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Food For Change

The Politics and Values of Social Movements

Jeff Pratt and Pete Luetchford

with Myriem Naji and Sara Avanzino



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producers were interviewed, as well as consumers; interviews were carried out at markets and in people's homes and workplaces. I would like to thank all the organic producers and farmers who helped with this research – including many who are not mentioned in this chapter – for their willingness to meet me despite their busy schedules, and for talking so readily about their values and strategies, joys and struggles. I would also like to thank my mother, a keen supporter of local and sustainable farming. Without her the research would not have been possible. Special thanks also go to Marie-Claude Bousquet, who introduced me to more traditional organic farmers.

The main literature on *néo-rurals* by sociologists Bernard Hervieu and Daniele Leger-Hervieu is based on ethnographic research done in the Cevennes, Hautes-Alpes and Pyrénées regions between 1976 and 1980 (see Leger & Hervieu 1979; Leger-Hervieu & Hervieu 1983). In the earlier of these two works, they argued that the *néo-rurals* belong to the new petty bourgeoisie and have abandoned their original anti-capitalist philosophy in their endeavour to secure integration into the local society and economy, even if they kept an anti-urban, anti-modern, anti-institutional romantic ideology. The second book deals with the religious dimension of this utopian movement. Fournier (2008) provides a good overview in English of the extensive French literature about 'de-growth'. Information on Pierre Rabhi is limited in English to Wikipedia and Baykan (2007). The sociologist Deléage (2004) focuses on anti-productivist farmers. Leroux (2011), a PhD on organic agriculture in the Midi-Pyrénées region, focuses on mainstream organic producers, whereas Van Dam et al. (2009) consider the conversion of conventional farmers to organic agriculture in Belgium and the north of France. The journalist Philippe Baqué (2012) has edited a book that critiques intensive organic farming and offers information on alternative approaches: it includes data on the main political and commercial actors in the French organic landscape, on AMAP, agro-ecology, Via Campesina and the right to the land (see also www.reclaimthefields.org.uk). Finally, a recent book in French by Quellier (2007) on the history of food considers the relationship between the countryside and cities, and emphasises the economic and social significance of vegetable plots for both urban and rural dwellers.

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Andalusia, Spain

Pete Lutchford

Our third case study from southern Europe focuses on political cultures and strategies behind local and organic food provision in Cadiz province, western Andalusia. Here we find a variety of small-scale organic producers. Some are *campesinos* who run inherited family farms on the margins of the great estates, and come from farming traditions with a history of supplying local towns and villages with food. Others have roots in the political movements of agricultural labourers who occupied land; these produce for local markets, and through their connections supply food to major cities. This chapter picks up these different strands and explores the way they intersect over time. A central part of the story is a failed attempt to draw farmers with different backgrounds into an alliance based around a second-level retail and distribution cooperative called Pueblos Blancos.

Pueblos Blancos was conceived as an attempt to provide more stable livelihoods for smaller farmers growing organic fruit and vegetables for local and regional markets. Pooling production would, it was hoped, allow these farmers to supply a greater range and quantity of produce, and so consolidate organics for local and regional consumption. The case is instructive in the first instance because it allows a discussion of ideas and practices that have inspired people to try to build closure into economic relations. These ideas and the commitment to alternative economies are an important part of the story; they pre-date Pueblos Blancos and continue to drive people's strategies.

On the other hand, the case speaks to problems encountered in attempts to build alternative economies when people engage with open markets. For Pueblos Blancos there was the ever present danger of market competition from the larger farmers and commercial

interests that dominate the organic sector in Andalusia, but which had hitherto confined themselves to export-oriented activities. Another challenge was to build viable networks when participants come from different political cultures. A third danger was that a more commercial organic sector would reaffirm the distinction between producers and consumers, so reproducing features of the open economy. Together, these questions about the viability of a project to build a regional system of organic provision in Andalusia speak to the problem of building and maintaining closed economic relations in the face of the open economy, even when there are long and enduring traditions of closure.

'Land for Those Who Work It'

My story of an alternative politics of food begins with the activities of the field workers' union, the Sindicato de Obreros del Campo (SOC) in western Andalusia. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the SOC led rural workers in demands for 'land for those who work it', a radical programme of civil action for agrarian reform. The SOC lobbied government, invaded and occupied land, blocked roads and farm gates, and in the process clashed with the Civil Guard. The outcome of these actions was a number of cooperatively run farms. These cooperatives had common aims and ideas, but followed a range of trajectories and strategies. What they shared was an agenda that responded to the direction mainstream agriculture was taking.

A key feature of farming and hence political culture up until the 1970s had been the predominance of large tracts of land, *latifundias*, arranged around *cortijos* (farmsteads), which were owned by absentee landlords and run by an overseer employing temporary workers. Employment involved informal, verbal and temporary contracts, often on a daily basis for the harvests and other peak periods of work. These *jornaleros* lived in nucleated settlements or *pueblos*, and were hired in the central square and taken out to the land to work. The outcome was a system of flexible but uncertain employment, which suited employers but kept workers in conditions of near or actual starvation. The last major European famine occurred in Andalusia in 1905, and older people today still recall starving people roaming the countryside and stealing food. Under this system, employment and labour relations

between landowners and workers was marked by the use of force and moral indignation, as codes of conduct were contested and violated (Martinez-Alier 1971). While liberals introduced various reforms to try to defuse labour problems, labourers and landlords tended to remain entrenched in their respective left- and right-wing political traditions. In any case, for labourers, influenced by the writings of Marx and the anarchist ideas of Bakunin (brought to Spain by the Italian activist Fanelli in 1868), politics meant struggle against class oppression.

