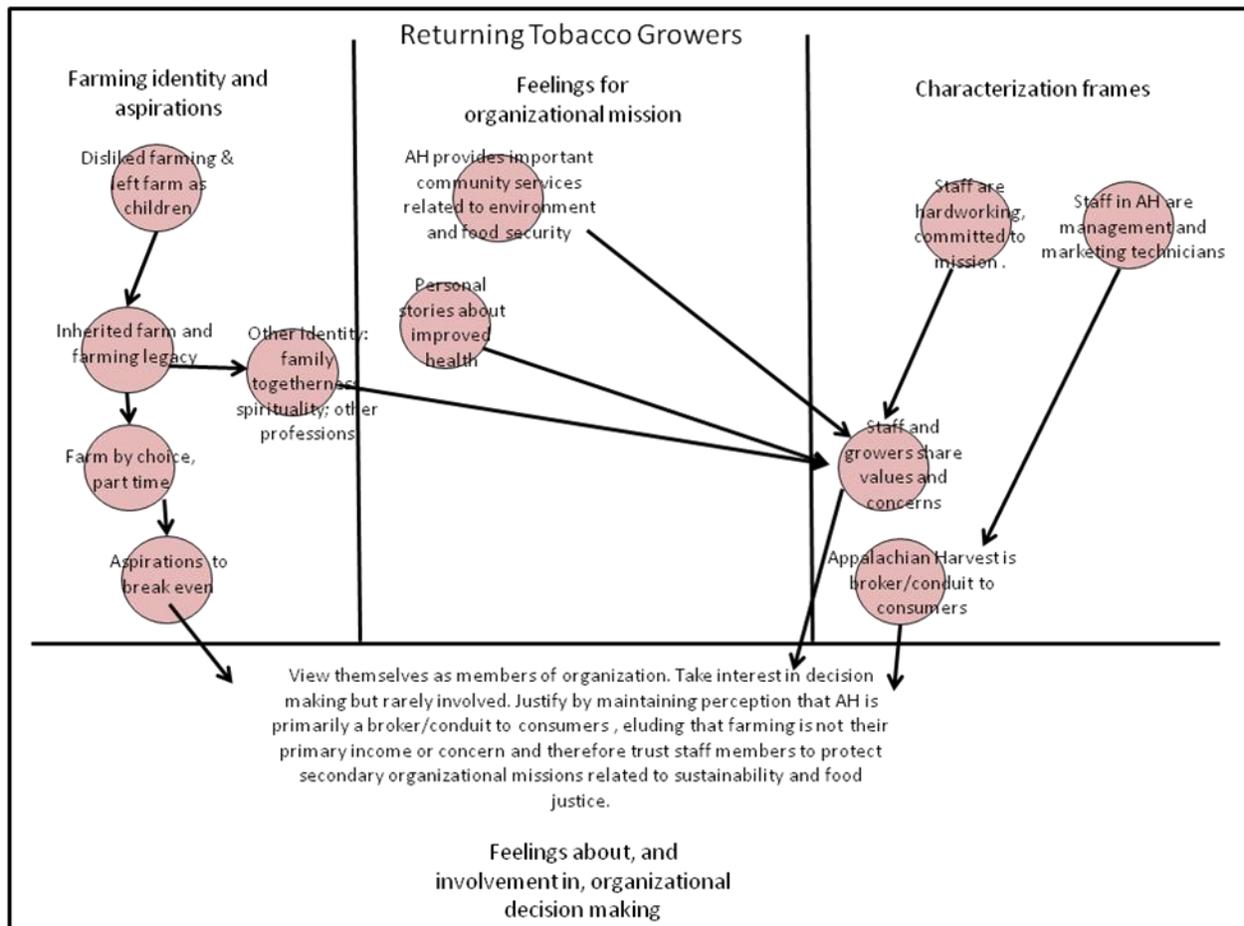


Figure 7. This illustration highlights the ways that the frames held by returning growers influence their approach to, and participation in, decision-making at the organizational level. The graphic shows that returning growers' trust in staff members, which is rooted in their belief that they share many values and ideals with staff, as well as their limited financial concerns leads them to have limited involvement in decision-making.

Lifestyle Growers

Lifestyle growers have little farming experience before joining Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. These individuals join the collective because they enjoy learning about farming and hope someday to farm on larger scales. This section describes how the same three enactments used to describe the membership frames of legacy and returning growers contribute the development of lifestyle growers'

membership frame. I classified five growers (and families) in this group. These are: Craig Hartl, Jeff Hellier, Kristi Warrick, Julie and Mitch Spiegle and Larry Thompson.

Lifestyle Growers' Relationships to their Farms, Farming Identities and Farming Related Aspirations

Lifestyle growers, like returning growers, farm by choice. All growers in this grouping have full-time jobs and incomes outside of farming. Each emphasizes that they do not need nor are concerned with the money that their farm generates. At first glance, it appears that these growers participate as a hobby—as a recreational activity to pass time, to learn and to produce some of their own food. Yet, the passion for farming that lifestyle growers exhibit runs much deeper than what would typically be categorized as a hobby and the farms that these growers cultivate are larger than the backyard gardens that are typically considered as common among hobby gardeners.

Kristi Warrick, a lifestyle grower, exemplified these points when she described what she felt as her “calling” to farm. While lifestyle growers each described their “calling” differently, all farmers in this group described a deep sense of personal urgency and duty to farm. In the following quotation Kristi describes this desire:

I started just playing with the idea, I had no money, I had no clue, had never farmed... I think I was at Natural Food Shop in Johnson City and saw a poster, I think that's where I heard of it. So about 6 years ago, just for the heck of it I went to Donald Gear's house.... ...he had gotten his first tractor and he was playin with it like it was a toy... and I thought, "I know what you're feelin buddy," and often I can't say that type of thing, I thought, "I know what you're feelin."

I think the word that I don't hear used very much anymore but kinsmen, describes it completely. [Then] I was at work, and I work and [a friend] came in and said, "You got to farmin yet? My wife's selling farms and she's got one listed." I went there that evening. The government hadn't paid me for 3 months... I was living on my savings and I signed that piece of paper because there was fresh water on that land, and a creek.

Two elements of Kristi's story stand out. The first is the unknown and unexpected way that she comes into farming. Kristi is unable to explain why she was inclined to take her first steps into farming and to visit Donald Gear's house after seeing a poster, yet it is clear that she is driven by a feeling from within, and not by previous experiences.

The second critical element of Kristi's story is the "feeling" that she believes she shared with Donald Gear that day she visited his farm. Kristi feels on two levels. First, she feels Donald's love and excitement for farming and farming equipment. At this level, Kristi's feeling is one of attachment to the idea of farming and farming practices. That is, she wants to perform these practices as Donald does. She describes these feelings in the following statement:

I just identified. I didn't know I had the roots to grow food for other people. I didn't know that about myself. I had no idea. [I'm not from] a farm family at all. I descended from the mountains. I came out of there, but there's just some kind of an unconscious connection with the motive.

Secondly, Kristi demonstrates a feeling of attachment to Donald himself. She perceives they are kinsmen. Kristi does not delve into the meaning of her description, but we get the impression that she means that she and Donald share profound attachments for farming and what it means to farm, and that through their attachments to this activity and lifestyle they are also deeply connected to one another.

Kristi describes this feeling as one that she does not feel often. She suggests that she rarely feels deep and personal connections that include shared values and ideals with other people. Yet, she feels these feelings for Donald and attributes them to the shared connection to farming that she believes they hold. At this level of feeling, participating in farming offers Kristi a social opportunity that she craves. That is, the opportunity to participate in a network of growers with whom she believes she shares values and ideals.

It is not evident, however, if Donald shares Kristi's feelings for farming, or if they have ever discussed their attachments to farming and their farms and come to a conclusion that they do in fact share many of the same feelings. The question remains whether they are kinsmen in the way that Kristi believes. The role of imagination in the development of lifestyle growers' farms and relationships to other stakeholders in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables is a cornerstone of the membership frame held by members of this group.

The passion for farming and admiration for farmers that lifestyle growers feel is at the core of who they are, just like dedication to the farming way of life is at the core of the identity of legacy tobacco farmers. This is a critical point for understanding lifestyle growers. They *imagine* what they think farming must be like. Until participating in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables they did not have actual experiences in farming. Therefore, their farms are the tangible creations of their imaginations. Their farms and farming practices reflect what they think farming and farms look like, but they are interpretations of these concepts.

Another unique aspect of lifestyle growers' experience is the transitional element of their identities related to farming. These growers are new to farming and explain how, over time, they experience shifts in the ways that they view themselves in relation to their farms. For example, many lifestyle

growers described how they saw themselves as hobby gardeners before joining the collective but, over time, began to see themselves as true farmers (in the sense that legacy growers use the term). Lifestyle growers that did not describe undergoing this transition described their hope to realize this identity shift in the future.

There are four steps in the identity transition that lifestyle growers in this study experienced. The first occurs when these growers undergo a process of personal reflection and realization, during which they come to the conclusion that farming is an activity to which they are passionately drawn. It is this step that Kristi Warrick describes when she feels her “calling” to farming and that she and Donald Gear are kinsmen. The second step is achieved when growers take tangible steps to begin their farms, such as buying property or farming equipment and planting seeds. Lifestyle growers often associate this step with feelings of risk, because this step involves an outlaying of nonrefundable resources that symbolize commitment. Kristi Warrick describes this phase of her identity transition when she explains that she had not been paid by her full-time employer for several weeks, yet still made the decision to buy a farm. There is fear in her voice when she says, *“I was living on my savings and I signed that piece of paper because there was fresh water on that land, and a creek.”*

The third step of lifestyle growers’ identity transition comes when these growers begin the process of cultivating crops or producing eggs, and come to the realizations that, first, farming is difficult work and that by performing the tasks associated with farming they are performing tasks that “real farmers” (in the sense that Tom Carpenter uses the term) perform and; second, that their farms may be unsuccessful and they may not see any return on their investments. This step offers lifestyle growers the opportunity to begin to develop an understanding of the character traits and values related to farming that form the foundation of legacy growers’ identities. Mitch Spiegle illustrates this phase in the following quotation:

I was out here on the porch one day last early summer, right after we’d gotten the peppers in and the well had silt in it so we were having trouble with the irrigation, and we were hand watering 2200 pepper plants and we were exhausted, and one morning we got up and we were sitting out here having coffee and I stood there and looked out and said, now, if we lose all of those pepper plants, we’ll lose about I think \$660. So we’ll probably be OK. But can you imagine the sense of somebody standing on their front porch and looking out over a field in a drought saying, you know, if we lose this, we lose everything. That’s an important lesson for these guys to learn, and farming seems to do it. I mean, we realized at some point we actually, I think it was this year when we actually ordered seeds, and when you push the button on the menu when you call the seed company and we pushed the number that corresponds with commercial grower instead of home garden, that was like a watershed moment to suddenly realize hey, we’re actually farmers. Part-time at best, but farmers.

The final phase of lifestyle growers’ identity transition begins when these growers come to the personal realization that their identity is shifting, and they begin to view themselves differently than before they

began participating in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. Mitch Spiegle exemplifies this phase when he describes the significance of ordering vegetable seeds through a commercial dealer. An important element of the final phase that must be recognized is that this phase likely does not have a conclusion. The new and transforming identities of lifestyle growers represent their interpretations of what it means to be a farmer and their identities are based in their imaginations, not farming experience. These growers strive to see themselves as legacy growers, but it is a Sisyphean task. In other words, as Mitch indicates, these growers understand that while they have some elements in common with legacy growers, they can never truly achieve such status because they lack certain foundational elements of legacy growers' identities. Lifestyle growers were not raised on farms, for example, and as a result did not develop the foundations of legacy growers' identities as children by performing farm work with family members. As a result, even though lifestyle growers strive to achieve an identity of equality with legacy growers, they will likely never see themselves in this way.

The role of the imagination in identity formation and transition stands out in Mitch and Kristi's accounts. The imaginary is especially apparent when Kristi imagines that she and Donald Gear are kinsmen and when Mitch contemplates the risk associated with his family's farm. "We'll probably be OK," he says when considering the potential \$650 dollar loss his family may take if their crop is unsuccessful. While Mitch knows the loss won't set his family back a great deal, he believes that recognizing the risk puts himself in the shoes of a legacy tobacco farmer, who stands to lose much more. At the instant that Mitch imagines losing \$650 he also imagines that living with this risk is part of what it means to live like a farmer. The second way that the role of the imaginary emerges in Mitch's statement is when he indicates that from his perspective his family has gone through the steps—the actions—that it takes to be a farmer. They have plowed their fields, planted seeds, worked hard and contemplated the risk of losing their crop. As a result, Mitch indicates that he believes, in other words imagines, that they are farmers.

Mitch Spiegle and Kristi Warrick do not fully explain what they believe it means to be farmers. They give the impression, however, that not only does it mean that they perform the practices of farming, such as plowing fields and planting seeds, but that it also means they see their farms in the ways that legacy farmers see theirs: as sources of income, as risks, and as places that take lots of hard work and shape their identities. From here, it is clear that that lifestyle growers view their farms very differently than legacy tobacco growers and returning farmers. Legacy growers view their farms as their only option for making an income and as their source of livelihood, and thus hold little symbolic attachments to their farms. Returning farmers place great symbolic significance on their farms and see their farms as the continuation of their parents' and grandparents' legacies. Meanwhile, lifestyle growers view their farms as avenues for living out a dream, and for achieving or obtaining the sets of values and ideals that they imagine accompany farming. While they perform farm related tasks in a very real sense, these tasks allow them to imagine themselves in very different ways than they did prior to farming.

When it comes to financial aspirations, lifestyle growers consistently stated that they are unconcerned with the financial success of their farms. Farming is not an all-or-nothing proposition for lifestyle growers. This means that, given their financial resources and the fact that they have full-time jobs and incomes unrelated to farming, they have the ability to dip their toes in the water, so to speak, and try

farming without committing all of their resources and risking their entire livelihoods. This is exactly the opposite of the feeling that legacy tobacco farmers describe. Farming, for legacy tobacco growers, is exactly what it is not for lifestyle growers: an all-or-nothing proposition. Larry Johnson, a lifestyle grower, makes this point clear:

You know I'm small, very small as you can see. I would probably have a different attitude if I counted on it for something, if I needed the food to survive or if I needed the money, I'm sure I would have an entirely different attitude, but since I'm doing it just to learn and to become better and because it's fun, it's a lot more, less stressful.

Larry understands that his needs and objectives for his farm are entirely different than those of legacy growers. "If I counted on it..." he emphasizes, meaning that instead of playing a major role in his livelihood his farm actually plays a very minor role in helping him make ends meet. As a result, he feels none of the desperation that legacy growers feel towards their farms. His operation, in other words, is not make or break, as it is for Tom Carpenter.

What is critical about the fact that these growers emphasize their lack of concern for financial success is that they understand that money is one of the primary motivators of legacy tobacco growers, and it is this group that lifestyle growers suggest they admire and with whom they seek to identify. While they suggest that they understand the pressures that legacy growers feel, and they hope to one day live the way of life that legacy growers live, the risks that lifestyle growers face are minor. Additionally, while understanding the risks associated with farming is one element that lifestyle growers claim allows them to see their farms as more experienced legacy farmers do, the risks lifestyle farmers actually perceive are relatively minor. When Mitch Spiegle suggests that he understands what it must feel like to know that if your farm fails you will have no livelihood, Mitch admits that the money he may lose will not be a hardship. In other words, it's not a risk. While Mitch Spiegle suggests that his family will be able to make ends meet if their farm is unsuccessful, Tom Carpenter suggests an entirely different level of meaning and risk when he says that he started farming again because he "had to do something to try to survive."

Lifestyle Growers Relationships to Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' Sustainability-Oriented Mission

Lifestyle growers also think about Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's mission differently than legacy growers and returning growers. Whereas legacy growers allude to having little attachment to Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's mission, and returning growers suggest that their attachment to the mission is secondary to other reasons for participating, such as honoring and carrying out the legacy of

their parents, lifestyle growers suggest that the mission is one of their primary reasons for participating. In addition to feeling passionate about farming and shifting their identities, these growers discuss a personal desire to help others that they see as less fortunate than themselves, return their land to productivity and use their farm as living laboratories for teaching their children about farming and plant biology, among other topics. These elements are observable in the discussion points offered by Kristi Warrick and Larry Johnson below:

[My farm is] a way to give back. If I can feed people then I can have a connection to the human race in a way that is sensible to me.... I saw this farm as a way maybe to set an example, not only for other farmers... but I thought there might be a way to teach people how to cook simply. I'm terrified of the economic situation and the fact that people have become microwave junkies and children show that they are obese and malnourished at the same time.

A common element of lifestyle growers' identities is present in Kristi's discussion. That is, that from the very moments they start thinking about beginning to farm they consider the personal and social purposes of their decisions. "I saw this farm as a way to set an example..." Kristi observes. As she explains this element of her farm she reflects on how she considered her decision to farm in the earliest days of her farming practice. Kristi went into the operation dreaming, imagining and planning to serve others and set an example. These elements are as much a part of her farming identity as her passion for performing the practices associated with farming that were presented in the previous section.

Larry Johnson echoed many of the same sentiments as Kristi. Larry has only grown for the collective for one season, but reflected on what about his operation made him proud in that time:

Well I liked that instead of just mowing [my yard] it actually made food and the food went back into the community. [Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables] gave some to the food bank, which I like. So you know you're actually making things that go back into the community. And I really like that, and the land is more than just grass that you mow.

Two elements of Larry's story stand out. The first is his desire to participate in local food supply chains by providing food to those who live in the immediate area. The second is that he discusses a land ethic that admires productive use of the land, rather than land that sits dormant. Larry's farm is truly in his yard, integrated with plots of grass and ornamental flower plantings, as are the crops of almost all lifestyle growers.

The social purposes that Kristi and Larry describe align directly with Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's mission. What is most important about the way that these growers perceive the relationship among their farms and this organizational mission is that they acknowledge their awareness of this relationship

at an early point in the development of their farms—or even before they begin farming—and that the mission provides one of their primary reasons for establishing their farms.

The Spiegles, who have several adopted children, also showed support for the community-oriented aspects of Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum’s mission and their farm, as well as the land ethic described by Larry Johnson. The Spiegles also, however, described an additional mission for their farm. Mr. and Mrs. Spiegel described their farm as one way to teach their children about plant biology, the science of cultivation and business of farm management, as well as the importance of service to others and sustainability.

For the Spiegles, Kristi Warrick and Larry Johnson, the integration of their farms into the landscaping of their homes is more than just ornamental. It is also symbolic of the ways that these growers have integrated their farms into their homes and family lives. These growers discuss their love of accomplishing farm work with their children and spouses. They describe this process as creating togetherness and unity, as strengthening family bonds and teaching family members about one another as well as about agriculture. It seems that, for these growers, not only does performing the actions of farming shape or contribute to their farming identities, but that these actions also shape and contribute to their identities as family members and collective identity as a family. For these growers, farming becomes part of what it means to be a family.

Lifestyle Growers’ Relationship to other Stakeholders

Lifestyle growers evidence a great deal of loyalty and admiration for Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables’ staff members. They often characterize staff members as noble, selfless and trustworthy. When making these characterizations, they recount the mission-driven aspects of staff members’ roles, the ways that staff members relate to growers and the difficult conditions in which staff members work. Lifestyle growers suggest that without staff members, and if these individuals did not hold the traits of selflessness and attachment to mission that they possess, Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables would likely fail. Mitch Spiegle, in the following portion of our interview, exemplifies the feelings lifestyle growers hold towards staff members:

When we went to the first meeting with Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, the first thing I noticed is there was a good cross-section of people. There were the folks from Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables that were leading it, but there were some, there were a few folks like us that were kind of neophytes, and then there were guys that had been farming a couple of generations that were just now within the last couple years moving toward organic. Some of them I think had been tobacco farmers in the past, and Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables was giving them a way to still make a profit, to continue to keep the family farm. And it was the first place that I had been around organic

growers that treated the growers that had been doing this for generations, though not organically, with the respect and realizing they knew what they were doing. There were just some technique changes that would help them be profitable and be better for their farms, and that respect meant a lot to me, because my grandfather was a sharecropper, and I don't remember a whole lot about it, but I just, I was glad to see the respect for the men that had been doing it, the families that had been doing it for a while already.

Mitch's story evidences several critical pieces of his relationship to staff members. The first occurs at a more superficial level. At this level Mitch espouses his respect and admiration for staff members and the work that they perform. The second is that he acknowledges Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables as a mission-driven organization in addition to acting as a profit-oriented firm. Mitch exemplifies this point when he says, "*Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables was giving them a way to still make a profit, to continue to keep the family farm.*" This statement highlights a fundamental difference in the way that lifestyle growers view staff members and the organization from the views of other growers. The third critical piece of Mitch's statement is embedded throughout his account, and occurs at an even deeper level. The message underlying Mitch's story is that he holds high expectations regarding the relationships among staff and growers within the organization. He does not simply view the organization as an intermediary between farmers and the market, and staff as holding technical and instrumental roles. He views the relationships among staff and growers as a critical element of his decision to participate in the collective. His remarks give the impression that if he did not observe the levels of respect and admiration that he witnesses he would likely disassociate from the group.

Craig Hartl expressed similar feelings, though the sources of respect, trust and admiration that he described were different than those described by Mitch Spiegle. Craig's perspective shines through in the following conversation:

Craig Hartl: Me and Frances Dolan probably go back, I don't know, 15, 20 years doing glass. He had a trucking company and hauled gravel and coal and different things, and been in the monument business and tax service and different things, and I've known him for years, and one of the things was if, I knowed if he told me something he wouldn't feed me a line, he'd be honest about it. That's one thing I took into consideration. Then I got to know some of the others down there like Gary and couple of the women, they, you ask them something, they would do their best to help you.

CG: So, are you ever involved in any decisions that Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables makes about how to price things or where to send them?

Craig Hartl: No, I've not never been in no meetings like that. They have the experience. I trust Frances. I know Frances. And I trust them. I mean, it's in their best interest. I mean, I know the people ain't down there making a killing. After what all they've been through with the fire and stuff, and then starting a new warehouse and expanding and doing

everything they've done, it's in their best interest to do what's best for everybody. And if they've got good business sense, they're going to do that.

CG: Yeah. People know them. So when they say, like when you heard on the radio, and it was Frances saying it, you knew it would be OK.

Craig Hartl: Yeah. I knowed he wouldn't give me some line of crap.

As a result of these perceptions and the ways that their relationships with staff members meet their expectations, lifestyle growers allude to profound feelings of loyalty to the organization. These feelings play important roles in their approach to, and involvement in, decision-making in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables.

Lifestyle growers perceive their relationships with staff members as a two-way street. These growers perceive staff members as sources of a great deal of knowledge and hope. Lifestyle growers attest that they receive knowledge from staff members when they attend meetings and workshops, and that with this knowledge they develop additional confidence in their farming abilities and therefore gain hope that they may achieve their farming goals as well as shift their identities as described previously. Lifestyle growers also suggest that they provide resources to staff members, both as produce that can then be sold to grocery stores and other clients, and in terms of their support for the broader social goals of the organization. In other words, lifestyle growers suggest that they share staff members' commitment to Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's mission, and that by participating in the mission at the grassroots level—by growing vegetables—they provide staff members with the key resource that lets them fulfill their desire to serve the community. In short, lifestyle growers imply that without their support Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables would not exist and staff members would be left with no alternative for fulfilling their passion for sustainable agriculture and community development.

Lifestyle growers also hold a strong degree of admiration for legacy tobacco farmers. Their admiration for legacy growers plays a large role in their transitional identity and in their perception of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables as a "network" of growers. Kristi Warrick touched on her admiration of legacy growers:

I admire [the more experienced farmers]. We have meetings and Sherri has her computer out and she says 'OK, we need peppers' and somebody, I know his face but really haven't talked to him too much, he's sitting over there in his overalls and he says 'Alright I'll do an acre of that.' I'm just like, 'My hero.' I would never say that to him. Big scale organic farming, I think maybe we all need to have a social, maybe we should have a pot luck at everybody's farm so we could mix and mingle better. In other words everybody would bring to the farmer and entertain them for a day and we could see their place and we could pamper them and give them food and treats.

[I admire] their work and the dedication, cuz peppers are hard. That scale of production, it's absolutely selfless...

There are three key elements to Kristi's characterization. The first is her appreciation for the hard work that legacy farmers accomplish. Included in her appreciation is an awareness and acknowledgement that there is an enormous difference in the scales of farming, and the work associated with farming, between her own operation and those of legacy growers. The second element is her assumption that legacy growers perform their work for selfless reasons. That is, that legacy growers view their work as a contribution to community or society. Finally, Kristi characterizes legacy growers as unrecognized and unrewarded for their contributions to community and deserving of community recognition. She makes this characterization when she suggests that she would like to "pamper them and give them food and treats."

The next significant element of lifestyle growers' relationship to legacy growers is that they describe their hope to shape their own identities, and farms, into the image of the characterizations they make of legacy growers.

Another noteworthy element of lifestyle growers' relationship to other growers is their reliance on legacy growers for knowledge support regarding farming practices. These growers described legacy growers as possessing a wealth of knowledge that they tap into when they have concerns about their farms. Lifestyle growers discussed calling legacy growers on the phone or seeing them at growers' meetings and asking questions about controlling weeds or bugs, or preparing fields for planting and other elements of cultivation. As a result, lifestyle growers see themselves involved in a network of growers.

From the perspective of lifestyle growers, the relationships between members of their grouping and legacy growers is a two-way street. As lifestyle growers receive farming support from legacy growers, they provide the collective with additional vegetables that allow the organization to come closer to their volume commitments to clients. Lifestyle growers explain that without the support of all growers, including those with very small farms and very low productivity, the collective would not be able to meet client demands and would fail to sell any vegetables at all. Every vegetable counts, these growers suggest, and move the collective one vegetable closer to filling a truck and meeting their volume targets. Therefore, lifestyle growers suggest that every grower is necessary and that lifestyle growers supply an important portion of the collective's volume. Legacy growers alone, lifestyle farmers imply, cannot make Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables successful. Mitch Spiegle described this element of his relationship with other growers as well as staff:

It's the same thing like we were talking about, how impressed I was that the organic folks, the ones that were, that are really leading this organic thing in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, would not look at the growers that had been growing for years with any, I mean, literally not just with no contempt, but with respect and deference to their experience. The other thing that always has struck me, and it wasn't until we were

starting to do some stuff late in the year, when I pulled up with my Jeep and my little trailer full of green peppers and the guy that pulled in beside me to unload had a great big farm truck and had all kinds of stuff on it that just dwarfed what I was bringing in, and he got out of the truck and shook my hand and looked at my peppers and complimented them, and went on, it hit me that here are a bunch of guys that had been growing for years, that had acres and acres and acres. They had barns the size of my field. And I was not treated with, I don't want to say contempt, but it wasn't like they looked at me like some sort of upstart yuppie wannabe farmer kind of thing. There was that, and I think that kind of attitude is an outgrowth of what Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, the leadership, has brought to it, in that they treat everybody as if they are a commercial farmer, an organic commercial farmer. Right out of the box, from the beginning, because they know, they knew we didn't know what we were doing, but they knew that we were asking the questions and that we were willing to do what they were saying needed to be done to maintain the integrity and all. So there, I hate to use the word esteem, but they did do that. They let us know that what we were doing was important and made it feel important even though it was just a quarter-acre, and that was reflected in the big multi-acre, hundred-acre farms that people have out there, that, wouldn't you say?

Lifestyle growers did not discuss their relationship to returning growers. I believe that their perceptions of legacy growers include returning growers. Therefore, lifestyle growers seem to see two types of growers in the collective: experienced growers who grew up farming (this grouping includes legacy and returning growers); and, inexperienced growers like themselves.

Summary of Lifestyle Growers' Membership Frame

Unlike legacy growers and returning growers, lifestyle growers did not grow up on farms and had very little farming experience prior to joining Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. Instead, these growers discuss an almost unexplainable motivation to farm; they simply feel "called" to farm. These growers also discuss their desire to shift their personal identities to emulate those of legacy growers, for whom they feel admiration and respect. As a result of lifestyle growers' focus on identity transition, the imagination plays a large role in the ways that these growers perceive and relate to their farms as well as how they perceive themselves, that is their identity, and their identity as it relates to others.

The objectives brought to farming by members of this group are varied. Mitch and Julie Spiegle home-school their children, and use their farm as a living laboratory to teach their children about horticulture, the cycle of life, and character skills such as patience, work ethic and responsibility. They also enjoy the

feelings of family togetherness that they gain by working as a family in their field. Craig Hartl, on the other hand, enjoys the creative and adaptive form of management that he believes is required to operate a small scale organic farm. Craig is a tinkerer, who enjoys building and creating irrigation systems and experimenting with new horticulture methods, for example. Jeff Hellier, Larry Johnson and Kristi Warrick are driven by their passion for food justice. Their aim is to supply healthy, delicious, locally grown and inexpensive food to local consumers as well as to help local farmers maintain ownership of their farms, provide jobs to local residents and establish local markets for local foods, rather than further entrenching local residents' reliance on chain grocery stores that these growers see as reinforcing and incentivizing residents' poor dietary habits.

Though their farms tend to be smaller, members of this group often have high aspirations for their farms. For example, Kristi Warrick's farm is currently less than one acre. She considers herself an "intern" or "apprentice" to Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, and her aspiration is to learn enough so that she can one day operate the farm at a larger scale. Mitch and Julie Spiegle share similar goals for their farm. Jeff Hellier, who began growing as many in this group did—motivated by lifestyle choices rather than money—has grown his farm to become one of the larger in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. He is moving from left to right on the spectrum of economic concern (Figure 3), but has not lost hold on the original values, objectives and aspirations with which he joined Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. Lifestyle growers suggest that they are relatively unconcerned with the financial success of their farms. This element of their farming is in tension with the ways that they imagine their farming operation and identities in the future, after their identity transition occurs.

Growers in the lifestyle grouping discuss a variety of additional purposes for farming in addition to their calling. Many of these are connected closely to the overarching sustainability-oriented mission of Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum. Lifestyle growers, for example, discuss a desire to contribute food to the local community, especially to community members who they perceive do not have access to inexpensive and healthy food, as well as a desire to model new ways of farming and eating. For this group of growers, Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's mission supplies a key motivation to participate in farming in general and the organization specifically.

Lifestyle growers characterize Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables staff members as trustworthy, sincere, committed and noble. These growers describe staff members as frequently exceeding their expectations in their willingness to answer questions, assist them with farm chores and otherwise facilitate inexperienced and small acreage growers' development and involvement in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. A consistent element of these growers' descriptions of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables staff members is their ability to welcome growers of all experience levels, sizes and objectives as equals and peers among farmers that have been growing much longer. For lifestyle growers this is extremely important, as many share stories about their fear of being ridiculed by more experienced farmers when working with an organization that they perceive as designed to serve longtime, large and legacy growers. When these growers describe Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables at-large, their characterizations tend to be extremely positive and focus on the broad sustainability and food justice that they perceive as central to the organization's purpose.

Growers in this grouping also characterize legacy tobacco farmers as noble. These growers paint idyllic pictures of legacy growers, and describe their own aspirations to emulate certain aspects of the way of life legacy growers lead. The image these growers hold of other farmers often includes elements of self-sufficiency, ecological sustainability and salt-of-the-Earth values such as hard-work, family, patience and honesty.

Understanding the characterizations of traditional farmers that growers in this category make is vital to understanding their identity. Many growers in this category hold aspirations of growing their farms to the point where they can rely on their farm incomes for their livelihood as well as growing into the identity with which they characterize financially dependent growers. For these growers, being a farmer is about self-sufficiency, living close to the land, being involved in local neighborhood and community networks and salt-of-the-earth values. Growers in this grouping discuss their intense identification with these elements of the farming identity, which many claim to have felt an attachment to even before becoming involved in organic farming. In other words, being a farmer has been something of a dream for growers in this category.

Lifestyle growers perceive themselves as embedded in a network of growers and staff members, in which each participates in two way relationships with each other stakeholder group. These relationships are founded upon mutual trust and respect, as well as the need to move food from farm to market. A key difference in the way that lifestyle growers view relationships from the perspectives of legacy growers is the emphasis that lifestyle growers place on strong and respectful relationships. In other words, lifestyle growers look for and expect staff members and other growers to treat legacy growers with admiration and respect. For these growers, this is one of the primary purposes of the organization.

As a result, the identities of these growers are in transition from that which they held prior to beginning their farm and working with Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, to a new identity based on the realities of farming, as they are currently experiencing them. These growers often tell stories about events that forced them to modify their idyllic characterizations of farmers and subsequently to modify the identity into which they hoped to grow. These stories, for example, are about feeling the stress of paying farming costs upfront, knowing that you won't make money until several months later when produce is sold after harvest; the daunting feeling of seeing your entire front yard tilled for planting, knowing that the next day you've got to plant thousands of seeds and starter plants; and realizing that if you don't pick zucchinis today, even after working eight hours at another job, the crop will be lost. Stress, fear and exhaustion are generally not elements that these growers associated with farming before operating their own farms, but they are feelings that, over time, they have come to adopt as common elements of their identity and those of more experienced farmers.

Table 6 summarizes the membership frame of lifestyle growers.

Table 6. Summary of Lifestyle Farmers' Membership Frame.

	Framing
Relationship to Farm and Farming Identity and financial aspirations	Identities in transition and based on characterizations of legacy farmers. Very little concern about financial success and high levels of concern for environmental conservation.
Relationship to Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's Mission	Strong attachment to social and environmental aspects of mission.
Relationship to other growers and Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' staff members	Perceive a network of growers based on information exchange and mutual respect as well as need to meet crop production goals. Relationship to staff based on trust and shared values. Deep admiration and respect for legacy growers.

Table 6. This table outlines the key elements of lifestyle growers' membership frame. These are: that the identities of lifestyle growers are in transition; that these growers hold strong attachments to the social and environmental aspects of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' Mission; and that lifestyle growers hold trusting relationships with staff members and a deep admiration for legacy growers.

Lifestyle Growers' Sustainability Frame

Lifestyle growers view sustainability at the individual, organizational and regional scales, though their emphasis on sustainability at the individual scale outweighs organizational and regional perspectives. The primary concerns of these growers are environmental and cultural. Lifestyle growers enjoy experimenting with farming methods that surpass the organic standards of the US Department of Agriculture. Many described experimenting with less invasive methods of controlling weed and bug infestations as well as new methods of irrigation and water conservation. These growers tend to view their farms as playgrounds and laboratories in which they get to play with new tools and equipment, get dirty, solve problems and work with family members. Additionally, for lifestyle growers these activities tend to be as much about building relationships with family members and other growers as they are about growing vegetables. These growers expressed a high level of concern and knowledge about the environmental benefits of organic farming as well as about the continued ecological importance of maintaining a working landscape of farms in the region for the maintenance of wildlife habitat and

water quality, among other things. Additionally, these growers expressed a high level of concern for the cultural and social elements of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. These growers expressed a strong admiration for farmers in general—especially legacy growers—and a desire to develop a personal understanding of the cultural values and ideals that legacy growers identified as critical to farming. Indeed, one of the stronger motivations lifestyle growers feel for farming is reflected in their desire to transform their identities to exemplify those of legacy growers. Lifestyle growers expressed little concern for the economic elements of farming. They are not interested in generating a profit from their farms and in many cases seemed unconcerned about whether they received a return on the financial investments they already made.

Lifestyle growers do not view the three elements of sustainability in conflict with one another. These growers see sustainability through an aspirational lens. Rather than seeing the organic standards as minimum benchmarks of environmental sustainability they see environmental sustainability as an unattainable objective to strive for in an ongoing fashion. Through their experimentation with new farming practices they continually strive to make their farms “more sustainable.” Additionally, they do not see minimum benchmarks that relate to cultural sustainability. Their cultural interests lie in maintaining the strength and density of the Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables’ network of growers, learning new farming practices and identity transformation. They hold the perception that the network, through network activities such as workshops and trainings, can always be made stronger. Finally, these growers place a great deal of importance on the transformation of their identities. Lifestyle growers intend to adopt a new identity related to farming and that includes many of the cultural values and ideals held by legacy growers. Lifestyle growers view their transformation as ongoing process in which one becomes more deeply embedded over time, but without an endpoint.

Figure 8 illustrates the ways that lifestyle growers prioritize the three elements of sustainability as well as the scales at which these growers focus their attention regarding sustainability.

Figure 8. Lifestyle Growers' Sustainability Map.

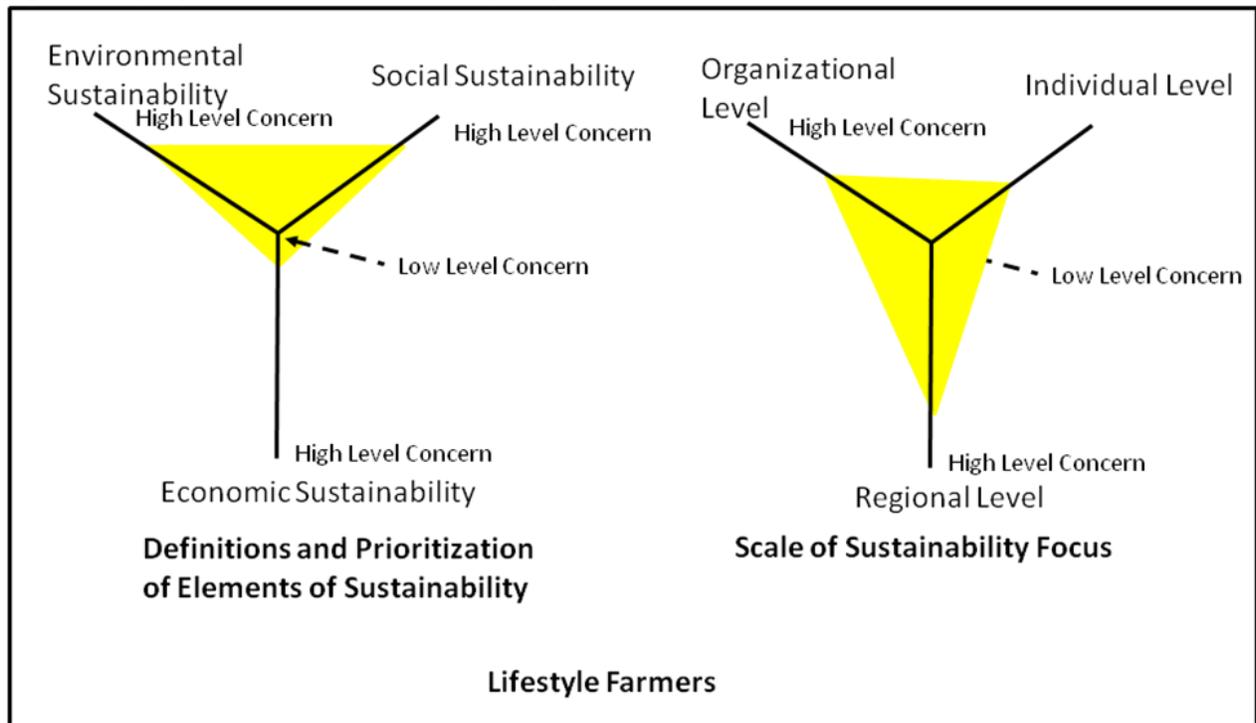


Figure 8. This illustration shows that lifestyle farmers espouse strong feelings about the benefits of the environmental aspects of their farming as well as to the social elements of Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum’s mission. These growers evidence little interest in the economic success of their farms. Lifestyle growers view sustainability at the regional scale and related to food security and community development. At the individual level these growers seek personal satisfaction and fulfillment from their farms, while seeking to maintain and integrate into the regional farming community.

Lifestyle Growers’ Membership Frame and Approach to Decision-making in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables

Members of the lifestyle farmers’ group show a heightened interest in decision-making in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, but they are no more involved than other growers. Growers in this final grouping excuse their lack of involvement by describing their trust and loyalty to Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables’ staff people, who they see as mission-driven. Members of this group describe staff people as honest, hard working, self-sacrificing and committed, and as a result, they believe that Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables’ staff people have their best interests in mind and will make management decisions that suit these interests and further the mission upon which Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum and Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables were founded.

