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Motivating Factors for Young Adults in the Brattleboro Area to Start in Organic Agriculture for Their Career

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MOTIVATING FACTORS FOR YOUNG ADULTS IN THE BRATTLEBORO AREA TO START IN
ORGANIC AGRICULTURE FOR THEIR CAREER

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PIM 70

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Service, Leadership and Management at the School for International Training in Brattleboro, Vermont,
USA.

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Date 07/20/2012

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Abstract

Despite a worldwide push for the conversion of conventional agriculture to organic agriculture, organic farming itself is not a very popular vocational choice for young people. Brattleboro, one of the towns in Vermont, is no exception. Although several local organizations are promoting local agriculture and food security, in reality, not many young people in Brattleboro want to choose organic agriculture as their career. With a total of 17 in-depth qualitative interviews with young adults in the Brattleboro area, this inquiry sought to identify a range of factors that would motivate them to choose organic agriculture as their career. The results of this research could be helpful to advise organic farmers or individuals in the Brattleboro area who are interested in attracting more young human resources to be engaged in organic agriculture, in order to revitalize local agriculture and maintain food security in Brattleboro.

1. Introduction and the Statement of Research Question

1-1. Introduction

Organic agriculture is a farming practice which aims to produce healthy foods, minimize the damage to the natural environment, and also maintain the health of those who are engaged in it. With conventional agriculture, agricultural methods are mechanized and systematized based on the idea of productivism with the use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers. Organic agriculture has become a popular choice for many people, since awareness of the benefits of eating healthy foods and the vulnerabilities of the conventional agricultural system have been raised.

According to data reported by the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) (2010), in 2008, the total agricultural population in the world had increased to 6,750,057,000, while the total consumption of chemical fertilizer in the world had decreased to 161,829,000 tonnes from a high of 171,844,194 tonnes in 2007 (FAO, 2010). Moreover, the use of pesticides in agriculture is also decreasing, especially in the main EU countries, such as Germany and England, because of their nationwide promotion of organic agriculture (Ibid). “The land devoted to organic agriculture worldwide has increased over the past decade from 15.8 million hectares to 37.2 million hectares exhibiting a compounding rate of growth of 8.9% per annum” (Paull, 2011, p. 111). These facts above show that agricultural methods, which do not rely on chemical fertilizers and pesticides, have already been recognized as one of the essential food-producing methods and also, an important industry for the whole world, including the global south.

Meanwhile, the absence of chemical fertilizers and pesticides and the use of lower-tech farming methods require more labor on the part of farmers compared to conventional agricultural

practices. "Compared with conventional farming, organic farming requires 1.6 times longer working hours, although yields are about 15 percent less, making it a very costly production method indeed" (Japan for Sustainability, n.d.).

The accelerated growth of the organic agricultural sector is not restricted to this sector only, but it is believed to have spilled over to other sectors of the economy as well, like the processing industries, the supply industries, and the transportation sector. Therefore, it is very important to get enough people involved in this field in order to maintain this type of agriculture and ensure it will remain throughout the future generations. It will be especially important "to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations" (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. 43), so that involving the younger generations, and the potential future leaders, in organic agriculture is very important, because it is the youth who could enlarge this industry and also disseminate it to future generations.

1-2. Organic Agriculture

To define the term, organic agriculture in this thesis, I would like to refer to a 1998 FAO report quoting from a USDA definition:

In 1980 the US Department of Agriculture defined the concept of organic agriculture as follows: "...a production system which avoids or largely excludes the use of synthetically compounded fertilizers, pesticides, growth regulators, and livestock feed additives. To the maximum extent feasible, organic agriculture systems rely upon crop rotations, crop residues, animal manure, legumes, green manure, off-farm organic wastes, mechanical cultivation, mineral bearing rocks, and aspects of biological pest control to maintain soil productivity and tilth, to supply plant nutrients, and to control insects, weeds, and other pests". The report also included the following observation: "The concept of the soil as a living system which must be "fed" in a way that does not restrict the activities of beneficial organisms necessary for recycling nutrients and producing humus is central to this definition" (p. 7).

Sustainable Agriculture

The term organic agriculture is not technically interchangeable with sustainable agriculture, although the two terms are sometimes confused (Bird, Bultena, & Gardner, 1995, p. 60). Organic farming carries a strong commitment to avoiding all chemical pest controls and inorganic fertilizers, whereas many sustainable farmers still use these inputs, but in reduced amounts (Ibid). Yet, generally, a clear distinction between these two types of agriculture is not recognized, especially among young people who are the main focus of my research. Hence, the type of agriculture, which is the focus of this thesis, will include sustainable agriculture in addition to organic agriculture. Even though the former practice is not certified as organic by the organic certification authorities, it is still covered as “organic agriculture” in my thesis as long as the agricultural practices follow the USDA definition above.

1-3. Geographical Background of Brattleboro and my Internship Experience

My experience working in agriculture in Japan inspired me to want to learn more about organic agriculture. Thus, I chose to work as a farming assistant at the Community Action Brattleboro Area (CABA) Community Farm during my internship. My role on the farm was not only to produce organic vegetables for the weekly farmstand, but also to assist in organizing a local market in collaboration with local organizations and farms, such as the Neighborhood Market in the town of Brattleboro.

During my internship in Brattleboro, I worked with several local organizations, which support local agriculture through implementing various projects. Their initiatives for supporting local agriculture as a way to promote both local food consumption and security are many and include the Brattleboro Farmers’ Market, the Neighborhood Market, and the Strolling of the Heifers Parade. They are not only working to implement projects, which promote local

agriculture, however, but are also working to educate young people about agriculture through programs such as Farm to School, the Youth Agricultural Project, and the Kindle Farm School.