All this began to change in the 1970s, a time of great change in Andalusian agriculture. Machinery and agro-chemicals entered the sector, so chronic unemployment threatened field workers' livelihoods. The coming of herbicides and machinery also meant increasing concentrations of land ownership and expanding monopolies. The larger farms today continue to practise extensive farming of cattle, olives, wheat, cotton, sunflowers and, in some areas, wine. With the coming of mechanisation, the *jornaleros* were increasingly redundant; it seemed to signal their end as an economic force. Many of the million or more Andalusian *jornaleros* who had once worked the land abandoned agriculture. What remained was a political identity and tradition carried over into the towns and cities, and absorbed into new workplaces and forms of politics. Many migrated to the coast to work in mass tourism, to the cities to seek employment in industry, or to northern Europe to work temporarily in harvests or in factories. In Andalusia today, the many squares and streets named *de los emigrantes* are a reminder of the exodus. But as many as half a million *jornaleros* remain today welded to the identity (Donaire 2011), and most subsist on casual and temporary employment and state benefits. Others continue to organise through their unions, and draw on the tradition of radical politics of anarchism, socialist and Marxist-inspired ideology. A handful of these activists revived the practice of land occupation last seen in the 1930s to realise the long-held aspiration for land distribution, or *reparto*. In this endeavour, they welded their radical politics to a model of agriculture that had long existed alongside the great estates.

Between the *cortijos* there exist quite substantial but scattered pockets of smaller farms and kitchen gardens (*huertas*). From the former we get a tradition of market gardening by autonomous commercial small farmers. From the latter, come notions of self-sufficiency in food;

there are small family-owned *huertas* and municipal allotments on the periphery of most towns. The smaller landowners, squeezed by economies of scale, were natural allies for landless workers struggling to retain employment on larger farms using an increasingly industrialised agriculture. So, in appropriating land for those who work it, the SOC embraced the model of small-scale mixed cultivation, but in keeping with their politics they wanted, in the words of one activist from the time, 'to vindicate the idea that land should not be private property but in the hands of workers'.

The process through which labourers achieved that goal, their approaches to making livelihoods, and their consequent experiences have varied, but all responded to the dominant model of agriculture. Some, such as the large cooperative at Marinalleda, with 2700 workers, have pursued more industrial methods and a communist model. Others, such as REPLA, have concentrated on generating rural employment and produce in large enough quantities to export to Tesco. A third cooperative, Tierra y Libertad, operates a show farm, conference and activity centre. Of more concern here are the 'autonomist' and arguably more radical agendas pursued by El Indiano and La Verde. In the case of El Indiano, workers engaged in protracted confrontations, and gained ownership of land after many years of struggle, occupation, imprisonment and an eventual negotiated settlement (Romero 2003: 450–53). Once the scene of occupation by thousands of rural workers, El Indiano was also the venue for the anti-capitalist Second Zapatista World Forum against neoliberalism in 2003. Today the farm has an abandoned air, and a handful of workers keep goats and practice a mix of organic and conventional agriculture.

More instructive for the politics of alternative food provision is the experience of La Verde. Here, SOC members successfully petitioned for unused land owned by the state (Luetchford et al. 2010). The people at La Verde have spent years creating their version of organic production, which they call *ecológico*, and an alternative food marketing network. As the most successful and best known of the original SOC cooperatives in Cadiz province, La Verde has become a hub in an alternative organic food network. The importance of La Verde lies not in the size of the operation or its success in the market. Rather, it provides a basis to discuss the relation between politics and

the cultures of food production, distribution and consumption, and the tensions between open and closed economies in southern Spain.

La Verde: A Politics for Production

La Verde began in 1986 when about 20 members of SOC from the town of Villamartin petitioned for ownership of 3 hectares of unused land alongside the Guadalete River, which was owned by the water board. In 1987 they were granted concession and began to grow food in earnest. Today, three remaining members of that group, Manuela, Manolo and Enrique, maintain cooperative membership with three more recent recruits, José, Isabel and Francisco. Over the years, the cooperative has expanded to 14 hectares, through further concessions of public land and the purchase of 5 hectares with money lent by urban consumers. On this land, and because they can irrigate it from the river and have a propitious climate, the cooperative are able to grow a wide range of fruit (plums, apricots, figs, blackberries, strawberries, grapes, nectarines) and equally diverse vegetables (onions, potatoes, leeks, cabbages, beetroot, asparagus, sweet potatoes, aubergines, peppers, tomatoes, lettuces).

The La Verde cooperative is well known in organic and environmental circles in Andalusia. Numerous technical studies and newspaper articles have highlighted their pioneering work in building a sustainable, closed, production system. Although by no means the first organic-certified farm in Andalusia, they are renowned for maintaining a radical agro-ecological stance, distinct from mainstream organics (Sevilla Guzmán and Alonso Mielgo 2005). At the level of production, this manifests itself in specific agricultural practices and social relations at work.

A fundamental aim is to eliminate relying on agro-industry. Organic standards permit a wide range of commercial products, but these are shunned because they would tie them to the interests of capitalist multinationals (see Luetchford et al. 2010). For example, visitors sometimes bring organic treatments as gifts, but they are not used. As Manolo points out, 'that container of Rotenone [a naturally occurring pesticide] has been lying around for years'. Another tactic to cut dependence on commercial suppliers is on-farm seed production and seed exchanges. The large seed bank is a resource to ensure genetic

variety, reduce cash expenditure and resist genetically modified (GM) crops. The cooperative is an active participant in the anti-GM group, Red de Semillas. A third strategy is to minimise expenditure on machinery by repairing and recycling what they already have. Such practices help them create as far as possible an autonomous and closed agricultural system, outside mainstream commercial circuits.