Figure 9. The Influence of Lifestyle Tobacco Farmers' Membership Frame on Organizational Decision-making

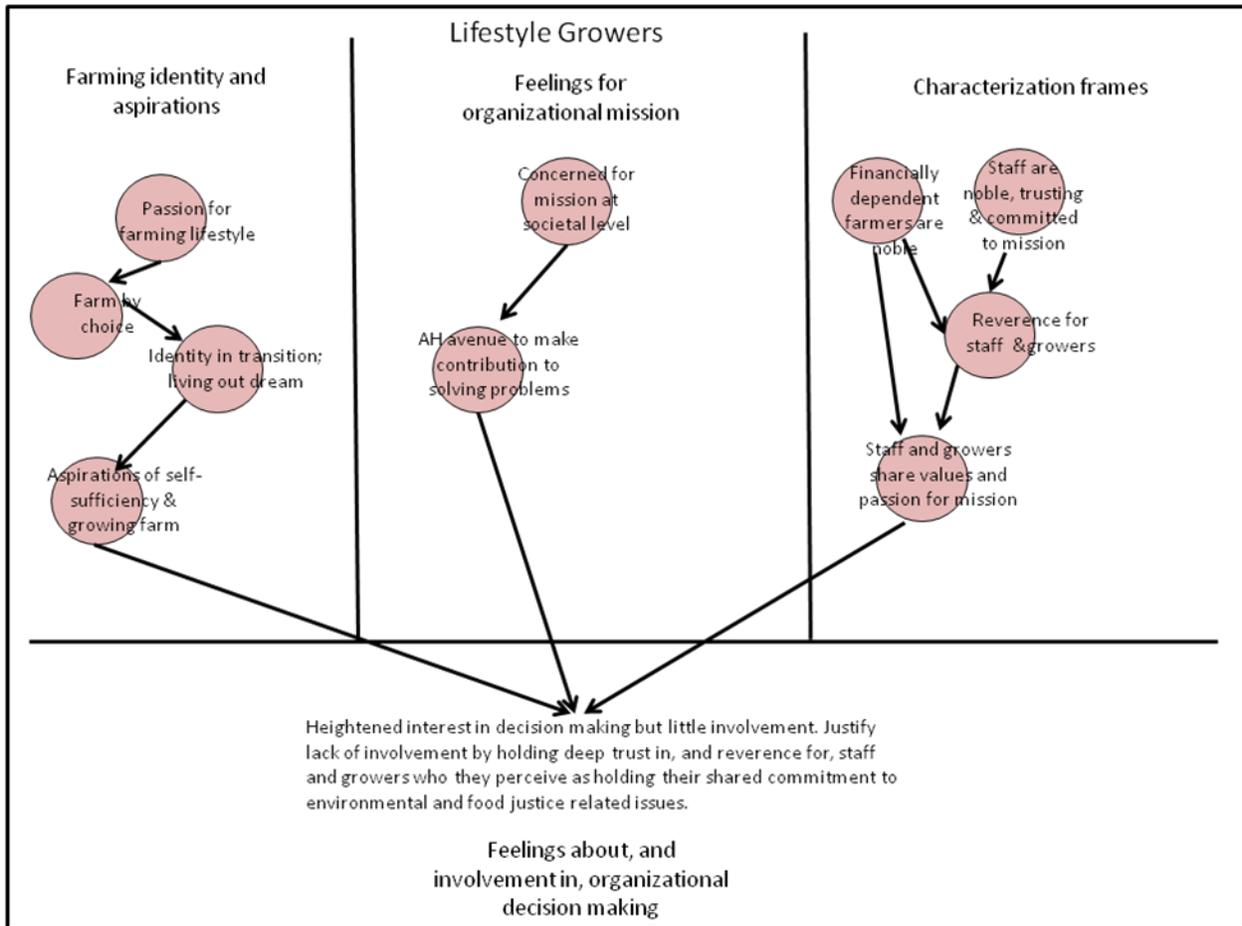


Figure 9. This graphic illustrates the key elements of lifestyle growers' membership frame and how those elements influence their approach to and participation in decision-making in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. The graphic shows that all three elements of lifestyle growers' membership frame influence their participation in decision-making.

Chapter 4: Staff Members' Frames

I don't think that Susan Goren, Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' marketing director, intended for me to interpret her story about working as a special education teacher in the local school district as a metaphor for her work as a staff member with Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, but that is what I did:

When I started working [for Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables] I was actually a schoolteacher. I started being a grower as a schoolteacher and a devout child advocate. I've been a child advocate for special needs kids for 12 years. ...And I went through several hard years. ...I accommodated the children, and then the county didn't keep their end of the deal, so to speak, and they left me. I was going to be liable. [The county said], 'You want to break the law? Do it with your teaching license and do it with your value system, because you're not doing it in our classroom.' ...I was 10 days into the school year when I resigned. I was having some struggles with complying with some special needs [individualized education plans (IEP)], and for my last two years of teaching I had an attorney that I reported to every week on the violations.... My middle daughter is hearing-impaired. I've fought about her IEP forever. I was told that if I gave children milk that I was buying them in the lunchroom that I would be fired for insubordination. I said 'OK, let me bring you my research: whole milk and whole milk products, the coating in the brain is developed by these until the child is eight. After eight, that lining is developed. It's going to be what it's going to be.' And then [the school district] said, 'Well, we don't make any money if you buy the milk out of the lunchroom. Our snack program makes money for the school.' I said, 'You're feeding them Fruit Roll-Ups and Gummy Bears!' And I said, 'Let me feed their brains until they're eight, and then you can! It's not costing you a dime!' That just made me sick: the value system. We're in a socially deprived area. There are children that never see milk when they go home and they never see it at all in the summer. But they got it from me, breakfast, lunch and snack. And if they wanted two, then they got two. And it literally made me physically sick and I went to the [school office]. I went to the office and I called Donald Gear and I said, 'are you still looking for a marketer?' and he said 'Yeah.' ...I just went ahead and resigned.

Susan describes herself as a fearless, tireless and aggressive advocate for her students. Her story illustrates the bifurcated view that staff members hold regarding their roles in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. From this viewpoint they view the organization as

mission-driven, because they perceive their roles to be to provide services that fulfill the mission of Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum, Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' parent organization. From this viewpoint they see the organization as one that values and aims to protect the local farming industry and way of life as well as environmental resources. When staff members view the organization this way they see themselves as noble protectors of those in need. This is the perspective that Susan's story exemplifies. As a teacher she saw the students in her school district as vulnerable and victimized and now, as Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' Marketing Director, that is how she sees the growers that participate in the collective. Furthermore, just as she perceived herself as holding a position of legitimacy and authority to act on her students' behalf to overcome their positions of vulnerability and victimization, she also perceives herself in a position to help Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' growers.

The second viewpoint from which Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' staff members view their work is more business-oriented. I came to understand this viewpoint by reflecting on my own work, and a short conversation—a distraction almost—that occurred while I interviewed Sherri Baker, Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' business manager.

Prior to returning to graduate school I worked for The Etowah Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) in north Georgia. The Etowah HCP aimed to protect three species of endangered fish by implementing new building construction and land use regulations in several cities and counties. Those of us working on the plan often described it as a "market-based approach to conservation" because our goal was to find and implement inexpensive alternatives to building and land use practices that degraded aquatic habitat. The term "market-based" was, to us, a clear, concise and easily understood term that meant we were trying to find new building practices that residents of the Etowah watershed would use because they cost less than the more expensive and detrimental building methods that were common practice. If we were successful, we hypothesized, the market would encourage residents to use the new practices, and we wouldn't need to rely on people's environmental values or environmental literacy to protect the fish. As long as residents cared about their pocketbooks they would use the more environmentally friendly approaches, even if they had no knowledge of the environmental benefits they carried.

The term "market-based approach" never struck me as odd, confusing, loaded, or as a term that carried multiple meanings. Sherri Baker however, who came to work for Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables after many years as a financial officer for large corporations, forced me to question my interpretation and use of this phrase:

I've had a hard time getting used to the word 'market-based approach' because I thought 'well, what is that?' All that means is that you're trying to influence behavior. You're trying to make the change that your non-profit was established for by influencing the market. By selling something. By the market, you know?

It's instead of just being a non-profit that goes out and tries to educate people, or change peoples' minds, you're selling something, and you're producing something in the market. When you're in a for-profit business there isn't anything else. I just have never been in the non-profit industry so I thought, 'Well, what the heck else is there? Oh, I see!' It just never entered my brain that you wouldn't do anything like that.

By reflecting on her account I came to understand that sometimes staff members choose to view their work as business-oriented, and shift their viewpoint away from the mission-oriented aspects described by Susan Goren. When viewing their work from the business perspective, as Sherri does, staff members view the organization as a for-profit business. This is the viewpoint Sherri takes when she describes the difficulty she had coming to terms with the term mission-oriented. "What the heck else is there?" She asks. From her viewpoint the business perspective, which is different from Susan's mission-oriented perspective, is the only perspective.

This chapter explores the frames through which Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables staff members approach their work and the organization at-large. The overarching frame of staff members described in this chapter is termed the *service frame*. Service frames describes a general framework through which staff members view themselves and their staff roles as they interact with growers in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. In short, staff members see themselves as service providers.

There are four main sections in this chapter. The first introduces staff members' service frames and their four core enactments. The second offers a more detailed description of these frames and presents three different services that staff members see themselves providing to growers. The three services this section explores are the buffering service, business management service, and education and networking service. The third section presents staff members' sustainability frame. The final section describes how staff members' service and sustainability frames influence the ways they approach decision-making within Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables.

An Introduction to Staff Members' Service Frames

Service frames describe frames through which one perceives oneself, or their organization, to provide services to those in need. In other words, people that hold these frames see themselves as service providers. These frames are born among staff members in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables in three

ways. The first is exhibited by Frances Dolan, Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' agricultural manager. The second is exhibited by Susan Goren, Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' marketing director. The third origin of service frames is evidenced by Donald Gear, Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' founder.

Frances Dolan grew up farming in southwest Virginia and became agricultural manager of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables after growing for the collective for several years. He was among one of the earliest growers in the collective. Throughout our interview, Frances described his intensely strong sense of pride and attachment to the region in general, and farming in particular. These feelings stretch back deep into his childhood and are extensions of his family's long farming legacy. Although Frances is a staff member in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables he also grows produce for the collective and approaches his farm through the legacy tobacco membership frame.

There's nothing better than farming, you know. I think it's a mixture of the seasons and a mixture of pleasure more than work. When spring hits, once you've farmed before, when that spring air hits, you've got the fever. I don't care whose farm, if you've farmed a small plot, you can't wait to grow something. And all my life, I mean, as much as we hated those 5:30 mornings picking beans, I hated it all my life. ...But once that air hits, I'm ready to plow. Every year I'm wanting to plow more and more and more, and I know I can't handle it. I know I ain't got the manpower. ...As far as making a living: no, you don't make a living. ...And there have been points in our farming here that I've said, 'Well I've had enough, maybe we'll just [quit]...', but every spring I do it again.

Frances's description focuses on physical aspects of farming. He stresses his attachment to his family's farm as a geographic and physical place. The place he describes is centered on crops and the physical labor that is required to cultivate them. In other words, his stories about, and passion for, farming take place in fields and barns, among other locations on the farm, and while performing farming-related activities. For Frances, the purpose of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables in general, and his role in particular, is to help participating farmers find increased productivity so that they may continue to generate an income from farming and maintain ownership of their farms. As a result, the services that Frances sees himself providing to participating growers are services that are focused on improving farming practices and farm management and, as a consequence, improve the likelihood that the farms that are owned by participating farmers remain active and productive.

Susan Goren was also born and raised on her family's farm in southwest Virginia. Susan echoes Frances's passion for farming, though she stresses a different type of attachment. For Susan, the physical elements of place and labor that Frances describes create a set of values associated with farming that she believes are rarely seen or understood elsewhere in today's society. The values that Susan describes echo those described by Tom Carpenter and other legacy tobacco growers in Chapter three. They are about work ethic, responsibility, and family, for example. Susan's attachment to the notion that farming teaches and instills these values in farmers—and especially children that are raised on farms—form the foundation of her service frame. This frame allows her to perceive her primary role,

and that of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables in general, as being to spread these values throughout Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' membership, the community and perhaps even beyond through the practices of performing farm work. Susan's value system and its relation to farming shine in the following quotation:

We're not a values-oriented society any more. Because we're afraid of hurting somebody's feelings or getting sued or whatever else. ...So I know that [my kids'] character, values, and work ethic are going to have to come from us. And what better way to teach it than from the heritage of their families that had to live and die by that? If you were a lazy farmer back in my granddad's day, your family didn't eat in the winter, and whose fault was that? Well, 'B.C.', that's 'Before Children,' we all have a different perspective on the how's and the what's of what's important. I think having children is God's way of reminding you that there's something always greater than yourself. First of all, Him, second of all, your kids. And you look at some of the areas of disconnect that you've had in life, maybe you've had limited appreciation for the simple things or just... we all go through these phases. And I want my girls to just stay very well connected and grounded in what I call the 'meat and potatoes of life.' That's being able to work hard and regardless if they ever farm, or have a farm of their own, or [my husband and I] die and they take over the farm, or they sell-out to Wal-Mart, they will have a seed planted in there somewhere that will serve as a survival skill. And hopefully a value system that'll parallel that.

As a result, Susan sees those who still carry and abide by the values she associates with farming as forming a unique community that needs protecting, lest it be overwhelmed by the dominant value system she observes in the rest of society. Within the farming community that she observes, Susan even singles out farmers like those in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, who use organic methods and other practices that she claims date back to the ways that their parents and grandparents farmed, as the standard bearers for this value set. She describes this community and their values in the following interview segment:

OK, there's 47,100 farms in Virginia, approximately. Leverage that against the population. We're 6/10 of 1% of the population. That 47,100 represents the total agriculture landscape: pig, chicken, livestock, tobacco, grain, hay, vegetables, Christmas trees, OK? Organics are a microscopic percentage of that. So we are a unique, special bunch.... We have a different way of thinking of how we want to preserve our farms. And obviously we're not willing to devalue the land for personal gain, and that's deep. Far more than you can get from a lot of other people in the other 47,000. ...like I said, we're a special bunch and our mode of survival through the Appalachian Mountain range has always been: 'you do what you have to do to get it done.' And whereas a lot of kids, let's say up in Alexandria, Prince William County and all that. Our kids are drawing in the dirt with sticks, and [northern Virginia kids] were painting, going to the museums and seeing

Van Gogh. We're a very unique bunch. Our minds are more creative down here because of limited exposure and necessity. Creativity in our area only came out of necessity. So I mean, we're just, like I said: we're unique. We're not strange, I don't use it as strange, but we're special and we're unique.

I asked Susan how the values she associates with farming as a means to preserve a way of life play out in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' operating practices and help the organization run smoothly. To answer this question she told me a story about when she first started growing vegetables with Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables and before she was a staff member:

When we started we didn't have a plastic laying machine personally on our farm, and we had two of the old-timers that helped us out with that. They owned one jointly. And we got the land ready and they brought the plastic layer over. And I started bitching and moaning to Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. I ended up buying one the next year. It was like, 'if I want to be ready to go and [Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables] wants me to be on time I need to have everything that I need'. So I went ahead and I bought a plastic layer and a water wheel planter that winter, because that's when Dave and I decided well, 'if you're going to go at it, let's finance it through the bank and let's go!' And so we paid it forward. That year when we got our plastic layer, I had recruited a friend of mine that worked in the school system. We both were there at the time, and we recruited her and her husband and her brother. So we went and laid their plastic, OK, to kind of pay it forward. ...And we went and laid Frances's plastic because I recruited Frances. And you know, it all came from being able to get started, to have somebody to pay it forward. And so you need people that are willing to network and help each other out and to pay it forward. I've helped out many a grower that's run out of spray or whatever, because I keep quite a bit down at my farm anyway. ...you really have to be willing to give-take. Are you willing for your partner farmer to lose his crop because you don't believe in sharing? It goes back to just that whole unique value system.

The values that Susan associates with farming and which she claims make farming more than an occupation, but also a way of life, instill in her an urge to help others preserve their farms, as a means of preserving the way of life she holds dear. In other words, Susan feels an urge to provide services that help others maintain their farms and values in order to accomplish her goals. This is a service frame. For Susan, this means maintaining values and activities associated with farming such as paying it forward, creativity, hard work, love of family and friends, sharing, helping others and other values that encompass what she calls the 'meat and potatoes of life'.

The third source of the service frames held by staff members is that exemplified by Donald Gear and other staff members who did not grow up farming in the local area. While these staff members do grow organic vegetables for the collective now, they only began growing later in life, and in some cases only

after taking on staff roles with Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. These staff members describe their service frame as stemming from an urge to participate in a social movement they consider meaningful. In other words, these staff members suggest that their service frame stems from “a calling” much like that felt by lifestyle growers when they describe their decisions to begin growing vegetables for the collective. Prior to working for Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables these staff members did not necessarily have an interest in farming or organic production. What they did have was an urge to help others they viewed as less fortunate than themselves and to solve what they perceived as critical social problems. In the following statement, Donald Gear, the founder and executive director of Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum and Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, describes the roots of his service frame and its relationship to the development of the organization:

...Before I came to the region back in the late '70s, early '80s, and certainly once I got here, I had this growing sense that this jobs vs. the environment conflict seemed to dominate the landscape, at least as far as economic development was concerned, and labor issues were concerned, and environmental issues were concerned. There was always this either/or. These kinds of stark choices. ...So that was a big issue that was just a recurring theme. So if you were doing environmental organizing, so often the argument against it, sometimes a pretty vociferous one and even a scary one, was that you're keeping jobs from coming to this community, or you're taking jobs away from this community. ...So a group of us got together and decided simply that there's got to be a better way to do this, because we're not doing well on either ends of those spectrums. There were still a lot of low-paid, poor-condition working jobs, and there's just a tremendous amount of unemployment and underemployment and poverty, and the environmental stewardship of at least much of the region, though it was better than in the pre-Surface Mining Control Act days, but still there was just a lot of environmental problems. It was kind of like we were fighting each other and all of us were losing. ...I mean, basically I had a kind of messiah complex from a pretty young age. I mean, I really did. As a fairly young teenager I felt that my role in the world was to make the world better. And I envisioned doing it in all kinds of ways. I thought I'd work in the third world and that's why I went to graduate school... I thought I would be working in poor communities, helping them be more self-reliant, helping them basically have better lives. I also had notions at various points of dramatically changing the political process, but from an early age I had a sense that this world is really not right. It's really not fair, and you can't just complain about it, you've got to do something about it. And I also felt a certain sense of capacity to do something, even though I really had no reason to think that. I mean, at a young age I hadn't really, no particular insights or skills or anything, but I had this sense that I'm somebody who can do something.

Donald Gear's statement describes the source of his service frame as coming from a general urge to help solve social problems, but not necessarily those related to agriculture in Appalachia. In fact, Donald came to be living in the area by chance: he followed a job to the region many years ago. He came to

develop his interest in the intersections of agriculture, jobs and the environment only after living in the area for some time. Had life choices taken him somewhere else, where he identified other critical social problems such as crime, homelessness or public health as deserving of his attention, it is imaginable that he would likely be content working in those issue arenas.

The stories that Frances, Susan and Donald told can be interpreted at two levels. At the first level, they can be interpreted as interesting stories about how and why people become involved in sustainability-oriented organizations like Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum and Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. At the next level however, at the level of frames, these stories uncover deeper elements of service frames. At this level, four elements of their stories are apparent. These elements, which I term *enactments*, are performative elements of service frames. This means that not only are they evident in the ways that staff members consider their roles, but they also play formative roles in the ways that staff members carry out their duties and make decisions.

The key to understanding the four enactments is to understand that they are performed by service providers through cognitive means as well as physical actions. Thus, they are heavily informed by the frames of the service providers performing them. For example, understanding how a service provider describes those in need of their services amounts to understanding how the service provider characterizes those they see as in need of their service. Likewise, understanding how a service provider sees the threats that face the beneficiaries of their services amounts to understanding how the service provider characterizes the sources of the threats they perceive. When service providers describe their legitimacy and authority, they are characterizing themselves in ways that justify their actions. Lastly, the final enactment of service frames requires staff members to characterize their actions as helpful for those they intend to serve. Indeed, in every case others, including the target beneficiaries service providers aim to serve, may characterize these enactments differently.

The Four Enactments of Staff Members' Service Frame

This section introduces the four enactments of service frames. These are: 1) describing those in need; 2) describing the threats that face those in need; 3) describing the source of one's legitimacy and authority to serve those in need; and, 4) characterizing the actions one takes as beneficial to those in need.

The first enactment is visible in Donald's remarks when he states: *"There were still a lot of low-paid, poor-condition working jobs, and there's just a tremendous amount of unemployment and underemployment and poverty..."* and, *"I thought I would be working in poor communities, helping them be more self-reliant, helping them basically have better lives."* In these statements Donald is not simply identifying the problems he would like to address, he is identifying and characterizing the *people* he wants to help. The people he describes are those in need; those in desperate circumstances. Susan also characterizes those she aims to help. That is, the *"unique, special bunch"* that has a *"different way*

of thinking” about preserving farms. Characterizing one’s target audience as *needy* or *desperate* is the first critical enactment in the foundation of staff members’ service frame. Accomplishing this enactment justifies holding the frame. In other words, it is impossible for someone to approach their work through a service frame if they cannot justify why and how the services they provide serve the needs of those they see as in need or the causes they aim to address.

The second enactment of service frames means describing the threats that face those one characterizes as in need. Donald states, *“if you were doing environmental organizing, so often the argument against it, sometimes a pretty vociferous one and even a scary one, was that you’re keeping jobs from coming to this community, or you’re taking jobs away from this community. ...It was kind of like we were fighting each other and all of us were losing.”* Here it becomes clear that the threat Donald aims to address is not simply the set of problems associated with environmental degradation or ineffective environmental and industrial regulations. Donald, of course, sees these issues as problems, but they are much smaller, and perhaps only symptomatic, of the true threat that Donald sees facing the stakeholders he characterizes as in need. The more significant threat that Donald sees is the *relationship* that exists between the environmental and industrial communities, and the *process* by which these communities interact. *“It was kind of like we were fighting each other and all of us were losing.”* he stresses. Donald’s statement suggests that he perceives the cycle of conflict among the environmental and economic development communities as the key barrier to helping desperate community members in the region. The conflict cycle—which from Donald’s perspective produces only losers and never winners—prevents the stakeholders he characterizes as desperate from finding improved income producing opportunities and breaking the cycle of poverty.

Susan, in her statement, also describes the threats she sees facing those she aims to serve. She portrays this threat as a decline in values associated with farming. These values include strong character traits, work ethic, love of family and appreciation of family heritage, a connection to the landscape, the responsibility to pay it forward, creativity and a desire to preserve family farms, among others. She sums up the threat that she perceives when she describes her ultimate fear: that her children do not grow up to share her values and, as a result, “sell-out” the family farm to Wal-Mart. For Susan, the lack of values she observes is symptomatic of a larger looming threat: an economic system that has overtaken family as the dominating force in teaching children—especially her own, the values she thinks they should have, and one that can, if left unchecked, bring about the ultimate destruction of the way of life she cherishes.

The third foundational enactment of staff members’ service frames is portraying the position that one holds in relation to others as granting them sufficient legitimacy and authority to take actions to address the threats that they see facing desperate stakeholders. Donald suggests that he felt the responsibility to help others from a very young age, but for no reason other than holding the sense that he was somebody who could “do something.” Donald, at this stage in life, lacked legitimacy and authority even though he felt a personal urge to “make the world better.” To overcome his lack of legitimacy and authority Donald sets himself on a path to build a repertoire of skills and experiences that will enhance his abilities to provide for those he views as in need. He attends graduate school where he studies social sciences, for example, as well as takes jobs in the social service sector. As is discussed in a forthcoming

chapter, however, these experiences were not enough to grant Donald legitimacy and authority with local stakeholders.

Susan exhibits the third enactment of her service frame differently for the two stakeholder groups she characterizes as in need of support services. The first, are her children. When it comes to her children Susan justifies her authority to instill in them the values that she sees as critical for creating the future she desires—one in which her kids don't sell-out to Wal-Mart—simply because she is their mom. Susan believes that with parenting comes authority to make decisions for one's children. *"[My kids'] character, values, and work ethic are going to have to come from [their father and me]."* *"They will have a seed planted in there somewhere that will serve as a survival skill."* The words that deserve emphasis in Susan's remarks are *have* and *will*. If Susan's kids are going to develop the values she hopes they develop it will *have* to come from she and their father, and they *will* develop them. When it comes to her kids, Susan believes she has the legitimacy and authority to make sure of that.

For the second group that Susan characterizes as in need of support, the special bunch of farmers in the region that hold the values regarding farming that she holds, she draws her legitimacy and authority from three sources. First, from her initiative to take action. Susan was an early adopter of organic practices in the region and one of the first growers to join Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. She took the initiative to buy the plastic layer that she lets others borrow because she saw having a plastic layer as a critical need. She also takes initiative to recruit other growers to Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables and have extra spray on her farm in case other growers run short. Susan takes it upon herself to do these things and they put her in a leadership position that allows her to serve others. Susan does this intentionally, and these actions develop and reinforce her self-perception that she is a service provider. These actions, in her eyes, grant her legitimacy.

Second, Susan draws her authority from her long, personal experience living the values and way of life that she aims to help others live and preserve. She describes developing her value system from working on her parent's and grandparent's farms as a child. As a result, she sees herself as the living embodiment of these values. She knows them at their deepest levels and they are the core of who she is. In short, she believes that she is an expert in the values and way of life that accompany farming in Appalachia. From her expertise comes authority; she believes she can help others develop and preserve these values because she knows them as deeply and personally as anyone.

The final element of Susan's authority to serve others comes from her commitment to live the values and way of life she holds dear. This final factor is essential to understanding her service frame. In order to live these values to their full potential Susan must accomplish them in ways that make them apparent to others and that meet their standards of understanding. She must perpetuate these values in order to preserve them, and that can only be accomplished by demonstrating them to others so that they too may live them and pass them on. Additionally, many of the values she aims to live and preserve can only be performed in public ways. For example, in order to live paying it forward one must pay it forward to someone else.

Susan believes that living these characteristics—taking action, understanding the values she aims to preserve in deep and personal ways, and living these values in ways that allows others to observe, understand and adopt them—gives her legitimacy and authority (although Susan would never call it authority) to help others.

The fourth and final foundational enactment of service frames is depicting the actions that one takes as beneficial to those in need. The action that Donald describes in his story is gathering a larger group of concerned individuals to brainstorm ways to break the cycle of conflict that he perceives as rendering both the environmental and industrial communities ineffective at solving social problems in the local area. Susan describes the actions that she takes to address the threats she observes as having her children work the family's farm. She also describes how she bought the plastic layer so that she could lend it to others and paying forward the help others gave her by willingly helping others perform farm-related tasks. What is important to notice about the ways that Donald and Susan describe these actions is that they directly connect them to the threats they aim to address, and make sure that those they aim to serve understand how their actions mitigate and minimize those threats.

In summary, the foundational elements of service frames are describing those in need of one's services; describing the threats those in need face; depicting the legitimacy and authority that one holds that allows them to serve; and, depicting the actions one takes as beneficial to those stakeholders in need.

The following discussion describes how these enactments of service frames are embedded into the working approach used by Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' staff members as they go about managing the collective.

Staff Members' Service Frame

Staff members in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables see themselves supplying three main services to growers in the collective. The first are buffering services that shield growers from changes in the regulatory, market and political environments that threaten their economic success. The second are business related services. When performing these services staff members view themselves as managers of a business with goals of turning a profit as well as maintaining and growing the organization's membership of growers, employment levels, customer base, production capacity and efficiency. The third type of services are educational and network services. When supplying these services staff members seek to enhance growers' productivity through training opportunities that teach new farming techniques and management skills. These objectives are, primarily, accomplished through group training workshops and individual, face-to-face meetings in which staff help growers set goals, manage expectations and conduct farm related planning activities.

When performing buffering and business services staff members consider their primary audience members to be growers that fit the previous description of legacy tobacco farmers like Tom Carpenter, Rhonda Madison and Henry and Dinah Marrow. When performing educational and networking services staff members focus their attention on returning and lifestyle growers like Lyle Carmichael and Mitch and Julie Spiegle, respectively. Staff members tend to group returning and lifestyle farmers together and separately from more financially concerned legacy growers. Frances Dolan summarized the ways that staff members characterize these groups:

You've got a handful of people that want the best in the quality, the whole issue of good health, good life, clean living. And you've got the other half that's the best buck, you know what I'm saying? It's good money...

This section outlines how staff members perform the enactments of service frames in relation to the three services they see themselves providing.

The Buffering Service Frame

This section uses a story told by Sherri Baker, Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' business manager, as an example of the ways that staff members frame and carry out the buffering service. Sherri's story is about new regulations, called Good Agriculture Practices (GAP), which, according to her, were recently developed by a grocery store trade association. The GAP regulations are intended to prevent bacterial contamination in produce. The regulations are not mandated by law, but from Sherri's perspective the trade association uses pressure to force farmers and collectives like Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables to comply with them. According to Sherri, the trade association claims that grocery stores will not buy produce from farmers and collectives that do not follow the guidelines.

Sherri began her story by providing some background on the reasons that she believes many of the farmers that participate in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables make the decision to join. She set the stage by describing who the growers are, and what she believes to be their primary interests. In this portion of the story she accomplishes the first enactment of her service frame: describing those who she perceives as in need of her services and those of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables:

To be candid, there are some people who really don't have many other options in terms of how they're going to earn extra money. I truly believe that part of the reason we've been a little more successful recruiting growers this year is because of the economy. You know everybody is worried about money and jobs. 95% of our growers have day jobs and their farming supplements their income. Well, if you think about everyone being paranoid about being laid off or what have you, it kind of makes sense. But I honestly

think, if you've got land and it's sitting there, a lot of these people are used to thinking about what they can do to make money on their land. Particularly if you look at it as a replacement to tobacco.... You know [tobacco] was like their Christmas savings account a lot of times, or college tuition.

Several elements of Sherri's description stand out. She begins her remarks reluctantly, with the phrase, "to be candid." Characterizing others as in need is not something with which Sherri is comfortable. Yet, she proceeds to make characterizations that support her belief that Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' growers are in need of the services she and the organization provide. Sherri's characterizations are that participating growers have limited professional prospects, have grave concerns about the economy and their abilities to make ends meet, and depend on the income their farms generate for major personal expenses. The difficulties that Sherri has with making her characterizations are not with the cognitive acts of generating a description to fit the pictures of farmers she holds in her imagination—she quickly and succinctly completes her characterizations once she has tempered them with her statement of reluctance—rather, it is with verbalizing them. Performing the act of characterizing others in a public way is troublesome for Sherri, because describing others as in need is not socially appropriate in many contexts. Put simply, Sherri, like many people, doesn't like to talk about others in a negative light even though once she does describe the growers it is clear that she has developed her characterizations thoughtfully and over time. The act of characterizing those in need comprises the first enactment of a service frame. Without accomplishing this step—without identifying someone to provide services to—Sherri would be unable to approach her work through this frame and unable to develop a repertoire of services that support the stakeholders she views as needing assistance.

Another element of Sherri's description that stands out is the description itself. To Sherri, the target audience for her services is farmers who "don't have many other options," are "worried" and "paranoid" about the job market and job stability, and who need to find ways to make ends meet using any resources at their disposal. Sherri also suggests that the farmers in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables are "used to" thinking about these issues and living with the kind of fear and concern that she describes. In total, her characterization paints a dramatic picture of a desperate people. A people who live in fear and feel they have few options for breaking free of their condition. From Sherri's frame, Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables seems to be a last ditch effort for many participants; one that comes right before selling their farms.

Sherri's description raises the stakes of her work. The very livelihoods of those she aims to serve are at risk. From Sherri's perspective this characterization elevates her sense of responsibility, and that of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' in general (the third element of service frames), by increasing farmers' reliance on her services and those of the organization. This depiction also helps motivate Sherri to perform her role as a service provider in an effective manner. As a result, Sherri's service provision frame is reinforced and she is encouraged to continue to approach her work through this frame, which means making decisions that perpetually maintain her role as a service provider and continuing to characterize the growers with whom she works as in need and desperate.

A third element that stands out in Sherri's opening remarks is her suggestion that the farmers she aims to serve are in need of a "replacement to tobacco." This is the overarching and key service that Sherri sees Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables providing: a replacement to the staple crop and critical component of the farming way of life in the region. The term "replacement" can mean many things. It could, for example, describe a business model and process by which staff members must operate Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. That is, if their intention is to provide a replacement for tobacco the term "replacement" could mean that they must make Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables look and feel like the government tobacco program, because managing one's farm under the regulations of the tobacco program is what staff members believe farmers in the region are accustomed to. In other words, the organization must develop a system of predicting the volume of produce they can sell to grocery stores, and the prices growers can expect, so that farmers can have a similar level of confidence that their efforts will generate a worthwhile profit that they were accustomed to when dealing in tobacco.

"Replacement" could also refer to the type of farm and farm chores that growers associate with tobacco. In this interpretation, Sherri could mean that the job of staff members is to make growing organic vegetables similar, in practice, to growing tobacco. This means that growing vegetables must follow a cultivating schedule that is similar to that of tobacco, must use equipment that farmers already have on hand, include planting and harvesting techniques with which they are familiar and fit the physical layouts of their tobacco farms, among other things. When using the word "replacement" Sherri could also refer to the way of life that accompanied tobacco farming. That is, the work ethic, culture of sharing, creativity and other values that Susan Goren, Tom Carpenter and others described previously.

In the second portion of her story about the GAP program, Sherri outlines the next enactment of service frames—characterizing the threats that face those in need of assistance—as it relates to the legacy growers she views as in need of buffering services:

[GAP] is a program to try and keep contamination from happening in crops. For instance, one of the things that is easily recognized as a problem is if you don't have restroom facilities for your workers, or a way for them to wash their hands. It's somewhat obvious that you don't really want that kind of a thing to be an issue. Another is water testing and making sure that water isn't contaminated. I always think of it as a ladder. I don't know if you've ever paid attention to a ladder, but [a ladder] has more stickers on it because every time there's a law suit or a problem someone slaps another sticker on there as a result. That's kind of what GAP looks like to me. Every time there's been an issue with spinach or whatever, it's like they add another piece to this. What my understanding is, is that big agriculture, conventional agriculture, is trying to make it—maybe this almost sounds paranoid, but this is what I'm hearing, and I'm not a paranoid person but I can see how it might happen—is that they're making the solutions to these issues so burdensome that some small farms won't ever be able to do it. So what we're trying to do with GAP... is trying to figure out how we can address what [GAP] is trying to accomplish, with a little dose of reality and practicality for the small farmer, so that it's not putting the small farm out of business.

Sherri characterizes two main threats that she believes face Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' growers. The first is immediate, and comes in the form of a new regulatory program with which farmers must comply. Sherri's concern with GAP is not with the intent of the program itself. She clearly illustrates that she understands the value of keeping crops free from contamination. Rather, her conflict is with what the GAP program symbolizes. To Sherri, the GAP program symbolizes an escalating system of regulations that, over time, will accumulate into a complex portfolio of regulations that escalate the cost of farming by forcing growers to purchase equipment that meets new standards, alters the physical layout of their farms or modifies growing practices in ways that do not match those with which growers in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables are familiar. This depiction of GAP focuses on the technical aspects of the GAP regulations.

The second threat that Sherri describes is more long-term, insidious and subversive than the immediate threats posed by the GAP regulations themselves. This threat comes from what Sherri describes as the "big" and "conventional" agricultural-industrial food complex that she believes is taking steps to systematically enhance its position of dominance in the marketplace by creating regulations that are relatively simple and inexpensive for large, conventional growers to comply with, but that force smaller farms, and those that follow alternative models of farming such as Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, out of the market.

Two portions of Sherri's account jump out as critical. The first is her use of a metaphor to describe how she perceives the emergence of GAP. By using a metaphor, rather than stating precisely what is contained in the GAP regulations, Sherri distances herself from the notion that there may in fact be health and safety concerns that justify the GAP program. In this statement her true feelings regarding the program are made clear. That is, that the regulations are unnecessary and won't make much of an improvement in insuring that food remains contaminant free. "No one reads those stickers on the ladder anyway!" she might add. As she closes this portion of her story she states that her intent is to "figure out" how to address the GAP program with "a little dose of reality and practicality." With these statements she suggests that she views the new regulations as unrealistic and impractical, and that it is her responsibility to provide realistic ways that farmers can improve food safety in their work. The action that Sherri takes to accomplish this task, and that aligns with her way of framing the GAP program, is described in the next segment of her story.

The second striking portion of Sherri's story is her use of the term "paranoid" when discussing her perception of the larger, more calculating threat posed from "big" and "conventional" agriculture. Through her use of this term and following statement it is apparent that she fully understands the threat from big agriculture lives most strongly in her imagination. Of course, there may be a truth in the threat she describes—large agricultural firms may in fact be taking actions to collude and put smaller and alternative growers out of business—but Sherri's description doesn't offer evidence of this. Her description is truly based in her imagination, yet serves to reinforce the legitimacy of her service frame by increasing the urgency with which she must provide services to those who she perceives as in need.

In the final portion of her story about the GAP program, Sherri illustrates the third and fourth elements of service frames: her belief that she and other staff members possess the legitimacy and authority to provide services to area farmers, and her belief that the actions she and other staff members have taken are beneficial to growers.

For Sherri, the source of her own, and Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables', legitimacy and authority to address the GAP program comes from their participation in a network of players related to wholesale organic vegetable production and sales, and that allows them to become informed of such proposals and regulations. Additionally, Sherri suggests that as salaried employees of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables she and other staff have the time and freedom to investigate the sources, justifications, requirements and implications of these proposals whereas full-time farmers or growers with jobs outside of farming may not. Sherri explains this perspective in the following portion of an interview:

The way it came to us is from our [grocery store customers], because they're the front-liners that are going to get nailed if something happens. [Consumers] go back to the store where [they] bought it. So in order to protect themselves [grocery stores] are requiring some sort of certification. I can't remember what the cost is, but in order to be officially certified it's like a thousand dollars a farm, and that just couldn't happen with our folks. So, what we try to do is come up with something to educate our growers that gets at the intent of the law, if not following it exactly and not getting certified. [Groceries] were okay with that last year and probably will be this year, but next year possibly not.

Sherri's implicit perception is that individual, small-scale farmers in the region do not hold positions in the wholesale organic vegetable marketplace that allow them to become aware of regulations such as the GAP program and do not have the time to research regulatory proposals and programs. Sherri's frame leads her to conclude that growers in the area would be, if it were not for their association with Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, caught unaware and disadvantaged by GAP.

Once she has established Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' legitimacy and authority to proceed with actions that will address the threats she and other staff members perceive she goes on to describe the actions that the organization took to serve growers needs regarding the GAP program:

CG: So grocery stores called GAP to your attention. Then what happened?

Sherri Baker: Well, if you are a large farm, at the Dole level, then you go out and get certified. It's just another little piece of your expense. If you're us you go 'holy cow!' You freak out. Then you look at what you can do. [Susan] went out and did a bunch of research and looked at the official GAP documentation and... the two of us kind of put together something that is basically a checklist that we give to our farmers where we say, 'Here, follow this checklist.' Basically you're looking at your farm and making sure

that you've addressed all the concerns. But you're not being certified. There's no independent third party that's come out and audited you.