The population of Brattleboro is about 12,000, while people in the age range from 18 to 24 comprise roughly 1,000 of these (U.S. Census, 2010). However, the total number of people who are engaged in agriculture in the area is actually decreasing. I personally saw very few young people around the age of 20 working in local markets, even though there were many young customers there. This made me realize that agriculture was not a popular choice of career for young people in and around Brattleboro, despite the many initiatives regarding agriculture. Moreover, when we invited local people interested in our farming practice to the Community Farm, I found that all the Farm Tour participants were middle-aged people. One of my SIT friends brought two young people to the Community Farm for the purpose of educating them about farming, but they appeared to show very little interest.

The experience I had, during my internship and in my preliminary research has lead me to question how we can motivate young people in Brattleboro to get engaged in organic agriculture. As a first step towards finding a practical solution to this question, in the scope of this thesis, I would like to identify the factors, which could motivate young adults to choose a career in organic agriculture. Therefore, the resulting inquiry question is: **What are the most motivating factors for young adults in the Brattleboro area to choose a career in organic agriculture?** As a sub-question, I would investigate: What prevents young adults from choosing organic agriculture for their career?

My hope is that the answers to my question will firstly enhance the geographical characteristics in Brattleboro which include a flourishing local agriculture in the area, to attract more young adults to choose a career in this field, secondly, bring practical solutions to the social

challenges of young adults in Brattleboro to get started in organic agriculture, and thirdly, help local farmers and others in Brattleboro who want to attract young people to work in organic agriculture, in order to revitalize local agriculture and promote local food consumption in the Brattleboro area.

2. Literature Review

In this literature review, we will learn about the process young people in the U.S. follow in their career decision-making and the social factors and phenomena that influence their choices regarding careers in organic agriculture or agriculture in general.

The vocational choices young people make are not simply determined by their preferences or perception of work. They are the result of the structural process whereby an interconnectedness of assorted social factors builds their preferences and perception of work. Many researchers have conducted studies regarding young people's career choices in different vocational fields. Leach and Zepke's 2005 study that examines decision-making by young people in tertiary education, gives a deep insight into the three different stages of the process they use to decide on a future career direction. Although this model was primarily developed for looking at tertiary education, it can also be used as a model for identifying the decision-making process of young people considering careers in the agricultural sector.

The stages of the model, adapted from the work of Leach and Zepke (2005), will be used as a framework to organize my literature review in order to both describe and better understand the social phenomena that influence the process young people in the U.S. use in their decision-making regarding careers in agriculture. Understanding the process of making vocational choices will also help add a dimension and depth to discussions in the rest of this thesis, beyond a focus

only on the motivational factors and challenges, which influence their decision-making.

2-1. First Stage of Young People's Career Decision-making Process

According to Leach and Zepke's (2005) study, the first stage of the decision-making process young people go through in choosing their vocation, the predisposition stage, involves consideration of predisposed factors such as "family background, gender, parental disposition to tertiary education, degree of self-belief of the student, and the nature of the school attended" (Leach & Zepke, 2005, p. 15). In this section, therefore, I will review how young people's gender, family, and educational environment influence their aspirations and interests in work.

Gender

Although there is evidence of change in some countries, in general, where women are becoming less willing to accept gender-linked jobs, many young people still in fact opt for traditional gender-linked jobs (Furnham & Stacey, 1991, p. 82). Firemen, fishermen and nurses are examples of typical gender-linked jobs. In the U.S., the stereotypical farmer up to now has usually been male. However, the number of women farming in the U.S. has been increasing at a substantial rate as sustainable agriculture has become more popular. "In the U.S.A. in 2002, women constituted 27% of the total farm operators (USAD, 2002)" (Sachs, 2006, p. 292). In addition, a study of gender and rural development, conducted by Sachs (2006), reports that women play an important role in sustainable farming. Sachs (2006) claims:

In the USA, women are playing key roles in sustainable agriculture, both at the farm level and in sustainable agriculture movements. Sustainable agriculture challenges conventional agriculture by pushing for more environmentally-sound, socially-just, and economically-viable agricultural systems. With the move towards more sustainable agriculture, opportunities are opening up for women in agriculture. More women are operating farms on their own and have increased their involvement in managing operations jointly with other family members (p. 292).

From this we understand that the former gender-based restrictions on young people choosing to start careers in agriculture are not as strong as they used to be.

Family

The father has traditionally been perceived as the main authority figure and the breadwinner of the family in the U.S., and young people, especially sons, tend to identify with their father's career, particularly when that career is prestigious, secure, and highly paid. Hence, if the father is a successful farmer, it is likely to positively influence the children to find jobs in the agricultural sector as well or join the father working on his farm. However, when young people see their father's job as insecure, poorly paid and with little prospect for the future, they usually avoid going into the same field (Furnham & Stacey, 1991, p. 82).

Although farming is popular as a family business in the U.S., the number of family-owned farms has been steadily decreasing due to rapid social and economic change. "Since 1990, the proportion of the national population who are farm residents has fallen from 40 percent to just 1.9 per cent or 4.6 million people (AAN, 1993)" (Pretty, 1995, p. 83). A study about the historical context of sustainable agriculture, conducted by Pretty (1995), states:

"Family farms have been consolidated into larger farms; labor opportunities have fallen; and farm enterprises have been concentrated in fewer hands. This modernization has been most visible in the declining number of farms and the replacement of family farming by modern large-scale farming" (p. 83).

According to the literature above, the family farming business is becoming less popular in the U.S. because of drastic societal change, and young people are losing the chance of inheriting the family farm or of being exposed to farming practice through their families.