The politics of refusal of commercial inputs is complemented by alternative cultivation practices. The only regular input is free manure, which they collect from local shepherds and goat-herders, and the livestock brought in to graze and so clear and fertilise the land. This requires reciprocal agreements with local shepherds because their refusal to inoculate livestock has created conflict with veterinary authorities; they retain their chickens but had to get rid of their pigs and sheep. The crops are grown in strict rotation to allow soils to regenerate and avoid the accumulation of pests and disease. This distinguishes them from farms, both organic and conventional, which practise some form of monoculture. Pests, like potato beetle, are controlled by hand, losses are tolerated, and insect habitats are created by tree planting, and by leaving 'weeds' around the crops. One of the achievements they flag is replanting the river banks with trees. The weeds and trees generate what they term 'ecological infrastructure'. An overall effect on the environment, they say, is to reduce average on-farm temperatures by 5 or 6 degrees centigrade. Farming practice based on agro-ecology therefore provides one set of distinctions they make between themselves and conventional and commercial organic farmers.

A second distinction rests on the use of intensive manual labour and the organisation of working relationships. The members attribute much of their success to their open-door policy towards people and new ideas. As Manuela says, 'we have never been closed; we have always been an open group, ready to learn from other people'. La Verde is an experimental station, and forms a hub for the exchange of information on organic production and seed varieties through talks, workshops and visits. Over the years, hundreds of visitors have come to stay, some for up to two years. The presence of these visitors indicates particular social-relations of production. The volunteers work and learn on the farm through 'practice'. As Manolo said, 'I like books and reading a lot, but you only really learn through practice'. On the other hand, La Verde does not pay wages for labour, apart from to

members of the cooperative. In the past they have employed workers but found it complicated:

We began to understand that it was a really dangerous situation we were getting ourselves into. It led to problems working with non-members, not because they were not members, but because they were friends and family, and the profits began to fall. It required living in that hard economic world and having a business-like attitude, and that has always been a really difficult role for us.

Only using 'social labour' is grounds for a distinction between them and specialist producers:

[Specialist producers use] an industrial style, with industrial machinery, with workers, mostly Moroccans, who work under difficult conditions. They are able to put carrots on the market at €0.75, and we cannot sell them for less than a euro. And that is because we work in a more personal way, and the dynamic is different because we don't just grow carrots.

Work begins early at La Verde, especially in summer when temperatures exceed 40 degrees centigrade by mid afternoon. The main tasks involve planting, harvesting and weeding, using the short-handled hoe, or *soleta*. The tempo of work is relaxed, and there are frequent breaks as people stop to chat, wander off to start another task or take a stroll. Often work seems haphazard, piecemeal and ineffective. Certainly it is not geared towards maximising production, as large areas remain fallow at any one time. There is little tendency to 'self-exploit' to intensify production. On-farm social relations are lived through sharing tasks and sharing food. The workers are encouraged to take away any supplies of fruit and vegetables they want, and eat meals on the farm. By 9 AM it is time for breakfast, and people gather in the kitchen to eat bread *molletes* laced with olive oil and tomatoes, drink coffee and chat. At lunchtime, those who do not return to their homes in the *pueblo* eat together, using produce from the farm or procured from other producers in the network. One visitor who stayed several months, Antonio, pointed out that there are few places where you can wander outside, gather what is around and make a meal.

Manuela says one of the best things about the job is that there is no 'boss breathing down my neck, telling me what to do'. This telling statement demonstrates the objective of creating a collective of autonomous workers making a livelihood from the land. Personal autonomy is the aim: 'to free ourselves is a life project', says Enrique. Nevertheless, this commitment to individual freedom and free association raises difficulties. A key issue is retaining members and recruiting new ones. One way of explaining this is that the flip side of freedom is the requirement to control the cooperative and its trajectory. Only three of the original occupiers of the land remain, and they are conscious of the importance of the next generation, but the young are often not inclined to work in agriculture and, while the cooperative is open to temporary visitors, there are issues when it comes to converting people to full membership.

A second problem is subsidies. As a collective, La Verde made the difficult decision to become a cooperative. It was difficult because cooperatives were, in their minds at the time, hotbeds of corruption. Despite this, legal conversion into an Andalusian Cooperative Society (SCA) meant they could apply for subsidies:

We had to decide whether we would go for 'public help', for subsidies, or not. As it was public money, we decided that if we didn't get it, it would go to someone else. The biggest landlord from my *pueblo* was getting 40 million pesetas of subsidies, though that didn't stop him shamelessly moralising about how undignified it was to live on handouts. There was no possibility of getting that public money if we were not a cooperative, it was the only way.

Subsidies may have been necessary to ensure the survival of the cooperative, but they play a contradictory role in compromising autonomy: 'people like my [Manolo's] father understood this. If you receive something for nothing, what morality have you left to ask for what? I mean, if they give it to you, you are left without your own will'.

As we have seen, La Verde has constructed a particular environment and a specific set of social relations organised around collective production, all built around a politics of autonomy. These practices are at once oppositional, in that they are a response to corporate

industrialised agriculture, and alternative, as they try to work outside mainstream commercial circuits by relying on thrift and collective effort, rather than by throwing money at agriculture. This was well expressed by Enrique:

If you arrive in a place, say 10 hectares, with 40 million pesetas, and set the thing up, it is sure to work. But if you have nothing and all you put in over the years is your energy, your hands, your imagination... [T]hen that for us is sustainable agriculture, because of the tremendous effort you have put in.

The people at La Verde have been innovative, oppositional, and alternative in their production strategies. Ideas about freedom and personal control of one's destiny are no doubt a reaction to the historical experience of *jornaleros* as subject to the whim of landlords. In taking control of their own land and labour, they have been largely successful in escaping from this subjection. But at certain key points – the need for legal recognition as a cooperative to engage with the state and subsidies, the problem of recruitment, the use of diesel for machines, requirements that their livestock be vaccinated – their vision of an autonomous closed system is challenged as they are forced to engage with wider industries and authorities.