The response that Sherri describes regarding the GAP program represents the fourth element of service frames. That is, she depicts Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' response in such a way that growers are able to clearly recognize their actions as working to directly minimize or mitigate for the key threats associated with the GAP program. Sherri's characterizations of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' actions accomplish this in several ways. In the previous portion of the story, Sherri states that her aim in responding to GAP is to "figure out" how to address the program with "a little dose of reality and practicality." In other words, the one action she takes is to *think* about the proposal and how Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' farmers might comply. Her intent is not to achieve compliance by modifying growers' farming practices in major ways, but rather to comply symbolically. From this point she proceeds to describe the method of compliance she and Susan Goren, who assisted her in the development of the organization's response, created. Sherri and Susan did not write a new organizational policy that required Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' growers to learn new farming practices to comply with the GAP regulations. Rather, they creatively developed a symbolic compliance document, a checklist, that they will give to growers to document their compliance with GAP. Thus, the service that Sherri and Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables at-large provided regarding GAP, was essentially, to buffer farmers from the regulations pushed by the grocery store trade association by *preemptively and symbolically* addressing the association's concerns.

The actions Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables takes in this case directly align with the previous characterizations about growers and threats that Sherri makes. For example, Sherri's core descriptions of growers are first, that they are dependent on the incomes their farms generate for critical and personal resources; second, they have run out of options for earning a living and are worried about income stability; and, third, that they require a replacement for tobacco. Her core characterization of the GAP program is that it is symbolic of a larger looming threat: collusion among big and conventional agricultural producers who aim to eradicate smaller growers from the marketplace. The strategy Sherri and Susan developed for coping with GAP fits these characterizations. First, the checklist she developed saves growers from having to pay for costly inspections. Second, for farmers who are desperate, the thought of another form of regulation that stacks the deck against them could be the final straw that breaks the camel's back and leads them to sell their farms. In other words, one more sticker on the ladder may be one sticker too many. Therefore, Sherri and Susan developed a way to prevent another sticker from becoming a reality for Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' farmers, even if only symbolically. The plan still requires farmers in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables to comply with the intent of the GAP proposal, without mandating new regulations across the collective. Third, the organization's solution allows farmers to maintain the growing practices with which they are familiar, rather than learning new practices that might not fit the tobacco context with which they are accustomed.

The symbolic response that Sherri and Susan developed matches the threats of the GAP program that Sherri perceives. It is likely that if Sherri imagined these threats differently—if she had evidence of collusion by conventional agricultural firms, for example, or if she exhibited a belief that the GAP program was practical—she would have likely developed a response that aligned with the practical natures of these threats.

During the period of time that staff members wrestled with the GAP program I had the opportunity to sit in on a staff meeting and observe the process by which staff members made decisions about how to respond to the impending GAP regulations. Susan Goren presented a slide show at the meeting regarding the origin of the GAP program and the proposed response that she and Sherri developed. The staff meeting served as a dress rehearsal for an upcoming growers' meeting, at which Susan would give the presentation to growers, if other staff members agreed that the presentation and proposed response were appropriate. The key decisions that staff members sought to make during this meeting were, first, how to characterize the GAP program in a way that would gain growers' support for the response that Sherri and Susan proposed and, second, whether to use the compliance checklist that Sherri and Susan created.

Susan set the stage by describing her interpretation of the threat that GAP aimed to address as well as her perception of the grocery store trade association she perceived as responsible for creating and advocating for the regulations:

Susan Goren: The whole emphasis on Good Agriculture Practices is a spinoff from a series of events that have begun to be miscategorized and displaced by not just the consumer, but a lot of scientists and big corporations that really don't want [groups like Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables] in the market in the first place. Let me just tell you a few historic moments. Of course, the spinach was the big spinoff. The E. coli in the spinach. The way that basically happened was that contaminated water going through the tissue membrane [of the spinach]. So no matter how many times you dipped it in a sanitized water source, you were not going to take the E. coli out of the spinach. It was the growing conditions! It was your actual agriculture practices on your land that caused the contamination. Then we had the lettuce. The famous wild hog that ran through the dirty pond that contaminated everybody's lettuce in California. Again, it's amazing to me how corporations take 30 days to do a trace back when we actually have stickers on our boxes and with our mock trace back we can find out in 15 minutes where the product came from. However, these are organizations with a wing dedicated to trying to find a way to blame others. Now what they're going to say about the whole lettuce issue is that it happened on a 15-acre farm. That's supposed to scare us smaller farmers. That's why we're getting put to the side. They're saying it was a small farm. But no, it wasn't! It was a 15-acre plot of land leased by Earthbound! OK. As far as the wild hog scenario, that's what they're telling on the streets, but the contamination was irrigation water used that was not tested and not clean. The whole tomato and jalapeno issue. The Florida tomato growers, small and large, got penalized because of a trace back. The source of contamination there: jalapeno peppers were bought from Mexico and shipped

to a packing house in Florida. The tomatoes that came into the same packing house were packed into contaminated boxes. The tomatoes themselves were not contaminated until they went into the boxes that came from Mexico. There again, the importance of a trace back.

So, farmers were hurt. In all this... farmers were hurt. So that's why consumers were hurt. There were some people that got very sick—there were some people that died—as a result of all these episodes. So that's where we're coming into the Good Agricultural Practice era of agriculture. Some of our buyers, like [names a firm], are requiring something in place. They don't have to have a seal, it doesn't have to have the USDA, or the FDA or anybody, but something in place that shows that you're demonstrating necessary steps to make sure that your agriculture practices as well as your facility practices are meeting some sort of safety criteria. They're letting us set the criterion right now, which is good, because it's saving you \$92 an hour for a guy coming from Richmond. You are already up to \$540 for an inspection before he gets down here to southwest Virginia. So let's assume he's going back home. That's \$1080 and 2 hours on your farm. So, by being proactive and doing some of the smaller components to ward off, or to demonstrate that we have our best foot forward on food safety, water quality and packing house management, we're developing our mirror program. It's not a certification, it's a lookalike.

Donald Gear: It's a funny mirror.

Susan Goren: Yeah. It's one of those mirrors at the fair. So is that a good intro?

Staff members decided, after some discussion but without suggesting major revisions, to move forward with Susan's presentation and to require all Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables growers to use the compliance checklist that she and Sherri created.

As Susan gave her presentation the characterizations she made reinforced the characterizations presented by Sherri previously. Those are that: growers are desperate, helpless and vulnerable in the face of major threats from the larger agricultural-industrial food complex; threats that growers face are not threats that they could manage or address without the assistance of staff at Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables and the organization at-large; Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables and staff are in positions that provide them with legitimacy and authority to manage and respond to these threats; and, buffering growers from these threats through symbolic actions and minor modifications that do not require changes in agricultural practices are appropriate responses.

The Business Service Frame

When performing the business service staff members view their roles as being to manage a viable for-profit enterprise. Through this mode, staff members modify their view of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables and its stakeholders to meet this purpose. This means that they no longer see participating farmers as members of an organization that carries a sustainability-oriented mission; they see growers as suppliers of a product for which they broker sales and transport to market. This characterization leads staff to focus their attention on legacy growers when supplying business services. When working through this mode, staff members view their job as being to move products to grocery store customers as efficiently and cost-effectively as possible and to generate revenues to pay growers for their produce as well as staff salaries, among other things.

The decision process that staff members used, and actions taken as an outcome of the process, during the construction of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' new packinghouse in 2007 and 2008 exemplify the business service. The original packinghouse burned to the ground in the spring of 2007. The organization spent the 2007 growing season working from a temporary facility and, over the winter of 2007-2008, built a new facility. The process of selling the property on which the original facility sat and building the new packinghouse at a different site represents what many stakeholders described as the most complex and financially significant decision process that the organization has undergone.

Having a functioning packinghouse is integral to the operation of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. Not only is the packinghouse the place where farmers bring produce to be sorted, graded, boxed and shipped to grocery stores, but it is also where Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables holds growers' meetings and houses staff offices. The packinghouse is the heart and soul of the collective.

I asked Sherri about how decisions concerning the construction of the new facility were made. Her response illustrates how she operates through the business mode:

Oh, you know, it was meetings, obviously. This wasn't a case, necessarily, that lent itself to my comfort zone which is spread sheets and numbers. It was more that I just had a strong feeling. I hate to manage by feeling, but I just really believed that putting the packing house in this area was the best thing for Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. Donald (Gear) didn't necessarily agree, because we owed more money on the site where we were than we could possibly have gotten for it. So we sold that piece of land for what I thought was a very generous price. I mean, I thought people would pay a lot for it, but it still didn't pay off the note. So he was looking at it from [his perspective], "we got so much money in this," and I'm looking at it [from mine], "if we're gonna spend a million dollars on the building, we don't want to make a decision based on the \$20,000 we owe on that lot." But that was just discussion. If there was a way to come up with a financial justification for that, I didn't either take the time or care enough to do it because I was just so passionate about it being here. If I get really wadded up or passionate about something, Donald Gear will usually think, "good lord, ok go!"

Three important elements of the business mode are observed in Sherri's comments. The first is that she holds strong feelings about the best options to pursue and these limit the range of alternatives she investigates. Sherri's gut feelings are not wild guesses. They are informed by her Master's of Business Administration degree and years of work in the corporate sector. The second is that Sherri prefers an approach to planning and decision-making that involves looking at financial costs and benefits. The third is that the decisions about buying and selling properties and building the new packinghouse—among the most significant that Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables has ever made—did not involve consultation with growers. I asked Sherri about this latter portion of her decision-making approach:

CG: Did you talk to any of the growers about the decision?

Sherri Baker: We kept them informed, we didn't ask them.

CG: Do you feel like everybody is satisfied with the outcome?

Sherri Baker: Yeah, I do. Many people are very pleased that we're not further away and that what we put up is a good facility and it is well thought out and it functions well for farmers. ...before it was just difficult. Now we have a dock that's for farmers and we have a dock that is for our big trucks. So it makes it easier for them.

CG: And how would you keep the farmers informed?

Sherri Baker: Just sent out letters periodically. Unfortunately a vast majority of our farmers are not on email. Our only ability to communicate with them are letters. During the summer, while much of the construction was going on, we don't have meetings even. While we were having meetings—we have meetings from about September or October through May, monthly meetings—we updated them every meeting with what was occurring. ...We would update them with progress and try to reassure them we would in fact have a place to operate in '08. Because again, it goes back to your gut; this trust thing. If you've got all this money you're dropping and there's not a packing house anywhere... there's nowhere to go, and so seeing nothing happening on this land would be disconcerting. We did a lot of talking and communicating about if we're not up and ready to go, if we don't have power, if we don't have coolers, this is what we're going to do. And I guess enough [growers] trusted that we were going to be ok. That they had no choice.

The four enactments of service frames are visible in Sherri's statement. When operating through the business mode of her service frame she characterizes farmers' key concerns as those related to efficiency and income. She characterizes threats as delays in construction of the new facility that may impact growers' ability to turn a profit. She draws her legitimacy and authority to make decisions that impact farmers from her ability to conduct financial analyses of various decision alternatives and to make decisions with confidence based on her conclusions. Her experience as a financial analyst in the

private sector makes her unique among Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' stakeholders. She is regarded as an expert in this area. Finally, the final decisions that Sherri discusses in her story—the decision to sell the property that housed the original packinghouse and decisions about where to build the new house—are actions that align directly with the previous characterizations Sherri makes. She makes these decisions because they align with her perceptions of growers needs and concerns as well as the threats they face in this situation. In the end she determines that selling the old property is cost-effective and identifies a new site that will be ideally situated for growers and truckers.

In addition to these concerns, approaching work through the business mode means that economic factors are weighted more heavily than others when making decisions. For example, in the case of building the new packinghouse, it is feasible to think of ways that Sherri could view the packinghouse through the buffering service frame, and as a consequence make different decisions about building the new packinghouse.

For instance, some respondents suggested that the packinghouse can be viewed as a kind of safe-house for Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables stakeholders. It is a place where meetings occur, decisions are made, growers network with one another, and stories and knowledge about farms and the practice of farming are exchanged. It is a place where growers come together to create community. If Sherri were to view the construction of the new packinghouse through the buffering service frame, and therefore view her priority to be to shield growers from outside influences that threaten growers' abilities to maintain their farms, she could decide to use the strength of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' community in alternative ways to the current business model. Rather than constructing a building that suits selling produce on the open market, and the industrial needs such a building requires, Sherri could decide that growers in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables would exchange their vegetables amongst themselves so that all members would have enough food to eat, and transition their community closer to self-sufficiency. If Sherri chose this path, then Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables would avoid interaction with the agricultural-industrial complex that Sherri, when working through the buffering service frame, views as the key threat. The packinghouse, if Sherri took this approach, might look very different. It might be smaller since it would not need to house industrial sorting and packaging equipment, for example. It also might not need semi-tractor trailer bays for loading vegetables and it might not need as much office space for staff members since this alternative model would not necessarily require staff. If Sherri viewed decisions regarding the packinghouse through the buffering frame instead of the business frame she would likely use a different procedure to make decisions as well. She might have involved growers in the decision process, for example, and looked for smaller sites or sites with amenities that would help build the sort of community that would be required to carry out such a radical choice. These elements could enter Sherri's decision-making process when she discusses the packinghouse, but they do not. Her mindset is singularly on economics and efficiency, which are key elements of the business service frame.

The Education and Networking Service Frame

When providing service related to education and networking staff members focus their efforts on returning and lifestyle growers. Sherri Baker characterized this group and in so doing performed the first enactment of her service frame:

We have several farmers who moved to the land from the city. And they've gotten involved. Those are more of the people who do it because it's the right thing to do and they wanted to get back to the land some of them have never been on to start with. One group, I say group but it's a family and then they've got some people around them that want to get involved in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. They've trying to get back to the land. They really truly, from their church and everything believe in an agrarian society.

When characterizing the needs of members of these groups, staff members focus on growers' inexperience and lifestyle related objectives. As a result, staff members see educational support as the primary need of these growers. In the following segment Sherri describes how she observes and characterizes this need among this group:

They're dedicated, they want to learn, they are interested in, they try to get as much information and educate themselves, they own the responsibility for learning. They come to more workshops [than legacy growers], they'll read books, they'll get involved in....One couple that I'm thinking of, they're a brother and sister who are running their farm together. They came over here and worked for a day in the packing house just so they could make darn sure what we were looking for in terms of product. And another one, we were over at their house because they were trying to help us recruit some more growers and they had all these books laying around. It wasn't contrived. It was just they were just sitting there because they'd been reading it. And so, you, know, they show a passion for learning and owning the responsibility of their success.

Staff members perceive the expectations of returning and lifestyle growers as the biggest obstacles to this group's success. Implicit in many of staff members' stories about returning and lifestyle growers are their fears that these growers do not share the same level of commitment as legacy growers. As a result, staff members wonder if the challenges inherent in farming, what Donald Gear calls the fourth rule of farming (that rule is, "that nature is a pain in the ass") and with which many returning and lifestyle growers are unfamiliar, will drive them to quit.

Staff members often described situations in which they felt new growers had unreal expectations about their farms. According to staff members these cases often ended poorly for growers, and led staff to see

the expectations of growers as the biggest threat to reaching their aspirations. Frances Dolan, in the following interview portion, describes one example:

[We had] a retired couple, and they done a very, very small plot. They didn't use plastic or drip, and it was a very droughtful here last year. Farming's a challenge and it's hard anyway. If you don't use the best way scenarios, then you've added another 50% hardship on you. At the end of the year they were just like, 'there's just no way. We didn't make nothing, our germination was poor, we just couldn't keep plants healthy.' [I thought] maybe that just ain't for them. If you don't want to spend the money to do everything like you should do it... ..But yet, they thought, 'we'll do it this way first, and if we make anything...' OK, you already going to have a little hardship. Then you're going to add 50% more right off the top. You are going to struggle.

When describing their legitimacy and authority related to managing the threats that face returning and lifestyle growers, staff members claim that their vast experiences in farming and with organic cultivation practices provide them with expertise that allows them to educate and serve as technical resources for new growers. Indeed, most staff members at Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables are, by any definition, experts in organic farming. With the exception of Sherri Baker, each staff member has a long resume of experience in farming and fits the description provided previously regarding legacy tobacco growers.

As a result, returning and lifestyle farmers see staff members as personifying the image of the farmer they hope to acquire. The admiration new growers hold for staff members encourages them to place a great deal of trust in their expertise. The actions that staff members take to assist new growers further pushes these growers to listen to, and trust, the information and guidance staff members provide.

Staff members take two general approaches to assisting new growers. First, they provide them with numerous workshops and training opportunities. The workshops staff members provide are open to all growers, but they are primarily attended by new and inexperienced growers. These opportunities provide general training in basic organic farming skills. Workshops address fertilization methods, irrigation and pest control, for example.

Second, staff members provide a great deal of individual assistance to new growers in which the core of their support is related to managing farmers' expectations so that they are not disappointed by the challenges of farming and their initial lack of success. Staff members often stated that the conversations they hold with new growers where they explain the difficulties of growing and try to provide them with realistic expectations are not easy. In the following quotation Frances Dolan illustrates the delicate, but upfront, approach that staff members take in these conversations. While Frances, in this example, discusses a conversation with an experienced grower, he and other staff members suggest that these talks are even more delicate with new growers who have no frame of reference for understanding the difficulties that lay ahead, yet hold a great deal of idealism:

Let's say for instance that Joe is working a 10 to 12 hour days every day. He lives 40 minutes away. That automatically throws up a red flag that he don't want a product that he has to pick every single day and ship every day. So he don't need to do zucchini.

He don't need to do yellow squash. So is he going to do a pepper? Is he going to do a, not necessarily tomato because tomato you have to stay on top of for blights and stuff more, so it does take a little more time. I mean, all that weighs in. Or is he better off doing a hard squash, winter squash? You see what I'm saying? Water it, keep it alive, pick it at the end of the year. So yeah, that's a big factor with all farmers. I have an experienced farmer that's got 21 or 22 acres certified organic. He's in Knoxville. And he bedded down 6,000 green zucchini. And when I went to visit him a couple weeks ago, I sat down and laid it out on paper. 'This is what you'll probably get, and I know how many we're going to get per plant, or how much you should average a day. I can tell you that.' So when I broke it down I said 'OK, here's your 40 boxes a day, can you afford to come to me with 40 boxes a day? Every day.' And when we done the math he's like, 'probably not. I understand. Probably not.'

Frances's story shines a light on three critical elements of the ways that staff members provide educational support to new returning and legacy growers. First, he relies on his extensive farming experience to make calculations about the time and resources involved in cultivating particular crops and the revenues those crops might generate. Second, he provides new growers with a healthy dose of reality about the challenges of farming. Managing expectations, it seems, means gently bursting the bubbles of idealistic growers. Third, he communicates information to growers by focusing on the realities of the work involved in farming, rather than by focusing on the grower's personal inexperience. This final step is critically important because it dissociates the act of farming from the grower's limitations. Frances doesn't imply, "I don't think *you* can accomplish this type of farming." Rather, he suggests, "Here are the realities of the work involved," and then asks, "Can you handle it?"

Summary of Staff Members' Service Frame

Staff members' see themselves providing three key services to growers. These are: 1) buffering services; 2) business services; and, 3) educational and networking services. Staff members' service frame is founded upon four key enactments. These are: 1) characterizations about those in need; 2) characterizations of the threats that these stakeholders face; 3) characterizations of one's position of legitimacy, authority and responsibility to develop and provide services that support these stakeholders and; 4) characterizations of these actions that encourage stakeholders to view them as directly linked to, and directly minimizing and mitigating for, the threats that stakeholders face.

Table 7 summarizes the ways that Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables staff members accomplish each enactment to frame the buffering service.

Table 7. Staff Members' Buffering Service Frame.

	Framing
Characterize those in need	Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables growers are desperate and fearful of an uncertain future related to farming. Farmers seek a replacement to the stability of tobacco farming.
Characterize threats	Regulations posed by GAP are unnecessary and part of a broader attack on small, alternative farming.
Characterize position of legitimacy and authority	Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables participates in a network of agricultural producers and market-players that provides them with awareness of new regulations and proposals. Staff members have time and professional skills that allow them to conduct research and develop responses to shifts in the industry.
Characterize actions	Staff members perceive the compliance checklist as meeting growers' needs for agricultural stability and as appropriate response to the symbolic nature of the regulations themselves.

Table 7. This table provides an outline of the four enactments of service frames and examples of how staff members use the enactments to frame the buffering service.

Table 8 provides a summary of staff members' business-related service frame.

Table 8. Staff Members' Business Service Frame

	Framing
Characterize those in need	Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' growers are small farmers that use alternative methods and they are victims of a long history of injustice. Key concerns are with economic success and convenience.
Characterize threats	Delays in decision-making by staff.
Characterize position of legitimacy and authority	Staff members possess professional experience and business acumen that growers do not have.
Characterize actions	Found a suitable site based on economic criteria and location.

Table 8. This table illustrates the four enactments of service frames as they pertain to staff members' provision of the business service.

Table 9 summarizes the four enactments performed by staff members when providing educational and networking services.

Table 9. Staff Members' Education and Networking Service Frame

	Framing
Characterize those in need	Lifestyle and returning growers lack experience in agricultural techniques.
Characterize threats	Inexperienced growers have unrealistic expectations about organic farming. As a result, will be disappointed at their lack of success. Many will, as a result, quit farming.
Characterize position of legitimacy and authority	Staff members see themselves as holding knowledge and experiences that will help inexperienced growers plan and manage their farms as well as manage expectations.
Characterize actions	Provide training opportunities and meet individually with new growers to provide them with new tools and techniques that will enhance their productivity. Hold frank discussions to manage growers' expectations.

Table 9. This table outlines the characterizations staff members make when performing services related to education and networking.

Staff Members' Sustainability Frame

Staff members approach sustainability at individual, organizational and regional scales. At the individual scale staff members conceptualize sustainability in terms of what it means for participating growers. At this level staff tend to focus on both economic and social elements of sustainability, while showing little concern for environmental aspects, once individual farmers have met the organic standards.

When considering the economic elements of sustainability, staff focus their efforts on legacy growers. Staff members' primary concern regarding legacy growers is in helping them obtain their financial objectives, so that they remain active participants in the collective. Staff accomplish this goal by helping legacy growers improve the productivity of their farms, through improved cultivation practices. When considering cultural elements of sustainability, staff members focus their efforts on the needs and aspirations of lifestyle and returning growers. In this capacity staff members develop educational programs and networking opportunities that allow these growers to learn and adopt new farming practices and integrate into the farming community.

Staff members justify their perspectives of sustainability at the individual level by nesting the success of individual growers within the success of the organization. They view Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables as an organization of individual and independent growers, thus their collective success depends on the number of growers who successfully provide produce to the collective and who remain active growers. Therefore, nurturing the sustainability of individual growers enhances the sustainability of the organization. As a result, as staff members make strategic decisions, their attention is on organizational structures and procedures that will bring sustainability to the organization, and meeting the needs of individual growers is seen as a subset of that mission.

At the individual scale staff members conceive sustainability through a lens of attainability. This means that staff believe that sustainability has been achieved once a farmer consistently earns a profit from the sale of their produce to Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, consistently meets the requirements of organic certification and is comfortable with organic farming methods, and once they have reached a baseline level of personal satisfaction and fulfillment from farming. At this point staff members do not stop working with growers to enhance their operation and level of sustainability, but they do consider this farmer to have met baseline criteria of sustainability.

At the organizational scale, staff members focus their attention on growing Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables to the point that it no longer requires external subsidies from Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum or other sources. As a result, at the organizational level staff members view their priority to be on the economic success of the organization. This focus does not come at the expense of environmental and social pieces of the sustainability puzzle, however. Staff members recognize and discuss these elements, but their definitions of environmental and social aspects of sustainability are limited to baseline standards. It is at the point that these standards are met that staff members turn their focus to the financial elements described previously.

When considering environmental sustainability at the organizational level, staff members limit their consideration to the organic certification standards provided by the US Department of Agriculture. Once these standards are met, staff members consider the organization to have met its environmental responsibilities and to be environmentally sustainable. At times staff members did express additional interest in environmental objectives, however they tended to justify the pursuance of these objectives in economic terms. For example, Susan Goren expressed an interest in refining the transportation routes used by Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' trucks, and even to share trucks with other firms. She justified her interest from an environmental perspective by explaining that refining transportation routes could reduce the organization's carbon footprint. During our discussion however, she placed equal emphasis on the cost savings new trucking routes could provide and described the environmental benefits of the changes as secondary to economic benefits. Additionally, Goren mentioned no timeline or imperative for accomplishing this work; she described it as an extracurricular activity that she may take on if time permits.

When considering social equity at the organizational level staff members limit their consideration to the wages they pay growers for their produce. Within this consideration staff members' goals are to make sure that growers are paid fairly and adequately for their produce and labor so that they will remain

participants in the collective. Staff did describe additional ways that they consider social aspects of the organization's work, but these also tended to be secondary to their consideration of fair wages for growers. Staff described interests in providing growers with information about some organizational decisions and educational programs, but emphasized that these instances were often symbolic and financially motivated. For example, during the process of reformulating the marketing fee, staff described the growers' advisory committee as a symbolic platform for allowing growers to feel included in decision-making. Additionally, Sherri Baker, who is often responsible for convening growers' advisory committees, explained that she rarely sees the need to solicit input from growers and that she only does so when decisions hold economic implications for growers. The general thinking by staff members considering social elements of their work is that once growers are paid fair wages for their work, the organization has met its social obligations.

At the organizational level staff members view sustainability through a lens of attainability. Staff members, through this lens, consider Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables to have reached sustainability once it is financially secure, meaning that it is able to cover all expenses through the sale of organic produce to clients. While staff may work to achieve additional levels of success within the arenas of economic, environmental and social sustainability (with a focus on economic success), it is only after the standards set out in this definition are met.

Staff members view Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' role at the regional level in terms of the organization's ability to help bring about a shift in the regional economy. The shift staff members aspire to bring about is one that moves the regional economy away from dependence on nonrenewable, extractive natural resource dependent industries such as coal, tobacco farming and logging, to renewable resources. Staff members view renewable resources, such as organic agriculture, as able to provide more stable incomes and jobs for local residents.

At the regional level, staff members view their work through an aspirational lens. At this level staff members do not hold strict definitions of what sustainability means at the regional scale nor that govern how sustainability should be achieved. From this perspective, staff members view Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables as one player on a team of economic and environmental development organizations in the area, all working to achieve sustainability in different ways. As a result, any actions taken by members of this team that move the region to a more sustainable economy are acceptable. Additionally, staff members do not define minimum benchmarks for sustainability at the regional scale and they do not view economic, social and environmental objectives in conflict with one another.

Figure X. summarizes the way that staff members define sustainability, as well as the scales at which their conception of sustainability focuses. The illustration shows that staff members focus their efforts at the organizational scale, because this is where their daily decision-making responsibilities lie. At this level, staff hold limited definitions of environmental sustainability and social equity. Once these minimum benchmarks have been achieved staff members show a greater concern for enhancing the organization's financial success than for other aspects of sustainability. As a result, the overarching lens through which staff members tend to view sustainability is a lens of attainability.

Figure 10 illustrates staff members perception of sustainability at three scales as well as their concern regarding the three elements of sustainability.

Figure 10. Staff Members' Sustainability Map.

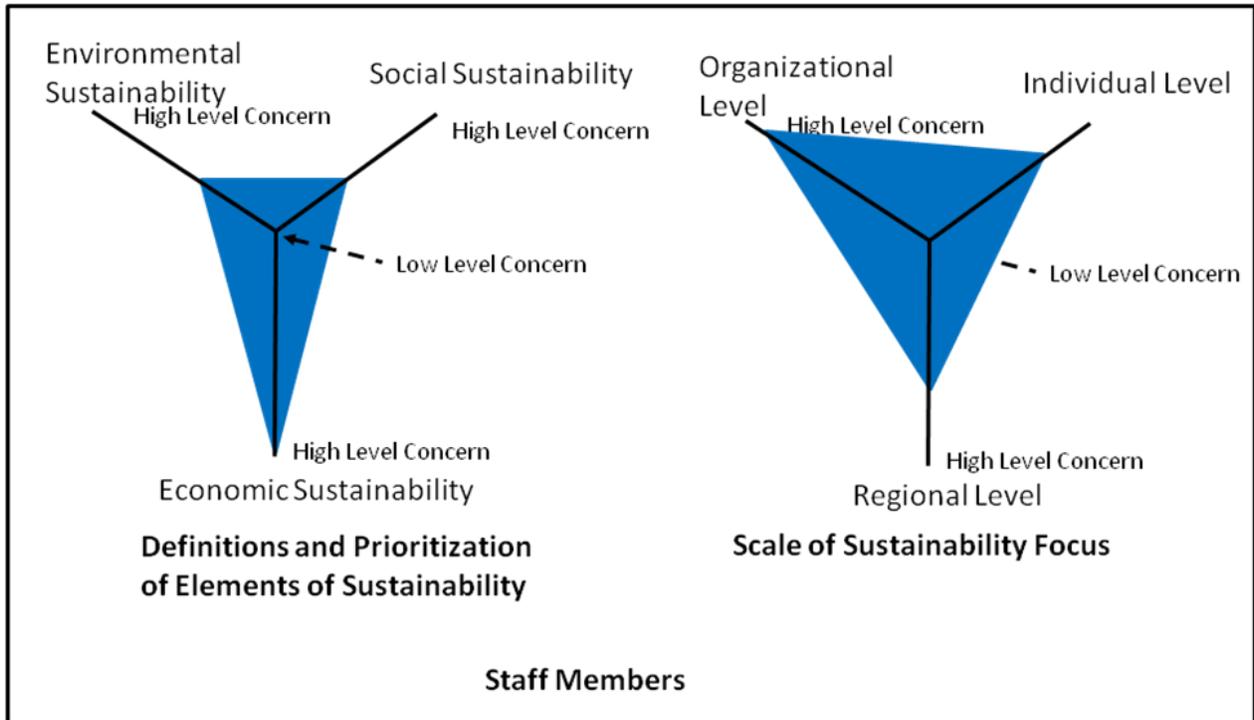


Figure 10. Staff members prioritize Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' financial success above environmental and social concerns once baseline criteria have been met in the environmental and social arenas. Staff members view sustainability at all three scales, though they tend to emphasize the organizational and individual scales. At the individual level staff members understand the importance of helping individual legacy growers maintain their farms as sources of income. At the organizational scale staff members emphasize the importance of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables as an intermediary among farmers and the market. Many staff members are also legacy growers and hold strong feelings about the preservation of farming culture in the region.

Staff Members' Service Frame and Approach to Decision-making in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables

The service frames through which staff members approach their work serve as the foundations for the ways that staff members view decision-making, develop decision-making processes and make decisions within Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables.

During my interviews with staff members, they described a general model of decision-making that suggests most decisions are made among staff. Often, one staff member takes the lead on researching various choices for a particular decision and makes recommendations to the broader staff. Staff members then discuss the recommendations and other possible solutions, and come to consensus on an appropriate course of action. Growers are periodically informed of progress but not directly involved. Sherri explains this process, and justifies the limited involvement of growers, in the following statement:

I honestly don't ask [growers] to participate in day-to-day decisions. I know that when [Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables] was very young, before I was here, that there was a lot of interaction in the decision-making. I really don't do that anymore. There might be something like at a growers meeting, we might say, 'hey, were thinking about doing X, is anybody interested in that?' We might say, 'you know, were trying not to spend a lot of money on labor and we don't want to operate the packinghouse 7 days a week, lets discuss what the best hours might be.' So it might be something like that. But, at this point, at least over the last year and half, there really hasn't been anything. I'm not big on managing by committee. I feel like it's our job and our commitment to the growers to run this place right. And if ever I have any questions or anything, I'm more than happy to pick up the phone and call, or schedule a meeting. I feel like we've got the right group in place to operate this as a business and that [growers] shouldn't have to. They should go grow, and they should have enough faith that we're doing our jobs, that they don't have to worry about it, and they don't have to spend their time [doing management]. These people don't have any time anyway. So that's why I was saying it was such an amazing commitment that 80% or 90% of the people showed up when we were having those committee meetings. Because a lot of them work and farm, and they're going to come to these meetings? So it's a commitment.... It's like, 'ugh, the last thing I need is another nighttime meeting!'

Through Sherri's description it is easy to see how this decision-making model is rooted in staff members' service frame. For instance, the overarching characterizations of growers made by staff members in previous examples describe legacy rowers growers as desperate and out of options. As a result, staff members surmise that these growers will accept nearly any type of relationship that may supply them with income. This includes a scenario in which decisions are made without the inclusion of growers. Furthermore, staff members' characterization of growers as "out of options" also presents members of this group as having limited professional skill sets that do not provide them with abilities to work in employment sectors outside of agriculture. This includes abilities related to organizational management. As a result, staff members feel justified in their decision to exclude growers from decision-making, because they believe growers hold little experience in this area.

Additionally, one possible interpretation of the phrase "replacement for tobacco" that staff members make is that growers seek a replacement for the way-of-life that accompanied, or was created by, tobacco farming. A large factor in the tobacco life-way was the tobacco program, which placed growers

at the mercy and whim of a government bureaucracy that regulated all elements of tobacco farming. As a result, staff members characterize growers as accustomed to—and even accepting of—a loss of independence to an organization of this kind. Put simply, part of the tobacco life-way was to live under the control of larger organizations. Therefore, staff members are able to justify their view of decision-making and the process through which they make decisions by claiming that growers accept a decision-making model that excludes them. In other words, this characterization allows staff members to assume that growers will accept being told what crops to grow and by what volumes, as well being told the prices they will receive for their efforts, because one component of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' mission is to replace one of the key institutions that structured the lives of farmers in Appalachia.

Staff members' characterizations of growers also emphasize the hard-working lifestyle farmers lead. This lifestyle includes working several jobs to make ends meet, the hard nature of farm chores, and time constraints, among other things. As a result, staff members justify their decision-making model by claiming that including growers is an inconvenient and inefficient use of their time. Lastly, staff members justify their choices to exclude growers from decision-making, and keep decision-making processes within the staff only, by falling back on their expertise, which they use to frame their legitimacy and authority. "We know what we're doing..." staff members seem to claim. Sherri Baker states that "they should have enough faith that we're doing our jobs...." The key word in her remark is "faith." In other words, staff members believe that growers should believe in—should trust—them because they know what they are doing.

In special cases staff members do solicit input from growers by inviting growers to form advisory committees. The invitation to form an advisory committee is offered to growers by staff members at growers' meetings. Advisory committees are formed anew each time staff members feel grower input is needed regarding particular decisions and therefore membership on these committees can be sporadic and changing. These committees are developed and facilitated by staff members. Sherri Baker described one advisory committee that she managed.

This committee, the "marketing fee committee", was convened so that growers could discuss and offer input regarding the restructuring of the marketing fee that Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables charges growers. The "marketing fee" is the term the organization uses for the fee they charge growers for sorting, boxing and shipping produce as well as for developing marketing materials to recruit new grocery store clients and enhance their business relationships with the stores or franchises with which they already work. In the following story Sherri describes how she mediated the work of this committee:

I started by sharing our financials with [the growers]. I mean just 'here it is. Isn't that a thing of beauty? That bright red large number at the bottom that doesn't even include staff salaries! Look at how much the boxes cost, look at how much the labels cost, look at how much fuel costs...' showing them all the details. It seemed at the time, I'm sure to them 'good grief, it's overkill!' But it helped them understand, 'wow! I can see how this just isn't going to work.' And we ended up changing how we structured the fees and

never got any beef about it. It went surprising well. I just kind of put down examples so that they could understand the financial impact to them and to Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum. I think those meetings and those discussions gave them an understanding of the fact that, if we cannot get Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables to ever break even, we will not be here. So there was enough interest and buy-in in keeping Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables around that they were willing to spend that effort and in some cases take more money out of their pockets just so that they could make sure [the organization] was viable. They really didn't do much of any work. They were more of just a sounding board and again, part of it was the change management philosophy that I was trying to have.

Sherri had already described her change management philosophy earlier in our interview. Essentially, the philosophy of change management she described was a system based on symbolic actions. When she recognizes that a management decision needs to be made she researches the financial implications of various options, talks with other staff members, and then selects the option she and other staff members feel will be the most effective and efficient at reaching their goals regarding that particular decision. Then, in order to obtain “buy-in” from growers, she presents growers with data that justifies the decision that staff members have already made, while giving growers the impression that they can still affect the outcome of the decision. The goal, Sherri explains, is to allow growers to feel as if they are “making the change themselves”, so that they feel heard and empowered to make organizational decisions.

Sherri's story about the marketing fee advisory committee illustrates the symbolic nature of growers' participation in decision-making. She described the advisory committee as a sounding board only—not a decision-making or management committee—and explained how she maintained control of the committee process throughout the entire endeavor. Sherri described how she “started by sharing our financials...” which represent the type of information that Sherri, who often operates through the business service frame, finds highly valuable; and how she “showed them all the details”, “helped them understand”, and “gave them an understanding”, of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' financial situation. Sherri's description places herself as the center point of this process, not growers. Sherri “gives” information, meaning that prior to providing the information she decided what information to offer based on what information she believed would justify the decision she had already made. At the end of her story Sherri alluded to the fact that she had already made the decision to restructure the marketing fee prior to organizing the committee, and the purpose of the committee was to gain support for her decision. The essential question that Sherri posed to committee members was interpreted and formed by her, thus the business mode of thinking—her mode of thinking—was the only mode of thinking present. Sherri asked: “Look at how much the boxes cost, look at how much the labels cost, look at how much fuel costs?” and through the use of financial data convinced the growers of what she already knew: unless the marketing fee was restructured, the operation would fail.

Including growers in management is, from Susan's perspective, ineffective and inefficient. She carries the belief that she and other staff members have been trained and hold experience in management, and it's their job to make management decisions. As a result, the symbolic use of advisory committees, which offer growers the impression that they can affect decisions, is justified by the characterizations that staff members make regarding growers. I asked Sherri how she decides that an advisory committee should be organized for a particular decision. She explained that she weighs the direct financial implications that a decision may have on growers, and only puts together committees in cases where the decision will affect them financially. Thus, the decision to organize a committee depends on whether Sherri views a decision as a business or buffering-related service.

The decision to organize a growers' committee aligns with the different characterizations that staff members make when approaching their work through the buffering and business frames. For example, if the aim of the buffering service is to shelter growers from the regulatory, economic and political environment, it makes perfect sense to staff that they exclude growers from decisions they view through this service frame. Including growers puts them in direct contact with the very forces that staff members perceive as threatening. Additionally, staff members justify their roles by characterizing growers as reliant on staff members' knowledge and expertise and as accustomed to submitting to the authority and control of other agencies and organizations, such as the tobacco program that Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables aims to replace. Thus, when staff members view a decision through the buffering service frame, or view growers as needing to be sheltered from external forces, staff members make decisions without grower input.

On the other hand, when staff members view decisions through the business frame, they perceive themselves as holding knowledge and expertise that places them in a position to make management decisions, while they view growers as inexperienced in these areas. Additionally, in the interest of efficiency, which is a key element of the business service, staff members seem to believe it is more expedient for to exclude growers from decisions because sorting through and coming to consensus on the multitude of opinions farmers carry regarding each decision will make decision-making processes longer and more complex. Lastly, staff members suggest that growers don't want to be involved in decision-making and this perception further reinforces their decision to exclude growers, or to offer only symbolic decision-making powers.

Figure 11 illustrates the way that the four enactments of staff members' service frame interact to construct their view of decision-making.