U.S. agricultural education

Needless to say, agricultural education plays an important and essential role in the young student's aspirations and interest in agriculture. In the U.S., there are a number of nationwide initiatives to provide students with exposure to agriculture. The 4-H program is one of the most famous and prominent examples. The common features of 4-H programs are well-described in the report issued by the National Research Council in 2009. According to the report:

4-H provides opportunities for young people across the country to be involved with an agriculture-focused national organization, to gain leadership skills, and to connect with scientists, practitioners, and other agriculture professionals. The 4-H network, for example, claims to reach nearly 6.5 million young people through locations in all 50 states and territories and makes connections to higher education through programs at more than 100 land-grant institutions. FFA, founded in 1928 as Future Farmers of America, reaches over 500,000 members 12–21 years old through over 7,000 local chapters. More than one-third of FFA members live in urban and suburban areas, and there are chapters in 11 of the 20 largest cities in the country (p. 83).

Programs such as these can complement young students' coursework and allow them to have a long-term engagement in learning about agricultural concepts. In addition to these agriculturally-focused programs, several general youth-development programs include some exposure to and activities around agricultural issues, such as the Scouts of America, the Girl Scouts of U.S.A., the Boys' and Girls' Clubs of America, and Big Brothers Big Sisters (National Research Council, 2009, p. 83).

Urban-rural divide

Although agricultural education programs are well-established in each of the states, the aspirations of young people towards agriculture varies according to the area where they live. Holz-Clause and Jost (1995) from Iowa State University used focus groups to examine young people's perception of agriculture in both rural and urban areas. The research finding states, "The

youth in these focus groups have largely shaped their perceptions of agriculture. However, these perceptions, even among rural participants, more often matched a stereotypical "hayseed" view of farming than the realities of a rapidly changing industry" (p. 4). Furthermore, this study states, "Though farmers were considered as important by urban and rural participants, urban youth had little interest in agricultural careers" (p. 1).

These findings indicate that there is a geographical constraint affecting young people's aspirations toward and interests in the agricultural sector. Young people living in urban areas in particular have very little interest in getting involved in agriculture. In part this is because they have had far fewer chances to be exposed to agriculture compared to young people raised in rural areas.

2-2. Second Stage of Young People's Career Decision-making Process

The second stage of the process by which young people make decisions about their future careers is called the "search stage" and it occurs when the young person begins to search out vocational options (Leach & Zepke, 2005, p. 15). The decision-making process at this stage is influenced by factors such as the career aspirations and interests of the student, academic achievement, access to information and contact with tertiary institutions (Ibid). In this stage, unlike the first, young people are more conscious about their future job options. Based upon the job aspirations and interests that they have grown up with in the first stage, and their academic achievement in school, they proactively start searching for information about vocational opportunities. A brief review of the accessibility to relevant information about the agricultural sector in the U.S. follows.

Access to information about the agricultural sector

When young people start searching for jobs, the Internet is one of the most useful resources for finding employment information. The infrastructure of the Internet in the U.S. is well developed compared to that of many other countries. The United States has over 67.7 million people subscribed to high-speed broadband providers, a figure which represents about 94% of the market (Leichtman Research Group, 2009).

The spread of the use of the Internet throughout the agricultural sector in the U.S. is not exceptional. Although some local farms still do not have their own websites, the use of the Internet is gradually becoming more common among young farmers in the U.S. A study that examines area-wide pest management, conducted by Carlson and Sutherland (2008) describes recent Internet use among young farmers. The study states:

When the technology is available and can aid farmers, they make use of it. The vast majority of young farmers and ranchers in the USA have gained access to Internet communications technology. As of 2004, in the 12th annual American Farm Bureau survey of young farmers, which included 342 producers from 45 USA states between the ages of 18 and 35, 92.4% indicated they had a computer at home or on the farm and 88.3% had Internet access (Thornton and Lipton, 2004, p. 135).

Thus the Internet can help young people in the U.S., searching for job opportunities in agriculture, to access the employment information from those farmers who are using the Internet as a tool for recruiting employees.

2-3. Third Stage of Young People's Career Decision-making Process

“At the third stage, choices to pursue specific tertiary programmes at certain providers are made. These are based on whether admission is achieved, whether the right courses in a preferred field of study are available, and whether costs and rewards are in balance” (Leach & Zepke, 2005, p. 15). In this stage, the last step in making their career choice, young people start

taking specific job providers and the financial factors of the job opportunities into consideration. In order to better understand the factors influencing this stage, I decided to take a look at literature relating to the scale of farms, the types of agriculture, and the farmers' wages in the U.S.

Scale of farms, types of farming

When young people initially decide to choose agriculture as a career, they have some options of job providers in terms of the scale of farm and the type of agriculture. In the U.S., the larger farms have generally been practicing conventional agriculture in order to manage their large quantity of crops. Bigger farms are also more financially stable compared to middle-scale, or small farms, because of the scale of the farming they are practicing. The U.S. Department of Labor (2008) reports:

Employment of self-employed farmers is expected to decline moderately by 8 percent over the 2006-2016 decade. The continuing ability of the agriculture sector to produce more with fewer workers will cause some farmers to go out of business as market pressures leave little room for the marginally successful farmer. As land, machinery, seed, and chemicals become more expensive, only well-capitalized farmers and corporations will be able to buy many of the farms that become available. These larger, more productive farms are better able to withstand the adverse effects of climate and price fluctuations on farm output and income. Larger farms also have advantages in obtaining government subsidies and payments because these payments are usually based on acreage owned and per-unit production (p. 48).

