Growing goods: the market, the state, and sustainable food production

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Abstract. Within Europe and North America the integration of environmental concerns into agriculture has become a domain almost exclusively defined by public policy. In this paper it is contended that we are currently witnessing a new direction in attempts to reconcile agricultural production and environmental protection, in which the market is playing an increasingly important role. The paper takes as its focus the rapidly expanding number of what are termed 'market-oriented initiatives for environmentally sustainable food production' (MOIs), in which the incentive for food producers to manage the environment positively comes directly through the market. The number of MOIs, in both Europe and North America, has proliferated recently, although some have been established for many years. However, both older and newer forms of these MOIs appear to be the focus of a new rural development, food quality, and sustainable farming agenda. In an attempt to make a contribution to this emergent debate, this paper sets out to address the extent to which these MOIs are capable of contributing to the development of more environmentally sustainable food production. In this paper we consider the drivers of this new approach, review the various types of MOI that are emerging in both Europe and North America, and examine the different approaches to environmental management that MOIs adopt. The paper also offers a reflection upon the potential contribution of MOIs to the delivery of environmental goods in food production and the implications of this for public sector approaches.

Introduction
The enterprise of food production enjoys an intrinsically paradoxical relationship with the environment, in the widest meaning of that often fickle word. “Environmental ethics”, writes Thompson (1995, page 11), “has little of a constructive nature to say about production”. In transforming materials from a less valued to a more valued state, production, and agricultural production in particular, has always implicitly transformed them also from a more natural to a less natural state. Agriculture epitomises what Cronin has called “second nature” (1991, page 264), not only in its transformation of the natural world but also, crucially, in its structuration of ‘natural’ space. The modern agrofood sector, from intensive production techniques on the farm to international processing, marketing, and distribution networks at the truly global scale, has made this transformation process its central foundation (Goodman et al, 1987). Farmers have been turned into mere providers of alimentary (and nonalimentary) raw materials for later reconstitution as appropriate food and consumers turned, increasingly we are told, into the dupes of multinational marketing strategies and competitive price wars (Schlosser, 2001). For many, the development of contemporary, productivist agriculture and the concomitant emergence of a global agrofood economy has been largely predicated upon supremacy over the environmental and natural conditions and features which might otherwise counter the economic efficiency of production techniques and the standardised form and quality of the eventual products. Furthermore, the policies and mechanisms that underwrite

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agricultural productivism in Europe, the USA, and the other major agricultural trading countries, themselves encourage environmental damage by directly rewarding intensification and concentration. Yet, accompanying this oft-repeated litany of agriculture’s intended and unintended environmental consequences is another, equally valid, discourse which celebrates, or at least recognises, the fact that, particularly in European states, many of the essential components of the rural environment, as experienced, perceived, and valued by society, have been ‘created’ and maintained by farming activities over the centuries (Jollivet, 1998). As countless observers have maintained, the European rural environment is essentially an agrarian one and, consequently, the aesthetics, priorities, social norms, and indeed ethics that nurture European environmentalism draw deeply from this basic cultural complicity.

Much of the recent history of agricultural policy and, to a lesser extent, environmental policy within Europe and elsewhere, has been characterised by the need to come to terms with this dualistic and often contradictory set of relations between agricultural production and environmental production (Buller, 2002a; Potter, 1998). Policy thereby seeks to integrate the means to avoid further environmental destruction as a result of agricultural intensification while at the same time encouraging farmers to maintain and protect those natural features, habitats, and landscapes that are also the (nontradable) products of their labours. Lowe et al (1999) expressed this double concern in terms of two policy models of the agriculture–environment relationship: the ‘impact model’ which assumes that agricultural practices are harmful to the environment and seeks to regulate and mitigate against environmental damage; and the ‘public goods’ model which assumes a more complex relationship and a degree of shared dependency. Hence, alongside the traditional mechanisms of agricultural support (subsidies to compensate producers from natural hazards and falling prices, guaranteed prices, and export subsidies) and the growing corpus of environmental and food regulations have developed a whole raft of voluntary and contractual instruments that seek both to compensate farmers for the costs of maintaining environmental features, habitats, and landscapes and to reimburse them for the income foregone as a result of not having changed their management practices (see Bishop and Phillips, 1993; Buller et al, 2000; Potter, 1998; Winter, 1996).

The underlying rationale here is that the market has failed to ensure the sustainable delivery of many of the positive environmental externalities that farming produces and that constitute a recognisable and socially valued ‘public good’. As Fine (2002, page 36) points out, for many commodities, “the impact of their sourcing upon the environment cannot be identified in the goods themselves nor their pricing”. Part of the reason for this failure, according to Taylor (1992) lies in the ‘nonexcludability’ and ‘nonrivalrous’ nature of their consumption: the former meaning that the provider of the good cannot prevent other nonbuyers from enjoying the externality created, the latter suggesting that, once the good has been created, its enjoyment by others is cost neutral to the producer. As this ‘good’ can be neither directly traded nor profitably accounted for by the market, where it is deemed desirable, it is almost wholly dependent upon public funds for its survival. Market failure has meant that the state and public agencies have had to step in to persuade, incite, encourage, and ultimately to pay farmers to deliver public goods.

Yet, the public goods derived from agriculture are essentially ‘hybrid’ in that they are not wholly provided for by the state (such as the police force or education). They are intrinsically linked to the process of agricultural commodity production and are, to a large degree, dependent upon the maintenance of agricultural activities. Even food, the most obvious product of agricultural enterprise, might be considered to be an ‘impure private good’ (Hatlestad and Soyland, 1998) whose ‘quality’ derives from a combination
of private, public, and ethical attributes. The characteristically ‘multifunctional’ role of agriculture, so lauded in current EU policy thinking (Fischler, 1999), becomes a complex, interconnected but distinct set of actions some of which are paid for by the market, others by the public purse (Romstad et al, 2000).