Figure 11. The Influence of Staff Members' Service Frame on Organizational Decision-making

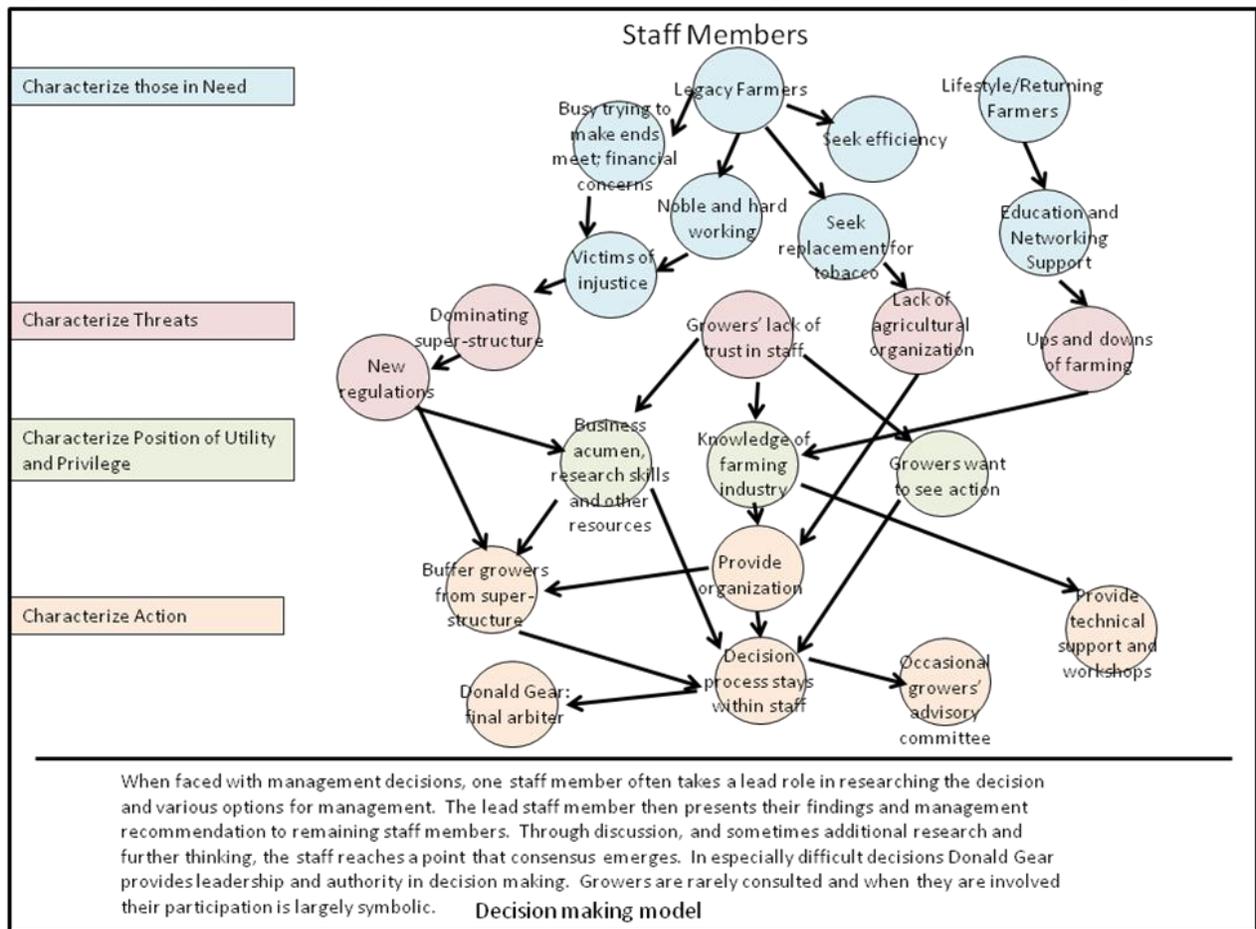


Figure 11. This graphic illustrates how the central components of staff members' frames are integrated to form staff members' overarching approach to decision-making. The four enactments of service frames are listed on the left side of the illustration. The enactments are color coded to match the various actions listed throughout the graphic in small circles. Arrows represent justificational linkages made by staff members that they use to enhance the legitimacy of their actions.

Staff members are responsible for making most management decisions regarding the day-to-day operation of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. Figure 11 illustrates that staff begin the decision-making process by characterizing the growers' that will be most affected by the decision at hand. This phase of service provision is identified at the top of the chart. Staff characterize growers into two groups. Although staff members did not name these groups explicitly, the first group staff described fits the legacy tobacco growers' frame described previously in this chapter. Staff members view growers in this group as busy, hard-working and noble tobacco farmers. The second group fits the descriptions of lifestyle and returning growers. Staff members characterize this group as inexperienced and idealistic. Once they characterize the group that will be most affected, or most concerned, with the decision at-hand they characterize the needs of that group. When considering the needs of these groups staff members characterize legacy growers as more concerned with financially-related decisions and lifestyle

and returning growers as more concerned with decisions about educational and networking opportunities.

Once they have characterized the needs of stakeholders, staff members characterize the threats that face each group. Staff see the key threats facing legacy growers coming from the agricultural-industrial food system and as the further entrenchment of injustice and victimization for these growers. These threats, along with those staff see facing lifestyle and returning growers, are symbolized in the “characterizing threats” portion of the graphic. When characterizing the agricultural-industrial food system that threatens legacy farmers, staff suggest that as this system strives to create increasing capital it seeks to force small, alternative farmers and organizations out of the market. Staff members see the idealistic expectations of lifestyle and returning growers as a looming threat to the commitment these growers show for farming. Staff believe that these growers are likely to be disappointed by their limited success with organic agriculture and will drop out of the collective when their expectations are not realized.

The next enactment illustrated in the chart symbolizes the ways that staff characterize their legitimacy and authority to make decisions on behalf of growers. Staff members claim that their business and farming expertise, as well as access to information and other resources, places them in a position that provides them with the legitimacy to make organizational decisions. In doing so, staff suggest that their business expertise, and desire to make management decisions, are seen by legacy growers as trustworthy characteristics that provide them with legitimacy and authority. When considering lifestyle and returning growers, staff suggest that their farming expertise allows them to provide these growers with the educational support they require and leads to the development of trusting relationships.

The characterizations staff members make about legacy and lifestyle and returning growers, and about the threats they observe facing these grower, lead them to take actions that they see as beneficial to each group. Staff characterize their actions as buffering services, in which they seek to shield growers from changes in the economic, regulatory and political environment of the region; business services, in which they make management decisions based primarily on financial considerations; and educational and networking services, in which they help inexperienced growers learn new farming practices and manage their expectations.

These framings lead staff to see themselves in a position to make most organizational decisions without involvement from growers. Legacy growers, they suggest, don’t want to be involved and lifestyle and returning growers do not have enough agricultural experience to warrant involvement as well as have other considerations that they prioritize. As a result, staff make most decisions amongst themselves, and even individually. When decision processes arise that hold major financial considerations they form growers’ advisory committees, but these are largely symbolic.

Chapter 5: Board of Directors' Frames

During the period of time over which I interviewed Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's board members, the board was in the midst of a heady soul-searching exercise. Early in my research, Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's founder and executive director, Donald Gear, announced his resignation. As a result, the board had recently embarked on a lengthy process of reflection about the organization's purpose, mission and practices as well as the roles of staff and board members. Board members stated that these efforts were conducted in preparation for hiring a new executive director. The board hired an outside facilitator to guide their reflection process. They met weekly with the facilitator to discuss progress and develop future plans, and they created several subcommittees to carry out specific tasks related to the upcoming search for a new director. I asked several board members if I could attend these meetings, but my request was not granted.

As a result of Donald's resignation and the reflection process in which board members were involved, I believe that I caught Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's board members at an interesting time in the organization's life. Board members were in the midst of explicitly thinking and talking about many of the issues in which I was interested. This presented both opportunities and challenges for my research.

For instance, I believe that board members held heightened sensitivities toward my research questions. They had been thinking about the topics in which I was interested as part of the facilitated reflection process, and therefore provided deeper, more thoughtful and revealing responses and insights than I believe I could have uncovered if I had conducted my inquiries at a different point in time. At the same time, however, as a result of the process in which board members were embroiled, I don't feel that I observed the board in its typical working context. Board members suggested that they had spent more time thinking about, talking with others and in meetings regarding Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum in recent weeks than was typical.

Additionally, I had a difficult time getting board members to comment directly about specific decisions that the board made regarding Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. The decisions with which board members wrestled as I interviewed them were at an altitude of 30,000 feet, while the work and decisions that I learned about from staff members and growers occurred at ground level. I was forced to wonder if serving on the board actually made it more difficult for board members to quench their thirst to serve because the board took them further from the ground level where the organization's mission-oriented work took place. Board members, it seemed to me, had a difficult time seeing the trees within the forest because they were overwhelmed by the immensity and

vastness of the forest itself. I assumed—perhaps wrongfully, but nevertheless assumed—that board members served on the board in order to feel connected to the issues for which they held passion, yet they rarely discussed decisions that brought them into contact with these issues. As a result, I often wondered why board members served at all! Clearly they held passion for the issues Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum and Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables addressed, but the work they performed as board members rarely fed their interests.

Furthermore, it was difficult for me to distinguish whether the broader frames that board members discussed, which tended to look more holistically at the role of Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum and Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables in broader environmental, cultural and economic arenas, were functions of the higher altitude from which board members observed the organization, the heightened sensitivities they held regarding these issues as a result of the soul-searching process they were involved in, or whether this characteristic was truly a manifestation of the frames through which they approached their work. As a result, I was forced to wonder if board members' landscape level perspective was a function of serving on the board or whether it was a common frame held by board members and a precedent to board service. Put another way, I wondered if being a board member encouraged and nurtured high-altitude holistic framing, or if thinking in this way was a precondition to becoming a board member.

I tried to overcome these challenges and others by reminding board members that my focus for this project was on the inner-workings of decision-making in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables and that my objective was to enhance the work of the vegetable collective and similar organizations. I emphasized that I could only accomplish these goals if I was able to develop an accurate understanding of decision-making in the organization and therefore my work depended on open, honest and frank discussion. Another challenge arose from the fact that Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables is only one program that Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum coordinates, and consequently board members have their hands in many activities in addition to those related to vegetable operation. Board respondents often related stories and examples about other Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum programs unrelated to Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables to exemplify a particular point. As board members told stories and made examples about other aspects of Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum apart from the vegetable collective or in the abstract, I asked questions such as, "do you see this same pattern or process occur when you think about Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables," "does Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables work in the same way," and "can you, or how do you, translate your broader perspective into more focused observations and decisions about Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables?" I also prompted board members to think critically about decisions the board made by urging them to think about organizational decisions and issues that other respondents suggested were sources of tension within the organization. My intent with these probes was to steer respondents to discussion points that pushed them to think

about the ground level implications of their work and beyond their roles as organizational spokespersons, in hopes that they might reveal their personal frames regarding their work with Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables and the organization at-large.

An Introduction to Board Members' Service Frame

I came to see that board members approach their work in Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum and Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables through service frames similar to those held by staff members. Through these frames board members see themselves as holding skills, abilities and resources that allow them to help those in need. Board members described two types of services that they provide: inward-oriented services and outward-oriented services. Outward-oriented services are mission-oriented services that directly complete the work of the organization by involving farmers in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables or members of the broader community, for example. Inward-oriented services work to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum and Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables by improving organizational accountability, practices and procedures. Inward-oriented services work to make sure the organizations run smoothly so that they can better accomplish outward goals.

Different board members described different circumstances in which they came to perceive their board participation through a service frame, but in each case board members described holding three common sensibilities that support their desire to serve others. First, board members discussed a strong sense of *empathy* for those they see as in need of their services. Second, board members suggested that they feel a strong sense of *responsibility* to assist those they characterize as in need. Finally, board members possess *hopefulness for the future* of the target stakeholders they aim to serve.

Dale Atkins, a board member of Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum, described the origin of his service frame. His senses of empathy, responsibility and hope show clearly in his story:

...I grew up in what was, in the 1950's, the most polluted city in America: Birmingham, Alabama. And it stunk. It had 27 miles of open hearth furnaces burning 24 hours a day. It produced more steel than any city in the world except Pittsburgh at the time. ...I grew up in a place where I saw, in the 1950s, policemen wearing masks when they directed traffic in the streets. I had a grandmother that died of emphysema.... My grandfather worked in the cement plant without any kind of protection at all, and so [my passion for sustainability] was something that was probably more on the negative side than going out and just falling in love with nature. ...Both of my grandfathers were very much socially conscious and aware, which was pretty unusual growing up in Birmingham,

Alabama, to have liberal parents and grandparents and people that saw what was going on was wrong. ...I think [those experiences] brought in me a social conscience and a sense that it's important to do something that's a little bit bigger than yourself.

Dale's story is a difficult one, yet it illustrates the first shared element of board members' service frame: empathy. Dale discusses growing up in a place where he observed others, including close family members, suffering from the inescapable burden of industrial by-products and poor working conditions. As a result of these experiences, which included watching his grandmother die of emphysema, he became conscious and aware of people's suffering and came to feel this suffering in personal ways. This is the essence of empathy. That is, empathy is Dale's awareness of, and feeling of distress for, those who suffer challenging conditions even though he has not felt those conditions personally. In Dale's case he saw the difficult conditions in which his grandparents and others worked, but he did not suffer the consequences of these conditions himself. Dale did not work in a cement plant or steel mill, or direct traffic while wearing a face mask, for example. Yet, he is still able to imagine, and through his imagination understand, what it must be like to cope with these conditions. This is the crux of empathy. It is a special kind of imaginative ability. It is a kind of imaginative ability that allows Dale to feel the hurt, pain, injustice and powerlessness of others, and this ability is one hallmark of the service frames held by board members.

Dale, now an adult, no longer lives in Birmingham, Alabama but in a small community on the Virginia/Tennessee state line in the heart of Appalachia. Even though he did not grow up in Appalachia he is still able to feel empathy for those that he observes suffering in his new environment. His sense of empathy allows him to feel the distress of others, no matter where he is and even if they suffer conditions that are different from those where his sense of empathy developed. Dale is able to imagine what it is like for tobacco farmers and other local residents of Appalachia who live with different challenges than he observed in Birmingham, because he has developed a capacity to imagine and understand the distress of others.

The second shared element of board members' service frame is their sense of responsibility. For Dale, holding a special brand of imagination that allows him to feel the hurt and pain of others creates in him a need to *do something* to improve the conditions of those he perceives as suffering. Dale states that he feels "it's important to do something" to help those for whom he holds empathy. In fact, Dale, and others who feel empathy like him, *must* serve or risk a personal identity crisis.

The two hallmarks of board members' service frames discussed so far, empathy and responsibility, reinforce one another. If, for example, Dale feels the hurt and pain of others as if it were his own and does not take actions to relieve these conditions, he believes that he is complicit in creating these conditions and will personally feel their effects more acutely. If one holds the imaginative capacity to feel empathy and does *not act*, then they become victims of their own inaction. For Dale, not acting would make him a guilty conspirator in the need for Birmingham's police officers to wear masks, the output of oppressive smog from local factories, and his grandmother's death, for instance. For those

capable of feeling empathy like Dale, inaction poses a serious threat to their identity. How could Dale go on living a satisfactory life knowing that he is complicit in hurting others, especially when he holds the ability to feel that pain deeply? Not only would Dale perceive himself as complicit in hurting others, but he would reciprocally *feel* the hurt that he perpetuates.

Indeed, many people feel empathy like Dale and do not serve on the board of directors of non-profit organizations. Of course there are many ways in which individuals can fulfill their need to serve. For Dale and other board members, the Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum board provides an outlet for this need. That is, the board allows them to carry out their need to serve others and with an avenue for treating the symptoms of the self-induced hurt that is inflicted when they leave the reinforcing relationship among empathy and responsibility untended.

The third foundational element of board members' service frame and exemplified in Dale's remarks is his ability to imagine an alternative future to one that is characterized by the continuation of the challenges that give rise to his empathy. In other words, to feel optimism that the poor conditions he sees facing those in need, can be overcome. Dale holds a hopeful vision for the future of those he aims to serve. Dale's hopefulness is implicit in his remarks when he states that it is important to do something, "*a little bit bigger than yourself.*" Embedded in this statement are the seeds for what Dale hopes to accomplish through his service frame. He aims to provide others with a way out of the treacherous conditions he observes and that he believes cause their distress. Dale doesn't describe his vision for the farmers and community members of southwest Virginia in great detail, but it is apparent that his vision is a positive one that is based on creating alternatives to threats he sees facing these stakeholders.

The hopeful vision for the future that board members hold for stakeholders is described more fully in the remarks of Martin Kruger and Ben Armitidge. Ben and Martin grew up in the local area. Therefore, the stories they tell about developing their service frames are different from that told by Dale Atkins. This is a common feature among board members. While each hold service frames, and thus the capacities for feeling empathy, responsibility and hope, they develop these capacities in unique ways. Martin, for example, described how he came to develop his service frame over the course of a career trying to solve economic development problems in southwest Virginia. In the following statement he describes the context that he sees as responsible for creating the economic problems he has dedicated his career to solving:

[This area has been in] a general decline for some time, based primarily on its heavy dependence on, for instance, a single industry, which is mineral extraction. So it's a typical all-eggs-in-one-basket kind of economy. And, as long as that basket, as long as those eggs that are in that basket stay in the basket, it's good. But, if the basket gets tipped over it's traumatic, and this particular area has seen a good amount of decline in recent decades because of that; because of that decline in the mining industry. ...Every industry and every business has a maturity, and just like you and I as human beings, at some point we kind of get to a point where we're not as productive as we used to be, and then we hang on for a while, but ultimately we all pass on.

Ben Armitidge echoed Martin's story in his own telling of the region's history. At the heart of their stories are messages about control. The central message that these two board members emphasize is that Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum and Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables exist in an area in which local residents have little control over the economy and, as a result, their livelihoods. The governing force in the region, according to Martin and Ben, is industry. Also according to Martin and Ben, industries have maturation points at which their revenues and production outputs among other indicators of business success, peak. How and when industries reach their maturation points, and how long these points are sustained, are, for Martin, like one's personal health as they grow older. From Martin's perspective, a person can take vitamins, they can exercise and eat right and they can follow their doctor's orders. Yet, at some point in their life—even if they make healthful decisions over the course of their lives and avoid major accidents—they will become less productive and then “hang on for a while, but eventually pass on.” From Martin's viewpoint all industries eventually wane, just as all humans eventually pass away, and the process by which this occurs is not entirely under our control. And, because industrial health, as Martin perceives it, is subject to forces beyond our control, the health of the local community, including the livelihoods of local residents and ways of life residents are accustomed to, are also dependent on non-local political, social and economic forces over which local residents have little control.

From this perspective it is possible to imagine that the empathetic emotions that accompany Ben and Martin's perceptions regarding residents' lack of control over their livelihoods and ways of life are similar to those that one might feel when they realize that their personal health is in decline and that the period of time in which they will *hang on for a while, but ultimately pass on*, may be drawing close. In other words, Martin and Ben imagine that local residents feel helpless, confused and vulnerable, when considering their future employment and income generating possibilities and, as a result of their senses of empathy, Martin and Ben feel this distress personally, if not directly.

The responsibility these board members feel to serve local residents is an extension of the emotions that they observe among community members and, through their empathetic imaginations, feel personally. In other words, they feel a responsibility to overcome these feelings of helplessness, confusion and vulnerability by taking ownership of their livelihoods and the local economy through the development of new economic opportunities that are not subject to the maturation cycles of industries and which are not under the control of local community members.

In addition to feeling a responsibility to help local residents regain control of the local economy, Ben and Martin clearly articulate their visions for what an alternative economy and future might look like:

Martin Kruger: Let's find a truly sustainable economy that's local people, it's craftsmen, it's farmers, it's things that are, like I said, that can provide a reasonable income to local people but can do so with a social and environmental conscious too.”

Ben Armitidge: People that live here and grew up here, can invest in, good economic opportunity while we're taking care of our environment.

The notion of regaining control is embedded in the points of emphasis of both board members. “Locals must invest in the economy and locals must commit to taking care of the environment, and that economy environment is *ours!*” they might shout.

The subsequent sections of this chapter describe the service frames through which board members approach their work in Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum and Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. Board members see themselves supplying outward and inward-oriented services. These services, and the four enactments involved with them, are described in the following sections. Following these is a description of board members’ sustainability frame. The final section of this chapter outlines how the service frames held by board members influence decision-making at the board level.

The Four Enactments of Board Members’ Service Frame

Board members perceive themselves as providing two key services organizational stakeholders. I have termed the first “outward-oriented services.” Outward-oriented services focus on stakeholders outside of the board of directors and staff at Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. When providing outward services board members consider their target audience members to be participating growers, members of the broader community of residents in the region and members of the economic development and environmental communities in the region. The second service, I have termed “inward-oriented services.” When considering inward-oriented services board members consider their key audience to be the board itself.

The service frames held by board members are carried out through the same four enactments as the service frames held by staff members. This means that as board members consider their board work and duties, they characterize those they see as in need; the threats that these stakeholders face; their own, and the organization’s, sources of legitimacy, authority and resources that make them legitimate service providers; and, lastly, the services they provide as appropriate and beneficial actions that will address stakeholders’ needs.

Board Members’ Outward Service Frame

The outward-oriented services that board members provide are those services geared towards stakeholders that sit outside of the board of directors itself, or outside of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables’ staff. When considering outward-oriented services, board members focus their efforts and decision-making on farmers that participate in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, residents of

southwest Virginia, and the broader environmental and economic development communities in the region, for example. Board members see themselves supplying two main outward-oriented services. The first pertains to the way that board members frame their work within the field of economic development. Board members' framing in this sense generally refers to job and income stability for local residents. The second pertains to what board members call "food justice issues." Food justice issues relate to the provision of inexpensive, healthy foods to local community members. These two services are described in detail in the following sections.

The Economic Development Service Frame

The first enactment of board members' economic development service frame is the characterization of target stakeholders that board members perceive as in need. Ben Armitidge performs this enactment as it relates to economic development in the following story:

We have faced so many economic development challenges in southwest Virginia over the years based on our reliance on extractive industries. Boom and bust cycles in the coal industry, and things like that. Our traditional economic development efforts have taken all of our attention and resources to offset the loss of several thousand coal jobs. ...We put a lot of energy, effort and money into traditional industrial park development and the development of shell buildings and recruiting large manufacturing employers and those kinds of things. That was out of necessity. When Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum came along, we were in the midst of that. So generating the interest of the local economic development community in a sustainable development approach to job creation and economic opportunity was not an easy thing, although I would argue that it wasn't that hard either, because we had gone through such tough economic times in the early 1980s when unemployment in this part of the world was over 20%. It wasn't that hard to show the local economic development community that [Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum] had promise. Based on that, based on the willingness to pretty much try anything that had the potential for creating economic growth, it wasn't that tough a sell.

In the story presented here, Ben characterizes two stakeholder groups. These are: the geographic community of residents that live in southwest Virginia, and the economic development community.

Initially, when considering Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum, Ben describes the target audience of the organization in a broad sense: "we" and "our" refer to all residents of southwest Virginia. The underlying message contained in Ben's characterization is that the economic development challenges that the region faces—"boom and bust cycles in the coal industry", for example—do not only challenge

those directly involved in the coal mining or agricultural industries but rather, from Ben's perspective, the entire region. As coal miners are laid-off, Ben imagines, there are likely ripple effects felt throughout the region's economy. Over time, the ripple effects created by economic challenges within specific industries are compounded and, eventually, the region slides into a perpetual state of decline from which it cannot recover. As a result, when Ben looks at his work on Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's board at its broadest levels, he is unable to point his finger at a single and specific target audience for the organization's services. Instead he considers the region and all its residents as in need.

Ben also uses the term "we" to refer to the economic development community, in which he claims membership. Ben is employed by a regional economic development agency that aims to develop and implement economic development strategies in southwest Virginia. The agency for which Ben works conducts economic analyses of the region in order to search for open industrial and market niches for new business development, advocates for business-friendly policies at state and local levels of government and works to recruit new businesses to the region as well as to support local businesses. In its early days, Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum worked to gain inclusion and legitimacy from those within the economic development community. At this point it is sufficient to say that the economic development community, concerned primarily with job creation and incomes for local residents, was a second stakeholder that board members of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables aimed to serve, at least in the earliest days of the organization's work as Ben considers in his statement.

Later in our discussion Ben described a third group of stakeholders in need of Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's and, more specifically, Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' services as they relate to economic development:

There are 60 traditional tobacco farmers now making their sufficient funding from organic produce to either provide their income or supplement their income that they used to get from tobacco. So I mean, that's the equivalent of a company coming in and creating 60 jobs, and that's only going to continue to grow as time goes on, so that's really been the most satisfying piece of it.

There are several elements of Ben's characterization of tobacco farmers that deserve noting. One is his use of the term "traditional" to describe this group. The term "traditional" is a difficult one to define; it can mean many things, and we're not sure exactly what Ben means by the term. "Traditional" could refer to the crop, tobacco, itself. In this case, Ben could mean that the traditional—*historically common*—crop of the region is tobacco and, since tobacco is no longer profitable, farmers have begun growing organic vegetables. "Traditional" could also refer to the *historical practices* by which tobacco was once cultivated, such as the means of plowing and harvesting tobacco as well as hanging and drying the leaves to prepare them for sale. From this interpretation, a new meaning in Ben's discussion emerges. This point is made when Ben says, "Tobacco farmers that used traditional methods of farming, such as horse drawn plows instead of using motorized tractors, are now making an income from organic vegetables." Ben's use of the term could also refer to a *set of values* that he imagines tobacco farmers

to hold. For example, Ben could easily be talking about the notions of work ethic, responsibility and commitment that Tom Carpenter and Susan Goren described in previous chapters. Lastly, “traditional” could refer to *the way of life* that accompanied tobacco farming. This interpretation considers elements such as farmer’s reliance on the tobacco program for crop quotas and prices as well as the seasonal and cyclical schedule of tobacco farming and other customs that accompanied farming in Appalachia. Each of these interpretations of the term is valid. The significance however, is that no matter the way Ben uses the term, it is clear that he has a *vision* of who traditional farmers are, and that vision is constructed and resides in his imagination. Ben uses his vision to guide the ways that he operationalizes the remaining enactments of his service frame and, as a result, makes decisions regarding Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum and Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables.

Interestingly, Ben’s generalization about growers in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables is inaccurate. Chapter three evidenced three groups of growers, and two of them, lifestyle and returning growers, cannot—no matter what definition of “traditional” one chooses—be considered traditional tobacco farmers. This raises a significant point. That is, that board members choose to ignore, or do not observe, subtleties in the organization’s work and relationships with stakeholders at ground levels. This point will be emphasized in subsequent chapters.

Throughout the remainder of Ben’s discussion it seems clear that he uses the term “traditional” in its most instrumental sense. That is, that for those farmers participating in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, organic vegetables have replaced tobacco as the crop of choice. Ben counts the number of farmers growing organic vegetables and translates that number into an employment statistic in the same way that an economic development agency might justify their support for recruiting a new factory to the region. Framing Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables’ stakeholders in this way, and excluding other interpretations, is a hallmark of the economic development service frame. This characterization, however, relies on making the characterization that all participating growers are financially-dependent on their farms and fit the characterization of legacy growers. For returning and lifestyle growers, however, this is untrue. The characterizations that board members make in this regard serves to elevate the organization’s role in regional economic development achievements and maintain their perception that the organization is an integral member of the regional economic development network.

There are several implications of this framing. The first is that board members see only one portion of the farmers that participate in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. By making this characterization they neglect the remaining two groups of growers. Neglecting less financially-dependent growers may carry a purpose, however. Perceiving all growers as financially-dependent, or ignoring other types of growers, reinforces board members’ service frames more than if their view were more accurate. If board members recognized growers that are unconcerned about their financial success, board members’ work would be less relevant at broader scales. Put simply, it’s difficult to feel fulfilled by helping hobby-gardeners feed their habits. Acknowledging this portion of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables’ base of growers weakens the organization’s role and accomplishments as an economic development engine. Additionally, acknowledging that many growers do not rely on the income their farms generate may make fundraising more difficult. Donors may be less likely to offer their support for programs that aim to assist those who they do not view as in need.

The second enactment of the economic development service frame that board members operationalize as they conduct their work is characterizing the threats that face those whom they describe as in need of Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum and Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' services. Board members describe two key threats when performing this enactment as it relates to economic development. These threats correspond to the three groups of stakeholders identified by board members previously. The first threatens residents of the region in a broad sense, including growers in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, among others. Ben describes the threat that residents of southwest Virginia face as the continuation of the economic challenges that arise from relying on extractive industries and that have pervaded the region for many years. The second threat is most clearly described by Martin Kruger when he describes what he perceives as cultural norms and values within the economic development and environmental communities that prevent these groups from working together to achieve common goals for the region.

When describing the first threat, the continued reliance on extractive industries, Ben describes the local region as one that has struggled to maintain economic relevance in recent decades. Downturns in the mining industry and tobacco—both natural resource dependent communities—have made jobs in the area scarce and created perpetual and entrenched poverty, Ben suggests. The tobacco and coal-mining industries, he describes, are subject to “boom and bust cycles,” meaning that their growth and success in terms of employment, revenue, production and sales, among other things, rise and fall over time. In other words, as Ben sees it, the local economy and residents' livelihoods—which rely almost entirely on these industries—are unstable because they are under the perpetual threat of suffering another downturn because of a bust in these industries.

During our conversation, Ben hinted at the relative powerlessness of residents in the local region. Extractive industries, he lamented, create ups and downs in local employment sectors and in residents' incomes that are beyond their control. Residents of the region are therefore at the mercy of broader elements such as regional, national and international social, political and economic fluctuations, over which they have little control. The overarching threats that Ben sees, then, are simply the further progression and prolonging of these cycles. The solution, as Ben sees it, is to break the region's exclusive reliance on coal mining and tobacco by creating economic opportunities that are not subject to the same boom and bust cycles.

The threat that Martin Kruger alludes to comes from cultural norms and practices that he observes within the economic development and environmental communities of which he and other Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum board members consider themselves members. This threat manifests itself, as Martin describes it, in the form of mutual distrust between these two communities. Distrust, Martin suggests, has developed between these communities as a result of the competing views that they hold regarding one another and their respective work. In each case, one community views the other as operating at the extreme edges of the economic development and environmental movements, respectively, and rejecting all suggestions made by members of the complimentary community. Thus the threat that Martin perceives is the continued intractability of conflict among the environmental and economic development communities. This conflict cycle, Martin suggests, threatens progress on either and both fronts. Martin describes the threat he perceived in hindsight:

In fact, one of the things about Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum was that instead of just letting it be scattered to the fringes just fussing about the evil people on the other end, they actually said, well, let's do something, not just bad-mouth what they're doing, let's do something positive. And I think that Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum has, what they're doing and the approaches they've taken, has been a well-thought-out and well-pursued process, and I admire why they're wanting to do what they're doing. ...In Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's predecessor's early life, I mean, they were an extreme. And the long-standing conventional economic development community was the other extreme. And those two extremes viewed each other very warily for a while. But I think gradually... the distrust of the other lessened somewhat, and I think they both came to realize that we don't have to be mutually exclusive. We don't have to fight to achieve... an economy where we can maintain good viable employment and good quality of life. It's just like two guys who didn't like each other starting off realizing, well, you know, if you get to know this guy he's not all that bad. I still wouldn't let my sister date him, but he's not as bad a guy as I thought he was to start off. ...I credit Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum for being part of that realization and being willing to kind of reach out a hand and say OK, let's find those areas of common ground and let's not be so distrustful of each other and let's realize that what the other one does isn't automatically the work of the devil, and let's all do the best we can for the benefit of our larger community here. And so there's still things that are done conventionally that Donald [Gear] is going to raise his eyebrow at, and I appreciate that and I understand that, and vice versa. ...So I do credit Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum for, over time, realizing that hey, there's, not realizing that the other side, so to speak, was, like I said, just all evil.

Overcoming this threat played a large role in generating the legitimacy and authority that Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum now possesses as an economic development and environmental organization in the region.

Both Ben and Martin described the key elements of Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's legitimacy and authority as coming from the trust they built between Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum and other members of the environmental and economic development communities. These two board members described the origins of the trust the organization generated as coming from different places, but both described the generation of trust.

In the story Ben related, he describes the economic development community's initial wariness of the notion of sustainable development, and of Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum itself, because the economic development community viewed Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum as a member of the environmental movement. Simultaneously, however, Ben describes the desperation with which the local economic development community sought new approaches to revitalizing the region's economy. There was a "willingness to pretty much try anything that had the potential" he states. In other words, the economic

development community was, from Ben's perspective, desperate for a novel approach to job creation in the region.

For Ben, Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's authority originated from the board's ownership of an idea for this novel approach—in this case, a business model for selling organic vegetables to regional grocery stores. Ben reinforces this point by illustrating that “[Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables} wasn't a tough sell...” By generating the idea for an organic vegetable collective Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's board members came to own the idea, and the economic development community, desperate to try any approach to regaining jobs and incomes in the region was, through a series of actions taken by Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's board members, convinced that the idea was a good one. Furthermore, while the idea of an organic farming collective did not match the previous economic development models that were accepted by the economic development community, their desperation to find new and successful ideas created a willingness to push the boundaries of their norms, and consider the proposal. In other words, as Ben describes it, at the time they were pitching their idea to others it was a seller's market. Authority, in this case, came to Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum because they owned the idea for Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, and their buyers, those in the economic development community, were desperate to make a purchase.

From Ben's remarks it seems that the product that Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum offered was “potential” that Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables could succeed in creating jobs and incomes for area farmers. Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's board conveyed this potential to the economic development community by describing the organic farming collective in terms that matched the frames and values of this community—in other words, by talking about the collective in the same ways that that the economic development community might advocate for a new factory. By talking about job creation, stable incomes, and other elements that addressed the threats associated with the boom and bust cycles that Ben's colleagues in the economic development community feared. Potential, however, is not reality. At the time that Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum made their pitch to the economic development community the organization did not possess a track record of success at creating successful businesses.

At its most basic level then, legitimacy and authority came to Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum because they were on the wealthy side of an information imbalance that existed between Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum and the economic development community. Essentially, as Ben described it, Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum worked hard to sell the economic development community an idea with which their members were unfamiliar and skeptical. As a result, all of the knowledge about the idea, including the business plan itself as well as the data that supported the concept, was developed and contained within Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's board. As a result, Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum was in control of the way that information was conveyed to the economic development community. Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum was in charge, talking about things which those in the economic development community wanted, but knew little about. The economic development community, as a result of their desperation, had little choice but to trust that Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's board members knew what they are talking about and pitched their idea with honesty. Trust was a critical component of the conversation. In fact, to continue with Ben's use of a buying and selling metaphor,

trust was the currency that was exchanged when the sale of Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's idea for an organic vegetable production to the economic development community took place.

For Martin Kruger, Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's legitimacy and authority comes from a different place than Ben Armitidge claims. Like Ben, Martin works for one of the regional economic development commissions in Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's service area. Throughout our interview, Martin reiterated that he felt his role on Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's board was to represent the economic development community rather than his personal views. He emphasized that in this role he views himself as an outsider to the board because most other members, from his perspective, sit within the environmental arena. Positioning one's self as unique within the board is common for board members, and will be discussed in subsequent sections of this chapter.

As Martin describes, Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's board gained legitimacy and authority through their ability to bridge the gap between the economic development and environmental communities whose entrenched norms and frames threatened their work. In other words, the board did not gain legitimacy by acting in ways typical of the economic development community or environmental community, but by acting differently. Martin describes the gridlock created by the antagonism between these two communities, and suggests that if Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum had simply translated their idea into the terms of the economic development and environmental communities they would not have achieved progress because both communities would have rejected the idea, based on their rejection of any proposal that they viewed as originating in their competitor's camp. The problem, Martin suggests, comes from the entrenched frames and values that these two communities hold, which include blanket rejections of proposals put forth by one another. Thus, for Martin, what gave Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum legitimacy and authority to move ahead with their plans to create Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables was their ability to create new values and norms that allowed for the economic development and environmental communities to interact productively.

It is at this point that the key difference between Martin and Ben's perspectives becomes apparent. From Martin's perspective, the key to Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's success at selling the idea for an organic vegetable collective to the economic development community did not come because Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's board members translated the idea into terms that the environmental and economic development communities accepted. Instead, Martin describes a situation in which Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum created an atmosphere of trust in which members of the economic development and environmental communities didn't need to translate their ideas into terms the other accepted, but to create a space where they were willing to look past their differences. As a result, legitimacy came to Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum not when they described the idea in terms of employment numbers and income statistics so that the economic development community understood them, but when both communities came to a place where that kind of translation didn't matter, because their belief—their trust—in the motives of the other community was enough for them to make the decision not to stand in the way of their initiatives.

The fourth enactment considers the ways that board members justify and characterize their actions as appropriate and effective methods for assisting their target audiences and addressing the threats they characterize as posing challenges to their audiences. It is at this point that the stories told by Martin and Ben come together.

Both board members see themselves as advocates for a new economic development and environmental conservation paradigm. This new paradigm is that of sustainable community development. This paradigm includes and values engagement and collaboration among the economic development and environmental communities rather than the competitive and conflicted relationship that these two communities once held. Included in this new paradigm, board members see themselves as supporters of a new kind of community conversation about economic development and environmental protection. That is, a conversation that gets past the threats posed by the deep-seated cultural norms and practices of the economic development and environmental communities, to one that recognizes and works to achieve multiple values in decision-making processes. The specific actions that Martin and Ben describe as working to accomplish this paradigm shift are: reaching out to others; translating the terms of one's idea and position into terms that others will understand; talking; and looking past the actions that others make and with which you disagree to recognize that the motives of other stakeholders are well intentioned even if you don't understand the tactics they use to achieve these motives.

Martin and Ben describe a situation in which each community viewed the actions of the other as inappropriate and ineffective. Members of the environmental movement characterized the economic development community as promoting the unrestrained use of natural resources with no concern for environmental repercussions, while the economic development community characterized the environmental community as unrealistic preservationists that preferred entrenched poverty over the creation of employment opportunities. Martin and Ben reported that while the economic development community was willing to act, the environmental community viewed their actions as inappropriate. On the other hand, they also suggested that the economic development community viewed the environmental community as unwilling to act, instead content to prevent any progress at alleviating poverty because progress, to the environmental community, necessarily meant environmental degradation. Board members described a situation in which the threat facing the economic development and environmental communities then was the entrenched nature of these perspectives which prevented any progress from occurring on either the environmental or economic development fronts.

Martin, in his discussion, describes several actions that Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's board took during the time period in which they sought support from the economic development community that were responsible for creating this new frame and its accompanying values. For example, he describes that Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum didn't just fuss about *"evil people on the other end, they actually said, well, let's do something, not just bad-mouth what they're doing, let's do something positive."* Based on what is known about the relationship between the economic development and environmental communities, this is a novel approach to interaction. Martin also describes several realizations that board members of Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum and individuals in the economic development community made that allowed them to act less antagonistically towards each other. These realizations

essentially amounted to members of each community understanding that they share many overarching goals with one another, even though the tactics they support are different. With these realizations members of both sides, Martin describes, “reached out” to one another. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, Martin describes the way that Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum’s board members allowed those in the economic development community to continue pursuing their objectives through common strategies and tactics for their community, without protest from those in the environmental community and vice versa. This is, perhaps, the most significant behavioral change for members of the economic and environmental communities. Martin states that, *“There’s still things that are done conventionally that Donald [Gear] is going to raise his eyebrow at, and I appreciate that and I understand that, and vice versa.* In general, Martin describes a situation in which members of both communities were still allowed to view the world from their original frames, and act in ways that supported these frames, while also stepping into a new frame where collaboration with those who, at times, view the world and act through different frames, is acceptable. For example, they can still pursue goals and projects that maintain their original values and working approaches, but they cannot protest the projects of others with the same vehemence that once characterized their disagreements. In other words, as Martin alludes, the economic development community may still chase smokestacks, but the environmental community is no longer allowed to stand in opposition to these projects. They may question them; they may challenge them; they may let the economic development community know that they disagree with them, but they cannot stand in their way. In turn, the economic development community must reciprocate this favor.