Although the number of small farms is expected to decrease in the U.S., some small farms, especially those engaged in organic agriculture, are successfully developing and increasing their markets with local area-centered strategies. The U.S. Department of Labor (2008) also reports:

Despite the expected continued consolidation of farmland and the projected decline in overall employment of this occupation, an increasing number of small-scale farmers have developed successful market niches that involve personalized,

direct contact with their customers. Many are finding opportunities in organic food production, which is the fastest growing segment in agriculture. Others use farmers' markets that cater directly to urban and suburban consumers, allowing the farmers to capture a greater share of consumers' food dollars (p. 49).

According to the literature above, young people would have a higher chance of finding jobs on bigger farms, because of their greater recruiting capacity and financial stability.

However, for those young people interested in organic agriculture as a career, small farms would provide a better opportunity for them to learn about organic agriculture and achieve their career goals. Working on small farms, they would be able to learn how to manage both the crops and the finances of organic agriculture, as well as how to develop markets for their organic produce.

Wages in the agricultural sector

For most young people in the U.S., salary is one of the most important and essential factors in making a decision about a career. The average salary of farmers in the U.S., however, is very low even though farming requires very hard work and long hours. Allen and Melcarek (2009) claim:

For the past two decades, the wages of farmworkers have declined; average wages paid to workers on crop farms declined 10 % (from \$ 6.89 to \$ 6.18) between 1989 and 1998. The average salary a farmworker can expect to earn lies between \$7,500 and \$10,000 per year -- poverty level wages. Lack of overtime pay and seasonal employment exacerbates economic challenges. During peak harvest seasons, farmworkers in some states may still work 80 hours per week without overtime pay. However, during the off-season, the majority of farmworkers are unemployed or underemployed (Shreck et al., 2005) (p. 241).

Even if their aspirations and interest in agriculture grow, and they gain access to employment information, this factor alone would discourage young people in the U.S. from choosing a career in agriculture.

2-4. Summary

Leach and Zepke (2005) provide a clear understanding of the career decision-making process of young people in the U.S., because their study comprehensively examined the structure of the process young people go through in making their vocational choices, and the social factors which influence them in making this decision. This, in combination with the other literature sources here, can help us gain a very deep insight into the social factors, conditions, and phenomena, which influence young people in the U.S. regarding their decision whether to go into careers in agriculture or not.

The main findings from the literature are the following:

- Young people make their career choices in a structural process that is the result of the interconnectedness of a variety of social factors, which subsequently affect their decision-making process.
- Gender, family, education, and location are the primary factors which play a part in influencing young people in choosing their career paths and helping them decide whether to pursue agriculture or not.
- Because of the widespread availability of the Internet, young people in the U.S have plenty of access to information about employment in the agricultural sector when making a job search.
- In the U.S., an increasing number of small farms have successfully developed and increased their markets with localization strategies, but, in general, wages in agriculture are low compared

to those in other industries.

After the above review of literature, I decided to add a further five questions (Questions 7-11: see Appendix A) to my questionnaire in order to gather data on the social factors influencing the motivation and challenges faced by young people in making career decisions regarding agriculture. The social factors examined in these questions include: financial considerations, agricultural experience, family background, geographic location, and institutional support. Rather than simply identifying young people's motivating factors and challenges, I expected that this would add a further dimension and level of discussion to my research. With knowledge from the literature review, I conducted research to identify the motivating factors and challenges for young adults in Brattleboro in choosing to go into organic agriculture as described in the next chapter.

3. Research Methodology

3-1. Choice of Research Methodology

Although there are several ways to conduct qualitative social research, individual in-depth interviews were chosen as the research methodology in this study to identify the factors motivating young adults in Brattleboro and influencing their choice of a career in organic agriculture. In terms of the advantage of in-depth interviews, Boyce and Neale (2006) stated:

The primary advantage of in-depth interviews is that they provide much more detailed information than what is available through other data collection methods, such as surveys. They also may provide a more relaxed atmosphere in which to collect information—people may feel more comfortable having a conversation with you about their program as opposed to filling out a survey (p. 3).

Thus, this research technique would not only allow me to get more detailed information about the motivating factors of these young adults, but also, by choosing a relaxed and safe environment for the interviews, the young interviewees would feel comfortable reflecting on and sharing information about their personal experiences, as well as their philosophy and opinions about organic agriculture.

3-2. Research Sample

The subjects of my research were a group of 17 young adults (9 female, 8 male), in the Brattleboro area, between the ages of 18 and 23. The sample size was determined as being the logistical maximum that one researcher can handle in the given time frame. Young adults who either live or work in the Brattleboro area, including the nearby towns of Putney and Dummerston, are considered to be qualified as interviewees for this study. Since many young

adults come to work in or move to Brattleboro from other places, the interviewees did not necessarily grow up in the Brattleboro area. The age range of the interviewees was set at between 18 and 23, given that this is the time in life when a young person might be expected to decide on a career field. Furthermore, if a young adult has already worked in a particular career longer than five years after graduating High School, this alone could be reason enough not to proactively choose or be interested in a career in agriculture.

In order to achieve my goal of finding 17 young adults to interview, I visited the University of Vermont (UVM) Extension that offers classes in Agriculture at Brattleboro Union High School (BUHS), the Community College of Vermont (CCV) in Brattleboro, and the Putney School. I also visited local organic farms in the Brattleboro area, such as Walker Farm and Lilac Ridge Farm in search of interviewees. In addition to this, I visited local food co-operatives in Brattleboro and Putney, as well as the Farmers' Market in Brattleboro to find participants to interview. In the meantime, I had been contacting my local friends in Brattleboro to ask them to help identify appropriate interviewees.

3-3. Data Collection

To gather data for my inquiry, I prepared a list of questions (See Appendix A: Interview Questions), which were open-ended. This would enable the interviewees to respond in their own words and, thus, better help me to identify the possible motivating factors and challenges they perceived regarding the choice of organic agriculture as a vocation.