More problematic is engagement with open markets. In Chapter 2 we saw how a 'just price' is a perennial concern for petty-commodity producers who always seem to be at a disadvantage when they sell their goods (Luetchford 2008a). The way La Verde have dealt with this is by drawing on specific political and cultural traditions in their engagement with other producers and consumers. The collective began as a project to access food for consumption. Manuela says they occupied and petitioned for land 'because we had to produce to eat'. Once they had the land, their subsistence activities, geared towards reproduction in adverse circumstances, yielded a surplus. This allowed them to move into markets, and generate markets of their own. The process of how strategies and ideas about consumption and social reproduction were widened into circuits of exchange, and problems and tensions from engaging in the open economy, is the subject of the rest of the chapter.

Local Strategies for Consumption and Distribution

The members of La Verde agree they opted for organics for three reasons: they had to produce to eat, through SOC they were in contact with ecology groups, and locally they knew of cases of poisoning through pesticide abuse. We have already seen how their production strategies were a response to industrial agriculture. We now turn to their need for food and how they approached that necessity, before describing social and political connections with other farmers, activists, politically-motivated consumers and wider networks.

When they started to produce from the land at La Verde, the workers adopted a peasant model of economy. The key aim is to build as far as possible a closed system, avoiding external inputs and reproducing rather than expanding. Of course, there are expansive and even entrepreneurial aspects to their market interactions, but these are secondary to the original and primary aim: they 'had to produce to eat'. The background to this is, first, an experience of extreme poverty in a rural environment in which up to 80 per cent of the population of their town were day labourers whose precarious incomes were threatened by industrial agriculture. Hiring on an informal basis allowed landowners to exert pressure on political agitators and enforce a compliant workforce. Failure to be chosen for work could mean starvation. Manolo explained that exploitation of labour and maximising landlords' profits was a deliberate policy of the Franco regime (1936–1975). The profits were expropriated rather than reinvested, and the Spanish economy at the time stagnated. Enrique said that, 'for 40 years nothing happened; the economy just stood still'. In such circumstances, securing food outside the money economy gains great significance.

There were different avenues for increasing food security in precarious times. First, 'wild foods', such as snails, asparagus, and cactus fruit could be collected from the countryside. Enrique pointed out that 'the people here aged 50 and above are from a rural world. We were always in the countryside and we knew the things we could collect to eat'. By the 1980s that situation had changed, as rural employment declined and people became neo-urban. At the same time, democracy, EU membership and mass tourism were part of a growth in prosperity. As incomes rose, it no longer became necessary to scavenge food from

the countryside. Nevertheless, such foods are still remarked upon, hold an important place in collective memory, and are gathered for home consumption and hawked on the street. To go to a bar and eat snails is a social occasion.

A second source of food is the *huerta*, or kitchen garden. Food production on these plots is a form of agriculture that has long been practised in Andalusia, and throughout Spain. The primary aim is the production of fruits and vegetables for home consumption. These can be supplemented with nuts and fruit from orchards, chickens, and cold cuts from pigs killed on the farms. With little cash to buy food, let alone industrial inputs, the workers at La Verde were drawn to traditional methods used by smallholders and gardeners to secure household food supplies. Manuela emphasises this idea: first and foremost, she says, 'our cooperative is a *huerta*, with products that we eat'. Following the *huerta* model meant growing food for consumption and struggling to be 'self-sufficient'. It was developed out of expediency, to take people through hard economic times.

The *huerta* model also gave La Verde a context for their agro-ecology; it provided an association with traditional practices for producing fresh, non-industrialised foods before the arrival of chemical inputs in the 1960s: 'We began working [the land] as a *huerta* for self-consumption. We worked it organically because we were going to eat it ourselves, we didn't want chemicals. We wanted healthy things to eat'. But this is a social as well as a practical model of economy. By following specific food-provision practices, La Verde draws on the idea of localism: a closed system based around the *pueblo* and the *huerta*, run by families to distribute food through personal and kin relations. In this way, people without land could hope to access food by drawing upon direct social relationships in their *pueblo*. This has two key aspects useful to La Verde: it gives a context and rationale for their production practices, and it affords an avenue for direct exchanges with local people who want to consume their products. In conversation, they often talk about the people who visit them to buy food. Indeed, at various times they have experimented with a farm shop: 'That [farm] shop was our most important outlet. Loads of people would come with their children in the afternoon to have a stroll and buy stuff'. On-farm sales were scaled down when they became involved in the second-level distribution and retail cooperative, Pueblos Blancos, in 2003. One outcome of this

was that storage facilities and the distribution centre were moved to a warehouse with a cold store a few kilometres down the road.

Specific kinds of food produced using 'traditional' practices means an easy association between the *huertas*, fresh local produce and organics. There is no necessity that *huertas* should be cultivated without the use of industrial inputs, and some people today admit or are said to apply chemicals, sometimes in large quantities. But the fact that this is remarked upon, and that these gardens have a history that precedes the availability of agro-chemicals and manufactured fertilisers, makes that connection an easy one. The shift from local to fresh to organic products is traced in this statement from Manuela:

Here in this *pueblo* there was a real tradition of *huertas* all along the riverbank. In the beginning, the people didn't buy our produce because it was organic, they bought it because the products were fresh and from here; cut in the morning and sold in the afternoon. But over time people began to understand that organic products were good for your health. That began with people like doctors and teachers. The ordinary people just bought it because it was fresh.

How readily people associate local food provision, non-industrial foods and organics was evident in interviews in one *pueblo* on consumption practices with 30 women of different ages and from a range of backgrounds. This data supplemented information collected at ten workshops that had been organised by local activists to promote organics to women's groups and parent-teacher associations in towns and villages around Cadiz province. The presentation on food additives and the organic alternative was followed by lively discussions. Women enjoyed describing the 'simple', traditional dishes and foodstuffs that had sustained their families over generations. The foods, redolent with taste and meaning, were repeatedly juxtaposed to modern 'junk', especially pizzas, which were associated with youth. The presentation on organics provoked conversations about their neighbour's eggs, the taste of plums from a particular tree, old-style breads, or the killing and processing of pigs on the farm. The discussions recalled life before food processes became industrialised, when every *pueblo* had a flour mill, an olive press and an abattoir.