This state-led–market-led balancing act has always underpinned the twin objectives of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP): increasing agricultural productivity while retaining European farmers on the land. In recent years this balancing act has, if anything, intensified (Potter, 1991) as European policymakers have sought to adapt the CAP to the exigencies of free-market liberalism and the rules of its principal defender and regulator, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) while responding to a European rural and agrarian agenda. The CAP’s priorities, as much sociostructural as trade oriented, are hence being pushed inexorably towards world market-price alignment and the primacy of economic value. As a result, the distinction between forms of public support linked to agricultural production (the so-called ‘blue box’ payments) and those non-trade-distorting forms of support designed to yield public goods (‘green box’ payments) has become a key watershed in international negotiations; the former destined to disappear from the CAP menu of aids, the latter likely to increase substantially (Potter and Burney, 2002). One of the consequences, for some observers, has been the gradual polarisation of agriculture within Europe into, on the one hand, a market-driven commodities sector, following the dictates of economic rationalisation and occupying the more profitable agricultural regions and, on the other hand, a public-goods-driven agriculture, dependent upon public funding for the maintenance of those equilibriums that produce the agricultural landscape in less profitable regions (Buller, 2000).

In this paper we are concerned with the blurring of the two classic approaches to agricultural support (that is, from the market and from the public purse) within a European context, while being informed by, and informing, the North American situation. Specifically, we seek to demonstrate that if, traditionally, market failure has been employed to justify public support for environmentally beneficial forms of agriculture, the market is increasingly being employed to meet the costs of such agriculture and to reconcile agricultural production and environmental protection as new forms of commodification permit a shift in the values attributed to the various ‘products’ of agricultural enterprise. This represents a deliberately distinctive perspective on what is a well-established and extensively discussed set of concerns about the relationship between agriculture and the environment, which has largely been conducted within a public policy framework. To illustrate our argument we look to the rapidly expanding number of what we have termed ‘market oriented initiatives for environmentally sustainable food production’ (hereafter referred to as MOIs). In these initiatives the incentive for food producers to manage the environment positively comes directly through the harvesting of market benefits. Although this process can occur in a number of ways depending on the particular configuration of the MOI concerned, two particular market benefits stand out for producers; relatively secure access to an increasingly competitive and regulated market and the receipt of higher prices through value added within it. Thus, where producers are supplying a retail chain, they may be required to meet a set of environmental standards, possibly in the context of the retailer’s quality-assurance procedures, in order to gain access to this particular market. Alternatively, an MOI can involve a small group of producers working together within a geographically circumscribed

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(1) The extensive literature on the EU’s agri-environment programme provides the clearest evidence of this ‘obsession’ with state-led mechanisms as the principle approach to resolving the tensions between agriculture and the environment (for example, Morris and Potter, 1995; Robinson, 1991; Whitby, 1994; Wilson and Hart, 2001).
area to produce specialist, quality products derived from environmentally sensitive production systems, in order to access niche markets and the price premiums associated with them. Typically, products derived from more environmentally sustainable systems are identified in the market place by labels (that is, an ‘ecolabel’), distinctive packaging and promotional materials, and even alternative forms of retailing (such as direct marketing). The market-oriented approach contrasts with government-funded agri-environment schemes where decoupled payments from the public purse are made to farmers and other land managers who agree to undertake particular management practices that benefit the environment. For the most part, the food products derived from these management systems are not distinguished in the marketplace, at least not in the United Kingdom, and therefore provide no added value for producers.

Initially, we will discuss the increase in interest in market-driven mechanisms to deliver environmental goods in agriculture alongside, and at times in deliberate opposition to, the state-led approach. Then we will move on to look specifically at MOIs, the reasons for their emergence, and provide an indication of the range of MOIs in both Europe and North America. Here, we draw on recent research conducted for England’s Countryside Agency on the environmental components of product labelling initiatives (Morris et al, 2001). The different approaches to environmental management that MOIs adopt are examined, although we do not attempt a quantitative assessment of the actual environmental impacts of MOIs (and how these compare with the environmental outputs of the state-led approach). The actual and potential advantages and disadvantages of MOIs to the delivery of environmental goods in food production are discussed and we use these observations to explore the pertinence of free-market environmentalism and the belief, as expressed by Pennington (1996, page 56), that “the failure of countryside policy is not the product of markets but the inevitable result of their absence.”

From public policy to market forces as environmental delivery mechanisms
The gradual penetration of market forces into the provision of public goods associated with farming can be observed across a wide spectrum of contexts from the relatively comfortable and familiar mechanism of incentive payments for the delivery of environmental goods to more ideologically charged free-market environmentalism and its property-rights prescriptions (Anderson and Leal, 1991).

In their review of different approaches to countryside conservation and recreation in the United Kingdom, Bishop and Phillips (1993) suggest that recent years have seen the emergence of growing support for a market approach to reconciling agricultural and conservation or recreation interests. Such an approach allows, in their words “the creation of a market in environmental and related recreational services which can be ‘acquired’ from farmers and landowners” essentially through the offer of incentive payments (page 326). Farmers and landowners are subsequently able “to market their role as custodians and managers of the countryside” (page 326). Although public funds are used to ‘buy’ these services in England, through agri-environment schemes such as Countryside Stewardship, these funds are used in a discretionary fashion, with farmers and landowners effectively competing for incentives by seeking to offer best value for money. In this way they differ substantially from the more common payment schemes associated with countryside management in National Parks, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, and Environmentally Sensitive Areas.

The objective of this research was to evaluate the applicability of these European and North American food, forestry, and craft labelling initiatives in the United Kingdom. Based largely on documentary sources, a database of sixty initiatives was compiled and detailed case studies of twenty one of these schemes were then undertaken, based upon interviews with labelling-initiative personnel.
Drawing upon the literature of free-market environmentalism, a more radical critique of the state-led approach is offered by Pennington (1996). Demonstrating that rural environmental degradation is commonly attributed to ‘market failures’ and addressed through regulation, Pennington argues that government failure and special-interest manipulation are the real culprits. Placing his trust in markets and voluntary exchange, he advocates a property-rights approach to countryside conservation: “If individuals, companies or voluntary bodies have private property rights in the environment, incentives will encourage the good stewardship of the resources concerned” (1996, page 51). As such, “profits will reward those who are most successful at marketing the relevant environmental values” (page 51). Much of the property-rights and free-market environmentalism literature draws its examples from land held in public or voluntary organisational ownership. Thus Pennington (1996) reports on the UK Wildlife Trusts and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds while, in the USA, others such as the Thoreau Institute advocate the ‘marketisation’ of public land through access charging. For both, central to the market’s deliverability of environmental benefits on private land are, first, the existence of suitable incentives (supplied either through public funds or through cost advantages) and the establishment of rules and rights that are exploitable through market mechanisms.