The interview questions were organized in the following way. The first two interview questions asked about demographic data: their full name and age, and how long they had been in the Brattleboro area. The third and fourth interview questions examined their general perceptions about organic agriculture and non-organic agriculture. Questions five and six sought to identify

their motivation and psychological hurdles about starting work in organic agriculture. Finally, questions seven to eleven examined various social factors (financial considerations, agricultural experience, family background, geographic location, and institutional support) that would influence their decision about choosing a career in organic agriculture.

All interviews were conducted in person. The interviews took place in a variety of locations: their work place, their home, or a public area, such as a school or a coffee shop in the town of Brattleboro. The interviewees all voluntarily agreed to be interviewed. All interviews were tape-recorded with permission. At the beginning of each interview, I would introduce myself and state the purpose of the research. As I asked each question, I made notes on the main point of their answer.

3-4. Limitations

There were three limitations to consider in conducting this research. Firstly, as I have already stated in my literature review, the gender of the interviewees could affect their motivation about working in organic agriculture, so if all the people I interviewed had been of the same gender, I would have been prevented from sampling the voices of all young adults for my inquiry. To prevent this data bias based on gender difference, I interviewed a similar number of males and females.

Secondly, as has also already been stated, young people's motivation and perceived challenges about going into organic agriculture vary according to their previous agricultural experience and their familiarity with organic agriculture. If, for example, they are already engaged in, or are familiar with organic products in their job, the motivation and challenges they mention in their response are likely to be informed by their knowledge of organic agriculture and organic products. Thus, interviewing only young adults who have been engaged in organic

agriculture or, are already familiar with organic products, would not have allowed me to understand all aspects of their motivation and challenges. To overcome this validity issue, I chose to interview eight young adults who are not currently engaged in organic agriculture (including four who are not currently working with organic products), in addition to nine others who are already engaged in organic agriculture.

Finally, the fact that all of the young people identified for this study were found through contacts and organizations already connected with organic agriculture, would indicate that they may already have a positive attitude toward organic agriculture and therefore not be entirely objective in their perceptions of positive and negative factors of this career direction. This bias could therefore present a potential threat to the validity of the findings.

4. Presentation and Analysis of the Data

I collected the data from the interviews and separated the results into the following categories based on the interview questions: the young adults' general perception of organic agriculture, their motivation to start working in organic agriculture, and challenges that would hinder them from practicing organic agriculture. The data was categorized in each of these areas and quantified based on the number of times each factor was mentioned, showing the research results explicitly in graphs.

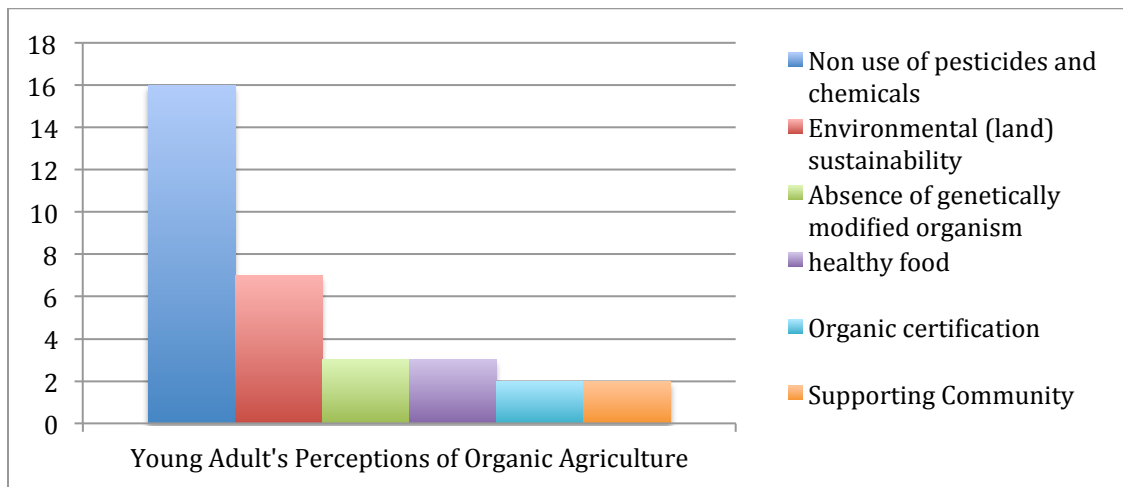
During the process of categorizing and quantifying the data, I examined the overall main points of the remarks made by the interviewees in the field-notes that I took during the interviews, especially for those questions about motivating factors and challenges for starting work in organic agriculture. I also listened to the recorded interviews for each question, in order to ensure I had not missed the main points of their remarks. After looking at the overall main points, I noticed some similar patterns in their remarks to be categorized and quantified. For example, in response to my question asking about challenges for starting in organic agriculture, if an interviewee stated that “money is very important for organic agriculture” and another stated, “organic agriculture is very expensive to practice”, that would indicate a financial hurdle to working in organic agriculture, and both would be categorized as the same hindrance, namely “money”, and each would be counted as one unit. Likewise, in response to my question asking about motivating factors, if an interviewee stated that “I like working outside” and another said, “organic agriculture realizes local living”, these would both be connected to lifestyle choices, so both would be categorized under “lifestyle” and, again, each counted as one unit.

The graphs were designed to show the following information: young peoples’ perception of organic agriculture in Table 1, motivating factors in Table 2, and perceived challenges in Table 3.