The second feature of local food useful to La Verde was the importance of historically and socially embedded exchange relations outside mainstream commercial circuits. The majority of the women at the workshops spoke about the *huerta* they ran, or how they accessed home-grown produce through their extended family. Others paid neighbours for fruit and vegetables. Meat, oil, eggs, dairy products and bread have long been produced and bought through local sources. While people used supermarkets, most claimed to prefer locally-owned grocers' stores for their everyday shopping. On the other hand, many make weekly or monthly trips to larger towns to shop at chain stores. Such excursions are an opportunity to stock up on industrially-produced bulk items, such as soap powder and canned goods, and to economise. They also provide occasions to shop for clothes, larger items and specialist products, and to enter a more cosmopolitan environment with urban and foreign shoppers. In a sense, these shopping trips have an air of being special events one dresses for, a treat for oneself and the family.

It is hard to gauge the importance of these different avenues to access food. Local exchanges certainly evoke commentary and have ideological importance. On the other hand, supermarkets are expanding and the tendency for local farmers to abandon the *pueblos* and sell into specialist organic shops in larger towns and cities suggests a slow decline in more traditional food routes.

Nevertheless, access to land puts the people at La Verde in a different category in the local food economy to that of *jornaleros*. They are able to produce for themselves and sell their surplus. Hence the *pueblo* became 'their earliest and most important market'. What is more, an economy based upon 'subsistence-plus' gives common ground with the small family farmers producing food for direct sale in the *pueblos*. The material expression of that common ground was the formation of Pueblos Blancos. This came about when Manolo from La Verde was employed as an advisor and extension officer on a project to develop organic agriculture run by the provincial council (*Mancomunidad*). Through this initiative, La Verde became involved in a second provincial council project aimed at marketing rather than production, named Pueblos Blancos after the famous white towns of the region. La Verde took the lead, consolidating a membership of local farmers and SOC cooperatives who practised organics or were open to transition

reputation as a fruit and vegetable grower (*hortelano*), and knowledge that his products are grown down the road and are freshly harvested. Notably, his prices compare favourably with others in the same market and with supermarkets, and he plays little on his organic status; an inconspicuous and faded sheet of paper taped to the wall of his stall is all that signals organic certification.

Local production-consumption links therefore suggest both an alternative to capitalism – a rural world maintaining relationships in which producers and products are known and trusted – and opposition to capitalism, where these conditions are not thought to be satisfied. On one level, La Verde encapsulates that combination because it pursues a model of localism and self-consciously recuperates practices and traditions that 'go back thousands of years', such as water management systems learned from the Arabs when they occupied much of Spain. At the same time, La Verde opposes the industrialisation of agriculture in pursuit of profit, with all that entails for the rural environment, as well as the kinds of distribution networks that capitalism creates. This is clear in Manuela's account of selling surplus produce to a distributor from a nearby town:

There is a wholesaler in Bornos, and he took the green beans off our hands at a really cheap price. What a surprise when we went to the shops in the *pueblo* and saw our beans, and the shopkeepers confirmed that the wholesaler had brought them to the *pueblo*. They were nearly triple the price we had sold them at! So we said: 'Enough. You'll never sell our beans again. You will never make money at our expense'. And obviously this is what led us to realise that we had to do direct sales. We would never sell again through a wholesaler because the only person who makes money is the wholesaler. The shopkeeper loses, the consumer loses, and above all the farmer loses.

Here we have a clear rejection of the open economy. What alternatives are available and how resilient are these alternatives? Supplying food to the *pueblos* gives La Verde their 'first and most important market'. However, their ability to sustain themselves through local sales is open to question. As cut-price supermarkets with a wide range of goods increasingly penetrate towns and villages, and local shops close down,

and certification, and supplied their *pueblos* with food. In this way, La Verde became the lynchpin of the new organic retail initiative, as they bequeathed their network of contacts to the new cooperative. They also had a hand in employing personnel: Maria, who took the post of manager of Pueblos Blancos, was a personal contact, and they supplied the driver and people to work in the warehouse and offices.

Pueblos Blancos developed as an alliance between cooperatives of politically inspired former *jornaleros* and more individually motivated family farmers. The different agendas of these people necessitated a fragile truce that did not last, but the two types of members shared strategies and some ideas. Like La Verde, most of the family farmers in Pueblos Blancos have long supplied kin, friends and their *pueblo* through stalls in their town marketplace (*plaza de abastos*), or sell through local shops. The political culture is clear: there is a preference for local markets and consumers. La Verde insist that their first and top-priority customers are from their town and surrounding villages. The political culture was also emphasised in the Pueblos Blancos mission statement: 'Establishing short commercial circuits' was the objective; they wanted 'people who live nearby to benefit from eating their products'. Discussions with the members of Pueblos Blancos often turned to the possibility of opening shops and market stalls locally under the cooperative name, but practical constraints and more lucrative sales to customers in larger towns thwarted those ambitions.

Alongside the values intrinsic to forging local production-consumption links, there are economic arguments about competing in terms of money value by 'selling direct, without intermediaries'. During interviews, farmers in Pueblos Blancos insisted that they can compete on price with conventionally grown crops as and when they sell directly to the consumer. Whereas specialist production, national distribution chains and export markets require economies of scale with which they cannot compete, there are claims that there is scope to be competitive in other markets. For example, one founder member of Pueblos Blancos, Antonio Perez, produces asparagus, tomatoes and artichokes, and has a network of customers in his *pueblo*. He says he 'guarantees to be able to compete with any conventional producer on price as and when the sale is direct to the consumer'. The competitive edge is borne out by the success of Antonio Mulero's market stall in his *pueblo*. Antonio supplies a stream of customers drawn by his local

they experience strong competition from 'convenience' stores. A possible alternative lies in connections to people who share an interest in and a desire to establish economic circuits outside mainstream food provision based around supermarkets and mass production. The vision of an oppositional alternative to the mainstream system takes us beyond the local, the natural terrain of the peasant economy, to links with actors at provincial, regional, national and international levels towards a description of wider networks and a broader politics.