Ben provided a final example of the kinds of actions that correspond to the economic development service frame while telling a story about Sustainable Woods, a second project of Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum. Sustainable Woods uses a similar business model to Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables though instead of serving farmers the program serves area loggers and timber land owners. In the discussion presented below, Ben discusses the ways that Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum’s board promoted the idea of creating a solar kiln and timber processing facility as part of Sustainable Woods. While this example focuses on the development of a sustainable timber industry it exemplifies the kinds of actions that Ben views as successful in the case of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. The two ventures share many staff members and are operated and managed in similar ways and aim to achieve similar goals in their respective areas of professional work:

A good example is Russell County, and the Russell County Industrial Development Authority. They heard Donald and I talk about Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum’s plans for a primary wood processing center, and went out and purchased three acres of land at a cost of \$60,000. This was in the late 1990s, when things still weren’t all that great. [They did that] just on the promise of, the potential for, economic growth through the Sustainable Woods initiative. So for the local economic development community that wasn’t a huge investment, but it was a significant investment for them without which the Sustainable Woods program wouldn’t have gotten started. Then they also were willing to spend some of their eligibility for federal funding by allowing Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum to apply for and be a co-applicant for a grant from the US Economic

Development Administration to build the first solar kiln in the region. That's still a big part of Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's primary wood processing program. On down in Scott County, the Scott County Industrial Development Authority, provided property at a discount price to Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum to build their new packing facility. That's on some prime land in the prime industrial park in the planning district. So, you know, the mission, the goals of Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum have captured the attention of the local economic development community and I think it's largely because Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's message has been, you know, one that I think most people that, especially people that live here and grew up here, can invest in: good economic opportunity while we're taking care of our environment.

While the example provided here takes place in a different context from the agricultural arena, the similarities between the Sustainable Woods program and Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables are clear. For instance, it is conceivable to replace the ideas and terms related to forestry with those related to organic farming.

The Food Justice Service Frame

The second frame through which board members approach their outward-oriented services is the food justice frame. Board members consider Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' mission, in the case of food justice, to increase the availability and affordability of healthy, locally grown vegetables for local consumers. Board members, through the food justice service frame, see inexpensive and unhealthy foods as those most readily available in local grocery stores and as a result, those most often purchased by local residents. Board members see this issue as a public health and justice issue: as a result of market limitations local residents eat unhealthy, cheap foods that contribute to obesity, circulatory and heart disorders, gastro-intestinal problems and poor dental hygiene, among other problems.

The service that board members aim to supply when considering food justice is two-fold. One is to educate local residents about healthy and affordable food options so that they are equipped with information that will help them make better choices. The second service is to provide healthy and affordable food at local outlets such as farmers' markets and local grocery stores as well as food banks that offer discounted food to low-income residents.

Meg Reynolds, in the following portions of our discussion, illustrates the four enactments of service frames as they relate to food justice:

Living in this part of the country, I'm often surprised at how little basic nutritional education people have. I guess the classic example is the people who think that

Mountain Dew is, I mean, they don't drink water. They drink Mountain Dew! You see them in the grocery store and their buggy is full of Mountain Dew and Twinkies. I think that there are 2 things happening. One is, those kinds of foods are inexpensive, they're tasty and they fill-up the kids. There are all kinds of health issues that we're getting into as you I'm sure are well aware, because of the way that we feed ourselves. A lot of it in this part of the country, I think, is simply that kind of food is inexpensive and it's readily available and people don't know better. I began to recognize that there is a real lack of education on the part of, I think possibly perhaps, from schools. But, there's a real lack of understanding about what a nutritious meal looks like, and how we can feed a family of four on a really limited income if you're very careful about what you buy and where you buy it.

I have kind of a passion for food justice issues. To my mind there is a tremendous opportunity in this area. We have a lot of folks who are working but they're poor. Our unemployment rate is not that bad, but we have a lot of working poor. And I think one of the things that I'm seeing, this is also as a result of getting involved with Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum, is people can feed their families very nutritious meals very inexpensively when they shop the farmers' market. And we also are really involved with the healthy farms, healthy families program of getting excess crops to the Second Harvest Food Bank so that they can be distributed to needy families, or just families in need. Right now a lot of folks could just use just a little extra. That's not necessarily a long-term thing but an extra bag of corn or an extra box of apples makes all the difference. So anyway... this is just a passion—an awareness—that I have for helping [people] to feed each other.

When providing services related to food justice, Meg describes Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' target audience as those residents who she observes at local grocery stores with Mountain Dew and Twinkies in their shopping carts. She characterizes these residents as working poor and under-educated and when it comes to food choices. As a result of these limitations, Meg imagines that these residents are at the mercy of the commercial food industry when it comes to making choices about the food they buy. In other words, Meg characterizes this group as one that has little agency to change their shopping and eating habits because they do not possess the education about nutrition and food availability that would allow them to make healthier decisions. Meg views local residents as victims of a commercial food system that limits their freedom to make decisions by presenting them with limited options and information. When Meg sees local residents making what she views as poor nutritional and financial choices regarding food, the only rational justification that she can make that explains residents' decisions is that they must be coerced or forced into these choices by the invisible hand of this commercial food complex. "Why would anyone, given a choice, buy Twinkies and Mountain Dew!?" she seems to wonder.

Meg's operationalization of the second enactment of service frames stems directly from her characterization of local grocery store shoppers. The key threat that Meg sees local residents facing is the continued loss of agency regarding food choices. From this framing, the threat that Meg describes originates from her perspective that the agricultural-industrial food complex has an enormous ability to influence local consumers' purchasing habits. For Meg, this complex is responsible for making the purchase of healthy, locally grown vegetables difficult. Meg sees an unequal power relationship between local residents and the commercial food complex. From Meg's perspective this complex is responsible for the production, transport and provision of food to grocery stores, and therefore governs food availability and pricing. Meg's frame allows her to rationalize her belief that, from the perspective of those within the commercial food complex, it is not financially effective to provide consumers in the region with healthy, locally grown produce. For the commercial food complex, Meg's frame justifies, it is more effective to promote the purchase of Twinkies and Mountain Dew, among other foods that she considers unhealthy. The profit motive of those within the commercial food complex, Meg believes, drives the availability and affordability of food on grocery stores' shelves and the results of the profit motive are visible in shoppers' carts. The threat, as Meg perceives it, is local residents' relative powerlessness in their relationship to the commercial food complex. Therefore, Meg's objective is to change this power dynamic by providing local residents with a new relationship to food production by informing residents about the nutritional values of food as well as by providing them with opportunities to buy healthy, inexpensive, locally produced food.

The third enactment of service frames is describing the position of legitimacy and authority that board members perceive gives them the right or privilege to provide services to local residents that relate to the food justice service frame. For Meg, legitimacy and authority come from her awareness and rationality. Throughout her discussion she suggests that she *recognizes, thinks about, holds awareness of, and is surprised by*, the kinds of food choices she sees local residents make. These terms indicate that Meg's legitimacy and authority are cognitive. That is, they stem from her ability to observe and reflect upon the food choices of others. She even describes her *passion* in this regard. Clearly Meg believes that she knows a thing or two about nutrition and although she doesn't tell us where she gained this knowledge it is clear that she sees herself as holding an awareness that those she observes purchasing Twinkies and Mountain Dew do not possess.

Throughout her interview Meg justified her desire to help others make what she perceives as improved food choices by making three rationalizations. These claims are that altering one's food habits and decisions to mirror her own is: 1) healthy; 2) inexpensive and; 3) tasty. Essentially, Meg justifies her position and draws her legitimacy and authority from her belief that these rationalizations are inherent truths that, if those residents she sees making poor food choices were aware of, would motivate them to make better decisions. It is Meg's awareness that allows her to feel empowered to provide services that allow local consumers' to develop the recognition that she already holds. The problem, through Meg's frame, is a relatively simple one with a relatively simple solution. Meg can't imagine why people would *want* to make poor food choices. Therefore, by providing them with nutritional information and showing them that healthy foods can be purchased locally and inexpensively, they will change their

behavior. Authority and legitimacy, for Meg, are embedded in her awareness and her ability to make what she perceives as a rational argument.

The final enactment of service frames is justifying one's actions that address the key threats and provides services to those in need. In the case of food justice, Meg and other board members rarely describe performing these actions personally or directly. Rather the actions they take are indirect. That is, they enable Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables and Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum, through directives to staff members, to carry out food justice related activities such as providing educational materials to local residents and finding new and local outlets for selling produce to local consumers. Meg Reynolds offers an example of the way that board members act in this regard. During our interview she told a story about working with staff members at Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum to modify the kinds of financial reports that the staff and board use to make financial decisions. Her story again emphasizes the indirect and distant ways that board members are involved in the on-the-ground activities and decisions of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables:

I think what it is, is that I understand we can't get to food justice issues if we can't run the organization with a financial report that people can read. ...None of the things that I see as things that need to be accomplished in our community can be accomplished if the organization isn't run efficiently.... ...How does my passion get fed? Well, my passion gets fed when I know that the organization is structured so efficiently that it can accomplish its mission.

Summary of Board Members' Outward Service Frame

Board members' see themselves providing two key outward-oriented services. These are: 1) economic development services; and, 2) food justice services. Board members' outward-oriented service frame is founded upon four key enactments. These are: 1) characterizations about those in need; 2) characterizations of the threats that these stakeholders face; 3) characterizations of one's position of legitimacy, authority and responsibility to develop and provide services that support these stakeholders and; 4) characterizations of these actions that encourage stakeholders to view them as directly linked to, and directly minimizing and mitigating for, the threats that stakeholders face.

Table 10 summarizes the ways that board members use the four enactments to develop their economic development service frame.

Table 10. Board Members' Economic Development Service Frame

	Framing
Characterize those in need	Conflicted members of the environmental and economic development communities as well as legacy tobacco farmers in the region.
Characterize threats	Entrenched cultural norms and values that prevent progress in both the economic and environmental arenas and further impoverish local farmers and residents.
Characterize position of legitimacy and authority	Legitimacy and authority come from the organization's ability to communicate and act differently with members of the environmental and economic development communities. New communicative and relational approaches break down barriers to the entrenched values and norms of the region, creating space to nurture trust and collaboration.
Characterize actions	Talking and creating new communicative and relational strategies as well as launching businesses like Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables and Sustainable Woods.

Table 10. This table illustrates how board members use the four enactments of service frames to conceptualize their work related to economic development.

Table 11 summarizes the ways that board members use the four enactments to develop their service frame related to food justice.

Table 11. Board Members' Food Justice Service Frame

	Framing
Characterize those in need	Local residents with poor nutritional habits.
Characterize threats	Agricultural-industrial complex that makes buying local, healthy food difficult and expensive.
Characterize position of legitimacy and authority	Meg's ability to make what she sees as a reasoned and rational argument.
Characterize actions	Working through Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables to make affordable, local, healthy produce available at local markets.

Table 11. This table illustrates the four enactments of the food justice service frame and the ways that board members frame their work related to food security.

Board Members' Inward Service Frame

The inward services provided by board members are services that members provide by reflectively looking inward at the organization and determining how their skills, abilities and experiences may best contribute to the organization's efficiency and effectiveness through the improvement of internal operating procedures, staff development, funding and accountability, among other management areas.

Before proceeding to discuss inward-oriented services in general it is important to recognize a key difference in the way that board members talk about their role and participation on the board when considering inward-oriented services. When considering inward services board members talk only about *themselves* and how they view *their* role on the board. In many cases board members refer to differences that set themselves apart from the rest of the board, which they see as standing in opposition to their personal perspectives or contributions. Board members emphasize their "outsider's perspective" in these cases. It is because of the outsider's perspective that board members carry that they feel able to view the board through the accountability and organizational development service frame. As outsiders, board members feel that they observe and think about board actions and decisions differently than other members, who they portray as insiders. Insiders, board members with the outsider perspective surmise, view board actions and decisions alike, and don't hold wide enough perspectives to imagine the consequences and implications of their decisions in broader contexts.

As a result, by openly and honestly expressing their outsiders' perspectives, board members view themselves as voicing what they believe to be constructive criticism. In other words, the service that board members supply in this case is the voicing of their critical outsider perspectives. What occurs in many board decision-making processes, as a result, are conversations in which different board members, at different times, view themselves as holding unique perspectives that allow them to approach their work through the accountability frame and to voice their contrarian perspectives. As a result, board members view the board as a place for raising and debating critical moral, ethical, management and operational issues that face the organization. In other words, by raising critical issues, board members view themselves as holding the organization ethically, morally and operationally accountable. At the same time, board members see discussing these issues as processes that make the organization stronger, and thus contribute to its ongoing development. When considering outward-oriented services on the other hand, board members tend to consider and talk about the board as a collective entity which represents the views of all board members.

Board members view themselves supplying two inward services: an accountability service and an organizational development service. When supplying the accountability service, board members seek to hold the organization accountable to its mission and to local stakeholders. Board members' abilities to perform accountability services are complicated however, because not all board members interpret the mission to mean the same thing and perceive the same stakeholders as in need of the organization's services. When supplying the organizational development service, board members see themselves working to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum and Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables through the skills and perspectives they bring to the board.

Clear boundaries between the accountability and organizational development services are not easily identified. These services are complimentary to one another. The general viewpoint of board members is that by holding the organization accountable, and having discussions with other board members about accountability, they are consequently strengthening the organization and therefore simultaneously viewing the organization through the accountability and organizational development service frames. As a result, the following discussion of the ways that board members perform the four enactments of the inward-oriented service frame does not separate the accountability service from the organizational development service. Discussion regarding the ways that board members provide these services is intertwined, although specific actions related to one service or the other are occasionally highlighted.

The Accountability and Organizational Development Service Frame

Dale Atkins related a brief story that exemplified the accountability service. During his interview, Dale explained that one ongoing and critical need he sees for Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables is the development of more, and larger, local retail outlets that carry Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' produce. Currently, Dale explained, much of the organization's produce is shipped to distant retail markets in North Carolina, northern Virginia and Maryland. Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables produce is only available at a handful of local outlets, most of which are not among the larger grocery stores in the region. According to Dale, however, a local outlet owned by a large national chain has shown interest in selling Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' produce. Dale views the opportunity to sell produce to this store as a significant step towards providing local consumers with Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' produce, as a way to dramatically increase the profits of farmers that participate in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables through reduced shipping costs and as a way to shrink Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' environmental footprint through the reduction of shipping and transport. Needless to say, Dale supports the idea of selling produce to the local store.

Others on the board, Dale describes, feel differently. In recent years the chain that owns the store has become the symbolic arch nemesis of many local sustainability initiatives. Local sustainability advocates demonize this chain for treating local workers poorly, bulldozing through local government permitting processes, receiving unfair tax breaks and other subsidies from local governments that wrongfully assume the grocery giant will bring a host of benefits to the local community, and poor standards for selecting store locations, among other things. As a result, Dale Atkins believes that some staff and board members are against selling produce to this grocer even though they understand that doing so might further the organization's mission to support local farmers and provide inexpensive, healthy produce to local consumers more effectively than relying on distant markets. Dale sees board members' personal values as interfering with the mission of Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum and business of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. In this case he views himself as an accountability officer, whose job is to hold the

board accountable to the organization's mission and growers, rather than letting board members' personal values hijack progress towards the organization's broader goals. Dale, in the following segment, explains his position:

CG: It seems like to neglect [this store] as a customer when they could be one of the biggest local customers, which would both increase the benefit to the farmers as well as to local consumers... is in some ways contrary to Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' mission.

Dale Atkins: I think it is. I absolutely do. But I haven't strapped on a sandwich board and stood out and said I don't want [this store] in Abingdon, and Donald Gear has. I don't blame him for not wanting [the store] in Abingdon either, especially where they were going to put it. But, [this] is a perfect example of the complexity of this whole issue. And it gets, I'll tell you, it's just not simple.

When viewing his work through the accountability frame Dale Atkins views his contributions to the board as working to keep the organization honest. In other words, he views his accountability-related contributions to the organization as advancing the organization's achievement of its mission by preventing the board from making counterproductive decisions. Dale supplies this service by identifying points of tension between the organization's mission and decisions and viewpoints of other board members, and by bringing these points of tension to the attention of other board members.

When approaching their work through the inward-oriented service frame, board members characterize the board itself or other board members as in need. When considering Dale Atkins' story about whether Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables should sell vegetables to the local retail giant, Dale feels that without his help, the board will wander from its original intent. He explains that he understands why board members may pull the organization off its original course in this case, because there may be repercussions to the broader community if they make the decision to sell Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables produce to this particular store, and he even acknowledges that he doesn't necessarily disagree with the intent of other board members, but he still feels that it is his job to hold the board on course. That is, to say: "Hey, board members! Let's not forget why we're here in the first place!" It's as if Dale sees the board making decisions that he knows they will regret later. He sees himself in a position to provide an anchor to the organization's mission, and the board as a boat that has lost its mooring. Thus, in this case Dale views the stakeholder group that is in need of his services as the board itself.

Dale Atkins offered a second example of his contribution in terms of accountability. In this case, the board had recently decided to initiate a fundraising campaign in the communities that Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum serves. Dale described a personal and philosophical disagreement that he has with the concept of a fundraising campaign and that led him to make the decision to hold the organization accountable. For Dale, hosting a fundraising campaign contradicts Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's mission. From Dale's perspective, if the goal of the organization is to become financially stable through

the work of the organization's profit-generating projects, Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables and Sustainable Woods, then accepting donations only subsidizes unsustainable business practices and delays the board's need to face the reality that they have not achieved sustainability. In that context, the idea of asking members of the local community for donations contradicts Dale's vision of sustainability. Dale explains his perspective in the following quotation:

Dale Atkins: Asking for donations is not economic sustainability in my mind, and so I was not real happy with that. I offered at that time with Donald, I said, if you would like, I will now resign, because I really am not going to fundraise for you. Now, I'll write grants and participate in that kind of stuff, I'll do whatever else I can do, and I've done a lot of that stuff over the years, but I'm not going to go ask people for their money and set up house parties and do that kind of thing. And so the board began to, and which I knew it would, [recruit] people who could in fact bring money into the organization, and boards are openly structured that way. There's not anything wrong with that. I philosophically think it's away from what Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum does. It gets away from the, it's a triple bottom line. It's not a double bottom line of social and environmental responsibility. It's a triple bottom line.

CG: When you suggested to Donald that you would resign what did he say? Or did anything change at that point?

Dale Atkins: No, not really, but he said that he certainly didn't encourage me to do that, and that he didn't think that raising money was something that all board members should have to do....

Dale, in this short anecdote, carries out the four enactments of service frames as they relate to accountability and organizational development. First, he describes who he perceives as in need in this situation. That is, the board and organization at-large, which he sees in danger of neglecting the importance of the triple-bottom line model of sustainability that he subscribes to.

Meg Reynolds offered an example of her inward-service frame regarding organizational development:

I can give you an example of where we're not on the same page. It doesn't have anything to do necessarily with the executive director, but a philosophical point that has been made. Some people really believe that a nonprofit is a holy entity that is above common business practices. [These people believe that non-profits are] creative entities and... have the philosophical mindset that we don't want to have things too well defined because then we paint ourselves into a box. ...We don't want to micromanage. We don't want to restrict things. We want to be very creative. We want to be very loose. We don't want to do policies. We don't want any guidelines or specifications about what we do because that way we can do more. And there's validity to that argument, and especially when you're working with creative people, I think if you paint them into a box

and you put too many restrictions on them, then you stifle their creativity and that's not a good thing. And it isn't helpful for the organization. But on the flip side, our organization is a business. And so whether or not you like the idea of businesslike and professional practices, that's the reality of what we have, and so I think when you look at our board, we have people who have a philosophy that everything needs to be loosey-goosey and then we've got other people on the board who are saying well, we need some definition and we need to have things basically, I keep using the word defined and I'm trying to come up with another one, but defining something doesn't necessarily restrict it in my mind. Where I'm coming from on this is I see that I'm a creative person myself. I'm a freelance writer. I see the idea of not restricting creativity, but I also recognize parameters need to be established because people work well when they know what they're up to. ...So I'm of the mindset that I don't see structuring your organization and doing strategic planning and creating structures for the organization as being restrictive. I see that as defining the organization in a very positive and very dynamic way. And so there's probably a philosophical difference on the board about that. ...I'm like the loosey-goosiest one of all when it comes to the way I do my own business, but I think that what the board ultimately, when you kind of get up at altitude and you look at the big picture, ultimately I think the board is on the same page when it comes to the fact that structure will help the organization move forward and make progress.

Meg, like Dale Atkins previously, also describes the board itself as the target stakeholder in need of her assistance.

The threats that board members seek to overcome when viewing their work through inward-oriented service frames arise from the personal values and interests of other board members because these are the sources of discussions that can, board members anticipate, derail the work and progress of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. For Dale Atkins, the decision that the board is making to reject the largest grocery outlet in the region as a client is based on board members' personal values rather than on a conflict with Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's mission or Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' business model. From Dale's perspective, if the board wants to reject this store as a client, it should be because there is a value conflict at the organizational, not personal, levels.

Dale's story may be interpreted in a number of ways. He states that, "[This store] is a perfect example of the complexity of this whole issue. And it gets, I'll tell you, it's just not simple." One could interpret this quote to mean that the question of whether to sell produce to the store is a conflicted one, which could both advance and hinder the organization's mission at the same time. This interpretation underscores that selling to this store will open up an enormous local market that will bring income to participating farmers, cost less in shipping, and provide locals with increased access to Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' produce while recognizing that partnering with this chain store may damage the sales of smaller, locally-owned grocery outlets and pose challenges to members of the broader

community by threatening the viability of other locally-based businesses. This interpretation recognizes the inherent complexities and contradictions in this decision.

A second interpretation relies on a deeper reading into the way that Dale presents his argument. He stutters. He starts and stops. There is frustration in his voice. Dale clearly has a difficult time articulating the point he is trying to make, which is about the difficulty of performing the accountability service. He seems to be questioning himself. He seems to question whether to raise the point he sees as critical in this decision and to hold the board accountable to its mission. Thus, when performing the accountability service, board members view other board members' values and interests as threats at two levels. At the first level are those values that threaten to sidetrack the organization's progress toward the mission. This is the viewpoint presented above. At the second level are values that prevent board members from providing the accountability service. These values are related to board unity, cohesion, trust and responsibility. It is at this level that Atkins' reluctance arises. He wonders whether he should voice his opinion, because he is afraid that other board members may view him as an outlier and contrarian. Dale's second example regarding the fundraising campaign illustrates similar tensions as does Meg's description of the debate about board flexibility. Board members it seems, including those who provide accountability services, hold values related to teamwork, collaboration and compromise, and the strengths of these shared values makes approaching one's work through the accountability service frame, difficult.

When performing accountability services, board members must take this into consideration. The board has developed a system of practices for allowing board members to provide accountability services without fear of punishment from other board members. These actions will be discussed as the fourth enactment of board members' inward-oriented frames.

Board members justify their legitimacy as accountability officers in three ways. The overarching commonality among these justifications is that in all cases board members view themselves as individuals apart from the rest of the board. Each justification allows board members to feel that they hold unique skills or experiences that allow them to view board actions differently than other board members. For example, Dale Atkins describes his extensive academic experience studying non-profit management and serving as a consultant to non-profit boards working to enhance their effectiveness. Dale believes that this experience gives him a special role when it comes to accountability. Dale does not explicitly describe the source of his legitimacy and authority in this case, though throughout our interview he often described his deep knowledge of scholarly and theoretical models related to sustainability, and he hints at that knowledge in this interview segment. Other board members, such as Meg Reynolds, discuss their experiences serving on the boards of other non-profits, and how they translate those experiences into knowledge that they feel gives them a novel perspective towards Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum. Meg also mentions her own loosey-goosey business practices. In this case she seems to be using her own organizational and management inadequacies as a point of legitimacy for providing a new perspective. Third, are board members like Ben Armitidge and Martin Kruger, who grew up in the region and work professionally in the local economic development sector. These board members describe their lengthy experience and understanding of the issues with which Blue Ridge

Sustainability Forum focuses as the source of their ability to keep the organization honest and true to its mission, especially as it relates to local needs and contexts.

Board members view accountability services as something they provide individually. At different times and in different ways, most of the board members I interviewed described a time when they held the board accountable. In each case they described their actions as taken individually, rather than in collaboration with other board members. As a result, the different ways that they characterize the positions they hold that allow them to serve as accountability officers are individually-based as well. Board members only talked about themselves and the experiences they hold that allow them to play this role.

The interesting feature of each of these role descriptions is that each focuses on the characteristics that make board members unique from other members, rather than common features of their backgrounds, values and interests. Thus, in order to play the accountability role, board members must balance their unique perspectives and desire to hold the organization accountable with board members' shared values related to collaboration, cooperation and cohesion. It is at this point that the overlap between the accountability frame and organizational development frame becomes important. By viewing their work through both frames simultaneously, board members make the case that the very reason they hold the organization accountable is to strengthen it. As a result, board members can set themselves apart from the rest of the board, and can be contrarian to the shared values other board members hold, while strengthening these values at the same time.

Included in Dale's stories, as well as others presented by board members, are several actions that board members use to exemplify, or explain how they deal with, the tensions that arise as they provide accountability and organizational development services.

Dale Atkins, for example, suggested that one of the best decisions he believes Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum has made in the past several years was to hire Sherri Baker, the business manager of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables and Sustainable Woods. Dale sees this step as a major move towards enhancing organizational accountability because he sees Sherri's business expertise as able to provide other board members with a much needed dose of objectivity and reality. Dale sees this decision as a serious step towards ensuring that Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum is managed for its financial as well as social and environmental objectives. From Dale's perspective, hiring Sherri further developed the organization by improving its financial planning practices, but also provides a check on board members' values that threaten the organization's ability to achieve its mission. A financial manager like Sherri, Dale believes, would not allow the board to make ineffective financial decisions that conflict with the organization's purpose, such as refusing to sell produce to a large grocery store.

The decision to allow the board to be a place where members can debate their philosophies of non-profit governance is another decision that the board takes to deal with the tensions that arise among board members. It is clear that board members hold different, and sometimes dissimilar, interpretations regarding Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's mission and the role of the board. If the board was not a place where the issues board members described could be discussed, and the purpose

and mission of the organization were not up for debate, then it seems board members would not remain on the board long because they would feel constrained by their abilities to effect change. Tolerance for alternative philosophies seems to be a common trait that board members possess. It seems that a characteristic of the board is to openly accommodate these differences and make the board a place where debate is encouraged. This characteristic seems to help alleviate the tension Dale exhibited about playing the accountability role. This development allows members to openly stand in opposition to other board members while knowing that they will not be punished for it. Furthermore, by allowing open discussion, board members come to see that their oppositional stances are likely only temporary. In other words, while they may stand in opposition to others when discussing one issue or decision, it is likely that they will sit with the majority of board members on another, and someone else will take a turn at serving the accountability role.

In fact, the board has made discussion and debate so welcome, that the board recently made the decision to hire an outside facilitator to nurture debate as the board began the process of searching for a new executive director to replace Donald Gear. This decision not only represents the board's willingness to hold vigorous debate about philosophical issues, but also its aims to keep these debates active. By hiring a facilitator to both nurture these debates and keep them civil the board takes steps to make sure that board members are allowed to speak openly and honestly—that is, to provide the accountability service—without feeling that they are ostracized from the board.

A final action that board members take regarding accountability and organizational development is to grant board members exemptions from participating in activities to which they have objections. For example, Dale was granted an exemption from participating in the fundraising campaign.

Summary of Board Members' Inward Service Frame

When viewing their work through their inward service frame, board members consider elements such as the role of board members and the role of the board at-large in organizational decision-making, fundraising, and the organization's purpose and mission, among other things. In considering these activities and decisions, board members perform the same four enactments as they perform when considering outward-oriented services.

These enactments and their contribution to the development of board members inward-oriented service frames are outlined in Table 12.

Table 12. Board Members' Accountability and Organizational Development Service Frame

	Framing
Characterizing people	It is the people on the board, and their values, that raise the need for the accountability and organizational development services.
Characterizing threats	The key threats are board members' beliefs and values.
Characterizing position of legitimacy and authority	It is board members' abilities to define their uniqueness, to set themselves apart and in opposition to the rest of the board that allows them to serve in the accountability capacity and contribute to organizational development.
Characterizing action	Evolved the board to become a place for open debate and negotiation; hire outside facilitators to nurture discussion; grant exemptions to board members with objections to decisions.

Table 12. This table illustrates the central components of board members' inward service frames.

Board Members' Sustainability Frame

Figure 12 illustrates that the overarching scale at which board members view sustainability is at the regional level. At this scale, board members define sustainability as an aspirational ideal, met by the development of a new regional economy that is based on identifying and creating new industries, business and employment opportunities for local residents. The opportunities that board members aim to develop do not rely on the same destructive practices and extractive resources that board members view as responsible for creating and reinforcing the boom and bust cycles of economic instability in the region. As an aspirational ideal board members view reaching sustainability as an ongoing process with no endpoint. Board members view Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables as one element of this process because it provides environmentally friendly economic opportunities to farmers in the region, who were previously involved in more destructive farming practices associated with tobacco cultivation. As an aspirational ideal, however, board members suggest that even though Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables is operational, there are an endless variety of ways to improve its business, social and environmental practices as well as other industrial arenas to address besides agriculture.

Board members focus their regional perspective on sustainability through their network relationships with the regional environmental and economic development firms with whom they partner on the development of sustainability initiatives such as Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. Throughout our

interviews board members told lengthy stories about the integration of Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum into the regional economic development and environmental communities. As a result, board members operationalized their regional approach through discussing and making decisions about how to better interact with, and position the organization within, this community so that Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum can better direct the process of regional sustainable development.

When considering sustainability at the regional scale, board members identified several elements of the economy, cultural landscape and environment with which they are concerned, and which influence their framing of sustainability. When considering economic aspects of sustainability at the regional scale, board members focus their attention on the creation of new industries, businesses and employment opportunities that do not rely on extractive or environmentally destructive industries. When considering environmental aspects of sustainability, board members focus their attention on business opportunities that utilize renewable resources and maintain the integrity of the landscape. Board members suggest that within the agricultural industry organic methods of farming accomplish this more successfully than the more intensive and polluting practices associated with industrial tobacco cultivation. Board members identified three critical elements of their work that address social equity and the cultural landscape of the region. First, board members described their efforts to develop a more trusting, communicative and collaborative network of economic and environmental development firms in the region. At this level, they focused their attention on overcoming the adversarial and conflict generating relationships of the past. The second element that board members emphasized was the support, maintenance and reinforcement of a distinct sense of place in the region, which recognized the region's agricultural roots and the importance of maintaining the working landscape for maintain a sense of local pride. The third element discussed by board members dealt with the development of a local economy around food production and consumption, in which local residents had opportunities to purchase inexpensive, high quality, locally produced food.

Figure 12 illustrates the ways that board members prioritized the three elements of sustainability as well as the scale at which they perceive their work. Figure 12 illustrates that board members focus their attention at the regional scale as described previously. However, board members did describe strong feelings regarding organizational sustainability as well. I speculate that these feelings are less strong however, because board members described debates about organizational sustainability as ongoing, persistent and secondary to the board's primary work, which is promoting sustainability at the regional level. In other words, board members felt that internal debates about the meaning of sustainability at the organizational level were unlikely to be resolved and that these debates were an important piece of their work, but that these debates did not get in the way of board members' focus on its core mission at the regional level and about which board members shared consensus. Board members did not exhibit strong concerns or feelings about the meaning of sustainability at individual scales. Most board members acknowledged that they were not familiar with participating farmers in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables and, as a result, I speculate that individual level sustainability is simply not a salient topic for these individuals.

Figure 12 also illustrates board members' prioritization of the three elements of sustainability. At the regional scale this means shifting the region's reliance on extractive and destructive resource dependent

industries to those that rely on renewable resources and that operate in a way that places positive attention on the region’s landscape as a source of identity and pride. At the organizational level, economic success means developing Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables’ financial resources and business models to the point that the organization no longer relies on external subsidies such as fundraising and grants. As a result, board members tend to view the individual business ventures of Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum, of which Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables is one, as experiments. Their concern is at the regional level, not organizational. This means that if Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables proves to be an unsuccessful business model and venture they can stop the program and initiate a new one. At the regional scale board members also exhibited a high level of concern for social equity within the environmental and economic development communities. This means that board members placed a great deal of importance on the development of trust and communication among economic development and environmental organizations and agencies. Additionally at the regional and global scale, board members illustrated less concern about environmental sustainability, although I suspect this is because they consider the environmental obligations of the organization to be met through the use of organic farming methods. By using these methods, board members suggest that the organization has achieved its goals of developing renewable and restorative resource industries, and as a result can shift its focus to social equity and economic concerns.

Figure 12. Board Members’ Sustainability Map.

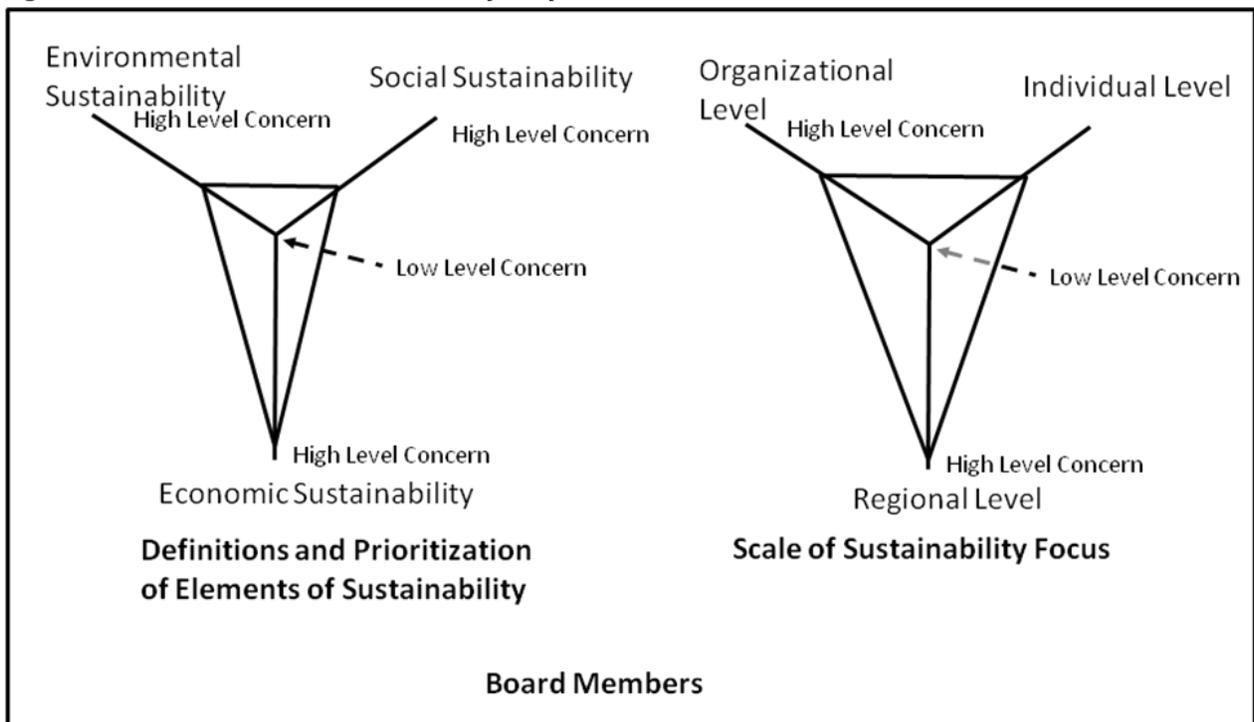


Figure 12. Board members prioritize Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables’ financial success above environmental and social concerns once baseline criteria have been met in the environmental and social arenas. Board members place their attention at the regional level, where they aim to enhance economic sustainability at the regional level through the development of renewable and respectful natural resource dependent industries.

Board Members' Service Frame and Approach to Decision-making in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables

The service frames through which board members approach their work serve as the foundation for the ways that board members view decision-making, develop decision-making processes and make decisions within Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum and about Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables.

When considering outward-oriented services, the general tasks of the board are, as board members see them, to develop an overarching characterization frame through which they would like those outside the organization to view the organization and its work. When considering inward-oriented services, board members view their key tasks as being to discuss, and reach consensus about, the organization's mission and board members' roles in carrying out that mission, as well as to hold the organization accountable to the mission when making operational decisions and directing staff.

The overarching decision-making process that board members described when considering their outward and inward-oriented services is one that includes four elements. The first element included in this process is lengthy and lively discussion about leadership and management philosophies, the roles of board members in organizational management, and the organization's identity and purpose. The goal of this process, board members suggest, is to develop shared values and consensus about these topics. The second element that board members described was making allowances for board members who do not share the values that other board members consider vital for board membership, and who cannot come to consensus on the issues of members' roles, or leadership and management philosophies. When board members disagree, the board, or Donald Gear in extreme cases, grants these members exceptions from participating in board actions or decisions in order to satisfy these members' philosophical differences and values and to keep the board intact. This third element of board decision-making is a heavy reliance on Donald Gear's experience and vision when making decisions. Essentially, when difficult decisions arise, board members ask "What would Donald do?" The final element of the decision-making process at the board level is the exclusion of staff and growers from board decision-making. These elements are described in greater detail later in this section.

Figure 13 illustrates this decision-making model.

Figure 13. The Influence of Board Members' Service Frame on Organizational Decision-making

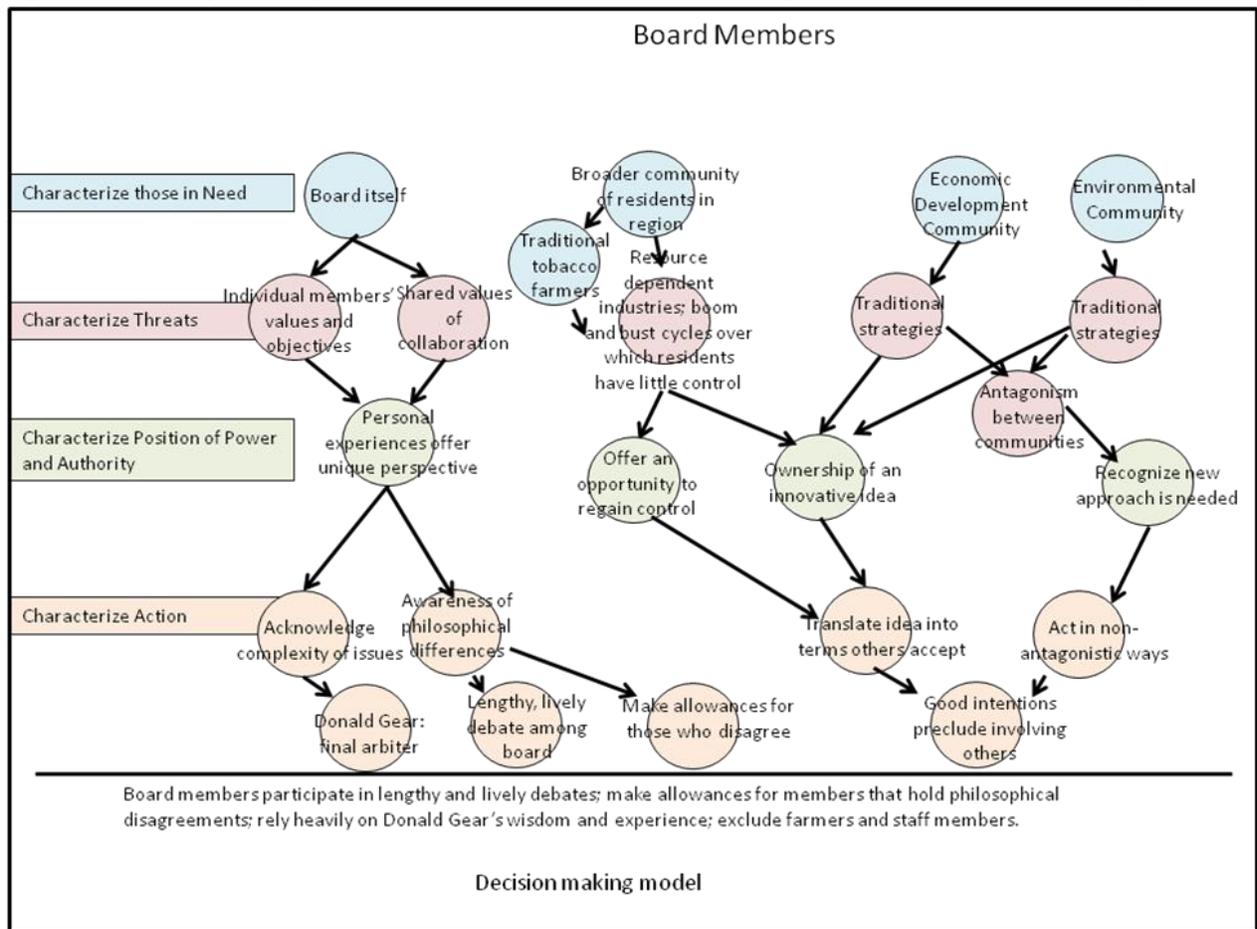


Figure 13. Illustrates the ways that board members' service frames influence their approach to decision-making within Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables.