4-1 Young Adults’ Perception of Organic Agriculture

In order to identify and have a better understanding of the motivational factors and challenges for young adults in Brattleboro starting out in organic agriculture, the interview questions asked directly about the interviewees’ general perception of organic agriculture. This is because it would be very likely to have an impact on the motivating factors for choosing a career in organic agriculture. The results were as follows:

Table 1



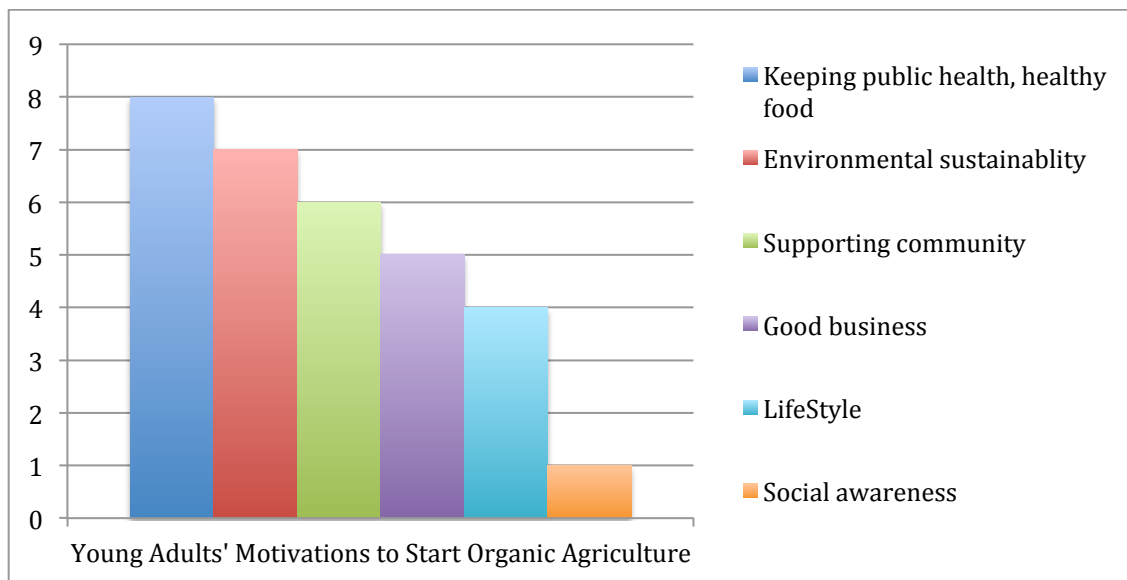
As can be clearly seen in Table 1 above, almost all of the interviewees used the words “non-use of pesticides and chemicals” to describe organic agriculture. Seven of them also understood that organic agricultural methods are more environmentally-friendly than conventional agriculture, and that organic agriculture is a way to produce healthy food, maintain

environmental sustainability, and support the community. In addition, two of the interviewees, who are already engaged in agriculture, stated that organic agriculture (organic produce) needed to be certified as organic by organic certification authorities. From their comments, I came to understand that the young adults I interviewed have a positive attitude towards and acceptance of organic agriculture, and they are not opposed to organic agricultural practices.

4-2. Motivational Factors for Young Adults in Brattleboro to Start Organic Agriculture

Once I had established these young adults' perception of organic agriculture, interview questions numbers five to eleven were designed to identify their motivation and challenges regarding choosing a career in organic agriculture. The results about motivational factors were as follows:

Table 2



In Table 2 the motivational factors identified by the interviewees range from maintaining the public's health, producing healthy food, promoting environmental sustainability, and supporting the community, to good business, lifestyle, and social awareness.

The most frequently mentioned motivational factor for these young adults about working in organic agriculture is keeping the public health by producing healthy food. Since almost all of these young adults defined organic agriculture as being free from pesticides, synthesized chemicals, or genetically modified organisms (GMOs) (See Table 1), the absence of these elements is a motivating factor for working in organic agriculture. Producing healthier foods in order to promote the public health is also a highly motivating consideration for working in this field.

This is illustrated in the following comments made by one of the interviewees who said, "Producing healthy food is one of the ways to approach self-reliance." Another said, " We have to deal with public health by producing organic food." From such comments, I learned that many of these interviewees are highly aware of the importance of having healthy food and promoting the public's health, and this is therefore one of the key motivations for moving into a career in organic agriculture.

The second most frequently mentioned motivating factor regarding organic agriculture is maintaining environmental sustainability. The interviewees are all very concerned about the environment, as demonstrated in their comments. One of interviewees said, "Organic agriculture is more sustainable than conventional agriculture." Another interviewee said, "One of the motivations for doing organic agriculture is fear of not having sustainability." Although only five interviewees took a class in Agriculture at school, most of them understand that organic

agriculture is environmentally friendly, and this motivates them to start working in organic agriculture.

The concept of supporting the community is another important motivating factor for going into organic agriculture. Even though eight of the interviewees do not have experience in organic agriculture, they still mentioned that organic agriculture helps to build the community. For instance, one of the interviewees with no previous agricultural experience said, “Organic agriculture helps to build community and community engagement.” In addition, according to the research, sixteen interviewees mentioned that they had participated in the Farmers’ Market or other events related to agriculture in the Brattleboro area. Although some of the participants had grown up in other places, their sense of belonging to the Brattleboro community is high.

Earning money is also an essential motivating factor for young adults considering starting a career in organic agriculture. Since some of the participants feel that organic agriculture is becoming more popular as a business, it stimulates their sense of entrepreneurship. For example, one of the interviewees said, “Organic agriculture, organic products are a good business, because people are interested in those kinds of stuff,” while another said, “ There is a large push to do organic agriculture in the current U.S.” Most people need to consider the value of a job and its financial rewards when they make a vocational choice, and now young adults are seeing that these rewards are available in organic agriculture.