Building Networks

Pueblos Blancos had been conceived initially as a way of bringing small organic farmers together to pool resources and develop a regional market that would lie alongside the export-oriented organic sector. This was successful for a time, in that the market expanded and Pueblos Blancos was able to offer a broader range of products to more customers than individual farmers or La Verde. However, the problems that led to the demise of Pueblos Blancos illustrate broader challenges faced by both small producers and alternative networks of food provision.

The contacts La Verde have long drawn upon include people in local and regional government, academics with an interest in farming systems, certification agencies, trade unionists, farmers groups, ecology networks, production-consumption collectives which grow food to eat, producer-consumer cooperatives that run retail outlets, private shops serving a middle-class clientele in well-to-do neighbourhoods, as well as wholesalers. The connections to these different people, groups and networks involve La Verde and Pueblos Blancos in processes that often contradict one another and lead to tensions.

At one extreme is the affiliation of La Verde to networks built on a social and environmental politics in opposition to capitalism. These networks are best exemplified today by radical groups of urban activists who have accessed peripheral land to produce and consume their food (López García & López López 2003). The best known of these is the Madrid group of 'guerrilla gardeners', Bajo el Asfalto está la Huerta! (BAH!), but similar autonomous production-consumption groups based around horizontal decision-making also operate in Seville, Granada and Córdoba. Members pay a monthly quota to

generate a fund, but also commit to work land they borrow, rent or occupy. The groups are popular – they have waiting lists – and they most closely represent the political ideal of collapsing production into consumption. On the other hand, the quantity and range of food they grow means that production for consumption must be supplemented by shopping. Hence it is necessary to distinguish between production for consumption and producer-consumer links, with the latter marking out different economic roles (producer and consumer), and so forming the thin end of a wedge into open markets. Discourse around local food sovereignty for the *pueblo* often loses sight of this distinction, and the same happens when applied to networks of people and groups.

Focusing on producer-consumer relations means returning to the market. Through links to farmers and cooperatives, La Verde and then Pueblos Blancos accessed products from other parts of Andalusia, Spain and Europe that they consumed themselves, or sold on through their distribution network (avocados and bananas from the Canary Islands and the Costa Tropical east of Malaga, milk from the Basque country in northern Spain, pasta from Italy). Qualities and practices associated with these products, such as mixed farming systems and the avoidance of waged labour and agro-industrial products, set parameters that bigger producers struggle to satisfy. In any case, these markets are not presently large enough to be of interest to specialists with economies of scale. To that extent, political ambitions are realised and reproduced through the network. However, the criteria and goals are complicated and often compromised by a second set of processes that coalesce around economic expediency. This occurs firstly because of the requirement to make a livelihood, and second because there are different kinds of markets and customers who are more or less committed to the political agenda. The way political and economic objectives play off one another is perhaps the most interesting thing about the networks and markets in Spain and elsewhere, and it raises the complex analytical issues we discuss in Chapters 8 and 9.

The problem of building and maintaining networks begins with internal relations between farmers within Pueblos Blancos itself. From the start, the aims and agendas of the politically motivated cooperatives were at odds with the ambitions of more individualist family farmers in Pueblos Blancos. La Verde ceded Pueblos Blancos its customer base when the latter group was formed, but the family

farmers were reluctant to do this and tended to retain their own private customers. In turn, this led to shortages in products and exacerbated supply problems for Pueblos Blancos. For this reason the more political members accused the small farmers of being 'uncooperative' (*poco cooperativista*). Making an independent farmer president of Pueblos Blancos was a ploy to generate solidarity. But long running disputes over policy and practices led to recriminations that contributed to the demise of the group.

This outcome is part of a more general problem, that of the tension between economic agency and political vision. It is an issue that the more politically minded are keenly aware of, and is well illustrated by the case of La Verde's misadventures in export markets. The story began after a representative of a large French organic distributor appeared on their farm looking for produce to send north. Although this was successful on an economic level, with good returns and positive responses to their products from Parisian retailers, it meant they began to lose sight of their local markets, had to produce in larger quantities, and were subjected to strictures placed upon them by the distributor that threatened their autonomy. As Enrique says, 'they want to control you, so you become like their subsidiary'. The cooperative concluded export markets require unacceptable compromises. They, and Pueblos Blancos, insisted that the first priority was supplying local and regional markets, though they sometimes answered requests to sell surpluses to national distributors for sale within Spain. They have, however, objected to the global food distribution system and refused to sell for export. A member of La Verde explains:

Food has to travel, I know. Globalisation means a complicated world, but what is not normal is that you can grow an apple here in the *buerta*, and they have to bring apples from Argentina. That is the strange, globalised world we live in, but for us it is not development and it is not sustainable.

While the values sustaining local markets are clearly defined and little contested – freshness, direct sales, the vestiges of a peasant-style economy, an ability to compete on price in a niche market – there is a range of ideas and commitments in the broader network that often complicates relationships. This was apparent in producers' attitudes

to retailers compared to consumers. While farmers tended to identify with the latter and go to great lengths to indulge customers in the box scheme, or say things like 'the consumer is king', their attitudes towards retailers tended to be more ambivalent and judgemental. For example, preferential terms, prices and choice products were reserved for cooperative retailers and others with shared political visions, or with whom there was a long-term relationship. On the other hand, there was little sympathy for private shops struggling to turn a profit. I several times heard farmers insist that supplies should be cut to shops who failed to pay invoices on time. This is indicative of the price squeeze put on farmers, and the problem of liquidity within Pueblos Blancos, a second factor contributing to its demise.