MOIs constitute, we argue, a third approach. Although they have yet to be captured in the ideological crusade of free-market environmentalists and environmental capitalists, they do nonetheless represent a considerable advance upon the classic separation within public policy between supporting agricultural production with one hand (or funding source) and compensating for environmental damage with the other.

The number of MOIs, in both Europe and North America, has proliferated in recent years, the majority having been established within the last ten years. Both older and newer forms of MOIs appear to be the focus of a new rural development, food quality, and sustainable farming agenda. Thus, a complexity of factors can be identified as underpinning the emergence of MOIs, and these originate from both within and without the agrofood system. The very fact that MOIs are the outcome of a number of different processes and events provides a further means of distinguishing them from the public sector agri-environment programme in Europe, which has been largely based upon one (that is, environmental protection or enhancement) objective.

Within the agrofood system, MOIs are positioned at an interface between shifting production and consumption demands (and the relation between these demands) and thus bring purported benefits to both ‘ends’ of the food chain. For consumers a key element to MOIs is their distinctiveness, frequently expressed in terms of ‘quality’ (Bessière, 1998). Consumers are now exercising much more caution in their consumption habits, becoming selective in what they eat, and more attentive to how food gets from ‘pasture to plate’. This consumer shift has resulted not just in a growth in demand for ‘quality’ products (Atkins and Bowler, 2001; Banks and Bristow, 1999; Holloway and Kneafsey, 2000; Marsden, 1998; Marsden et al, 1999), but also in a shift in the understanding of that quality, which is, as Nygard and Storstad (1998) argue, increasingly perceived as being inherent in more ‘local’ and ‘natural’ products. Hence, that quality is multidimensional, usually combining, in addition to claims relating to taste and culinary excellence, geographical specificity of origin (where the food was produced), freshness and seasonality (when the food was produced), identified environmentally friendly and healthy production techniques (how the food was produced), and social embeddedness (who the food was produced by). As such many, but by no means all, MOIs distinguish themselves from more classic (global) agrofood chains, characterised by appropriationism and substitutionism (Goodman et al, 1987), by reinforcing their connectivity not only to nature and natural resources.
but also to the agricultural and rural communities from which they draw (Mormont and Van Huylenbroeck, 2001; Pecqueur, 2001). Consequently, quality production systems are being ‘reembedded’ (Ilbery and Kneafsey, 1999; Murdoch et al, 2000) in local ecologies.

For producers, MOIs offer the possibility of improved market access and/or the capture of a greater proportion of the value of food production as the higher prices obtained offset more accurately the true costs (externalities included) of production. The falling share of food price that actually goes to food producers has been well documented. Pretty (2002), for example, estimates that only around 7.5% of every pound spent on food in the United Kingdom actually goes to the farmers, against 50 – 60% half a century ago. Faced with economic marginalisation in the face both of an increasingly competitive and globalising agrofood system and the recent crises, such as BSE and foot and mouth, to hit British and other agricultural communities, many producers engaged in mass food production, based upon large-scale industrialised agricultural processes, are likely to find it increasingly difficult to compete on a world market where basic foodstuffs can be produced cheaper elsewhere (Goodman and Watts, 1997; van der Grijp and den Hond, 1999). The answer for many is to turn towards specialist, value-added products, which emphasise traditional systems of production (Battershill and Gilg, 1996; Ilbery and Kneafsey 2000a) as well as local authenticity and provenance (Bell and Valentine, 1997). A further reason for the emergence of MOIs lies in the new degree of stakeholder involvement that we are witnessing in the agrofood system. As agricultural corporatism recedes, so new regional and local stakeholders in the food-production process are emerging and are learning from the policy opportunities the aforementioned trends are presenting. In part, this is being driven by a reaction against the increasing verticality of food-production networks and chains and the associated disenfranchisement of producers. In part, too, it reveals, potentially at least, the capacity for innovation at the producer end of these networks and chains in the face of declining economic security.

To this market-driven ‘double dividend’, we might add the impact of policy changes. The gradual reorientation of EU agricultural policy away from agricultural production support towards rural development policies, as demonstrated by the Agenda 2000 reform of the CAP, has explicitly sought to encourage MOIs in the food sector through the provision of cofunding arrangements to stimulate local quality production chains. Within England, the Countryside Agency’s Eat the View programme aims to encourage consumers to buy products from more sustainable production systems:

“Some products, because of the way they are produced, their area of origin, or other qualities, can help maintain the environmental quality and diversity of the countryside while at the same time bringing benefits to the rural economy and local communities” (2000, page 1).

Such views have been recently endorsed by the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food (2002). Within this debate it is apparent that environmental sustainability is being considered alongside a range of other issues relating to locality and place promotion, community development and national or regional identity. However, although the territorial provenance of ‘quality’ foods and their labelling and marketing have been the subject of a recent wave of writings (Enteleca, 2001; Ilbery and Kneafsey, 1999; 2000a; 2000b; Tregear, 2001), much less has been said on their contribution to environmental sustainability. It is those initiatives with an environmental emphasis that we now consider in more detail.
Market-oriented initiatives and sustainable environmental management