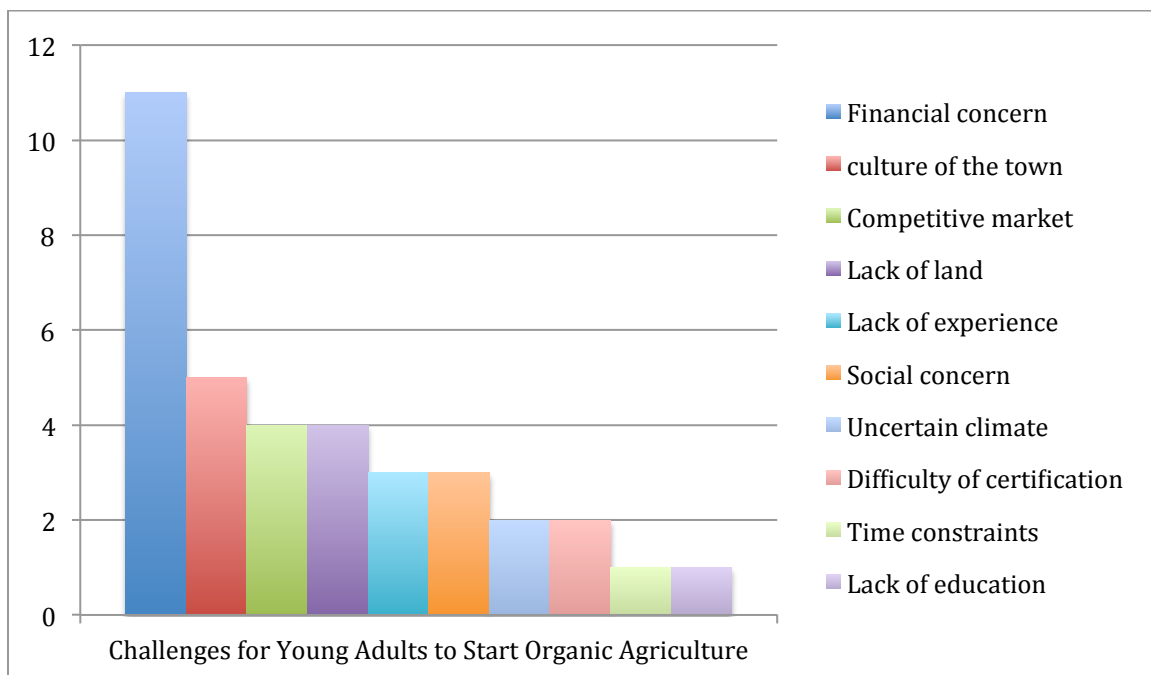
Beside the major motivating factors above, some of the young adults in this study also value the quality of their lifestyle and want to consider this as well when they make a career choice. Four of the interviewees stated that working in organic agriculture was one of the lifestyles that they desired. This is echoed by one of interviewees, “I like working outside and local living.” Furthermore, two other interviewees, who stated they value their lifestyle as a

motivation for starting work in organic agriculture, come from families already engaged in organic agriculture. In these cases, it seems that their social background influences their lifestyle preference and career decision.

4-3. Challenges for Young Adults in Brattleboro to Start Organic Agriculture

The following table examines challenges identified by the interviewees.

Table 3



The young adults’ perceived hurdles regarding starting out in organic agriculture vary much more widely compared to their perceived motivations. As can be seen in Table 3 above, the most frequently mentioned challenge for working in organic agriculture is the financial concern. Most of the participants are aware of the level of compensation in organic agriculture, since they are already adults who need to earn their own living. Those young adults, who already had agricultural experience, understood especially the financial difficulties of practicing organic agriculture. For instance, one of those interviewees said, “It is very important to get money in

order to keep it (organic agriculture) going.” Another interviewee said, “ It is very costly to invest money for equipment, land, and seeds.” However, although all the interviewees stated the importance of the financial factor in making their career choice, seven of them stated they could accept not making a lot of money while working in organic agriculture.

The second most frequently mentioned psychological hurdle is the culture of the town. Because the Brattleboro area has a unique culture, which promotes local agriculture and food security, five of the interviewees were concerned that they might not get support from the community or the understanding of the local people if they started up in organic agriculture in another area of the U.S. For this reason, one of the interviewees said, “Not all people might like them to do it.” Thus, people’s awareness about organic agriculture in other areas is a concern for the young adults.

Land availability for organic agriculture, and the competitive organic market in the Brattleboro area are further concerns for young adults in getting started in this field. Since the land available for organic agriculture is limited, the interviewees were anxious that they might not be able to find suitable land for starting up organic agriculture. In addition, since they recognize that organic agriculture is already flourishing in the U.S., they feel it might not be so easy to find a market for selling the organic vegetables that they produce.

One of the most intriguing findings of this research is that not many of the interviewees considered a lack of education and experience as a challenge to entering this field. As stated previously in the literature review, education and vocational training usually play an important role in influencing the career decision-making process of young people. Although half of the interviewees had not taken any agricultural classes, and a third of them had not had any previous agricultural experience, the lack of agricultural skills and knowledge do not appear to present a

barrier to them in practicing organic agriculture. However, those of them who are in the process of gaining experience in organic agriculture, have started to become more aware of the pressures and the challenging features of organic agriculture, such as the uncertain climate, the difficulty of getting organic certification, and the time and workload required by agricultural practice.

5. Conclusion

5-1. Summary of the Key Findings

The following conclusions can be drawn from my research about the motivation and challenges of young adults in Brattleboro to choose work in organic agriculture. Firstly, the main reasons they would consider a career in organic agriculture are related to their personal values and philosophy, such as protecting the public's health, maintaining environmental sustainability, and supporting the community, as well as the fact that organic agriculture is a growing industry. These values and attitudes would be influenced by their education, family background, sense of community, and their perception of organic agriculture. Most of the interviewees in this study perceive organic agriculture as “something good for health, the environment, and the community,” so that choosing a career in organic agriculture would fulfill their desire to put their values into practice. At the same time, they also recognize that not all people understand the positive impact of organic agriculture.