Interviews at retail outlets supplied by Pueblos Blancos documented the ideas and commitments of retailers and their generally middle-class and well-educated customers. Here we meet politically motivated retailers and customers who are more or less radical in their demands and expectations. They adhere to an 'ideology of consumption', outlined in Chapter 3. This market is more difficult for big suppliers of organics to penetrate. But there are other retailers who sell mostly to people concerned about healthy bodies for themselves and their children. The latter customers want to engage in distinctive and ethical consumption, but may be more easily satisfied by generic labels and the cheaper prices of more mainstream products. The different expectations and commitments make the future trajectory of organics hard to predict, but the problems encountered by Pueblos Blancos and the financial difficulties faced by specialist organic retailers, both exacerbated by the recession, give pause for thought and further research.

For the moment the regional market for organic food favours smaller farmers. Large-scale producers, for their part, find more lucrative and bulk markets in northern Europe, and have not as yet paid much attention to the small, specialist, national sector. Most retailers reported a struggle in sourcing products and needed a range of suppliers. They expressed a preference for locally produced foods, but had to turn to national and even foreign suppliers. When it comes to fruit and vegetables, for example, they usually stocked products from Pueblos Blancos and other local growers, but also made recourse to Gumendi, a producer and supplier from the Basque country. Scarce, but sought-after products means premiums in the cities remain high.

Large national supermarkets stock few or no organic goods, and also charge high premiums when they do. So the picture for small producers growing an array of fruit and vegetables is of a niche urban market in which there is little competition and relatively high prices. In that respect it is more similar to the UK in the 1970s and 1980s, before big supermarkets stocked competitively priced organic produce. How long this will continue and the market remain viable for smaller growers is open to question, especially in the current economic climate, with recession and unemployment hitting Spain hard.

Urban consumers can purchase their organic fruit and vegetables (and other 'ethical' products) from producer-consumer cooperatives, from private shops or through box schemes. The first of these, the producer-consumer cooperatives, have both farmers and shoppers as members. Based in urban centres, they include La Ortiga in Seville, El Encinar in Granada and Almocaffe in Cordoba. They have their own umbrella organisation, the Andalusian Federation of Consumers and Producers of Organic and Artisan Products (FACPE). Producer-consumer cooperatives have a small and politically committed group at the centre, with anti-capitalist and anti-corporate values. They run the retail outlets and decide policy. At the periphery is a larger general membership who may have political sympathies with the cooperative model, but are thought by the more radical core group to treat it 'like a shop'. If this suggests a lack of commitment, it also implies that customers will go elsewhere to buy food if they can get organic produce cheaper from supermarkets, or their incomes are squeezed by recession.

One motivation for being a member of these organisations is that prices are cheaper than in privately owned boutiques because cooperatives are eligible for subsidies, they are 'not for profit', and they get preferential prices from sympathetic producers. Privately run shops are also often run by committed individuals, but prices are higher and customers are generally less political. In the shops there tends to be less emphasis on social and ethical concerns, and more on individual and family health, issues that fall more readily within the neoliberal paradigm of individual consumer choice. Finally, there is the box scheme initiated by La Verde in the early days but later handed over to Pueblos Blancos, whose customer base includes ecologists, teachers and friends. Box schemes draw on political, ethical and financial

motivations; they take advantage of direct relations between grower and consumer and the excising of intermediaries into an urban setting.

The array of outlets and consumers in the network undermines the idea of organics as a generic category and presupposes a range of relationships. Those relationships are personal, but were brokered by the distribution team at Pueblos Blancos (the manager, accountant, warehouse staff, and delivery team) who overlapped with and largely reproduced the political vision of La Verde. Dealings with different retail outlets were tempered by a number of factors. These included the extent to which there was a shared politics, the history of a relationship with La Verde and latterly Pueblos Blancos, and the volume and reliability of sales.

These preferences manifested themselves in the volumes and consistency of supply, and the different qualities of products that reached the consumers, whether through shops, producer-consumer cooperatives or box schemes. Shops tended to be a low priority, and shopkeepers often complained in interviews that they could not secure the products they wanted from Pueblos Blancos, and so had to source through distributors from other parts of Andalusia or national suppliers. The most important of the producer-consumer cooperatives to Pueblos Blancos was La Ortiga in Seville, an organisation with several hundred members. Key figures from La Verde were instrumental in its creation, so it is not surprising that La Ortiga, with its collective approach to decision-making, radical agenda and pursuit of direct relationships between consumer and producer, had fixed and preferential terms of trade with Pueblos Blancos compared to private shops.

The third group of customers are individual clients or consumer groups who participate in the box scheme as a form of direct selling. The most historically established of these customers are groups of ecologists who have had long-term relations with La Verde. During the time of Pueblos Blancos, the box scheme expanded to include a social programme organised and subsidised by the Andalusian regional government to supply schools, hospitals and old people's homes with fresh organic fruit and vegetables. Involvement in this programme was a double-edged sword. It allowed Pueblos Blancos to link up with like-minded producers in other parts of Andalusia, and so signified an extension of their network. Through this they developed a programme to share products, and so extend the range

of foods they offered, as well as making moves to form a platform for lobbying and political action. On the other hand, there was limited success and some contestation in formalising the network. There was also wariness within the Pueblos Blancos' administration about becoming too dependent on official avenues for sales, as this diverts supplies away from other retailers. Further, their position within the social programme was seen as vulnerable to competitive tender, since large-scale commercial producers would probably win out.

While the network approach to distribution and sales appears likely to break open the closed system of the *pueblo* food economy, this is not necessarily the case. Rather, there was a conscious struggle to retain control of sales and make a virtue of the conditions of production. This was particularly so in the case of the box scheme, where the products were delivered direct to the end consumer and the producer-consumer cooperatives, who impose standards that exceed those stipulated by organic certification agencies. It is not, then, the distribution network itself that breaks open the closed system. Rather, involvement in organics as a commercial venture, opportunities in terms of price, the threat of competition that this brings, and the specialist and somewhat precarious nature of the market, haunts the network and potentially threatens smaller producers' livelihoods. For this reason, they always retain half an eye on their local customers in the *pueblos* as a kind of 'bottom line'.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored two strands in relation to local and organic food. The first, and most prominent, is the kinds of values that motivate and sustain people as they try to maintain and develop alternatives to mainstream food provision. The second, which is the conditions, limits and possibilities set by a more open economy, has appeared at certain points but largely remains the elephant in the room. In the grey area between these two lie tensions, which coalesce around how people negotiate and try to reconcile the money value of the open economy and their social and political convictions to pursue some degree of closure.