Having considered the reasons why MOIs have emerged, we now turn to a more detailed examination, within selected countries in Europe and North America, of what MOIs are: the actors involved, the nature and scale of their operation and organisation, and their approaches to environmental management. MOIs exhibit considerable diversity with respect to all of these characteristics. Sometimes focused on single food products, individual MOIs are as likely to encompass more than one type of food or drink, with a concentration of activity in three product categories: dairy produce; fruit, vegetables, and cereals; and meat. The actors responsible for the setting up and running of MOIs include single producers, groups of producers, nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), state agencies, public institutions (such as universities), private foundations, retail chains, and food manufacturing companies. Partnerships between these actors are a significant feature of MOIs both in European and in North American contexts. However, in Europe partnerships between public and private actors appear to be slightly more common than in North America, where those between private sector actors dominate (Morris et al, 2001). Once established, the scale of operation of MOIs, in terms of the numbers of producers involved, can be relatively small (for example, fewer than ten) to extensive, as in the case of some supermarket quality-assurance schemes where the membership can run into thousands (Morris, 2000). In part, this is a reflection of the different rationales or philosophies that underpin MOIs; for example, some of the smaller MOIs deliberately seek to operate in this way and as such are established as an alternative to the mainstream, conventional food networks that are associated with corporate processors and retailers. It is also evident that MOIs cover a range of geographical scales, from international and national to regional (such as individual, or groups of, counties, states, or provinces) and local. Although sometimes based upon individual agricultural enterprises, local MOIs more typically cover a small group of enterprises within a particular area defined by either topography (such as a watershed), cultural history, or a local administrative district.

Many of the recently implemented MOIs have yet to monitor and evaluate their environmental impacts; indeed, accreditation and monitoring procedures provide further illustration of how MOIs vary in their operation, with some initiatives having no verification at all or voluntary compliance and others inspected by either independent certificatory or state or federal organisations. It is therefore not possible at this stage to undertake a quantifiable assessment of the actual environmental achievements of these initiatives (though this remains an important task for research). However, the various management approaches that are employed by MOIs, with the aim of realising environmental benefits, can be examined. From our analysis of a broad range of MOIs in Europe and North America (Morris et al, 2001), it is possible to identify three principal ways in which such initiatives are attempting to enhance the environmental sustainability of food-production systems. These are discussed in turn and extended examples provided of how specific MOIs utilise each environmental management methodology.

Environmental management methodology 1: ‘traditional’ production systems

The first approach to environmental management within MOIs entails the protection, maintenance, and encouragement of existing forms and practices of food production that are often ‘traditional’ (low density, grass-based, extensive) and therefore considered (rightly or wrongly) to be more environmentally friendly than what would replace them if the initiative did not exist, either though intensification or withdrawal. Such initiatives seek to distinguish themselves in the marketplace from products that
are mass produced, at far higher production intensities, and with less regard to the conditions of production. For the bulk of these schemes it is the intrinsic environmental qualities of the production location and territory that contribute both to the quality of the product and to the environmentally beneficial nature of the production process. Furthermore, such qualities are directly evoked as key components of the product's value. The additional costs of producing within these environmental and resource constraints are then translated into higher retail costs in addition to being, in a number of cases, partially offset by public support mechanisms such as agri-environment payments. It needs to be noted that in many of the areas concerned, particularly within the more economically marginal areas of Europe which are often regarded as areas of high landscape value, more intensive forms of lower cost production are not an option given the environmental and resource constraints. In this way, a market initiative (and the environmental implications it represents) becomes a means of legitimating (and protecting) the translation of higher production costs into higher retail costs.

An example of this approach to environmental management, within Europe, is provided by Comté cheese, which has had a recognised Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée (AOC) since 1958. It is a food product initiative resulting from the collective endeavour of some 3400 milk producers, 190 cheese dairies, and twenty cheese refining centres all of which are located within the Jura upland region of eastern France. Producing 46 000 tonnes of cheese per annum, it is one of the largest cheese AOCs (of which there are currently thirty six) in France. The territory within which Comté is produced is tightly defined by the AOC and covers the chalk uplands of the Jura massif. The Comté cheese production system thereby represents the close association of a local economy (dairy farmers, cheese production and refining centres), a specific upland environment (chalk-based grass meadows) and traditional production practices ensured through contracts with milk producers. These specify that feed for Montbéliard cows must be grass or grass based and the feeding of fermented or artificial sources of animal feed is not permitted (including silage). Farmers must maintain species-rich natural grasslands which involves late grass cutting, minimal spreading of animal waste, and low rates of nitrate fertiliser application. The milk quality (and thereby the cheese quality) varies according to the season, with cheese produced from summer milk (herds grazed on species-rich meadows) fetching the highest prices (from 33 francs per kg for the high-quality summer milk cheese to around 23 francs/kg for the lower quality, winter-feed-based milk) a significant proportion of which goes to the milk producer (Torre and Chia, 2000). Furthermore, milk must be brought to the dairies from an area within 25 km, thereby reducing transportation. This AOC cheese has been a major factor in reinforcing the territorial and economic ‘identity’ of this particular eastern corner of upland France and in maintaining the economic vitality of a traditional, low-density, grass-based form of extensive dairying, particularly in the face of national policy pressures to intensify and rationalise production. With the shift, over the last twenty years, towards more sustainable forms of agriculture, Comté cheese offers a particularly strong example of how the market can be employed to support, through higher prices and product differentiation, the maintenance of an equilibrium between agriculture and the environment.

Oregon Country Natural Beef (OCNB) provides an example from the USA of this type of environmental management methodology. Established in 1986 by a group of fourteen ranch families, OCNB is an independent marketing cooperative that now includes forty ranches, all in east Oregon, and covers 2.5 million ha of ranch land. The cooperative sells extensively produced beef direct to retailers and restaurants throughout Oregon, Washington, California, and Alaska. At the time of its establishment the
beef market had been in a poor condition for a number of years, with calves sold onto
the open market giving ranchers little control over their returns. Economic reasons
therefore provided one of the main drivers for setting up OCNB. The ranchers involved
recognised that a market existed for the particular type of beef they were producing
(from extensively managed systems, without the use of hormones and feed antibiotics,
and where cattle are vegetarian fed) and that they needed to access this market through
their own efforts, notably personal negotiations with processing and retail outlets and
consumer awareness-raising events. Group decisionmaking and personal contact with
retail outlets and consumers lie at the heart of OCNB operations. The OCNB label
represents the close association of a local economy (ranchers, processors, and retailers)
and existing environmentally sensitive production practices characteristic of extensive,
traditional ranch-land farming. Nevertheless, in the development and deployment of
its ‘Grazewell Principles’ (which the group describes as ensuring its commitment
to ecologically sound production methods), this MOI looks toward the second type
of environmental management methodology.