The four key audiences that board members characterize as in need are identified along the top of Figure 13. Each audience is connected by arrows to the key threats that board members perceive as creating "need" among these audiences. For example, board members characterize the board itself as an in need audience when they discuss the accountability service frame. The two key threats board members identify related to accountability are individual board members' values and objectives that threaten to derail progress towards the organization's mission, and shared values related to collaboration that make holding the board accountable difficult for board members who oppose board decisions.

In terms of the broader community of residents in the region, and tobacco farmers, the key threats that board members perceive, and use to justify their view that these audiences are in need of their services, are the host of threats related to the region's economic and cultural dependence on a small number of resource dependent industries that are subject to boom and bust economic and employment cycles.

The final audiences that board members view as in need are the environmental and economic development communities. In this case, board members justify their perceptions that these communities are in need by describing the conflict that these communities are engaged in, as a result of their commitment to their respective traditional strategies of achieving their goals—which are antagonistic towards one another.

The next phase of the illustration outlines where board members view their legitimacy and authority to perform the key enactments and provide services to the audiences they describe as in need, originates. In the case of the board itself, board members justify their contributions to accountability and organizational development by setting themselves apart from the rest of the board, by describing personal experiences that they believe give them unique experiences that provide them with viewpoints of which other board members may be unaware. In the case of the broader community, who board members view as in need of a new economic and cultural system that offers local residents more control of their economic and cultural way of life, board members justify their ability to intervene by describing their ownership over a new approach to economic development. This characterization directly meets the need of this audience, board members rationalize, because the key threat facing the community is a lack of innovation in economic development projects. The board specifically describes their legitimacy and authority coming from the board's ownership of the idea. Because they own the idea, and have convinced others in the community that it is a worthwhile idea, they view themselves as holding legitimacy and authority to implement the idea.

When considering the economic development and environmental communities, the board justifies their legitimacy and authority in much the same way. Again, legitimacy and authority comes from the board's ownership of a new and worthwhile idea. Legitimacy and authority, in this case, also come to the board as a result of their ability to bring the economic and environmental communities together around this idea. That is a feat that no other group has been able to accomplish, and as a result the board believes they gained the trust and respect of both the environmental and economic development communities.

The fourth enactment of service frames is characterizing the actions taken as beneficial and necessary steps to serve in need audiences. The general medium through which board members described decisions being made is discussion during board meetings facilitated by a hired professional facilitator. Several board members described the discussion processes regarding the current decision with which the board is wrestling: how to go about replacing Donald Gear, the organization's founder who recently announced his resignation. In this case, board members described a process in which the board aims to develop a shared vision regarding the organization's purpose and mission, and to document that purpose and mission, so that the new executive director may more easily transition into their role. A key element of this process then, is to reach consensus on issues regarding organizational vision, purpose, mission and values. Board members described two key drivers of this discussion process. The first is the notion that board members see themselves as individuals with unique experiences and perspectives, and thus unique contributions to make to board discussions. As a result, board members often describe their differences from the rest of the board and that set themselves apart and often in opposition to the remainder of the board. This feature of board members' individual service frame is in tension with the shared values related to collaboration, cooperation and cohesion that board members

hold. As a result, board members at once set themselves apart from the board by offering unique perspectives, while working to bridge those perspectives to achieve consensus. The end result is that the board often has lively and lengthy decision-making processes based on open debate.

Evidence does suggest, however, that consensus is not always achieved among the board. In cases where consensus is not achieved, allowances are made for board members with philosophical disagreements with board decisions. This is the second key element of board members decision-making process. This is a key step in allowing the decision-making progress or actions to move forward, without punishing board members, delaying action or board attrition. Evidence of this was seen in many stories related to me by board members, such as the example Dale Atkins provided regarding his refusal to participate in fundraising activities. In cases such as these, where consensus is unable to be achieved, board members who do not agree with the approach shared by other board members are granted exemptions from participating. At the same time, however, those individuals who cannot come to consensus and are granted exceptions make exceptions of their own to actions by the remainder of the board with which they disagree. For example, not only is Dale exempted from participating in fundraising by Donald Gear, but he decides to remain on the board even though they have made a decision with which he strongly disagrees. Additionally, he implicitly grants the board an exemption by allowing other members to proceed with the fundraising initiative even though he believes it places the organization at a disadvantage and conflicts with his personal philosophies of board management.

The third element of board decision-making is the board's heavy reliance on Donald Gear's opinion. Dale Atkins demonstrated this point:

The primary measure of whether we will reach consensus is based on Donald's analysis and input. I wouldn't say it's just based on what Donald wants, because that wouldn't be fair to him. But it is based on his expertise. And again, that's what the organization is built on, is Donald's expertise.

The general feeling of board members is that the organization itself is Donald's brainchild, and much of the success that the organization has enjoyed has been the result of his thinking and action. Board members state that Donald's experience is a tremendous asset to the board, and as decisions arise they often turn to him for advice. The impression that Dale's remarks provide is that consensus would often not be achieved without Donald's input. In other words, board members hold such trust in his wisdom, experience and vision, that in many cases his opinion is the opinion that unifies the board.

The final element of board members' decision-making process is that staff and growers are generally not involved in decision-making. Again, Dale Atkins discussed the lack of involvement between staff and board members:

The board has not been involved in deciding, nor should the board be involved in deciding, where the vegetables are sold. And so, with a philosophical statement, I understand that they have to provide a market for the vegetables and for the farmers

and it's up to Donald and Sherri and Susan Goren and all those guys to make those decisions, and I don't think the board – and this comes back to that basic organizational structure – I don't think the board should be involved in the operational planning of the organization. I think the board is too involved in that right now in a lot of ways. But I don't think that boards should meddle in the management practices that are going on.

When it comes to staff and growers, it seems that board members view their role as to guide the organization on philosophical issues and perspectives, but not to reach down to the level of operational matters and decisions. Board members see themselves as “contributing” personal expertise and guidance to the organization, but not involved for the purposes of performing day-to-day activities. For Dale Atkins, this seems to be a question of checks and balances. As a board member who frequently plays the accountability role, it seems he holds little trust in board members and believes that by meddling in the daily operations of the organization, board members will be counterproductive and allow their personal values to obscure staff members’ work and veer the organization off course.

It should be noted that one board chair is dedicated to growers. However, many growers suggested that they were unaware who their board representative was or their representative’s role in decision-making at the board level. Other growers stated their opinion that they held little confidence in the effectiveness of their grower representative. Board members rarely mentioned the grower representative during their interviews, other than to make the point that growers did have a representative on the board. It seemed to me, however, that this representative was mostly absent from board discussions and decisions. I invited the growers’ representative to the board to participate in an interview, but he declined.

In summary, this chapter illustrates that board members’ individual frames do influence the ways that they approach decision-making in Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum and regarding Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. Board members hold a service frame that operates at two levels. The board, collectively holds a unified vision for outward-oriented services. The board supplies two outward services: economic development services and food justice services. The board performs four enactments when providing these services and the decisions and actions that the board takes when approaching its work through the outward service frame directly align with these enactments. At the second level the board holds an inward-oriented service frame, which focuses on organizational accountability and development. At this level, board members act as individuals, and perform the four enactments as individuals. At this level, the inward-service frames, and ways that individuals perform the four enactments, often come into tension with the service frames of other board members. When considering inward services, the board takes several actions to allow for board members’ diverse frames to play a role in the organization.

Chapter 6: Discussion

Donald Gear and I had a frank discussion about managing the differences over growers' diverse objectives while eating Denver omelets, hash browns and toast at the Chickin' Lickin' Café. He described two types of growers in the collective. First, he described what seemed like traditional tobacco farmers.

These guys are socially conservative, politically kind of mixed, basically conservative with a little bit of a labor streak in them. They grew up very, very much in the traditional agricultural mode.

Donald's characterization aligned with my own image of Tom Carpenter. He continued his explanation while adding spoonfuls of sugar to his coffee.

[Those in the second group] are newer, younger people, including some who've moved to the area and who are the more typical organic type philosophically, socially and politically.

Mitch Spiegel fits this group, I thought. Donald went on.

The traditional guys come to Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables because of the size of the market and the prices they can get. And it's really as simple as that. They think they can make more money at it.

...For the newer group it's all about being part of the movement, which is a real different motivation. And typically they're harder to work with... because they have all the idealism and no experience with really hard work that involves incredible ups and downs in the course of a single season, let alone over time, and is almost guaranteed to include a substantial dose of failure in spite of all your efforts. Because ultimately it's a biological process, and that's what I like to say. The 4th rule of organic farming is that nature is a pain in the ass.

"Can I get you gentlemen anything?" our server inquired. "No thanks." we answered in synch.

Donald went on to describe the overarching assumption that guides staff members' decision-making when they consider the values and aspirations of the two groups of farmers.

The assumption that drives the research that we do... and that drives the way we try to conduct the distribution process, how we run the packing house, the delivery and all that, and the types of markets that we sell into and the crops that we sell... the assumption that drives that is that most of the farmers are in it for the money. Either because they're cash-strapped or they're kind of a little bit forward-thinking, but mostly in a sense of 'how can I make more money? How can I be profitable? How can I increase my market share?' That's who we assume we're selling for.

Essentially what Donald described was a system by which staff members prioritize the needs and concerns of some growers—those like Tom Carpenter—over those of farmers like Mitch Spiegle.

And so the people who are more like [you and me] in a sense—who are by and large experimenters, tweekers, and curious... those people can always go deeper and those people tend to attend more of the farm tours and attend more of the trainings. So they'll get what they need for the most part. ...but mostly we hit it at that level for the folks who mostly have a kind of self-interest. A financial self-interest.

I'd already learned from interviews with other growers and staff members that Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' decision-making processes rarely included growers. This reality didn't sit well with me. My vision of sustainable development taught me that initiatives like Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables were to be as much about fairness, inclusion and equity as about making money. In other words, not only were sustainable development initiatives as I understood them to create fairness, inclusion and equity among stakeholders at the grassroots level, but they were supposed to do it in a fair, inclusive and equitable way. Yet, the process that Donald Gear described did not fit this model. I was being told that in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables the process of making decisions was not only an exclusive one, but it also rarely considered the values or aspirations of approximately half of the program's membership. The reality that Donald described did not match my vision. Was I a naïve idealist, I wondered? Why would growers like Tom or Mitch participate in an organization that perpetually compromised their personal values?

Donald seemed to read my mind. He began slowly, weighing his words before speaking.

By and large, our growers are very much individualists and they're probably used to making their farming decisions and most of their decisions kind of on their own.

Gauging my reaction to see that he was getting to the point I was after, Donald began to pick up the pace.

...They realize pretty quickly that the way this system works— well, they realize pretty quickly that they need the other growers and they need the system. That's the infrastructure and the cooperation of the staff. It all takes at least a minimal level of cooperation to play; you just can't play on your own. In fact, there have been a couple of growers who have tried to sidestep the system. We discourage that. We say 'if you're going to grow organic we hope you'll stay with us.' But we can't stop them from doing it. But what happens [when they do sidestep us] is the buyers [at the grocery stores] call us and say, 'so and so says he wants to sell to me directly. I don't really want to deal with them, I want to deal with you guys.'

I nodded, urging Donald to continue.

...this is also why we didn't form it as a cooperative. ...Because the real problem with coops is that there's a lot of layers. You know, you've got by-laws and articles of incorporation, you've got personnel policies to deal with, and you manage staff people, and then sometimes the staff people are managing the coop board members. It's complicated and it's cumbersome and a lot of people just hate all those damn meetings! The thing about our system is it's this network approach. The people come together because they need each other to fill a market; to produce a product to fill a market. By themselves they can't do it. They can't meet the standards. They can't hit the quantity or quality. And so it's a system based on mutual need. Which again would bother some people. Some people would be like, 'but [the farmers] are not all philosophically together, they're not sharing enough.' To me that's not the way the world works. ...Most people are more focused on themselves and their own needs, which is not good, but that's who we are. It's what we've come to be. ...So if you can parlay that into, 'what I want is to make more money or I'm going to give up this farming,' and then they hear about Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables and they've heard that 'it's not a bad deal because they've got these big markets or several acres or whatever, and overall they pay pretty good too,' and if you enter into it for that reason and then you just get enough of an understanding that 'I'm going to do my part or I'll mess it up for myself and others,' which they don't all get, but as long

as you get to that point, then that's the level of investment that we need.
...it's not that we balance individualism against the community thing. It's just that people realize they've got to behave in this cooperative fashion in order to get what they need.

Meanwhile, in the kitchen at the Chickin' Lickin' Café a tray of juice glasses crashes to the floor, shattered.

Check please.

The previous three chapters illustrate that each of the key stakeholder groups in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables—growers, staff members and board members—approach their work with the organization through different frames. These frames define the ways that these stakeholders approach their service and membership in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables as well as their perceptions and definitions of sustainability. The previous chapters also illustrate that the frames stakeholders hold have implications for the ways that they view and participate in decision-making as well as the decision outcomes they support. This chapter builds from these points to describe the types of tensions and conflicts that arise as a result of stakeholders' divergent membership, service and sustainability frames as well as how stakeholders in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables cope with these tensions and the implications of these coping mechanisms.

This chapter has four sections. The first provides a summary of the decision-making processes used by stakeholders in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables to make decisions regarding the organic farming collective. This summary moves beyond the stakeholder level descriptions provided in the previous chapters to describe how the frames of each stakeholder group are integrated into organizational level decision-making processes within Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. The second part discusses the kinds of tensions that arise over stakeholders' divergent membership, service and sustainability frames when organizational decision-making processes are underway. The third section outlines three ways that stakeholders in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables cope with these tensions. The final portion discusses the implications of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' conflict management mechanisms as they relate to trust, organizational learning and resilience, relationships between growers and the achievement of aspirations related to sustainability.

Decision-making Processes within Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables

This section provides a summary of the decision-making processes used by stakeholders in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables to make decisions regarding the organic farming collective. The summary presented in this section describes the ways that the frames of growers, staff members and board members are integrated into an organizational approach to decision-making.

For the purposes of this research the three stakeholder groups included in this study—growers, staff members and board members—can be conceptualized as relating to one another vertically, across three hierarchical levels. Growers sit at the grassroots level and board members at the highest level of the hierarchy. Staff members are located at the intermediary level, and hold primary responsibilities for decision-making regarding the collective on a day-to-day basis. Their decisions must reflect the directives given to them by board members as well as the needs and concerns of growers. As a result, much of the focus on decision-making and conflict management in this chapter emphasizes how decision-making and conflict management occur at the staff level, and the implications of these processes for growers.

Decision-making by Growers

Growers suggest that they have a great deal of decision-making responsibility and control over decisions that concern the management of, and farming practices used on, their individual farms. Throughout this research growers discussed their freedom to make decisions about whether to join Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, how large an area to farm for the collective and who will perform farm work, among other decisions. When considering decisions that hold implications for Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables at-large and for other participating growers, such as what vegetables to grow and at what volumes, growers recounted that they held less control and responsibility. According to growers, many of these decisions are made in accordance with other farmers and staff members at Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. For example, when determining crop volumes staff members provide growers with target numbers for each vegetable the collective grows. These volumes are based on the quantities staff members predict can be sold to clients and are developed through communication with clients. Once staff members determine the predicted volumes, they facilitate an auction among growers to determine how the volumes will be met and divvied up among growers. Each grower bids on the volume of vegetables they would like to grow. Growers' bids are viewed by the collective as non-binding contracts and quotas. Participants' bids are non-binding because farming includes a great deal of variability and chance, and no grower can confirm their exact production levels so early in the growing season. The revenue the collective generates from the sale of produce depends on each

farmer's ability to fulfill their quota, because the prices that staff members negotiate with clients are based on the collective fulfilling their volume commitments.

When it comes to more strategic decisions that hold long-term implications, such as finding new clients or determining where and how the new packinghouse should be built, growers stated that they rarely participated in decision-making processes. Growers told stories about only two situations in which they had been directly involved with decision-making. The first was when staff members set out to revise the marketing fee that Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables charges growers for marketing, sorting, boxing and shipping produce. The second occurred when staff members embarked on a process to develop a recruitment plan for bringing additional growers into the collective. Growers recounted that in both cases they were invited to participate in discussions about these decisions, but that these discussion processes were short-term opportunities for participation. Growers stated that they were not aware of systematic or consistent avenues for further involvement in decision-making. Growers did suggest that they were confident that if they held concerns about decision-making, or ideas for improving the management of the collective, they could easily communicate with staff members and that their concerns and ideas would be well-received.

Table 13 summarizes the approaches to decision-making by growers, staff and board members.

Table 13. Summary of Stakeholder Approaches to Decision-making

	Approach toward Decision-making
Legacy Growers	Choose to have little involvement in most decision-making processes but try to maintain the ability to become more involved if they see a need. Voluntarily concede decision-making responsibilities to staff members who they view as holding expertise, resources and interests in organizational management.
Returning Growers	Suggest that they are interested, but rarely involved, in decision-making in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. Satisfied with level of involvement in decision-making, and decision-making processes themselves. Basis for comfort level with decision-making comes from trust in staff members. Believe that they share many of the same values related to sustainability as staff members and view staff members as noble and hard-working.
Lifestyle Growers	Comfortable allowing staff members to make management decisions because possess little agricultural experience and are in process of learning. View staff members at Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables as noble and hard-working experts. Place a great deal of trust in staff members' decision-making capabilities.
Staff Members	Purposefully exclude growers from decision-making, because perceive growers to be inexperienced at business management, and believe growers don't want to be involved in making decisions. Believe it is their job to make decisions and growers expect staff to play this role. Explain that the opportunities they offer growers for involvement are highly symbolic.
Board Members	Make decisions by holding lengthy discussions about the organization's mission and purpose, and how best to achieve the organization's objectives associated with them. Process includes discussions about the meaning of sustainability in a theoretical sense and how to balance the three elements of sustainability on the ground. Rarely involve staff and growers in discussion or decision-making. Board members are rarely involved in day-to-day management decisions.

Table 13. This table presents a summary of different approaches stakeholders in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' stakeholders' take towards decision-making.

Decision-making by Staff Members

Staff members sit at the second and next highest organizational level. Staff members are responsible for running the day-to-day operations of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. Each of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' seven staff members have a specific and well-defined set of duties that they carry out individually. Within the silos of their job descriptions staff members generally make decisions and conduct their work without consulting others. When decision-making opportunities that fall outside of one staff members' duties arise, the group identifies one or two staff members to work together to conduct research and provide management recommendations to remaining employees. Remaining staff members then consider these recommendations and come to consensus on appropriate actions. In the rare cases where staff are unable to come to consensus, final decision-making powers fall to Donald Gear, the founder and executive director of Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum and Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables.

Table 13 summarizes the approach towards decision-making used by staff members.

Decision-making by Board Members

Board members sit at the third and highest level of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' hierarchy. Board members hold responsibilities for decision-making within Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum, which includes Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables and a number of other initiatives. The decision-making responsibilities of board members rarely concern the day-to-day management of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, and therefore rarely involve staff or growers although growers do have one representative on the board. Board members make decisions about the role of Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum in the broader regional economy and community of economic and environmental development organizations in the region. Board members also make decisions about the role of the board in organizational management.

Table 13 outlines the approach board members take towards decision-making in the collective.

Stakeholders' Frames and Achieving Sustainability

The summaries of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' stakeholders' frames, and their influences on decision-making, provided in the previous section illustrate two important factors when considering organizational management and decision-making within Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables in particular, and in sustainable development assistance organizations in general.

The first is that stakeholders' frames regarding participation in sustainable development initiatives, and the meaning of sustainability itself, clearly influence how they perceive their relationships to sustainable development organizations at broad levels, and to decision-making within these organizations specifically. The second important factor stems from the first. This factor highlights that many strategic decisions that arise in a sustainable development organization can create tensions among stakeholders in the organization by highlighting their competing frames.

These two factors were highlighted in the sustainability maps and decision-making flow charts that appear in chapters 3-5. The two illustrations provided below, Figures 14 and 15, highlight the differences in stakeholders' perspectives regarding sustainability by overlaying the sustainability maps of each stakeholder group. A discussion of the implications of the tensions that arise from the differences that the figures illustrate, and how they are resolved in decision-making processes in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, follows.

Sustainability Frames and Conflict Scenarios

Figure 14. Stakeholders' Divergent Perspectives and Concern for Sustainability

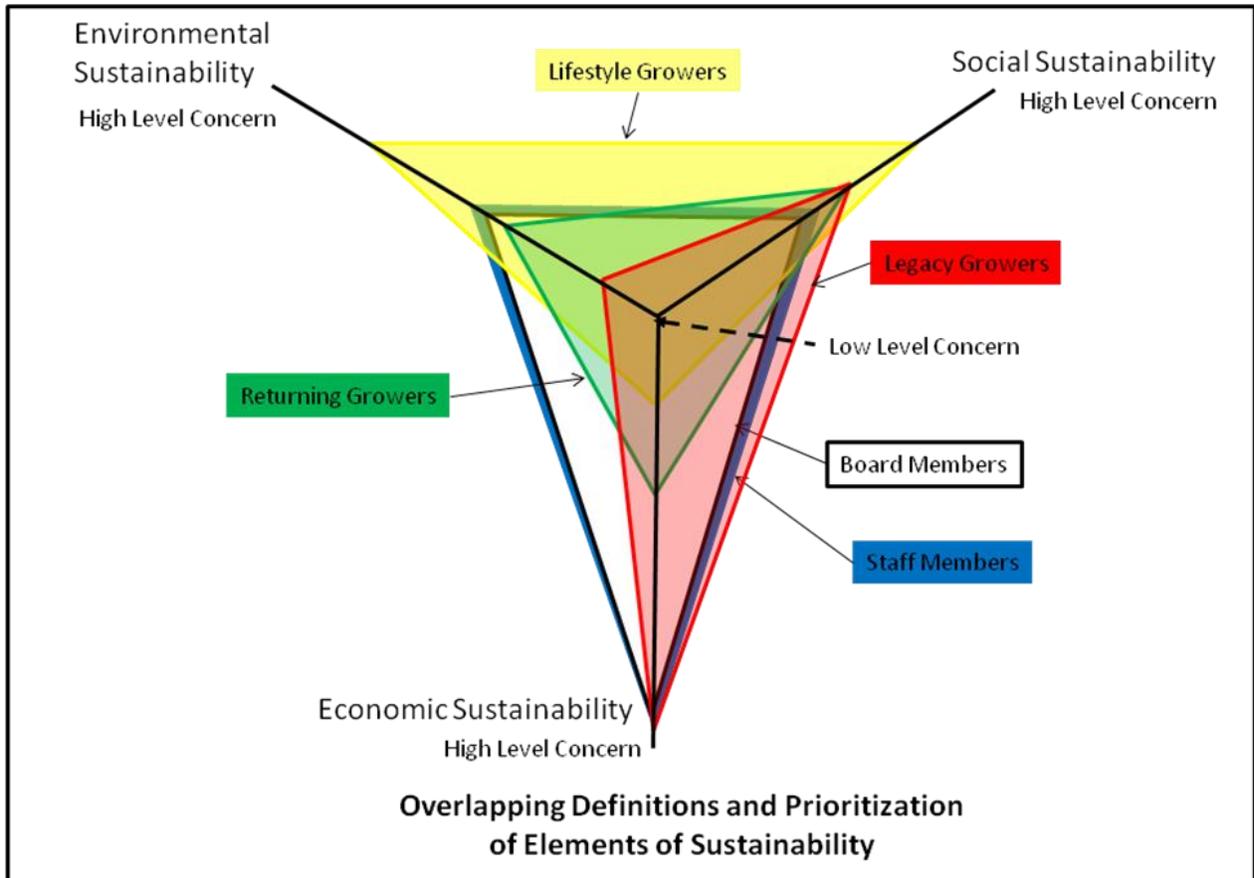


Figure 14. The illustration shows the differences in sustainability frames held by stakeholders in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. The overlay representing legacy growers shows that their primary concern is with financial success, although they hold secondary concerns regarding the maintenance of the cultural values they associate with tobacco farming. The overlay that represents returning growers shows their moderate concerns for financial success as well as their desire to honor their families' farming heritage and moderate concern for the environment. The portion of the chart that illustrates lifestyle farmers' sustainability frame highlights their attachment to environmental and social elements. The overlay that reflects staff members' concerns regarding sustainability shows that staff members prioritize Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' financial success above environmental and social concerns once baseline criteria have been met in the environmental and social arenas. Finally, the overlay dedicated to board members illustrates their focus on financial sustainability at the regional scale. Board members view environmental and social sustainability as products of an economic system that relies on renewable natural resources. This is also illustrated in Figure 15, which focuses on the scales at which each stakeholder group views and pursues sustainability.

Table 14 identifies six different conflict scenarios that arise from stakeholders' agreement or disagreement over the meaning of each of the three elements of sustainability and their agreement over the ways that these elements should be weighted in decision-making processes.

Table 14. Conflict Scenarios Related to Definitions and Values Related to Sustainability

	Description
<p>Scenario 1: Stakeholders hold a high level of concern about the same element of sustainability and define that element in a similar fashion.</p>	<p>Decisions that fit this scenario can be made quite easily and often consensus can be struck. Most stakeholders have very positive feelings about participating in decision processes that fit this framework and feel overwhelmingly positive about decisions long after they have been reached and carried out. Decisions that fit this framework suit stakeholders that view sustainability through an aspirational lens or lens of attainability equally well. An example of this scenario is the decision Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables faced when making decisions about building a new packinghouse. The frames of most stakeholders were met in this process because most stakeholders define economic and social sustainability in the same ways and prioritize these elements equally.</p>
<p>Scenario 2: Stakeholders hold a high level of concern about the same element of sustainability but define that element differently.</p>	<p>Decisions that reflect this scenario are often sources of high levels of conflict and may not be resolved easily, if at all. These conflicts pose major threats to sustainable development assistance organizations because they can create irreconcilable rifts among stakeholders. Choices that fit this framework also pose challenges when some stakeholders view sustainability through an aspirational lens while others view sustainability through a lens of attainability. For those that view sustainability through an aspirational lens, these decisions represent a weakening of the promise of sustainability by viewing the three elements of sustainability in conflict with one another. The decision that board members face about whether to allow Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables to sell produce to the large national grocery store represents this scenario. In this case, some board members define economic sustainability as success for farmers, while others consider the organization’s financial security.</p>
<p>Scenario 3: Stakeholders hold a low level of concern about the same element of sustainability and define that element in a similar fashion.</p>	<p>Decisions that fit this scenario can be made easily and often with consensus. However, these decisions often result in minimum benchmarks of sustainability that can threaten a sustainable development assistance organization’s mission. Decisions that fit this scenario pose their most serious problems for stakeholders who view sustainable development through an aspirational lens, because these decisions place boundaries on the meaning, and therefore achievement, of sustainability. An example of a decision that fits this framework is stakeholders’ tacit agreement that limits the definition of social sustainability to the payment of fair wages to growers. Once the organization has paid growers adequately for their produce Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables has met its responsibilities in the area of social sustainability. These stakeholders do not consider Moote et al.’s indicators of just decision making, among other elements of environmental justice, to be critical elements of the processes by which the organization conducts its work.</p>

<p>Scenario 4: All stakeholders hold a low level of concern about one element of sustainability but define that element differently.</p>	<p>While stakeholders faced with decisions that fit this scenario often hold differences of opinion regarding viable solutions to the challenges they face, they may not be concerned enough to take the time to discuss their viewpoints and make a decision. Decision conflicts that fit this scenario can be easily resolved in the short term (often agreement means agreeing to delay decision-making), though they risk morphing into those that fit scenario two in the long term. One example of a decision that fits this description may be board members’ discussions about the level of rigidity in their definitions of the board’s purpose and role in management. Board members have put this discussion off for some time while focusing on what members consider more pressing concerns, though if not addressed soon it could lead to other conflicts.</p>
<p>Scenario 5: Stakeholders hold different levels of concern about the same element of sustainability and define that element in a similar fashion.</p>	<p>These decisions can often be made quickly and without conflict. These decisions tend to be made in ways that fit the priorities and definitions of those who hold higher levels of concern, because those with lower levels of concern concede their decision-making responsibilities to those who feel more strongly. An example of this decision-making scenario is represented by the differences in concern among legacy growers and lifestyle growers over the importance of economic success at organizational and individual levels. Throughout Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables there is a high level of support for prioritizing the economic concerns of legacy growers above those of less financially concerned growers.</p>
<p>Scenario 6: Stakeholders hold different levels of concern about the same element of sustainability and define that element differently.</p>	<p>Decisions that fit this scenario are often quickly resolved in the same manner as those described in scenario 5. One example that fits this scenario is Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables’ provision of networking and educational opportunities for participating growers. Educational and networking opportunities are critical concerns for lifestyle growers, who view programs such as farm tours and workshops as opportunities to gain valuable experience and integrate into the farming community. Legacy growers, on the other hand, suggest that they do not often participate in these activities because they are familiar with farming practices. Legacy and lifestyle growers define the meaning of social sustainability differently and hold different levels of concern for this element. Legacy growers seem unconcerned with the educational and networking opportunities that Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables provides. As a result, they do not show an interest in participating in decision-making and planning these events.</p>

Table 14. This table outlines the conflicts that can arise in sustainable development assistance organizations as a result of stakeholders’ different perspectives on the meanings and importance of each leg of sustainability. Conflicts that can likely be managed and concluded with relatively low level conflicts are those outlined in scenarios 1, 3, 5 and 6. Those that present heightened challenges if not dealt with proactively are represented by scenario 4. Scenario 2 presents a highly conflicted scenario.

Scales of Sustainability and Conflict Scenarios

Tensions may also arise as a result of the different scales at which stakeholders perceive sustainability. Figure 15 illustrates these scales.

Figure 15. Stakeholders' Divergent Perspectives on Scales of Sustainability

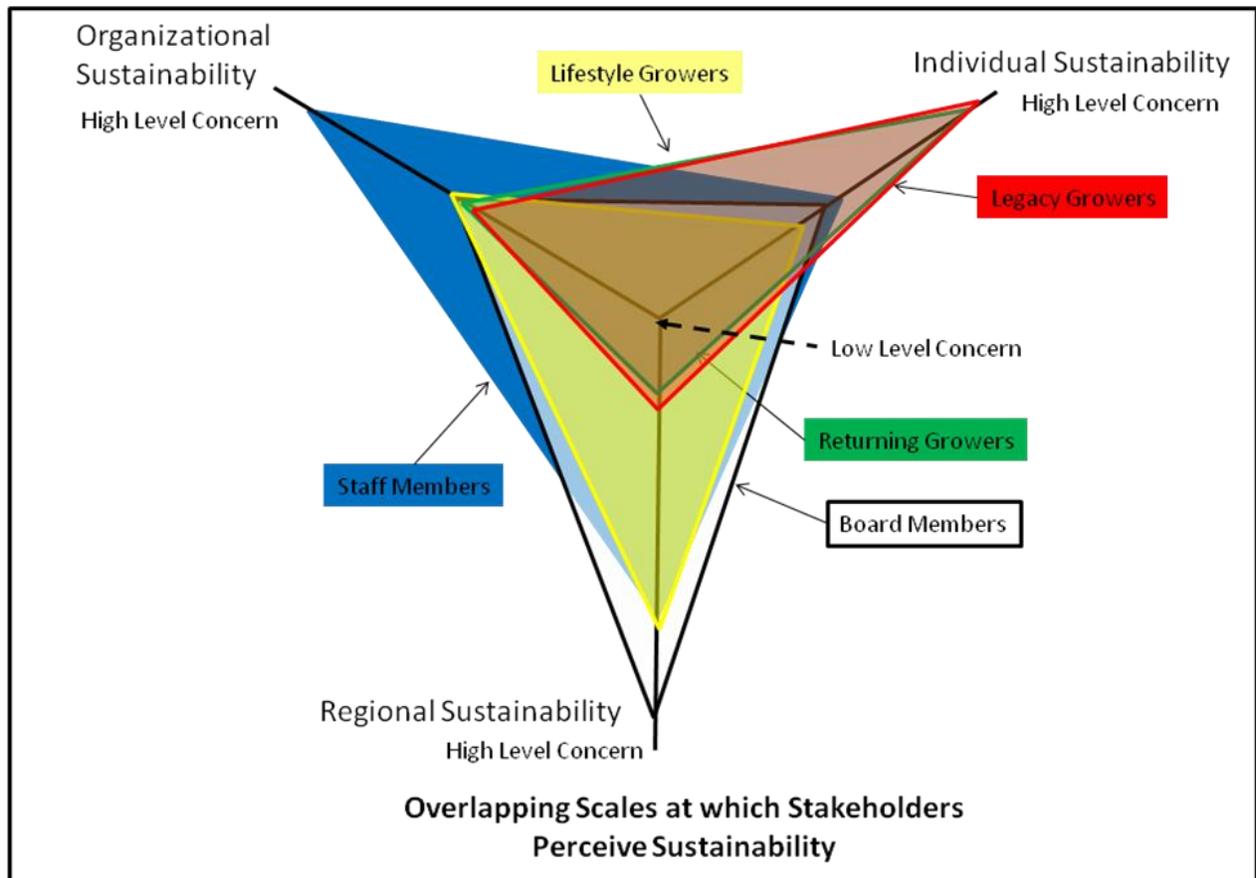


Figure 15. While stakeholders in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables tend to hold common understandings about the meanings of individual, organizational and regional sustainability they are not in agreement over the scale at which to prioritize efforts. Legacy and returning growers tend to prioritize an individual focus; staff an organizational focus; and, board members and lifestyle growers a regional focus.

The concepts of individual sustainability, organizational sustainability and regional sustainability all tend to be defined by members of each stakeholder group in the same way. For example, all stakeholders define success in the individual realm as the ability of individual farmers to continue farming in a way that meets their personal aspirations. Stakeholders define success in terms of organizational sustainability as the ongoing maintenance of the organization over time, especially in a financial sense.

Stakeholders define regional sustainability as the region's success at shifting from its current extractive resource based economy to a more stable economy based on renewable resources.

As a result of stakeholders' consensus regarding the definitions of each scale of sustainability, stakeholders within each classification tend to hold unified priorities regarding achievement at each scale. In other words, growers tend to hold unified visions of sustainability at individual scales, staff members at organizational scales and board members at regional scales. As a result, there is little disagreement among stakeholders within each hierarchical level over the ways that these scales should be prioritized in decision-making. Therefore, there are not six scenarios that accompany Figure 15, but three. The three scenarios that follow from Figure 15 are summarized in Table 14. Decision conflicts over the scales at which stakeholders view sustainability hold one key commonality. That is, these decisions raise questions about stakeholders' divergent viewpoints over the organization's target beneficiaries. These scenarios force stakeholders to ask questions such as "are key beneficiaries growers, broader community members, or the organization itself?" As a result, the "description" column has been omitted from Table 13, because each scenario would be described in the same manner.

Table 15. Conflict Scenarios Related to Scales of Sustainability

	Description
<p>Scenario 7: Some stakeholders hold a high level of concern for sustainability at regional levels, while others hold concern for sustainability at individual scales.</p>	<p>Decisions that fit this scenario pit the concerns of legacy and returning growers, who view sustainability at the individual level and through lens of attainability, against those of lifestyle growers and board members, who view sustainability at the regional scale and through an aspirational lens. An example of a decision that fits this scenario is the decision faced by board members concerning whether to sell vegetables to the national chain store. Growers would likely favor selling produce to the large grocery outlet while most board members do not. “who are our target beneficiaries?” this scenario asks.</p>
<p>Scenario 8: Some stakeholders hold a high level of concern for sustainability at regional levels, while others hold concern for sustainability at organizational scales.</p>	<p>Scenarios that fit this description force stakeholders to address issues related to the organization’s durability. When dealing with this scenario stakeholders must ask “How do we sustain ourselves while completing our broader mission?” The decision to sell produce to the national chain also highlights tensions between board members and staff members. Staff members perceive sustainability at the organizational level, and would likely see board members’ decision to not sell to this store as organizational sabotage and as a threat to their job security. If these decisions occur frequently they could bring about quick and ongoing staff turnover.</p>
<p>Scenario 9: Some stakeholders hold a high level of concern for sustainability at organizational levels, while others hold concern for sustainability at individual scales.</p>	<p>Like scenario eight, decisions that fit this description pit mission-oriented objectives against the organization’s durability. This decision is represented by the tensions that arose among growers and staff members during discussions about the marketing fee. Staff members decided how the fee should be modified based on the organizational scale at which they pursue sustainability prior to consulting growers. Legacy growers, on the other hand, view sustainability at the individual level and pushed for a lower fee that would provide them with additional income.</p>

Table 15. Decisions that require stakeholders that hold different views about the scales at which sustainable development efforts should focus can be especially sticky. This table documents some of the various conflicts that arise among stakeholders in sustainable development assistance organizations that hold individual, organizational and regional perspectives or priorities.

Table 16 summarizes the implications of decision scenarios that arise as a result of the different scales at which stakeholders conceptualize and pursue sustainability.

Table 16. Implications of Conflict Scenarios Related to Scales of Sustainability

Conflicts over Scales of Sustainability		Decisions made in favor of...		
		Board members' regional perspective on sustainability	Staff members' organizational perspective on sustainability	Growers' individual perspective on sustainability
Decisions made at the expense of ...	Board members' regional perspective on sustainability	NA	Protectionist strategies leave Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables isolated from community	Decisions that protect growers may leave Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables isolated from broader community.
	Staff members' organizational perspective on sustainability	Decisions often made at board level without staff involvement. Staff may feel unrepresented and may result in high staff turnover. Loss of trust among staff and growers may destabilize organization.	NA	Decisions that protect growers may weaken organization's financial positions, resulting in need to cut services and /or reduce staff.
	Growers' individual perspective on sustainability	Decisions made at board level without involvement from growers. Growers feel unrepresented and withdraw. Grower recruitment may trend towards lifestyle growers.	Staff members make decision and symbolically include growers. Growers may feel unrepresented and reduce trust in staff.	NA

Table 16. This illustration highlights the ways that differences in the scales at which stakeholders in sustainable development assistance organizations envision sustainability can create conflict and weaken the organization.

Mechanisms for Managing Frame Conflicts among Stakeholders in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables

Participants in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables have developed three mechanisms for managing and mitigating tensions that arises because of the different frames through which they approach their work with the organization. The first mechanism constitutes the processes by which some stakeholders exclude others from participating in decision-making. The second mechanism constitutes the process by which some stakeholders prioritize the concerns and needs of select participants over others when considering various decisions. The third mechanism is a system by which participants limit the meaning of sustainability to a specific set of objectives, and prioritize these objectives over others, during decision-making processes. While each of these mechanisms occurs to a limited extent at all three hierarchical levels of the organization, and therefore are performed by members of all three stakeholder groups, the majority of decisions that occur on a day-to-day basis and that carry the most significant implications for growers are made by staff members. As a result, the following descriptions and discussions of these mechanisms focus on the ways that they are carried out by staff members and their implications for growers.

The First Mechanism: Limiting Stakeholders Involvement in Decision-making Processes

Staff members limit the involvement of growers in decision-making in three ways. First, staff members make many decisions before informing growers that a decision process is underway, and only inform them that a decision has been made after the fact. The development of the GAP compliance checklist represents an example of this technique. Growers were unaware that discussion regarding the GAP policies was underway, and staff developed the checklist without consulting growers. Once the checklist was completed, it would be presented to growers as a new requirement for participating in the collective.