It is within this frame that the failed experiment of Pueblos Blancos must be examined. In part, this was a failure to compete in the open

economy, especially in the current recession; shops failed to sell to consumers and pay invoices, and debts accrued on infrastructure and salaries. The role of subsidies in the story remains obscure. What is clear is that some kind of bottom line was set by the open economy. Alongside this was a failure of the network as it was conceived; relations between independent farmers and the politicised cooperatives were fraught and difficult to manage.

There is also the question of the wider networks and the potential or desirability of expansion. On a long drive back from one meeting I was party to a long and sometimes vociferous discussion between key members of Pueblos Blancos on the merits and pitfalls of expanding the network, as against consolidation of the local base. This debate was never resolved, but the default outcome was the latter course of action: a retrenchment back towards the local and a reinforcing of networks and contacts closer to home.

So, it is not a case of 'networks not working' (Edelman 2005); it is more a question of shifting alliances, moving sideways, and developing new initiatives. On my most recent visit to La Verde there was a new energy and determination to pay off the debts accrued from Pueblos Blancos. Extra workers had returned from the recession-hit tourist and construction industries on the coast. A new chicken shed had appeared and a bread-baking business was being developed, signs of determination and renewed vigour. The *pueblo* and local relations around food production retain their role as a site of resilience in hard times.

What, though, of the market and the open economy? The role played by certification in opening up organics to mainstream practice, capitalist assimilation and 'conventionalisation' is by now well documented (Guthman 2004a, 2004b). The principle argument is that big interests force down standards and outcompete smaller, more radical pioneers, who are then squeezed out of the market. The comment of one member of La Verde shows that the cooperative is well aware of the process: 'I am not in organics for a certification system which operates under shit rules modified to support the productionist sector. They accept dubious practices because of that, or they certify products that come from thousands of kilometres away'.

The challenge for smaller organic farmers and activists is to counter the conventionalising tendency by reaffirming the values that sustain

the alternative: the social relation between producer and consumer and specific conditions of production that go beyond certification requirements. Manoeuvring between and beyond the bureaucratic strictures laid down by the European Union and implemented by regionally based certification agencies means ensuring customers see beyond the label to know where, how and by whom food is produced. This is understood by Enrique: 'we have never used La Verde like a label. We use the name and our prestige as a human group to sell'. For Manolo, it means 'returning to the minority', for example by breaking away from mainstream, third-party certification, and establishing forms of self-certification in which farmers monitor each others' practices. Experiments in such 'participatory guarantee systems' are already underway in Andalusia and elsewhere (Cuéllar Padilla 2010). As mainstream organics bends the rules to maximise profit, so alternative practitioners seek new grounds to differentiate themselves.

The second area that threatens the closed system is the market itself and the use of money as an impersonal exchange mechanism between people separated out into distinct categories of consumer and producer. When someone comes to the farm to buy, then the exchange is immediate and direct. When they send boxes to ecology groups, the exchange is less immediate but remains direct. Through shops, the exchanges are not immediate, not direct, and so are viewed as problematic. Money is the technology that allows the distancing of relations of exchange, but it is not the cause. For advocates of alternative food, problems come more from the separation of people into distinct categories of 'producers' and 'consumers', the distancing between them that money allows, and the capacity for entrepreneurs to profit from that.

In Andalusia an important model against which this is set is the idea of the closed, autonomous economy of the *pueblo*. This assertion is backed up by the emphasis La Verde puts on the *pueblos* as their first and most important market, and by Pueblos Blancos's preference for short, local circuits of exchange. Food provides a particularly clear window through which to see the strategies and values people pursue, the forces that draw them in to the open economy, and the problematic relations that emerge from that process.

Sources

The information in this chapter comes from fieldwork in Cadiz province over the last eight years. Data collection involved interviews and engagement with growers, retailers and consumers of organic food. It was made possible by many organisations and individuals, only a few of whom can be mentioned here. Fieldwork and subsequent analysis was generously supported by the Economic and Social Research Council. Martha Soler opened many doors, arranged interviews, and shared some of the fieldwork. David Gallard introduced me to the fieldwork site. The Universidad Rural Paolo Freire offered invaluable support. Members of La Verde cooperative were generous with their time, and in sharing their lives and work in the fields. The farmers and administrative staff at Pueblos Blancos, and especially Maria Carrasco, were open and helpful beyond any reasonable expectation. The study would never have happened without the openness and generosity of all the people encountered during the research.

There is an extensive literature on anarchism in Andalusia (Brenan 1990; Corbin 1993; Foweraker 1989; Kaplan 1977; May 1997; Mintz 1982; for an overview, see Pratt 2003). Accounts of agrarian change, and particularly work regimes, *jornaleros* and their culture, can be found in Malefakis (1970) and Martinez-Alier (1971). Information on the organic sector and recent political and social movements that focus on food is largely in Spanish. The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries of Andalusia's regional government has published useful statistics on the organic sector (Junta de Andalucía n.d.). Del Campo Tejedor (2000) gives an overview of organic agriculture, and considers cultural aspects. In a recent edited collection, Guerrero Quintero and Soler Montiel (2010) examine rural transformations and emerging cultural and political initiatives around cultural heritage, agro-ecology and attempts to generate new agrarian models. Finally, work in an activist vein on social movements and food can be found in López Garcia and López López (2003), as well as in Autoría Colectiva (2006).