Environmental management methodology 2: ‘new’ production systems
This second approach involves the active promotion of new and alternative production
techniques that are considered to be environmentally friendly. Participants follow
specified practices and actions that have a direct and environmentally beneficial
impact upon land management. These include the respect of minimum stocking
densities, the use of organic fertilisers, the maintenance of traditional landscape
features, the ploughing in of organic matter and so on. The higher prices paid by
consumers for the product represent not only recognition of the additional costs of
producing in specified environmentally beneficial ways but also potential income
foregone by those producers in their resistance to intensification or competition.
Such market initiatives might employ a label or form of certification that explicitly
and deliberately connotes ‘environmental superiority’ over other products (Erickson and

Undoubtedly, one of the most common and widely recognised MOIs of this type is
organic agriculture. Products accredited and labelled as organic have been enjoying
price premiums and market growth in recent years in both Europe and North America
(Lampkin and Padel, 1994; Michelson et al, 1999; UK Agriculture Departments, 1998).
In the United States, in the absence of a single US-wide organic certification scheme
or food label, individual states and private certifying agencies have been relatively free
to establish their own labels, standards, and requirements. Although this is now
changing following the introduction of the United States Department of Agriculture
(USDA) national organic label, a move welcomed by the organic producers community
in the USA, fifteen states currently operate their own organic certification schemes in
addition to the forty-eight private organic certification bodies that have largely come
into being over the last 10 years (OFRF, 2002). In Europe there has been a well-
documented growth in organic production with over 100 organic schemes existing
within the twenty five or so states of the European continent (Lampkin et al, 1999;
Offerman and Neiberg, 2000). Although organic agriculture is clearly significant within
the overall profile and development of MOIs, in part perhaps because it has benefited
from government financial support in the EU, it is by no means the only market-based
method that is illustrative of this particular approach to environmental management.

Less understood and currently with a lower profile than organic farming, at
least in the United Kingdom, integrated farming systems (IFS) and their variants
(such as integrated crop and pest management—ICM and IPM, respectively) also
underpin a number of accreditation and labelling initiatives in the United Kingdom
(Morris and Winter, 1999) and elsewhere (de Snoo and van de Ven, 1999; van der Grijp and den Hond, 1999). In the United Kingdom, the recently launched LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming) marque is illustrative and distinguishes products derived from farms employing LEAF’s Integrated Farm Management system (LEAF, 2001). The various quality or farm assurance schemes in the United Kingdom, which have been established by a variety of organisations, notably supermarkets, and have been brought together under the umbrella label of the Red Tractor, also draw upon elements of IFS (Morris, 2000). Elsewhere in Europe, IFS-based eco-labels appear to have achieved a higher profile and include the ladybird label of IP Suisse and various supermarket-led labelling initiatives such as those devised by Auchan in France, Superquinn in Ireland, and Heijn in the Netherlands (de Snoo and van de Ven, 1999; van der Grijp and den Hond, 1999). Similarly, in the USA, a number of MOIs are based upon integrated systems, notably IPM.

Also illustrative of MOIs that adopt ‘new’ production practices (which are neither organic nor based on IFS) are, in the United Kingdom, the ‘Conservation Grade’ certification scheme and products derived from farms within Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESA),(3) and in the USA, ‘Salmon-Safe’. Launched in 1997 by the Pacific Rivers Council (PRC), a nonprofit river and native fish protection organisation (and since 2000 operated as an independent nonprofit organisation), Salmon-Safe is a certification programme designed to provide a market-based incentive to reduce degradation of water quality and aquatic habitat by agriculture in the Pacific Northwest. The primary driver in this case was environmental, notably “recovery of our imperilled salmon runs” (Pacific Rivers, 1997) but with the aim of achieving this through the market, by giving participating farmers a competitive advantage (through expansion into new markets and positive public relations). The programme currently covers an area from northern California to the Canadian border. It has already attracted interest and support from the agricultural community and retailers with approximately seventy farmers and growers (covering more than 10,000 acres) having so far received the independently verified Salmon-Safe certification. Certified farmers and growers must adhere to the PRC’s conservation guidelines and management practices: for example, minimizing erosion into streams, using ecologically sound methods to control weeds and pests, improving irrigation practices, planting trees near streams to keep water cool for fish to thrive, and to promote improved water and aquatic habitat quality and biodiversity protection. Producers benefit from a programme of public education and marketing organised by the PRC, and use of the Salmon-Safe label on their products.

The Salmon-Safe product range includes wine, rice, fruit and vegetables (fresh, frozen, and processed), and dairy products. A significant number of retailers are involved in the programme. Initially, sixty retail outlets in Oregon and Washington stocked and promoted Salmon-Safe products and 115 Fred Meyer Stores in Oregon, Washington, Alaska, Montana, Idaho, and Utah joined these in 1998. More than 200 natural food stores and supermarkets throughout the western USA now stock Salmon-Safe products. Although formal evaluation and monitoring of the programme have not yet been executed, there are plans to do so. However, aspects of the certification ’build in’ monitoring by the accredited producers: for example, nutrient management plans which should provide a basis for monitoring soil P and K levels on land receiving manure applications. Furthermore, ongoing effort is put into refining the standards

(3) Although, as indicated in the introduction, the products from agri-environment schemes such as ESAs have not been widely promoted, in specific cases attempts have been made to establish ESA-based product marketing schemes. For example, ‘Fell Bred Lamb’ was an initiative established in the mid-1990s by farmers and public sector organisations, to promote sheep meat derived from farms within the Lake District ESA.
through consultation with ‘key stakeholders and pertinent experts’. Expansion of the programme geographically into British Columbia and sectorally, to cover nonagricultural products, represent key future opportunities, although concerns exist about sustaining funding for the programme which is principally derived from two private foundations.