Second, when staff members do invite growers into a decision-making process, they filter the information that they provide growers so that growers will be directed towards the outcomes that staff members support. In these cases, staff members pick and choose what information they will provide to growers, based on what they feel is most relevant and supportive of their decisions. The symbolic use of the growers' advisory committee during discussions about the marketing fee represents an example of this technique. Growers were only presented with information that suited staff members' perspectives and growers were led to develop conclusions that matched those of staff members.

Third, all decision-making processes in which growers participate are closely mediated by staff members. This means that staff members closely manage the ways that growers engage in decision-making. Staff members invite growers into the decision-making process, make deliberate decisions about how to frame and communicate about decisions with growers, and lead discussions among growers so that they reach the decisions that staff members already support. As a result of staff members' close mediation, growers are not provided with opportunities to freely interact, examine and find new information or draw new conclusions. Rather, the actions, conclusions and decisions that growers draw are entirely shaped by staff members. As a result, when growers are invited by staff members to participate in decision-making their participation is generally limited to symbolic actions. Growers have few tangible decision-making responsibilities or control, although they are led to believe that their involvement is genuine. Staff members acknowledged their intentional exclusion of growers from decision-making process. They justified this decision by claiming that it increases the efficiency with which decisions are made. They did not acknowledge an awareness of the inequitable or unfair treatment of growers that this conflict management mechanism may embed within the organization.

While the most significant forms of limiting stakeholders' involvement in decision-making occurs among staff and growers, board members also limit the involvement of others in decision processes, including growers and staff members. When considering the ways that board members limit growers from organizational discussions and decisions, board members suggest that the discussions they are involved in, and the decisions they make, occur at broader levels of organizational management than concern growers. Therefore, board members suggest that it is not necessary for growers to be involved in these decisions.

A second mechanism used by board members to limit the involvement of growers in decision-making is to reserve one seat on the board for a growers' representative. The purpose of placing a growers' representative on the board, board members suggested, was to enhance the board's awareness and responsiveness to growers' concerns and to provide growers with an avenue for involvement in decision-making. These objectives have not been realized, however. While the original intent of placing a grower on the board was not to limit growers' involvement in decision-making, board members and growers acknowledged their awareness of the repercussions that this decision has, and they have made no moves to change the situation. Many growers and a few board members hinted that the current growers' representative was largely ineffective as a board member but that no moves were made to identify a more suitable participant. As a result, communication among board members and growers is weak and further limits growers' participation in decision-making. The effect is that board members are able to direct growers that do have concerns to their representative, which essentially means their concerns will never be discussed by the board. While board members did not suggest that they intended for this outcome to evolve, it does seem to suits their desire to limit grower involvement in decision-making. The current situation allows the board to retain the ability to access growers' perspectives regarding decisions and decision-making processes occasionally and at their discretion while avoiding addressing growers' concerns directly.

Board members also expressed a desire to shelter staff members from some decision processes. Board members justified their exclusion of staff members from discussions and decision-making processes by

suggesting that the altitude at which board decisions occurred held little relevance for staff members. Additionally, board members sheltered staff members from decision-making by suggesting that including staff in board discussions would raise conflicts of interest for staff members. Board members felt that many discussions and decisions that occurred at the board level would raise issues that forced staff to question their management activities to the extent that the complexity and contradictions embedded in decision-making would prevent them from carrying out their work on a day-to-day basis. Board members seemed to suggest, for example, that if staff members were forced to wrestle with questions about whether to sell produce to the large national chain grocery store described in Chapter 5, they would be stymied to the point of inaction. How could staff members make a decision to sell produce to national chains as well as to local stores knowing that their decision to sell to national chains may contribute to the destruction of those same local stores? These decisions, board members alluded, were better left to board members who could debate their philosophical complexities over time and provide staff members with clear directives once conclusions had been reached.

Board members also suggested that they restrain themselves from becoming involved in staff level decisions in order to avoid setting a precedent for crossing hierarchical boundaries during decision-making. Subsequently, board and staff members share an unspoken agreement that the boundaries that separate the board and staff will not be crossed. As result, board and staff members avoid creating an organizational atmosphere in which discussion and co-involvement in decision-making across hierarchical layers of the organization are common place.

Because of the limited roles that growers play in collaborative or organizational decision-making, I was unable to uncover evidence that they acted to limit the involvement of staff or board members in decisions that occur at growers' levels. However, growers did not seem to protest or disagree with the actions taken by staff and board members to limit growers' involvement and as a result contribute to the institutionalization of this mechanism. In other words, through their quiet acquiescence and acceptance of practices designed to limit stakeholders' involvement in decision-making growers are complicit in supporting and maintaining this mechanism.

The Second Mechanism: Prioritizing the Needs and Concerns of Certain Stakeholders

The second mechanism that staff members employ for managing and mitigating tensions is to give select growers preferential consideration during a decision-making process while reducing their concern for other growers. When confronted with a decision, staff members research and make choices that they believe reflect the concerns, needs and aspirations of those growers they believe to be most affected by the decision at-hand. For example, when faced with decisions that hold financial implications, staff members emphasize the needs of legacy growers. When faced with decisions about

the provision of educational programs or strengthening the growers' network, staff members emphasize the concerns of lifestyle and returning growers.

The description of staff members' service frame presented in previous chapters provides evidence that they characterize different growers as in need of different services. For example, staff members observe that legacy tobacco farmers require less farming-related educational support while showing more concern for the pursuance of new markets by staff members. Staff members perceive lifestyle growers, on the other hand, as in need of educational support while showing less concern for the financial elements of managing the collective. Additionally, staff members characterize different growers as holding more acute needs at various times. When faced with decisions about building the new packinghouse after the original site was destroyed for instance, staff members sensed the urgency of the situation for legacy growers who they characterize as having more resources invested and at-risk in their farms than lifestyle and returning growers.

The prioritization scheme created by staff members requires a degree of acquiescence from growers in order to work. For example, some growers must be willing to take a backseat to others, or forgo decision-making involvement, while others play more central roles. Returning growers and lifestyle growers, for example, must accept the prioritization of the needs of legacy growers above their own when financial decisions are at hand. Likewise, legacy growers must accept taking a backseat to others when non-financial decisions are at hand. Growers in all three classifications seemed willing to comply with this mechanism.

Board members evidenced a different prioritization scheme from staff members based on a different characterization of growers. Board members characterized all growers as legacy tobacco farmers and did not acknowledge the presence of growers with other frames within Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. Board members admitted, however, that they had relatively little involvement with growers and generally left decisions that held effects for growers to staff members, whom they trusted. As a result, the prioritization scheme employed by board members aligns with that of staff members.

The Third Mechanism: Prioritizing the Three Elements of Sustainability

The third mechanism for managing and mitigating tensions that arise as a result of different frames held by stakeholders in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables is a system of prioritizing different elements of sustainability at different points in time and as they relate to particular decisions. In other words, sometimes stakeholders illustrated a stronger attempt to reach financial sustainability while at other times they focused on environmental or social objectives.

The task of interpreting the concerns and needs of growers, and translating them into objectives, decisions and actions related to sustainability, sits with staff members. As a result, staff members

exemplify three rules regarding the prioritization of values related to sustainability. These three rules represent a tacit agreement among all stakeholders. First, objectives related to financial sustainability take precedence over environmental and cultural sustainability once baseline standards in each area have been satisfied. Second, staff members believe that environmental sustainability is limited to the standards of organic certification. This means that staff members do not promote the achievement of higher levels of environmental excellence such as reductions in carbon emissions, energy conservation, land conservation or enhanced water conservation and quality standards. Third, staff members' conceptualization of social sustainability is primarily limited to the payment of fair wages to legacy growers and secondarily to the provision of educational opportunities to returning and lifestyle growers. In other words, maintaining or strengthening the cultural foundations of farming in the region, providing growers with an avenue to explore other professions if they desire, or offering growers the opportunity to take responsibility and ownership of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables does not seem to be among the priorities of staff members. Rather, it seems that staff members assume that if area farmers are able to maintain their farms and earn a living in farming as a result of their work with Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, local farming culture will survive in perpetuity and local farmers will be satisfied.

Growers evidenced little awareness of the prioritization scheme regarding sustainability put in place by staff members or knowledge that the notion of social sustainability was reduced to the terms of fair wages for farmers. Most growers also seemed comfortable considering environmental sustainability as limited to the standards of organic certification. Additionally, most growers suggested they had little interest in, and were satisfied with, decision-making within Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. Growers' acceptance and tolerance of the first conflict management mechanism as well as the prioritization scheme described here aligns with their membership frames and approach to decision-making in the organization.

Board members evidence the use of a different prioritization scheme than staff members. Their aspirational lens seems more flexible than the lens of attainability used by staff members. As a result, board members seem more willing to allow Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables to subsist on external funding than staff members so they can focus on their environmental and social objectives. This prioritization scheme, however, is only used when making decisions at the board level. When considering decisions that cross hierarchical boundaries in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables board members tend to support the decision-making and prioritization schemes of staff members.

Implications of the Three Mechanisms for Managing Sustainability Frame Conflicts

At the time of this dissertation the decision-making and conflict mechanism processes in use by Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables have served the collective relatively well. Recruitment has increased over the past few years, the collective's revenues have steadily grown, the organization has overcome major challenges such as the fire that destroyed the original packinghouse and the rebuilding of a new facility, and staff and board members agree that the organization has accomplished good work and met many of their aspirations. Furthermore, many growers state that the collective has provided them with agricultural opportunities, markets and income that they might not have had otherwise. Growers also state that they have a great deal of trust in staff members to make decisions that represent their interests and that relationships among growers and staff are positive.

There are signs, however, that the organization and the relationships among participants are under strain. Respondents told stories about growers that dropped out of the collective because they were unable to meet their expectations. Respondents suggested that these growers blamed staff members for painting an overly rosy picture of organic farming and the revenues that farming could generate. Some respondents also showed signs of distrust or discomfort with the decision-making processes used in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables and discontent with specific decisions that had been made. Tom Carpenter, for instance and among other growers, questioned the need for increasing the marketing fee when many growers felt the fee was already too high. Jeff Hellier, as well as other growers, suggested that the growers' representative on the board of directors was ineffective at advocating for growers' interests. Additionally, while growers and staff members were unaware of the board's decision to not to sell vegetables to the large national chain, this decision and the process by which it was made, would almost certainly raise tensions in the organization. Furthermore, one way to interpret growers' high level of involvement in the marketing fee advisory committee, is as an indicator of their dissatisfaction with, and concern over, decision making. Sherri Baker described her surprise at the commitment of growers to attend meetings that she thought would not interest them.

The remainder of this chapter discusses some implications of the decision-making and conflict management mechanisms used to navigate decisions in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. This discussion first focuses on more positive implications of these decision processes. This section is largely reflective. It is based on comments and stories related by respondents. The second portion of this discussion focuses on more negative repercussions. Because most respondents shared positive reflections about Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables and the organization has experienced fast growth in recent years, this second section is speculative. This section looks to the future to consider the repercussions of the decision-making processes and conflict management mechanisms in use by the organization as Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables wrestles with more challenging decisions as they move ahead. This section poses answers to questions such as "how will trust among growers, staff and board members change if the collective continues to focus on economic success?", "how will

relationships among growers shift if the organization continues to focus efforts on meeting the needs of legacy tobacco growers?” and, “how will growers respond to continued exclusion from decision-making processes at the staff and board levels in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables?” While respondents hinted at the implications described in this section, they did not describe them as strong forces within Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables currently. Rather, they hinted that these implications could come to pass, if the decision-making processes currently in use continued to be used in the future as the organization faces more difficult challenges. As a result, this section incorporates findings from the literature to support its speculations on the outcomes of the decisions used as example throughout this dissertation.

Positive Implications for Sustainability

There are at least three key positive implications of the decision and conflict management processes used in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. First, the processes used tend to allow for efficient decision-making procedures. Second, the processes used tend, at least in the short term, to minimize conflict among stakeholders. Third, the processes used allows for consistency in decision-making.

Quick Decision-making

Most decisions in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables are made by a relatively small number of individuals at the staff level. Susan Goren, Sherri Baker, Donald Gear and Frances Dolan are the key decision makers. These staff members make most decisions that fit within their individual job descriptions without consulting others. When decisions fall between the roles of staff members however, or they feel that the implications of a decision are especially critical to the organization’s success, they consult one another. Therefore, even in the case of especially difficult decisions communication often only involves four individuals who share office space and have regular meetings. Decisions, as a result, can be in quick order without delays for calling meetings, inviting participants and giving participants time to think about solutions. Staff members have also developed shared working approaches in which they work together to quickly gather and analyze information and come to consensus. For example, Sherri Baker and Susan Goren each told stories about working late at night and up against tight deadlines to solve critical problems related to the sorting and shipping of produce and development of the GAP checklist.

Decision-making without Conflict

When decisions are made in isolation at the staff or board levels, without crossing hierarchical boundaries, communication and debate are kept among individuals with shared participation and sustainability frames. Participants in these decisions, as a result, tend to have well-aligned goals and visions regarding Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. One consequence of cohesion among decision-making is the ability to come to consensus relatively easily.

Decisions made with Consistency and Clarity

Using clear definitions and benchmarks for the elements of sustainability allows staff members to make consistent decisions regarding organizational management. For example, there are positive implications of the use of minimum benchmarks for environmental sustainability. First and foremost, identifying clear standards keeps the definition of environmental sustainability consistent for all stakeholders and allows all stakeholders to understand the organization's objectives when it comes to the environment. As a result, Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables is able to simplify decision-making regarding environmental sustainability. When questions concerning environmental management in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables arise, stakeholders simply default to the organic standards. As new farmers join the collective the organization can present them with consistent requirements, and not be forced to proceed through a lengthy communicative process with each new grower, or all growers collaboratively, about the meaning of environmental sustainability. Additionally, the achievement of minimum benchmarks in some areas of sustainability buys Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables time to focus its efforts on more challenging areas of business management. In this case, by having a clear standard for environmental success, and reaching that standard, board and staff members are able to spend time examining and adapting other business practices related to financial sustainability.

Negative Implications for Sustainability

Although the decision and conflict management processes used by Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables to this point in time have allowed the collective to be relatively successful, and to make decisions quickly, with clarity and consistency, and without conflicts, these mechanisms also carry negative implications for sustainability. These implications, while seemingly unrecognized by organizational participants at this point in time, are likely to be felt more strongly in the future as decision-making contexts grow more complex. Some of the negative implications identified by this study are limited resilience and

collaborative learning, a lack of empowerment, ownership and responsibility among growers, a lack of cohesion among growers, and a reduction in progress towards achieving sustainability.

Limited Resilience and Collaborative Learning

Organizational resilience describes an organization's ability to constructively adapt and transform to change while retaining its core functions and identity (Gooch and Warburton 2009; Walker et al. 2004; Wolfenden et al. 2006). For organizations, enduring over time requires continual adaptation to environmental and internal shifts. Successfully managing the process of adaptation is critical for achieving organizational sustainability. In the case of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, decision making processes regarding the GAP program, construction of a new packinghouse, modification of the marketing fee and other decisions, all represent attempts by the organization to adapt to changes in the environment.

Collaborative learning describes the process by which resilience is created (Rubin 1995). Collaborative learning (Daniels and Walker 2001) is a constructivist process that describes the creation of shared knowledge among participants in a network. Collaborative learning has also been termed "social learning (Lee 1993; Schusler et al. 2003)." Schusler et al. define social learning as, "learning that occurs when people engage one another, sharing diverse perspectives and experiences to develop a common framework of understanding and basis for joint action (p. 311)." Networks can be described as interdependent relationships among anonymous social agents, such as individuals and groups, that come together around shared interests, purposes and objectives (O'Toole Jr. 1997; Stokowski 1994). The product of collaborative learning is the creation of knowledge or understanding that no single member of a network could create individually, because this knowledge is the outcome of interactive communication among participants.

Theories of social learning suggest that as network participants become more adept at learning through collaboration they enhance their problem solving skills and efficiency. With enhanced problem solving skills, comes improved abilities to respond to, and overcome, challenges. Thus, collaborative learning is the process by which adaptive management occurs (Daniels and Walker 2001; Mog 2006; Steyaert and Ollivier 2007). In this sense, as participants in a network plan, monitor, evaluate and begin to plan anew they talk about their observations and experiences, come to agreement about what their observations and experiences mean, integrate their understandings into new and shared knowledge, and use that knowledge to inform future planning processes.

Many researchers view the ability to plan in a collaborative way, and the ability to collaboratively learn, as keys to successful organizational management within the natural resource sector (Agrawal and Gibson 1999; Borrini-Feyerabend 2000; Carmin et al. 2003; Moote et al. 1997; Pinkerton 1994; Ross et al. 2002; Wondolleck and Yaffee 2000). Collaborative learning brings success, researchers believe,

because the process allows individuals and organizations to grow in their understanding of issues together, which leads to the development of shared purposes and objectives (Schusler et al. 2003). These researchers view highly collaborative organizations that have strong norms related to communication, and that exemplify collaborative learning, as more resilient than organizations that do not hold these characteristics.

Researchers describe several practices and processes by which collaborative learning occurs (Keen and Mahanty, 2006; Schusler et al. 2003). These often include:

- the formation of democratic structures and decision-making processes;
- open and transparent communication and reflection among members;
- participation by individuals and groups with diverse viewpoints, opinions and aspirations;
- equal valuation of multiple sources and types of knowledge;
- creativity and systems thinking;
- and, constructive conflict and negotiation over meanings and perspectives.

Bolton (2004), Tierney (1999) and Wilson (2006) describe several characteristics that nurture resilience within organizations. Many of these duplicate those characteristics that researchers suggest encourage collaborative learning. For example, some of the characteristics outlined by Bolton, Tierney and Wilson are: caring relationships, transparency in communication, sharing of ideas, trust in organizational members, freedom to voice opinions, dense and expansive networks, and freedom to work individually and to experiment with working approaches and practices. Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, however, does not portray many of the practices deemed important for collaborative learning or resilience.

What the literature on collaborative learning and resilience does not convey—but that is uncovered by the case of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables—is the role that frames play in the development of these processes. Frames play a large role in the development of collaborative learning and resilience because frames influence the ways that network participants interpret their observations and experiences and draw meaning from them, as well as how they interpret and value the understandings of others. Frames both enhance and limit opportunities for collaborative learning by encouraging participants to listen to, accept and value—or ignore, reject and devalue—the experiences of others and to integrate their experiences with those of others to create new and shared interests, purposes and objectives.

First and foremost among the decision making practices exemplified by Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables that limit collaborative learning and resilience in the organization are the limited number of staff members involved in decision making and the limited degree to which information is shared among board members, staff and growers. Yet, these decision making practices are tightly linked to, as well as

supported and justified by, stakeholders' frames. As a result of these practices however, if one staff member leaves the organization the knowledge held by that individual and ability of others to access that knowledge is lost. With the loss of information comes a reduction in the organization's ability to integrate that knowledge into decision making practices and, as a result, to respond to environmental changes. Indeed, as the data collection phase of this research came to a close the threats posed by this component of the organization's decision making process became a reality. Donald Gear, the organization's founder and executive director as well as final arbiter of many decisions, announced his resignation.

Additionally, at each hierarchical level of the organization decision makers exclude members of other levels from discussion and involvement. For example, staff members in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables often exclude growers, the organization's target beneficiaries, from decision-making. Staff members only provide growers with symbolic opportunities for involvement when they are invited to participate. These practices also closely correspond to, and are justified by, the frames of staff and growers. As a result, the interactions and communications that are necessary to bring about high levels of collaborative learning and resilience are not present within the organization's planning and decision-making processes. Growers, by not participating in organizational decisions, are not required to develop a full understanding of the environmental contexts that govern their farm work and relationships to the market and regulatory environments.

The process used to make decisions regarding the GAP program, and the decision outcome reached through this process, represent an example of the limitations posed by the organization's decision making practices. Staff members' response to the GAP policies, for example, included no changes to the farming practices that growers use to cultivate crops. As a result, growers are not required to learn and understand new rules that govern their practice, or to adapt, learn or develop new agricultural techniques. The risk of this approach is that growers become complacent in their pursuit of new, more efficient or more sustainable business practices and are caught off-guard and unable to modify their practices when regulations that require adaptation are implemented. Growers may also hold ideas about how Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables can modify its business practices to save money or generate higher returns. Without an avenue for communicating these ideas to managers, however, these ideas may not ever be discussed and implemented at the organizational level.

Furthermore, growers' willingness to allow staff members to make decisions on their behalf may place growers at a disadvantage for participating in decision processes when situations in which they would like involvement arise. While limited decision-making involvement suits growers' frames at the individual level and in the short-term, when voluntary exclusion is used as the overarching framework of participation by all growers, and reinforced by staff members, it can become an institutionalized method of decision-making. It may, as a consequence, prevent growers from collectively discussing their personal needs, concerns and aspirations regarding sustainability on a regular basis and from integrating these concerns into the management of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. As a result, the process of excluding growers from decision-making may prevent the growers' network and organization at-large from developing a capacity for collaborative learning and adaptive management, as well as for resiliency to overcome major organizational challenges.

Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables has shown resilience in the past, such as when forced to rebuild the packinghouse. However, the mechanisms of communication and interaction in this case did not require a high degree of organizational learning nor were the participation and sustainability frames of board members, staff and growers at odds with one another in this case. In the aftermath of the fire, all stakeholders in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables understood the importance of building a new packinghouse in an efficient and timely manner. As a result, staff members' approach towards making decisions in this case was to keep discussion among a small group of individuals—Donald Gear, Sherri Baker and Frances Dolan made most decisions during this time, and to communicate decisions to growers after they had been made. In the future, however, decisions could arise that do not hold the same level of agreement and compatibility among members' frames. As a result, the decision-making and communication processes used after the fire, and the conflict management mechanisms described previously, may not serve Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables as well as they have in the past. These mechanisms do not nurture high levels of collaborative learning and, as a consequence, do not bring organizational resilience. The challenges that face the organization in the future could very well threaten its survival.

Lack of Empowerment, Ownership, Responsibility and Commitment

Staff members, by limiting the meaning of social equity or cultural sustainability within Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables to fair wages for growers, seem to believe their obligations to the cultural or social leg of sustainability have been met once growers are paid adequately and satisfactorily for their produce. As a result, staff members' conceptualizations of the social elements of sustainability do not seem to include the elements of decision-making involvement and empowerment described by Moote et al., although these are hallmarks of environmental justice.

The tacit understanding among staff members seems to be that if growers are able to make an adequate living from farming, their social and cultural interests will take care of themselves. This view, however, fails to see the organization itself playing a vital role in the development of cultural capital and to view the operating practices of the organization as playing a role in the creation of equity or social sustainability among stakeholders. When growers are allowed to participate in decision-making processes, such as when staff members offered them the opportunity to sit on the marketing fee advisory committee, growers are provided with limited and filtered information that limits their ability to think creatively about the issues at hand. As a result, growers are unable to make their own assessments of the circumstances in which Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables finds itself and of organizational decisions. Furthermore, growers are rarely provided with enough information to develop and offer reasonable alternatives to the plans developed by staff members. In effect, the strength of growers' voices is largely diminished.

As a result of these processes, growers seem to look to, and expect, staff members to make organizational decisions without their involvement. Growers have become dependent on the organization to make decisions that serve their interests. The decision-making and conflict management procedures in use by Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables reinforce the view held by legacy growers that Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables is a necessary intermediary to the marketplace, but not one in which they are personally invested. The result is the reinforcement of the social and economic dependence that accompanied other natural resource dependent industries in the area, including tobacco farming, coal mining and logging. Although one objective of sustainable development initiatives is to empower local stakeholders by providing them with avenues to regain control over their livelihoods and local economies, the decision-making processes and conflict management mechanisms at work in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables may do just the opposite.

Conger and Kanungo (1988) suggest that in organizational contexts jobs that include task variety, creativity and prospects for advancement hold increased relevance to workers and are more likely to allow them to feel empowered by their work. Additionally, feelings of personal responsibility, ownership and accountability are shown to enhance feelings of empowerment (Singh 2006). Singh goes on to suggest that organizational trust, communication, supervision and job control are also related to members' feelings of self efficacy. Yet, the decision-making and conflict management processes of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables fail to provide growers with these experiences because growers are unable to make many decisions that govern their practices and relationships to Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables.

As a result, it is conceivable that the high levels of trust in staff members described by growers could decline as more difficult decisions that place growers' frames at odds with one another, and with staff members', arise. Most definitions of trust tend to have three common components (Whitener et al. 1998). These are: 1) an individual's belief that someone else or an organization will act benevolently and as expected; 2) a willingness to be vulnerable to the actions of another individual or organization, and; 3) interdependency so that the trustee's welfare is influenced by the trustor's actions.

Growers' descriptions of trust in staff members hold these three elements. For example, growers often described their belief that staff members would act in their interests. Interestingly, these statements were made by growers in all three categories whether their interests were economic, as in the case of legacy growers, or more socially or environmentally focused as in the case of returning and lifestyle growers. Growers also described their willingness to allow staff members to make decisions regarding the collective so that they could focus on other activities on and off their farms. In other words, growers showed a willingness to be vulnerable to decisions made by staff. Lastly, the decisions made by staff members hold important implications for growers, thus growers are dependent on the actions of staff members. For example, growers rely on staff members to tell them what vegetables to grow, how to invest resources in their farms, to make decisions regarding the sale of produce and for estimates of the revenues they will generate. All of these decisions, which are made by staff members, influence how growers make personal decisions regarding resource allocation and time management.

At the organizational level, Morely, Shockle-Zalabak and Cesaria (1997) describe trust as “positive expectations individuals have about the intent and behaviors of multiple organizational members based on organizational roles, relationships, experiences, and interdependencies (p. 35).” While it seems that a driving factor in growers’ acquiescence to the decision-making processes and exclusion mechanisms put in place by staff members is trust, trust alone may not be sufficient to maintain the relationships among staff members and growers. Two situations especially may lead to a breakdown in trust. First, breakdowns in trust could first occur if staff members make decisions with which growers disagree. For example, staff and growers suggested that if growers have management concerns, they can easily contact staff members to discuss them. However, staff members have not developed a system for collecting and discussing growers’ concerns on a regular basis. As a result, growers are forced to contact staff members individually, because they lack an avenue for collective action. Consequently, if several growers contact staff members independently and individually, but staff members do not share this information with one another, staff members may be unaware how widespread and severe concerns over particular issues may be among growers. They may, as a consequence, discount the feelings of individual growers as unrepresentative of the larger pool and make decisions with which growers disagree. For growers, this method of involvement also depends on the abilities of staff members to accurately understand their concerns because growers do not have an avenue for direct participation in management. The breakdowns in trust described here are mainly the results of breakdowns in communication.

Many researchers have documented the links between communication and the development of trust. Morely, Shockle-Zalabak and Cesaria (1997) identified three elements of communication processes that lead to trusting environments within organizations. These are: 1) conveyance of accurate information among members; 2) explanations of decisions and actions, and; 3) openness and transparency in decision-making. Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables exemplifies violations in the first and third areas. In the first area, the constant mediation of decision-making processes by staff members influences the thoroughness and accuracy of the information provided to growers. In the case of the GAP program, for example, Susan’s presentation only described the facts and situation as she interpreted them, leaving growers without the complete story and ability to make their own judgments of the new policies. In the third area, growers are often unaware of how decisions are made at the staff and board levels. Some growers expressed an interest in learning more about these processes. Regarding the second area, staff members did describe extensive attempts to inform growers about decisions after they had been made. For example, during the period of constructing the new packinghouse, Sherri Baker described the process by which they kept farmers informed of progress.

The second breakdown in trust could occur if growers become aware that staff members make decisions about issues with which they would like involvement, but are not given the opportunity to participate. Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables does not provide growers with a formal process to come together and discuss concerns. This makes organizing difficult for growers and leaves them without an avenue for direct and collective participation in decision-making. Without ongoing communication with staff and board members about management, growers may be unaware that discussions regarding many decisions in which they would like to be involved are underway among managers. Furthermore, when

growers are aware of decisions in which they would like to play a role, the process of excluding them creates institutional barriers to their involvement. The current decision process includes a chance for growers to become involved in decision-making through growers' advisory groups, but these are created by staff members, and growers must be invited to participate. There is no mechanism in place for growers to develop advisory committees on their own or to collectively voice concerns with the organization. As a result, if individual growers would like to provide input about a particular decision, but staff members do not recognize their interest, an advisory committee may not be formed and growers will not be able to participate in decision-making.

As Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables begins to face more difficult decisions associated with finding a sustainable business model it is likely that the collective will come to rely more heavily on the three conflict management mechanisms described previously. As a result, it is likely that sticky decisions between staff and growers will arise more frequently. Organizational trust, as a result, could erode. Morely, Shockle-Zalabak and Cesaria (1997) linked organizational trust to job satisfaction and perceived organizational effectiveness. Indeed, in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables there is a history of growers withdrawing from the collective when it fails to meet their expectations. If breakdowns in trust occur frequently or with severity, and numerous growers withdraw from the organization as a result, the collective could find itself fighting to keep members.

While this research does not make a causal link between the decision-making processes at work in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables and a disruption of growers' abilities to cultivate vegetables or declining commitment to the organization, respondents did share stories about growers that had withdrawn from the collective for these reasons and some respondents suggested they considered withdrawing as well. These feelings of disempowerment align with findings by Kane and Montgomery (1998) and Singh (2006).

Finally, one common concern of staff members was that Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables was not financially viable. According to staff members, the way to enhance the economic prospects of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables is to find more large volume growers. This means, in essence, recruiting more legacy tobacco growers to the collective since their farms tend to be larger and more productive than the farms owned by returning and lifestyle growers. An increased focus on economically concerned growers may reinforce the perspective that legacy growers hold regarding Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables and staff members. Currently, these growers suggest that they view the organization and staff members as playing necessary technical roles that help growers move produce to market, but that the organization does not play a role in supporting the cultural elements of farming. Expanding the cadre of growers that share this viewpoint may institutionalize this perspective, which carries with it a limited perspective on the role of growers in decision-making. Legacy growers alluded that they accept and expect staff members to make most organizational decisions without their involvement and that the decisions staff members make should represent growers' economic interests. Staff members stated that they understood and shared this perspective. The result may further reduce the empowerment potential of the organization. Furthermore, the perspective of legacy farmers that allows them to see themselves with few employment opportunities outside of farming is reinforced by the decision-making and conflict management processes described previously. Put simply, it is difficult

for these growers to see themselves in other roles when they are prevented from playing new roles in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. This perspective leads to a culture of dependence on the organization since they see it as their one avenue towards earning a living.

As a consequence of these processes, Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables may begin to look and act, both in terms of its management structures and processes, and its orientation to the creation of revenue, increasingly like a conventional capitalist enterprise rather than a mission-driven sustainable development organization concerned with environmental and social sustainability.

Division among Growers

Gray (2004) and Lewicki, Gray and Elliot (Lewicki et al. 2003) present a frame-based theory of conflict in the environmental arena. From this perspective, environmental conflicts are the result of clashes among the frames through which stakeholders approach the environment or an environmental issue. Lewicki, Gray and Elliot present several types of frames that they view as integral to the development of these conflicts. In addition to those presented in the literature review of this dissertation, which includes identity frames and characterization frames, these authors also discuss conflict management frames, whole story frames and social control frames. Conflict management frames describe how stakeholders believe conflicts should be managed and who should govern this process. Whole story frames, describe stakeholders' beliefs about the overarching causes, sources, and evolution of conflicts. Social control frames describe who stakeholders believe should be involved in decision-making regarding environmental management. The concept of frames developed by Gray, and Lewicki, Gray and Elliot, suggests that frames are sensemaking tools as well as mechanisms for justifying stances, protecting one's vulnerabilities, defining boundaries among different perspectives, mobilizing others to take action and identifying accepted solutions to environmental problems. This dissertation also develops the ideas of membership and service frames, which describe how different organizational stakeholders view their role and purpose in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, and sustainability frames which describe how stakeholders view, define and approach the concept of sustainability.

Frame clashes, the authors explain, occur when individuals that approach the environment, or an environmental issue, through different frames use their frames to justify positions and make or support management decisions that compete with the positions of those who hold different frames. Frame alignment, these authors note, occurs when stakeholders with different frames transform the ways they think about the environment or a particular issue in a way that allows them to support the same management decisions. The goal of managing frame-based conflicts, these authors allude, is to develop processes that allow once-conflicted parties to reframe their conceptions of an environmental issue so that they perceive the same management decisions as able to achieve their divergent interests. One conclusion of the research described in this dissertation, however, is that the decision-making and

conflict management approaches used in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables may create or exacerbate frame clashes among stakeholders and prevent frame alignment.

The previous three chapters in this dissertation were dedicated to describing the different, and sometimes divergent, frames of growers, staff members and board members. Included in the descriptions of stakeholders' frames presented throughout these chapters, are examples of frame clashes and frame alignment. For example, all stakeholders' frames seemed to align in the aftermath of the packinghouse fire. As a result, the process of building a new packinghouse appears to have proceeded smoothly. Other examples, however, such as the board's decision to prohibit sales to the national chain store, represent frame clashes. In this example, the sustainability frames of legacy growers and board members clash.

The mechanisms that Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables uses to manage frame clashes include implicit agreements that may create divisions among stakeholders. These practices may also prevent or slow frame alignment. For example, there exists among stakeholders an implicit agreement to focus decision-making, especially those decisions with economic implications, on the economic success of legacy growers. This agreement, at this point in time, aligns with the frames of all stakeholders. In the future, however, Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' implicit focus on the financial concerns of legacy growers may hold implications for the participation of lifestyle and returning growers, as well as for the environmental mission and progress of the organization.

First, there may be a general decline in the attention and services provided to lifestyle and returning growers. For example, large volume and more experienced growers may tire of watching revenues be funneled into educational programs for less experienced growers and decide that it is time for Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables to "get serious" about making money. As a result, a rift may form between growers that place economic success at the center of their frames and those that do not.

Second, focusing on the financial considerations of legacy growers may create further barriers to network development, relationship-building and information exchange among growers of all stripes, as lifestyle and returning growers may increasingly feel that Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables no longer represents their concerns with identity development, education and environmental progress. Consequently, lifestyle growers may feel isolated within the organization and come to the conclusion that they are no longer welcome members.

Third, because most of the growers in the region with the capacity to grow large volumes of produce tend to be legacy growers, emphasizing recruitment among growers that share the legacy growers' frame may limit the growth of the agricultural industry at large, by preventing new growers from entering the field. As the population of farmers in the region ages and long time growers retire from farming there may not be new farmers entering the industry and able to replace them. The result may be a slow and steady decline in farming across the region because agricultural organizations such as Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables cease to provide safe learning and entry pathways for less experienced growers.

The use of minimum benchmarks for environmental sustainability may also allow Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables to become a target for the criticisms of organizations that hold different frames regarding the environment and would like to see the collective take stronger environmental positions. If, for instance, other regional environmental groups feel that Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables is not living up to its potential or environmental responsibilities, they may put pressure on Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum's board and Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' staff to make decisions that reflect a stronger pro-environmental framing. This may create challenges for Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables both in terms of its relationships with those outside the organization, but also within the organization. If staff and board members, as a result of pressure from outside groups, begin to place more emphasis on environmental sustainability, legacy growers may feel that these decisions clash with their frames and object that stronger standards infringe upon their ability to generate income. These decisions may align with the frames of lifestyle growers, however, and they may support the new actions. These differences in opinions represent frame clashes that could create friction among growers, staff and board members over the mission and purpose of the organization.

Reduced Commitment to, and Aspirations Regarding, Sustainability

The organic methods of agriculture defined in the US Department of Agriculture's Organic Food Production Act of 1990 (and amended in 2005)(Organic Foods Production Act 1990), and that are followed and endorsed by Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, certainly provide environmental improvements over the intensive farming methods involved with tobacco in the past. Organic methods of agriculture prohibit the use of the synthetic fertilizers, pesticides and other environmentally harmful practices that were common in tobacco cultivation.

However, one finding of the research described in this dissertation is that most staff and growers approach sustainability through a lens of attainability. A hallmark of this lens is the use of benchmarks that define stakeholders' views of success. The single benchmark of success that many growers and staff members in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables use when considering environmental sustainability is compliance with the USDA's organic standards. In other words, for these stakeholders environmental sustainability has been achieved once they adhere to these standards. One conclusion of the research described in this dissertation is that using the USDA's organic certification standards as a common benchmark for environmental sustainability actually limits the environmental sustainability of many growers and the collective at large. There are regional and theoretical implications of this decision as well.

The lens of attainability through which legacy and returning farmers approach sustainability encourages them to accept the US Department of Agriculture's standards for organic certification as benchmarks for reaching environmental sustainability. As a result, once these growers' receive their organic certifications from the US Department of Agriculture they consider their farms to have achieved

environmental sustainability, and they stop striving to achieve higher levels of environmental excellence. The use of the Department of Agriculture's standards as minimum guidelines does not affect the pursuit of environmental excellence among lifestyle growers, however. Members of this group continue, even after meeting the organic standards, to experiment with innovative environmental farming practices. Therefore, at the individual scale the prioritization schemes used to manage tensions over the meanings and practices of sustainability offer most growers a sense of accomplishment regarding environment sustainability while providing others with the freedom to pursue environmental aspirations that exceed the minimum standards.

The sense of accomplishment that some growers feel from obtaining the organic certification is a double-edged sword. While the organic certification standards surpass the environmental practices these growers might use if Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables did not require organic certification, it may also nurture a lack of enthusiasm among growers for pursuing additional levels of environmental excellence.

At the individual level, this means that once legacy and returning growers have achieved their organic certifications they may decide not to participate in other farm-related environmental initiatives because they view themselves as having achieved sustainability in the environmental sector. These growers may not, for example, take steps to develop wildlife habitat on their farms, reduce their carbon footprints or to place their farms in permanent conservation easements.

At the organizational level, Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables does hold growers' meetings and workshops in which they provide growers with training in organic farming practices. However, the methods the organization endorses at these venues tend to reinforce the view that the standards of organic certification included in the USDA law are the definition of environmental sustainability. In other words, the practices addressed in workshops focus on complying with the law, not surpassing it. Furthermore, as staff members strive to recruit more growers, especially legacy growers with large farms, they frame the organic standards as reflections of historical farming methods. Staff members tell stories and explain the organic standards in ways that relate them to the historical time period when tobacco culture thrived. They describe organic methods as the "way farming used to be." Staff members' intentions in making these descriptions seems to be to give the impression that the standards are common, well-known and simple to follow so that farmers do not develop the impression that organic farming requires major changes to the practices they already know.

The result is that the importance of environmental objectives are downplayed in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables and reduced to following the letter of the law, rather than achieving higher aspirations related to sustainability. This development holds implications for the social and economic legs of sustainability as well. Using organic certification as a benchmark for environmental sustainability means that once the organization has reached this minimum standard, staff members turn their attention to other elements of sustainability, mainly enhancing the organization's financial position. Yet, the use of a minimum benchmark for environmental sustainability may preclude opportunities for further enhancing the economic success of individual growers and the organization through additional innovations. For example, the organic standards for certification only regulate the cultivation of crops, and do not

address the conservation of farmland, wildlife habitat and water quality, or the reduction of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' carbon footprint, among other environmental interests. Each of these areas hold enormous implications for the local environment, and working to grow these elements of the organization's environmental mission may enhance the organization's financial success.

For instance, if Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables created a farmland conservation easement program in which the organization helped participating farmers place their farms in permanent conservation easements that allowed for continued farm uses, their farms may be subject to reduced tax bills. Such a program may increase the profit margins of individual farmers by reducing their expenditures. Additionally, participating in conservation easements and combining farming practices with habitat conservation practices, such as planting hedgerows instead of using fences to separate fields or property lines, may allow growers to become eligible for public or private grant funding that allows them to subsidize the purchase of new equipment or make capital improvements to their farms. Finally, reducing the carbon footprint of the packinghouse and associated with the transport of produce to markets may provide energy-related cost savings to Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables.