Environmental management methodology 3: territorial commodification

Perhaps more common in Europe, and increasingly in the United Kingdom, is a third approach, one that seeks to link the creation of a demand for a product, through marketing initiatives, with the ‘valorisation’ of particular territories and their human and natural qualities—seen as integral components of the overall value of the product. Such an approach reinforces (and by implication, protects and enhances) local identity, thereby raising the visibility and viability of a particular place, landscape, environment, and/or culture. A number of European local product marketing initiatives, particularly those located within designated landscape areas, such as national parks, are illustrative of this. They contribute strongly to the region’s tourism profile, and reinforce what are generally protective planning and heritage-oriented policies. Agneau Fermier du Quercy is in many ways a classic French MOI. Benefiting from a ‘Label Rouge’ designation, and from an EU Protected Geographical Indication (PGI), it is a marketing initiative that explicitly links product quality with the commodification of a particular set of sociocultural–nature relations in what has been an economically marginal but culturally and environmentally rich area of western France. The initiative has its origins in a family firm of sheep farmers, meat conditioners, and retailers that was originally established in the early 20th century. Having developed into the Association de l’Agneau Fermier du Quercy, a group combining farmers, shepherds, local communities, and, critically, key players in the local meat-processing industry (that is, incorporating the whole food chain), whose goal is the modernisation and technical development of the filière, this MOI achieved its Label Rouge in 1990. It is founded upon the production of milk-fed lambs of the Caussenarde rustic breed in a relatively poor upland part of the Lot Département. Around 17,500 lambs achieve Label Rouge status each year. Here, quality product marketing is increasingly being seen as a response to agricultural and rural decline. Undoubtedly, one of the principal reasons for setting up the scheme was to play the ‘quality’ card in the face of growing lamb imports from the United Kingdom. A second motivation was to respond to the increasing standardisation of lamb meat available in French supermarkets, access to which was problematic for farmers unable to guarantee the regularity of supply or of meat quality (under supermarket criteria ill adapted to meat from rustic breeds). Another was to stake a claim within the increasingly competitive product labelling environment in France and in particular, the rapid expansion of quality lamb production in southwest France. By emphasising the quality of the local environment and the sustainable forms of land management associated with the lamb breeding and rearing, yet combining these with a highly modernist and technical development strategy (Léger, 2001), the initiative seeks to derive commercial value from the particularities of a characteristic dry upland landscape, rich local cultural heritage, and rustic local breed all of whose interdependent importance has recently been recognised by the establishment of the Parc Naturel Régional de Quercy. The geographical embeddedness of the Agneau de Quercy production within a distinct historico-cultural–environmental context emerges as a form of quality legitimacy, a marketing benefit rather than a goal in itself (Léger, 2001).

(4) The ‘Label Rouge’ is one of a series of national food product quality labels awarded, upon application, to products derived from certified and monitored ‘quality’ processes.
(5) One of only four French lamb PGIs.
In the USA, ‘Conservation Beef’ (CB) is an MOI that can also be interpreted as employing this third methodology which combines place and environmental protection. However, in this case, environmental protection is a more dominant and explicit driver than in the French example. CB is a joint venture set up in the late 1990s in Montana, by the charity Artemis Common Ground, The Nature Conservancy (NC), an NGO, and its Centre for Compatible Economic Development. The objective of CB is to use conservation-oriented market forces to develop economically sustainable and ecologically sound cattle ranching in biologically significant landscapes, as one of a number of strategies\(^{(6)}\) to address the loss of these landscapes from unconstrained housing development. A desire to reconcile the interests of ranchers and environmentalists also explains CB’s genesis. The initiative has been developed following market research in 1995 into consumer demand for high-quality beef raised with stewardship standards. It is currently focused upon a limited number of watersheds in Montana, but if successful it could be extended into biologically significant landscapes elsewhere in the USA, and beyond. Currently, four ranchers, owning and managing 70,000 acres of land, are participating and production has increased from 80 to 500 cattle per annum. Ranchers receive a premium on cattle sold through CB that are reared according to environmental standards devised by the NC, in consultation with the ranchers. Difficulties encountered since CB’s launch in 1997 include the lack of appropriate processing facilities. The niche marketing operation of CB involves different methods of meat production and processing which require an infrastructure that is not widely available (whereas conventional beef production and processing take place on a large scale and are heavily subsidized through the public purse) for example, dry ageing of the meat involves a hanging period of 3 weeks, under temperature-controlled and humidity-controlled conditions. This is a traditional method of processing which is no longer widely practised. There is currently only one plant in the whole of Montana that can handle only very small quantities of meat at a time. Other constraints relate to the vulnerability of the grass-fed system to weather (which has adverse impacts on finishing time), and that a limited number of staff constrains the development of new market opportunities. Future challenges and opportunities lie in encouraging more ranchers to participate (long-standing antagonisms between ranchers and environmentalists are a key barrier to this even though the premium prices on offer through CB are a potential counterbalance), securing particular market outlets (for example, specialist retailers), and ensuring a year-round supply of product. The aim is to achieve a scale of production that is both profitable and ensures the conservation of biologically significant and distinctive landscapes.

In identifying and codifying particular practices through agreements, regulations, contracts, and conventions, whether they are simply existing production methods or specified ceilings and standards, the MOIs reviewed here contain requirements for production procedures that are usually stricter than the legal requirements under public policy, including agri-environmental schemes. In this alone, they represent a significant step forward. Although this paper has not sought to evaluate the environmental and land-management outcomes of MOIs, the contractual arrangements associated with them generally combine rules governing both agricultural practices and food processing, and in doing so offer a holistic filière (vertical) and territorial (horizontal) regulatory framework, largely absent from more conventional food-production chains. Furthermore, and crucially, it is a framework that can be constructed locally through partnerships and voluntary contractual arrangements between farmers, food producers,

\(^{(6)}\) Others include conservation easements donated by wealthy landowners and land purchase by environmental groups.
and distribution networks, leading to particular institutional configurations (such as, from the examples above, Artemis Common Ground and the Comité Interprofessionnel du Gruyère de Comté). Finally, and perhaps most simply, some initiatives, particularly those that seek to maintain the authenticity and quality of particular products, operate production ceilings. This, in itself, has proved not only an effective barrier against production intensification and land concentration but has allowed the prices for extensively produced goods to be defended and maintained.

The examples presented above thereby exhibit forms of market-driven regulation that are acting to improve, whether directly or indirectly, the environmental sustainability of farming systems. The positive environmental externalities of these, generally, extensive agricultural production systems (including their territorial and sociocultural embeddedness) are turned into additional extrinsic components of product value, and hence price, that combine with the intrinsic qualities of the product itself. Yet, they also become elements in product exclusivity (a form of territorial copyrighting reinforced by territorial or process labelling, from Label Rouge and PGI to organic certification). Intrinsic values (product), derived from production chains and the organisations associated with them, and extrinsic values (sociocultural, environmental, and cultural context) reinforced by landscape-protection policies, tourism development, and so on, come together within successful MOIs to form a set of values and benefits that deliver a range of public and private goods to the consumer. In some cases they become emblematic of the wider territory, bringing value into rural areas, as in the case of Comté cheese. In others they offer what Pecqueur and others (Pecqueur, 2001) describe as a ‘bundle of goods’, whereby the purchase or consumption of one (for example Agneau de Quercy or CB), renders others both visible and accessible within a broader and reinforcing territorial network. In such cases, it is the territory that gives value to the product.

Market-oriented initiatives and sustainable food production

In this final section of our assessment of MOIs in sustainable food production, we consider the implications of their growth for the actual and potential relationship between market mechanisms and public policy instruments in the delivery of sustainable agriculture and explore the increasing interplay of differential public and private forms of market regulation. To do this, we draw on the insights offered by the case studies to tease out four elements of this evolving relationship: the emergence of new components of value in food products; the territorial basis for competitiveness; the dynamic relationship of consumers to producers, product, and place of production and, in conclusion, the shifting regulatory influences of the market and the state.

Food value, territorial value

Part of the contribution of MOIs to sustainability lies in their capacity to ‘internalise’ some, if not all, of the costs of providing environmental externalities into the cost–price relationship. In achieving this, they extend beyond mere novelty value (Marsden, 2003, page 145) into the realm of broader environmental sustainability and, ultimately into a new conceptualisation of value within food production, one that combines the ‘good’ of food quality with an array of wider social, environmental, and territorial ‘goods’. For Mollard et al (2001; see also Lacroix et al, 1997; 1998) this demands a reassessment of the classic Ricardian concept of economic rent, based largely, for the agricultural sector at least, upon the productive capacities of soil and the effects of distance. Proposing a ‘territorial quality rent’, they suggest that the value of goods such as those emanating from food MOIs increasingly needs to reflect, if it is resist the effects of international trade and globalisation, the importance of nonreproducible and
nonsubstitutable natural and sociocultural elements integral to their production. Such a reappropriation and revalorisation of positive externalities offers a counterbalance to the substitutionism of the mainstream ‘Fordist’ agrofood sector and in doing so provides an additional source of revenue for those involved in the supply chain. It becomes, thereby, an element in the broader process of sustainable rural territorial development.

Furthermore, having costed in environmental externalities and drawing on sociocultural inputs, MOIs are then able to help stimulate other spatially embedded marketable and nonmarketable goods, such as local community development and the reinforcement of territorial identity (for example, see Kneafsey et al., 2001; Tovey, 1997) and can clearly contribute to the creation of additional value for rural places. Indeed, the propensity of networks of private actors to establish and develop agrofood MOIs, whether supported by state or institutional bodies, has lain at the heart of the agro-industrial districts and specialised production zones so lauded in the rural development literature of the 1990s (de Roest, 2000; van der Ploeg and van Dijk, 1995).

**Competitive territories**

Of course, once territoriality becomes a component of value, it also becomes a commodity in itself, to protect and to exploit, a source of differentially commodified relationships, leading to, in Marsden's words (1999, page 507) “new rural geographies of value”. The dimensions and expressions of this new competitive territoriality of value, and its implications for processes of rural development, are only just beginning to be explored. However, within the context of MOIs, the proliferation of labelling, certification, and accreditation mechanisms is certainly indicative of the importance of spatial distinctiveness not only in product differentiation but also in defining product value, even though it is also problematic leading both to consumer confusion and to increasingly high transaction costs for producers. To some extent, for any strategy based upon the marketing of territorial or product difference, and the assumed qualities associated with that difference, the proliferation and multiplication of other strategies are serious threats (Morris and Buller, 2003). Not only is this likely to bring the need for rationalisation (as has been the case of US organic labelling and as currently fuels calls for a single EU organic label), but the market-driven competitive territorialisation it yields strikes at the very raison d’être of distinct local product marketing and the competitive advantage existing schemes enjoy. Territorial certification can thus become an element in differential spatial regulation. The Agneau de Quercy MOI, for example, has attracted charges of elitism. The technical expertise and financial investment required mean that only the larger, more productive, and more forward-looking farmers have thus far been able to participate. As Léger (2001) observes, it is paradoxical that a product that seeks to derive value from its sociocultural embeddedness should ultimately be an element of social distinction. Certification, and the values thereby certified, also becomes ripe for capture by the more classic actors of the agrofood chain. In the USA, companies such as Heinz and General Mills have already acquired small local organic producer-companies, and in the United Kingdom, supermarkets are showing growing interest in buying into a wide range of MOIs (Morris, 2000; Risk and Policy Analysts/Entec UK, 1998).

**Buying product, process and place**

The success of MOIs ultimately depends upon having something to sell and someone to sell it to. Broader food cultures and consumer knowledge or interest in both food quality and the ‘bundles’ of public goods associated with quality foods are not distributed evenly, neither geographically nor socioeconomically. In their analysis of the
European PDO (Protected Designation of Origin) and PGI labels, Parrott et al (2002) draw the oft-made distinction between ‘northern’ and ‘southern’ European food cultures, identifying the latter as being particularly suited to the emergence of quality food supply chains based upon territorial and cultural distinctiveness. Yet, many of the MOIs within both Europe and North America are closely linked to tourist promotion. The development of Agneau de Quercy, for example, has been part of the wider promotion of the French region of Périgord, whose principal visitors are drawn from the northern European food culture states of Britain and the Netherlands. In this, consumer – producer relations are complex, invoking a range of market and nonmarket uses and culturally signed values (Goodman and Dupuis, 2002). However, a certain amount of care needs to be taken here. Advocates of MOIs often assume that consumers are effectively buying directly into a range of positive developmental values, including greater environmental quality and territorial development (which do not accruce simply to the consumers but to wider society). Not only is it by no means certain that environmental sustainability and/or rural development rather than consumer health is the principal motivation for consumer purchase (Lockie and Collie, 2002) but the linking of tourism to gastronomic experience introduces a very different set of relationships between consumers and producers and the territory they (temporarily) share (Enteleca, 2001). Nevertheless, food producers within MOIs have often been astute in linking consumer interest in their quality products with the wider public goods to be derived from particular production processes and their location within particular places. This might be seen as a particularly effective way of translating consumer concerns into land-management actions.