Additionally, the use of minimum benchmarks in the area of environmental sustainability may bring about a slow decline in environmental progress at the regional scale. Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables and Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum are widely recognized as leaders in sustainable development in Appalachia. The organizations have served as examples of innovative approaches to sustainability in several high profile venues and multiple media outlets. As a result, residents look to the organizations to set the standards regarding how sustainable development should look, feel and operate.

Therefore, through their focus on economic success and by employing minimum benchmarks for sustainability that stem from industrial and government regulations, Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables may be responsible for altering normative conceptions of environmental progress and sustainability in the region. Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables is a central player in the environmental and economic development narrative of the region, and as a result is influential in the ways that many residents view sustainability. Residents who previously viewed sustainability through an aspirational lens, for example, may observe the work of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables and reconsider the lens through which they view sustainability. The lens of attainability that is pervasive in much of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' work may, as a result, become a new norm for residents' conception of sustainability. If this transformation occurs it could bring about a decline in environmental progress because it encourages compromise between the elements of sustainability and sees these elements in tension with one another. For example, while the organization may succeed in protecting the farms of participating growers in the short-term by providing them with economic incentives to maintain their farms in working order, Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' limited definition of environmental sustainability does not push the organization to think about the long-term conservation of the farming community and farm land. Subsequently, local residents may adopt this view and reduce environmental progress at the regional level.

As a leader, residents look to Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum as a model not only in the environmental sector, but in the economic and social arenas as well. Yet, the decision-making and conflict

management mechanisms employed by the organizations do not exemplify practices that, if replicated across the region, would nurture sustainability in a broad sense. Other organizations and residents may adopt Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' approach to the social elements of sustainability as well. Justice and equality at the regional level could be reduced to meaning fair wages for workers and exclude broader meanings that enhance equality, fairness and empowerment for residents. This finding aligns with the conclusions of Bell and Morse (2008) and Belton et. al. (2009) who claim that indicators of success empower some stakeholders while disempowering others as well as with those of Valkila (2009) who shows that eco-certification programs offer limited success at achieving sustainability.

Belton et. al. explored eco-certification within the fisheries industry and show that eco-certification gives the impression that certified brand names have achieved sustainability when in reality the practices used by these firms may not be very different than those of uncertified firms. One finding of Belton et al. is that there is mismatch in the scales of production for which many eco-certification programs are designed. Belton et al. suggest that many eco-certification programs are designed for large scale industrial production, but are implemented by small scale producers. Subsequently, the practices required by these programs hold unintended environmental repercussions. Belton et al. also show that eco-certification programs hold implications in the social arena. These findings build from the work of Vandergeest (2007) and Delgado et al (2003) to argue that the environmental standards used in many eco-certification programs are separate from, and exclude, "the possibility of community input into their development and implementation (p. 841)." This finding aligns with those described in the previous chapters of this dissertation. Vandergeest proceeds to suggest that "If standards for tilapia aquaculture are to yield sustainable outcomes it will be necessary to adopt a conceptual framework that fully acknowledges the activities' social dimensions (p. 851)."

Valkila, in a study of the economic implications of organic and fair trade coffee production on small farmers in Nicaragua, illustrates that many of the same contradictions identified by Belton et al. in the aquaculture industry are also present in the fair trade coffee industry. In the case of coffee production, Valkila suggests that fair trade production does hold environmental benefits over conventional production, but the social benefits are limited and the scales for which the eco-certification programs were intended do not match those of the producers that subscribe to them. Valkila writes that fair trade organic coffee production "does not provide advantages to hired labor beyond those offered by agricultural labor in Nicaragua in general (p. 3023)." Valkila concludes that organic and fair trade production in Nicaragua destines growers to perpetual poverty because the economic and social benefits of eco-certification are not enough to lift producers out of poverty and take time and resources from the pursuance of other economic endeavors.

In the case described in this dissertation, the use of the organic standards as an indicator empowers the industry-government complex that created and supports the standards, while disempowering local growers and community members who may have alternative conceptions of the environment than that included in the organic standards. Additionally, viewing the organic certification standards through a lens of attainability fails to push growers to reach higher levels of sustainability on their farms, or to innovate, transfer and adopt new practices within the growers' network.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Farmers should have more input, because it's our lives that's on the line. It's not the people working there at the packing house. The manager at the packing house, the field manager... It's our lives that's on the line. And I think we should have a, at least have a voice in it.

Tom Carpenter, Farmer

At the very core of sustainable development (Agyeman 2005; Clarke 2008) of agri-food systems is the farmer. Farmers' perspectives and actions will ultimately enable or hinder society in the implementation of methods for sustainable development of agriculture and the larger agri-food system. But what motivates farmers to act in an environmentally friendly way? What keeps farmers farming and in good health? What basic needs have to be fulfilled in order for farmers to be content with their work and life situation? Farming is as much a way of life as it is a business. Farming is a social activity, although farming is seldom described in such words. The unique life-form and social aspects of farming have implications on farmers' decision-making, and thus on the possibility of realizing sustainable development, including its ecological dimensions.

Kallstrom and Ljung (p. 376), 2005

This research explored a new trend in rural community sustainable development that represents the development of linkages among sustainable development assistance organizations and local producers of sustainable products. Sustainable development assistance organizations may be non-profit organizations, quasi-government agencies such as regional economic development commissions, university centers and extension agencies, government offices and for-profit firms that assist rural producers of sustainable products in the creation and operation of environmentally, socially and financially sustainable businesses. The trend of developing linkages among producers and assistance organizations is a common approach to rural community sustainable development in the United States as well as internationally (Fernando, 2003; Haque, 2004; Lewis, 2003) The organizations and individuals at the heart of this study fit this context.

Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, an agricultural marketing and distribution firm, and Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum, Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' non-profit parent, are sustainable development assistance organizations. Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables buys organic vegetables from local producers and sells them to grocery stores. Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables also provides

growers with numerous training opportunities related to organic cultivation and conducts marketing and accounting work for participating growers. For the purposes of this study, the farmers that sell produce to Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables are considered producers of sustainable products.

Within this context, this dissertation explored the frames through which stakeholders in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables—growers, staff members and members of the board of directors of Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum—approach their work with the organization as well as their frames regarding sustainability.

The research question this dissertation addressed was:

Do the decision-making processes employed by producers, staff and board members in an SDAO hold implications for their collective achievement of sustainability?

This analysis reached five key conclusions, outlined below.

1. Growers, staffers and board members evidence diverse frames regarding their roles and membership in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables as well concerning sustainability.

I discovered three primary frames at play in the sample of growers examined here. Key differences among the frames held by growers emerged from growers' identity frames, attachment to Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' sustainability oriented mission, and relationships with other stakeholders. Legacy growers are economically dependent on their farms and strongly attached to their long family legacies of farming in the region. These growers exhibited little attachment to Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' mission and viewed staff members as playing limited technical roles in moving produce to market. Returning growers frame their farming related activities as an opportunity to honor their parents' and grandparents' commitment to farming. These growers expressed strong attachments to their family farms and viewed Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables as their avenue to keeping their family farms productive. Returning growers were not especially concerned about the financial viability of their farms. Returning growers exhibited a high degree of trust in staff members and viewed those individuals as sharing their values related to farming and family. Lifestyle growers demonstrated little concern for the economic success of their farms. These growers exhibited stronger attachments to the environmental and social justice-oriented elements of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' mission. Lifestyle growers also articulate strong admiration for legacy growers and Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' staff members. For their part, staff members manifested a more consistent framing of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. Staff members framed their work and the organization through a service frame, meaning that they viewed themselves as providing necessary business consulting and management practices to, primarily, legacy growers who they saw as poor, hard-working and victimized farmers struggling against a political, economic and regulatory system stacked against them. Like legacy growers, staff members demonstrated limited attachment to the

environmental mission of the cooperative. Board members, like staff members, approached their work with Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables through a service frame. Board members identified their key audiences as Appalachia's economic development and environmental communities. Board members view these communities as needing a paradigm shift in the ways they think and communicate about sustainable development in the region. Board members frame Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables as an economic development engine in the region, and exemplify this perspective through their focus on regional employment and economic stability. Board members manifested a broader conception of sustainability than staff and legacy growers.

2. Growers, staff and board members approach their work through participation frames with implications for the ways that they participate in, and develop, organizational decision-making processes as well as the kinds of choices they support.

Legacy, returning and lifestyle growers each hold different frames regarding decision-making. Each of these differences limited grower involvement among in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables decision-making processes. Legacy growers, for example, viewed staff members as experts in organizational management, and as decision-making professionals. These growers manifested limited interest in decision-making, as long as the decisions made by staff members met their primary economic objectives. Legacy growers refrained from participating in decision-making and showed little concern for decision-making. Returning growers demonstrated a high degree of trust in staff members because they believed staff members shared their concerns related to protecting and maintaining farming culture in the region as well their commitment to family. This framing of staff members lead returning growers to abstain from active engagement decision-making. They believed staff members held their best interests at heart and would make decisions that aligned with their interest in protecting the region's farming heritage. Lifestyle farmers also refrained from participating in decision-making. Those growers, as a result of their perceived inexperience, suggested they did not possess sufficient knowledge to provide value to decision-making processes. As a result, growers of all stripes only participated in decision-making when specifically invited to do so by staff members, though several suggested they would like to know more about how decisions within the cooperative are made and to become more involved in such processes. The upshot of this reality is most decisions of consequence are made by staff members with little involvement from growers and board members. Staff, who view decision-making as a key element of their job responsibilities, are happy with this situation. Staff members suggest that they do not want to burden growers with decision-making responsibilities because farmers have other more pressing concerns to which they must attend. Staff members periodically invite growers to participate in decision-making when they perceive decisions to have implications for the economic success of legacy growers. Finally, board members make few decisions regarding the management of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, instead focusing their efforts on the broader sustainability work of Blue Ridge Sustainability Forum. Board members do, however, make periodic decisions with purport for the entire operation, such as that concerning whether to sell produce to a large, national chain store. Board member decisions align with their framing of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables as a driver of regional

economic development. The frames described here come together to create staff-dominated decision processes. Accordingly, the staff frame proved most significant to decision outcomes.

3. When engaged in decision-making, growers', staff and board members' sustainability frames often come into tension.

This research found a number of instances in which the different sustainability frames of stakeholders were visible. Many of these decision conflicts, including those regarding the marketing fee and national chain store, revealed differences in how the various stakeholders understood sustainability or the scales at which stakeholders at which its claims might obtain.

4. Growers, staff and board members have developed three mechanisms for addressing the tensions that arise from their dissimilar frames.

First, most decisions are made by staff. The board periodically makes choices too and these decisions often exclude staff and growers. Second, staff often weight the economic elements of sustainability above its environmental and social elements, once minimum benchmarks in environmental and social arenas are met. Third, staff, especially, tend to exhibit more concern for some growers than others in decision making. Often, although not always, this means ranking the financial needs of legacy growers above those of returning and lifestyle growers. The three conflict management mechanisms identified in this research help Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables make decisions quickly, without much evident conflict and with consistency and clarity. Therefore, when viewed through an "efficiency-of-business" lens, it appears that these mechanisms "work." Yet, when viewed through an environmental justice lens, these same mechanisms may prevent Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables from reaching its sustainability goals. These processes may limit the Blue Mountain's ability to reach its potential as a learning organization; fail to empower growers with senses of ownership, responsibility and authority in decision-making; create divisions among growers when staff favor the concerns of some over others; and generate distrust among growers, staff and board members. As a result, resilience, commitment and trust within the organization may be limited in the long pull and these elements are critical if Blue Mountain is to realize its sustainability goals at the individual, organizational and regional levels.

5. Participants in sustainable development assistance organizations must develop explicit mechanisms for acknowledging and talking about their diverse frames and incorporating them into organizational decision-making processes. If these groups fail to accomplish this step, they risk failing to fulfill the organization's promise of promoting sustainable development.

Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables does not currently have a mechanism that allows engaged stakeholders to come together and communicate about their diverse frames regarding the

organization's, decision-making and sustainability. Mechanisms that allow Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables to focus explicitly on discussing and integrating diverse stakeholder frames, such as decision-making processes that include environmentally just decision-making practices (recommendations for developing such mechanisms are identified later in this chapter), will allow the organization to create shared, unified frames among stakeholders that will permit it to address multiple stakeholder needs simultaneously. Development of such processes will enhance the strength of the SDAO's focus on social elements of sustainability and bring this portion of its mission in line with its current focus on economic and environmental sustainability.

This chapter contains four sections. First, it discusses how these conclusions relate to theories of sustainable development and the achievement of environmental justice in the sustainable development arena. This portion focuses on sustainability at individual, organizational, regional and theoretical levels. Second, this chapter proposes a new framework for sustainable development assistance organizations that is based on achieving environmental justice and inclusion for stakeholders at grassroots levels. This section also presents a list of recommendations concerning decision-making and management within sustainable development assistance organizations that may overcome the weaknesses identified throughout the dissertation. The third section provides a response to the research objectives and theoretical propositions outlined in the introductory chapter as well as describes several directions for future inquiry. The final section returns to the three theoretical areas of inquiry presented in the literature review to present a few final thoughts about the relationships between sustainable development assistance organizations and sustainable producers.

Sustainable Development Assistance Organizations and Environmental Justice

At first glance, when viewed through a lens of organizational efficiency, the decision making practices of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables seem like rational and common approaches to making decisions in organizations. These practices foster efficiency, avoid conflict, and maintain consistency and clarity in decision making. In short, these practices are highly effective at sustaining the organization and this outcome meets the frames of staff members, who hold most decision making responsibilities and possess a high degree of vested interest in achieving organizational sustainability. In fact, the organization has been largely successful at meeting many of its goals. These decision practices align with the frames of other stakeholders as well. Stakeholders at all levels, including growers, describe high levels of pride, satisfaction, achievement and loyalty to the collective.

Yet, when viewed through a lens of sustainability, which promises environmental justice for all participants, Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables falls short of its goals. The decision practices in use do

not meet the indicators of just decision making provided by Moote et al. (1997). These practices fail to provide growers with feelings of self-efficacy, representation and access, equal access to information and learning opportunities, continuous and high levels of involvement, or decision making authority, for instance. As a consequence, the collective may suffer from limited organizational learning and resilience; the creation of conflicts and rifts among growers that approach their work and relationships with Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables through different frames; the disempowerment of, and a lack of commitment among, local growers; and, a reduction in aspirations related to, and the achievement of, environmental, social and economic objectives.

These findings support those of Agyeman (2005) and Clarke (2008), who suggest that sustainable development initiatives often fail to live up to the promises of sustainability theory, especially in the social and cultural arenas. Agyeman calls the unequal treatment and focus among the three legs of sustainability in these initiatives the “equity deficit (p. 44).” The equity deficit describes the reality that many sustainable development initiatives focus on the economic and environmental legs of sustainability while neglecting social or cultural elements. Clarke suggests that the equity deficit arises from confusion over the meaning of social sustainability, equity, fairness, inclusion and related concepts as well as over how to implement and evaluate social sustainability. In the case of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, the decision practices in use represent, are founded upon, and reinforce the equity deficit. It is my belief that the equity deficit not only results in a sustainable development initiative’s failure to live up to the promises of sustainability and environmental justice in the sense that these are objectives (in an aspirational or attainable sense), but that the deficit also represents a failure of these initiatives to conduct their work in just ways.

Already Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables shows signs of strain. Making the choice to develop a relationship with the large national-chain store, for example, represents one decision conflict that placed stakeholders with different sustainability, membership and service frames at odds with one another. It is likely that as the organization grows in membership, and is faced with increasing financial and operational challenges, conflicts such as this one may become more frequent and damaging. As this occurs, Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables is faced with a choice. The organization can further isolate and exclude growers at the grassroots level from decision processes, and further institutionalize decision practices that contain decision making responsibilities among a small group of individuals that share the same frames (the efficiency option), or the organization can change its decision practices to include growers and enhance information sharing (the just option). Pursuing the latter route meets the criterion of environmentally just decision making practices, and may lead to higher levels of organizational learning, commitment and resilience that, while not making the choices the organization faces any less difficult, will enhance the organization’s strength and will to meet such choices as well as efficiency and sustainability over the long term.

Sustainability at the Individual Scale

One promise of the sustainability movement is that it offers grassroots participants avenues to increased agency. Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables strives to realize this promise by providing participating growers with opportunities to accomplish their farming related aspirations. For legacy tobacco growers, the collective offers a replacement for tobacco. Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables offers legacy growers opportunities to generate income from the sale of organic vegetables. As a substitute for the tobacco program, Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables serves an important role as an organizing and cultural institution in the lives of participating growers. Through participation in the sustainability organization, growers are able to maintain their farms, earn an income and continue a way of life they cherish. Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables offers returning growers a way to continue their family farming heritage and to honor their parents and ancestors by providing them an avenue for earning enough income to cover the costs of owning and maintaining their farms. Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables offers lifestyle growers an opportunity to fulfill their farming related aspirations by providing educational and networking opportunities and helping them pursue the identity transformation they desire.

Yet, simultaneously to providing growers with opportunities for accomplishing their objectives the organization dictates much of the way that farming will occur for participants. For example, growers must negotiate the crops they will cultivate with staff members and other growers and must comply with financial agreements such as the marketing fee. Additionally, growers have few opportunities to provide input or to voice their opinions and concerns about the organization's management, and are excluded from decision-making processes within the organization. The general rule of participation in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables seems to be: follow the terms set out by staff members or don't participate.

As a result, Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables places growers in a difficult position. The collective offers one of the few avenues for achieving growers' aspirations in the region, but strictly dictates the terms by which these aspirations are met and, in some cases may even limit the degree to which growers' aspirations are attainable. For example, selling to the national grocery chain described in Chapter five would clearly meet the aspirations of legacy tobacco growers, but may not become a reality because this decision is first in the hands of board members, who are divided on this issue. Furthermore, legacy growers are unaware that there is a possibility of selling produce to the large national chain store. The information imbalance in this case places them at odds with the board of directors, who possess this information but seem reluctant to present it to staff and growers, claiming that it will create controversy and complexity that will make it difficult for these stakeholders to perform their jobs. As a result, neither staff nor growers are able to advocate for a position on this issue, or to develop an alternative plan to the one proposed by board members.

Likewise, as Sherri and Susan recounted their stories about developing Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables' response to the GAP program it was clear growers were not involved in that process. As a result, they lacked access to the information staff members used to develop their characterization of the

program. They were also unable to evaluate the reasonableness of the staff's symbolic response to meeting the new regulations. As a result, growers could not offer worthwhile alternative proposals for responding to the regulations. In the case of the marketing fee advisory committee, staff controlled the information presented to growers by selecting what financial data to share and how to present it. In fact, staff members had come to conclusions about the new fee prior to convening the committee and only gathered the advisory committee to affirm their decision. Again, growers were not presented with sufficient information to develop different conclusions than those developed by staff members. Instead, they were purposefully led to embrace the staff's conclusions. Again, this process reduced the agency of growers by preventing them from developing alternative perspectives and plans to those determined by staff.

In the examples presented here, as growers' agency to make their own decisions and act freely is reduced their dependency on Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables and staff members is increased. Not only must growers rely on staff for information that would help them make decisions about how to manage their farms, but they must also rely on the organization to develop plans to address new regulations, find markets and work the finances of sales and payments to growers. Growers in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, it seems, are dependent on the organization in much the same way that coal workers are dependent on coal companies and tobacco farmers were dependent on the tobacco program. Sustainable development organizations that buffer grassroots stakeholders from decision-making processes and make choices about the weighting of sustainability related values and stakeholders may be responsible for creating similar levels of dependence as the resource dependent industries that preceded them.

Sustainability at the Organizational Scale

At the organizational level, the decision-making practices of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables may prevent the organization from reaching its potential as a learning organization and for developing resiliency to overcome challenges. The limited role in decision-making that is provided to growers not only reduces their opportunities to act freely, but also limits their ability to learn and adapt to the changing environment in which the organization is nested. For instance, without opportunities to fully understand the GAP program and to think about how they may respond to and comply with the regulations on their own farms and as an organization, growers are not given the opportunity to evolve their practices as the industry evolves. The symbolic response to the GAP program that is offered by staff members requires little in the way of tangible modifications to growers' on-the-ground farming practices. As a result, if the next generation of GAP regulations is more strict than the first, and growers have not had the opportunity to adjust their practices slowly over time, they may be caught unable to make the more drastic changes required by the second iteration of the program. Additionally, the constant buffering and mediation in decision-making brought by staff members, in which growers are

not allowed to make decisions for and by themselves but rather all decisions are mediated, monitored and filtered by staff, prevents growers from developing relationships based on mutual learning and discussion.

At the organizational level the decision-making processes and conflict management mechanisms at work do not foster discussions among stakeholders that would help to reveal their frames and lead to more nuanced understandings of their aspirations, concerns and needs. As a result, it seems that the processes used in the organization leaves many members unfulfilled. Indeed, the current processes create inequities among growers as well as between growers, staff and board members. As a result the organization is likely to lack resilience to overcome challenges and conflicts related to decision-making.

Sustainability at the Regional Scale

At the regional level, board members intend to move the region's economy away from nonrenewable and extractive industries such as coal, logging and intensive tobacco agriculture towards an economy that they view as more sustainable. A more sustainable economy, board members envision, is based on renewable and non-extractive industries as well as offer residents job and income stability. At the regional level, however, the decision-making and conflict management tools used in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables represent the continued dominance of industry and government over local definitions and conceptualizations of the environment. The use of the organic standards of certification as a benchmark for environmental sustainability, per se, empowers the industrial-government complex that developed the standards and disempowers local residents. As a consequence, for example, local conceptions of the environment are not considered within the board's definition of environmental progress. As a result, concepts such as sense of place are not included in organizational discourse.

This finding builds on those of Belton et al. (2009), who argues that policies that rely on the implementation of best management practices to achieve sustainability, as the organic standards do, promote a policy discourse that favors the construction of standards that favor large, intensive production. Belton et al. writes that this discourse reifies these standards "as the 'responsible' standard, thereby obscuring the potential contributions of semi-intensive forms of production that are more ecologically sustainable and appropriate to the livelihood strategies of producers... (p. 851)."

Sustainability at the Theoretical Level

Finally, in the theoretical realm, this research introduced two new lenses through which sustainability can be viewed. These are the lens of aspirational sustainability and the lens of attainability. In Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, stakeholders who approach sustainability through the aspirational lens (lifestyle farmers and board members), view the process of working towards sustainability as a journey without an end. For these stakeholders, benchmarks along the way towards reaching sustainability are way points that mark progress, but not endpoints in, and of, themselves. Additionally, these stakeholders do not see the three elements of sustainability in tension with one another, and believe that all three elements can be pursued, and progress can be made in all areas, simultaneously.

Those who view sustainability through a lens of attainability (legacy and returning growers, and staff members), set out to achieve clear standards by which they claim sustainability is reached. For example, these stakeholders view the organic standards of certification as the pinnacle achievement of organic agriculture. Once they have achieved this benchmark they do not strive to achieve still higher levels of sustainability in the environmental realm. Furthermore, these stakeholders view the three elements of attainability in tension with one another. This means that, for these stakeholders, allocating resources such as money, time and energy towards the pursuance of success in one area automatically means diverting resources from progress in another area.

Additionally, the decision-making and conflict management mechanisms of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables do not achieve sustainable development theory's objectives related to environmental justice and the empowerment of local stakeholders. As a result, the organization reinforces class roles and hierarchical and decision-making boundaries within the organization and at regional scales and provides no outlet for breaking down these barriers. This finding forces a close examination of sustainable development theory and raises several questions about the effectiveness of sustainable development when pursued through sustainable development assistance organizations.

These findings align with the findings of other researchers including Kallstrom and Ljung (2005), who described the link between environmental progress and social sustainability within the farming industry. Kallstrom and Ljung document that many farmers feel a lack of equitable treatment, respect, responsibility, fairness and inclusion in decisions that affect the agricultural sector. These authors have argued farmers' shared feelings of vulnerability to the choices and actions of distant decision makers that are disconnected to the realities of farm work and the agricultural economy. Finally, Kallstrom and Ljung have contended that many farmers believe that collaborative decision-making processes offer pathways to increased involvement, responsibilities and opportunities to learn as well as avenues to enhance growers' commitment to sustainable agriculture.

Lessons Learned for Sustainable Development Assistance Organizations

The network relationships under examination in this study represent a growing trend in rural community sustainable development. With increasing frequency, sustainable development assistance organizations are identifying or developing local producers of sustainable products whom they intend to support and aid in the creation of thriving sustainable businesses. Sustainable development assistance organizations exist in sectors as diverse as agriculture, forestry, arts and crafts, fisheries and building construction, to name a few. The intent of sustainable development assistance organizations is to aid local producers in aspects of business management such as production, distribution, marketing and accounting so that producers may find success in the marketplace.

What the research presented in this dissertation shows is that the frames of sustainable producers and staff and board members at assistance organizations are often dissimilar, and may create tensions in decision-making scenarios. In this study, not only do staff and board members at the sustainable development assistance organization exclude local producers from decision-making, but they also show signs of making decisions that contradict the needs of growers at the grassroots level.

This research illustrates that a key weakness in the approach to sustainable development employed by the assistance firm in this study is a lack of concern for social and cultural elements of sustainability. This may in fact be the Achilles heel of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. Staff and board members have failed to understand the importance of maintaining the farming lifestyle and culture to legacy growers as well as the importance of educational and relationship building opportunities for lifestyle and returning growers. As a result, the organization does not seem to possess a culture of learning and commitment and trust among members may be low.

Additionally, because the organization relies on tacit mechanisms of conflict management, rather than formal rules or by-laws, avenues for involving growers in decision-making may not be present when growers do have concerns they would like to raise. The tacit mechanisms that are in use for regulating tension in the organization successfully dampen tensions over values and frames that sometimes arise and, as a result, create efficient decision-making now. This comes, however, at the expense of long-term organizational sustainability, organizational learning and resilience. Furthermore, as a consequence of their exclusion from decision-making, growers do not feel a vested interest, sense of concern, ownership or responsibility for the organization.

Instead of viewing the development of the social and cultural component of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables as tertiary to economic and environmental concerns, the organization may be better served by viewing the development of a strong farming culture, strong networks among growers and educational opportunities as the pathways by which economic success is generated. By enhancing communication among growers and staff members, by involving growers in decision-making, and by nurturing strong relationships and feelings of ownership among growers, Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables may increase the rate at which innovation in business and farming practices occurs as well as create senses of community, ownership and responsibility among growers, which could translate into

enhanced commitment and increased productivity. Offering growers opportunities for further involvement in management will also build growers' professional skills, providing them with wider professional opportunities in, and out of, farming. Accomplishing these objectives will allow Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, and sustainable development assistance organizations in general, to live up to the promise of sustainability theory.

A Framework for Inclusive Decision-making

These conclusions constitute a framework for improving collaborative decision-making within sustainable development assistance organizations. The framework described here provides four elements for managers in sustainable development assistance organizations to consider when developing decision-making processes that allow producer, staff and board member participation. These building blocks include considering the *scope*, *depth*, *duration* and *diversity* of producer involvement in decision-making. Considering these elements will help achieve the objectives for participatory decision-making in sustainable development assistance organizations outlined by Kallstrom and Ljung, as well as those that relate to environmental justice provided by Moote et al.

First, sustainable development assistance organizations should enhance the *scope* of issues in which sustainable producers are involved. In the case of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, this means not only developing growers' advisory committees when decisions with financial implications arise, as Sherri Baker suggests is current practice, but also when decisions that affect the environmental and social elements of the organization arise.

Second, sustainable development assistance organizations must enhance the *depth* of sustainable producers' involvement in decision-making. This means that the involvement of producers in decision processes must extend past the symbolic realm and offer full access to information as well as the opportunity truly to influence decision outcomes. For Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, this could mean that when discussing modifications to the marketing fee for instance, growers are provided with a full picture of the collective's financial status as well as with a full understanding of the marketplace so that they can make complete assessments of the circumstances in which the organization is nested. Without mediation and filtering from staff, growers may develop alternative proposals to those provided by staff members. Growers' involvement, however, should not stop at the development of an alternative proposal to that offered by staff members. Growers must also have the ability to participate in shaping final decision outcomes.

Third, sustainable development assistance organizations must increase the *duration* of producer involvement in decision-making. Producers should not only be included in decisions when staff or board members elect to do so; they should be offered opportunities for continual input. To ensure this level of involvement sustainable development assistance organizations should work with producers to develop

formal and structural avenues for their involvement that persist over time and do not depend on the benevolence of staff or board members. The development of growers' advisory committees in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables, for example, should not be left to staff discretion.. Rather, these committees should be formalized and institutionalized.

Fourth, sustainable development assistance organizations must allow for a *diversity* of frames to be included in all decision processes. This means that staff members in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables should, in addition to inviting participation from growers who they believe will be most concerned with a particular decision or who they believe hold particular objectives, develop structures that allow participants with broad and dissimilar frames to participate in decision-making. For example, rather than focusing on recruiting legacy growers to participate on the marketing fee committee, or focusing only on returning and lifestyle growers when educational and networking opportunities are discussed, staff should focus on recruiting a diversity of growers to all decision processes.

The following section outlines several recommendations for enhancing inclusion and social sustainability in sustainable development assistance organizations.

Recommendations for Sustainable Development Assistance Organizations

These recommendations are intended to address the challenges outlined in the previous sections and to achieve the four points related to scope, depth, duration and diversity of producers' involvement in decision-making:

- Include pathways for sustainable producers to participate in all organizational decisions. Write these pathways for involvement into organizational by-laws and let them be known among all stakeholders.
- Allow local producers to nominate and elect representatives to the boards of sustainable development assistance organizations.
- Develop training programs to assist local producers in organizational management so that they can move into leadership roles as opportunities arise.
- Develop transparent decision-making processes that welcome participation from local producers.
- Encourage and promote strong, hard, and aspirational views of sustainability among all stakeholders.

- Develop conceptions of social sustainability that go beyond financial elements such as fair wages. View benchmarks as indicators of progress rather than destinations.
- Promote environmental objectives that go beyond the standards of eco-certification labels such as the USDA’s organic certification and Forest Stewardship Council’s standards for sustainable timber. View benchmarks as indicators of progress rather than destinations.
- Develop programs that promote the development of strong relationships and networks within the organization as well as that encourage reflection on, and development of, cultural elements of sustainable production in the region.

Meeting the Research Objectives

Three objectives were outlined at the outset of this research:

- to use qualitative methods to develop an understanding of the frames held by participants in one rural sustainable development effort;
- to explore the ways that participants’ frames influence their perceptions of, and involvement in, organizational decisions making and conflict management, and;
- to highlight recommendations for improving the decision-making and conflict management practices of sustainable development assistance organizations that relate to their relationships with local producers.

The first objective was addressed through the research design. Data for this study was collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with farmers, staff members and board members in one sustainable development assistance organization. The second objective was addressed through data analysis, which identified stakeholder participation and sustainability frames. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 discussed these frames in detail and connected each to the ways decisions are made within the sustainable development assistance organization. Chapter 6 outlined three mechanisms for managing tensions related to stakeholders’ divergent frames. The final objective was met through considering the implications of the decision-making and conflict management mechanisms of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables as they related to the three elements of sustainability and at individual, organizational, and regional scales.

Steps for Future Research

There are a number of fruitful directions that future research on the relationships between and among sustainable development assistance organizations and local producers could take. First among them, and directly related to this study, is an exploration of the pervasiveness of the weaknesses related to social sustainability identified in this study. Research that follows this agenda could ask whether the challenges to achieving social sustainability identified in Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables are common throughout the field of sustainable development. Research in this arena could also investigate how, and to what end, other sustainable development assistance organizations have dealt with these challenges. Another area of research that builds on this study could explore the connections between the weaknesses in achieving social sustainability and producers' commitment to participating in sustainable development initiatives. Such research might ask 'at what point, and how do, producers raise issues of social sustainability with staff and board members and how do staff and board members respond?' Given the service frames through which staff and board members approach their work this might present a tense dynamic with interesting repercussions and findings for the field of conflict management.

An additional research track might explore alternative relational models or approaches to sustainable development other than that posed by the relationships among sustainable development assistance organizations and local producers. This avenue of study might ask inquire how else local producers of sustainable products develop business practices, market their goods and find clients if not for sustainable development assistance organizations. This research agenda could ask if alternative models of sustainable development are in use and what the benefits, weaknesses and outcomes of these approaches might be.

A Final Word

The development of relationships among producers of sustainable products and sustainable development assistance organizations is one common method of working towards sustainability, especially in rural areas. This research asks, essentially, if this process is successful in achieving its environmental, economic and social objectives. The concept of frames was employed to address this question. Evidence suggests that, at least in the present case, the strategy of developing linkages among producers and assistance organizations has room for improvement. Frames may prevent the achievement of sustainability in economic, environmental and social arenas.

This research brought into sharp focus the realities of decision-making in sustainability-oriented organizations. While stakeholders economic, social and environmental objectives, the values underpinning these are often compromised when sustainability organizations face decisions.

The development of Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables decision-making processes represents another set of negotiations and compromises within the organization. At no point in my interviews with stakeholders did any respondent describe an explicit process of discussion through which all members of the collective enjoyed fulsome opportunities to participate. The processes in-use, were developed incrementally through sometimes opaque and sometimes tacit understandings and agreements. The decision processes at work at Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables may reasonably be viewed as an active representation of the organization's definition of, and commitment to, social sustainability. And, as shown throughout this analysis, the organization's operating conception of social sustainability falls well short of the promise of sustainable development theory.

This is an important recognition for managers in sustainable development assistance organizations as well as for producers. That is, that as organizational decisions are made, evolution in organizational structures and processes takes place. Such changes often occur slowly and it is difficult for managers to observe the track and trajectory of decision-making, and to discern its implications as it unfolds. Yet, over time, decisions and decision-making structures and practices are institutionalized and become very difficult to change. It is likely that this is what occurred at Blue Mountain Organic Vegetables. Stakeholders were not self-consciously aware they were participating in the development of decision-making and conflict management processes, or that they were negotiating their values related to social equity when they engaged in those discussions, but that is exactly what happened. As a result, it is highly possible that staff and growers are not actively conscious of the exclusive and limiting model by which they manage the organization, or that the decision framework in use creates inequities among board members, staff and growers even as it falls short of their nominal aspirations to act in accord with the claims of sustainability theory.

In order to mitigate this possibility, sustainable development assistance organizations, which should strive to exemplify the three signal elements of sustainable development, must work hard to observe self-consciously the historical evolution and future trajectory of their decisions, both in terms of felt realities on the ground as well as over the longer term. The stakes, after all, of failure are high.

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Appendix A

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY
Informed Consent for Participants
in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects

Data Collection Instruments

Notes

Data sheet 1 will be used in all interviews with members of Appalachian Harvest.

Data sheet 2 will be used with all members of Sustainable Woods.

Data sheet 3 will be used with staff and board members at Appalachian Sustainable development.

In each case, the data sheets are simply reminders for the interviewer of the key decision conflicts for investigation in each organization as well as the elements of decision conflicts and the three scales of networks that this research examines. The sheets will be used in similar fashion to a bingo card. As the interviewer and respondent discuss the various decision conflicts listed in the first column the interviewer will check off network scales and elements of decision conflict as they are discussed. In this way the researcher will know what areas of decision conflict management have not yet been discussed.

Data Collection Instrument: APPALACHIAN HARVEST

Begin involvement	Identity Frame			Character Frame			Whole Story Frame			Power Frame								
First Decision	Source			Symptoms			Process			Results			Outcomes			Satisfaction		
	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net
Most recent decision	Source			Symptoms			Process			Results			Outcomes			Satisfaction		
	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net
Challenging decision	Source			Symptoms			Process			Results			Outcomes			Satisfaction		
	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net

Contentious decision	Source			Symptoms			Process			Results			Outcomes			Satisfaction		
	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net

Data Collection Instrument: APPALACHIAN HARVEST

Hire New ASD Exec Director	Source			Symptoms			Process			Results			Outcomes			Satisfaction		
	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net
Crop Production Auction	Source			Symptoms			Process			Results			Outcomes			Satisfaction		
	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net

Data Sheet 1A. If time permits, members of Appalachian Harvest will be about these two decision conflicts.

Data Collection Instrument: APPALACHIAN HARVEST

Build warehouse	Source			Symptoms			Process			Results			Outcomes			Satisfaction		
	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net
Crops to grow	Source			Symptoms			Process			Results			Outcomes			Satisfaction		
	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net
Pay growers	Source			Symptoms			Process			Results			Outcomes			Satisfaction		
	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net
ASD political issues	Source			Symptoms			Process			Results			Outcomes			Satisfaction		
	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net
ASD partnerships	Source			Symptoms			Process			Results			Outcomes			Satisfaction		
	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net

ASD BOD representation	Source			Symptoms			Process			Results			Outcomes			Satisfaction		
	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net

Data Sheet 1B. Decision conflicts listed in this data sheet will be used as prompts in cases when respondents from Appalachian Harvest have difficulty identifying decision conflicts.

Data Collection Instrument: SUSTAINABLE WOODS

Begin involvement	Identity Frame			Character Frame			Whole Story Frame			Power Frame								
First Decision	Source			Symptoms			Process			Results			Outcomes			Satisfaction		
	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net
Most recent decision	Source			Symptoms			Process			Results			Outcomes			Satisfaction		
	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net
Challenging decision	Source			Symptoms			Process			Results			Outcomes			Satisfaction		
	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net

Contentious decision	Source			Symptoms			Process			Results			Outcomes			Satisfaction		
	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net

Data Sheet 2. All growers in Sustainable woods will be asked these questions.

Data Collection Instrument: SUSTAINABLE WOODS

Hire New ASD Exec Director	Source			Symptoms			Process			Results			Outcomes			Satisfaction		
	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net
Modify SW Sustainable Harvest Guidelines	Source			Symptoms			Process			Results			Outcomes			Satisfaction		
	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net

Data Sheet 2A. If time permits, members of Sustainable Woods will be about these two decision conflicts.

Data Collection Instrument: SUSTAINABLE WOODS

Modify mill yard	Source			Symptoms			Process			Results			Outcomes			Satisfaction		
	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net
Pay landowners	Source			Symptoms			Process			Results			Outcomes			Satisfaction		
	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net
Pay Timber Pro	Source			Symptoms			Process			Results			Outcomes			Satisfaction		
	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net
ASD political issues	Source			Symptoms			Process			Results			Outcomes			Satisfaction		
	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net
ASD partnerships	Source			Symptoms			Process			Results			Outcomes			Satisfaction		
	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net

ASD BOD representation	Source			Symptoms			Process			Results			Outcomes			Satisfaction		
	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net

Data Sheet 2B. Decision conflicts listed in this data sheet will be used as prompts in cases when respondents from Sustainable Woods have difficulty identifying decision conflicts.

Data Collection Instrument: STAFF AND BOD APPALACHIAN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Begin involvement	Identity Frame			Character Frame			Whole Story Frame			Power Frame								
First Decision	Source			Symptoms			Process			Results			Outcomes			Satisfaction		
	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net
Most recent decision	Source			Symptoms			Process			Results			Outcomes			Satisfaction		
	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net
Challenging decision	Source			Symptoms			Process			Results			Outcomes			Satisfaction		
	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net
Contentious decision	Source			Symptoms			Process			Results			Outcomes			Satisfaction		
	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net
Hire ASD director	Source			Symptoms			Process			Results			Outcomes			Satisfaction		
	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net

SW Harvest guidelines	Source			Symptoms			Process			Results			Outcomes			Satisfaction		
	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net
AH Crop Auction	Source			Symptoms			Process			Results			Outcomes			Satisfaction		
	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net	Ind	Org	Net

Data Sheet 3. For use with staff and board members at Appalachian Sustainable Development.