MOIs and public policy

Yet, more fundamental perhaps are the questions MOIs raise concerning the relationship between the market and public sector approaches to achieving improvements in the environmental conditions of food production. To conclude this paper, we reflect on how, if at all, the growth of MOIs might provoke a significant shift in the balance of public – private actions in achieving sustainable forms of private production. Here we wish to make two points.

First, the evidence presented in this paper reveals the critical interplay and interrelationship of public policy and market forces in the setting of sustainability objectives. The market cannot act alone or in isolation. As Polanyi (1944) famously wrote, only a wilderness would result from the total commodification of labour and land to market mechanisms. The market is, after all, one institution (based upon only one form of capital) amongst others that include the state, public policy, and civil society. “More than any other”, writes Bourdieu (2000, page 25), “the economic field is inhabited by the state which contributes, at each and every moment, to its existence and its durability as well as to the power relations which characterise it” (our translation) and this is particularly the case of agricultural markets with their importance not only in trade terms but also with respect to food security and land management. Public and market-oriented initiatives for the achievement of sustainable farming techniques are neither separate nor distinct. The public sector classically intervenes in order to ‘pay for’ public goods that the market fails to deliver and often has a very significant role to play in structuring, guiding, and facilitating the operation of market-oriented sustainable food initiatives (for example, in providing start-up grants, incentives, and expertise). This suggests that public and market sectors can effectively work together in achieving positive environmental outcomes, providing that a common strategy of evaluation is applied (de Snoo and van de Ven, 1999). Many of the current MOIs operating within Europe benefit from the support of some kind of public-funded
environmental protection or agri-environmental incentive scheme. All of the case study MOIs presented above articulate, in some way, with the public sector, either in terms of the provision of grants and advice from public sector institutions such as universities, or, because they are located within areas designated by the state such as regional and national parks. Although the MOIs are rarely dependent upon them for their survival, and indeed, many, like the Comté cheese scheme identified earlier in this paper, predate public incentive schemes, this complementarity provides a viable framework for the delivery of multiple goods and services. However, where the market is demonstrably capable of sustaining the delivery of public goods, through such mechanisms as price premiums and guaranteed access to viable sales outlets such as supermarkets, the justification for public policy support vanishes. Market liberalisation, and the decoupling of agricultural supports, may ultimately prove more able to deliver effective environmental and food quality benefits than traditional support mechanisms.

Our second point concerns the shifting regulatory balance between the market and public policy. Contrary to the rhetoric of free-market environmentalism, market-oriented approaches do not constitute a regulation-free alternative to public policy. In their discussion of the nature of free-market and state relations in agricultural polity, Bell and Lowe (1998) argue that: “the debate over the ‘free’ market is not really one of freedom versus regulation but instead a debate over particular distributions of particular regulations [negative and positive] and thus over the distribution of particular contextual freedoms amongst us” (page 11). Market-oriented approaches to sustainable food production represent a particular configuration of the market, one shaped by societal demand and public policy. “The shape markets take”, write Bell and Lowe (1998, page 24), “inevitably depend on the structures we provide for them.”

The examples examined here reveal the growing penetration and importance of private rules, conventions, and market forms of regulation in sustainable food production. What we are arguably seeing is a reversal of the traditional division of responsibilities to a new situation in which public policy increasingly plays the role of facilitator through support schemes and payments while market forces play a greater role in regulation. As market initiatives gain in currency and, as environmental rules become increasingly built into them, then the privatisation of regulation (or coregulation) that this represents raises a number of questions concerning the attainment of public policy objectives, their effects on competition in the food industry, and the division of power and the distribution of benefits in food supply chains. A recent report by the accountants Deloitte and Touche for the UK Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on the current state of UK farming, while falling short of overtly criticising supermarkets of “ripping off farmers” (The Guardian 12 October 2001, page 9) nonetheless recommended that farmers should club together to challenge the might of the big retailers, pointing out that income generated at the farm gate is a fraction of that taken at the supermarket checkout.

Reprising Bell and Lowe’s (1998) arguments, the debate should not be about “the elimination of regulations and the down-sizing of governmental power, but is instead about the establishment of a new regulatory regime” (page 14). Ultimately, this is the sphere within which MOIs and public sector support for sustainable farming systems will cooperate. Marsden et al (2000) caution against ascribing current shifts in the agrofood system to processes of ubiquitous and universal deregulation. Rather, they prefer to identify processes of micronational reregulation (page 28) that accompany broader economic restructuring. MOIs, we maintain, constitute an element of local reregulation. Certainly, food quality, environmental, animal welfare, and labelling regulations (including those governing organic farming) form part of the shifting public
regulatory environment within which market-oriented initiatives operate. However, these can be increasingly seen as creating ‘spaces’ for the emergence of market-regulated initiatives, in some cases supported by public incentive schemes, in others not. In the face of sometimes intense competition, from supermarket chains for example, the response of many MOIs has been to tighten up their own internal regulations governing their territorial base and the environmental and land-management criteria associated with production (thereby strengthening sustainability claims and distinctiveness), rather than slacken them off and reduce production costs. This has certainly been the case with the Comté cheese label. The net result is that producers, retailers, and other food chain actors involved in the production and marketing of food from sustainable systems are delivering public goods through the market, whether individually or in bundles, that go beyond those directly supported through state regulation and support.

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