Secondly, the challenges they perceive in starting a career in organic agriculture are mainly related to their financial concerns, as they need to be sure they can make a decent living. Most of the interviewees are well aware of the financially challenging aspects of organic agriculture, such as low wages, the initial cost of equipment, the lack of community support in some areas, the difficulty of finding suitable land or markets, and time commitment required. Although some of the interviewees understood that they might not make a lot of money in organic agriculture, all of them expected to have some financial stability if they chose a career in organic agriculture.

Finally, when I started this research, I expected that agricultural education and experience, or lack of them, would be seen as the major motivating or challenging factors affecting these young adults' decision about a career in organic agriculture. However, after conducting the research, I found that young adults are willing to go into this field with or without related experience and education, and that these factors are not as influential as I had anticipated.

5-2. Practical applicability

There are a variety of different groups of people who could benefit from this study regarding young people in the Brattleboro area and the factors that would motivate them to choose a career in organic agriculture. Since this inquiry was initiated with the aim of increasing the numbers of young people involved in organic agriculture, it could be used to advise both individuals and organic farmers who wish to actively attract young adults to be engaged in this type of agriculture.

According to the findings of my research, young adults are most concerned about the possible financial instability of organic agriculture. Therefore, if organic farmers offered participatory workshops about organic agriculture at the local high schools and community colleges, including effective financial strategies for organic farming, this might help them recruit more young adults into this field. During my internship experience, for example, I discovered that many organic farms have their own strategies for improving their financial position and viability, such as by offering Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs, diversifying their crops, and applying for grants to support organic farms. Instead of simply telling students about organic agriculture, organic farmers could let the workshop participants know about a wide range of strategies practiced by organic farms in order to ensure their economic health. This

information could help eliminate those financial concerns the young adults may have about going into organic agriculture, and encourage those who are still on the fence to consider choosing organic agriculture as their career after graduation.

In the same way, this research could also be applied to help local organizations, such as CABA, Post Oil Solutions, and Transition Putney, and agricultural institutions in their development and program planning. For instance, organic farmers could collaborate to provide professional vocational training in organic agriculture, to young people who have graduated from high schools and are still looking for a permanent job. Such training programs could cover topics relevant to organic agriculture, including managing crops, budgeting, and marketing strategies. According to my findings, most young adults already understand the value of organic agriculture; therefore, providing them with the additional information about how to run an organic farm as a business could encourage them to consider more seriously a career path in organic farming. My hope is that getting more young people engaged in organic agriculture will help to revitalize in this important vocational field, in order to promote the health of the local population and provide better food security for the region.

5-3. Recommendation for further research

There are still many more issues to be explored in this area and open to further study. This particular research was conducted in the Brattleboro area and the data collected is based on young adults of the same racial group. Since young people's needs and opportunities would be likely to differ in other U.S. towns, interviewing young adults in other regions of the country, for example, young people from different racial groups in large U.S. cities, about their motivation to get engaged in organic agriculture and the challenges they perceive, would make an intriguing

comparison. Furthermore, since organic farming is not the only method of agriculture, the factors motivating young adults might be different for other types of agriculture. If further research were conducted in the same way for other types of agriculture, it would contribute to a better understanding of the whole picture of motivational factors of young adults in the U.S., and how these influence their decisions about whether to choose an agricultural career.

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7. Appendix

Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. What is your full name and age?
2. How long have you been in Brattleboro?
3. How do you describe organic agriculture?
4. How do you distinguish between organic agriculture and non-organic agriculture?
5. How do you describe the motivating factors (geographic, financial, institutional, or other type of factors) for you to start sustainable agriculture?
6. How do you describe the social challenges (geographic, financial, institutional, or other type of challenges) in the way of your starting organic agriculture as your long-term career?
7. How do you describe the importance of financial considerations for making career choices in organic farming? Please give a specific example.
8. Have you ever done organic agriculture before? If so, how did it affect you in choosing organic farming as your career?
9. Do any of your friends or your family members work in organic agriculture? If so, how did it affect your choice of organic farming as your career?
10. Have you ever attended the Farmers' Market, or some other events related to agriculture in Brattleboro? If so, how did it affect you in choosing organic farming as your career?
11. Have you ever attended agricultural classes, workshops, or vocational training in or out of your school? If so, how did it affect your choice of organic farming as your career?

Appendix B: Consent Form

Consent Form for

Participants in a Thesis Research in Social Factors That Impact on The Decision-making Process of Young Adults in Brattleboro to Start Organic Agriculture as Their Long-Term Career

From The School for International Training in Brattleboro, Vermont, USA

Description: You are invited to participate in a research project conducted by Tomokazu Utsugi; a student working toward his MA at The School For International Training. The research is an exploration of social factors that influence young adults in Brattleboro to start organic agriculture. Questions of general biographical information will be asked. The interviews will be recorded by audio-recorder or video. The information gathered from the interviews will be examined in order to better understand social factors that influence decision-making process of young adults in Brattleboro to start organic agriculture. All collected data will be provided for study and a subsequent capstone paper.

Risks and Benefits: I cannot guarantee or promise that you will receive any benefits from this study. Your name will not be used in any written material generated from interviews nor will actual name of others you mention in your interview be used unless they are already a public figure but your biographical information will be used.

Time Involvement: your participation in this project will consists of an individual oral interview ranging in length from 30-45 minutes. Also, time may required you to give follow-up information. In total, the time you spend for this study as an interviewee will take less than one hour.

Payments: You will not receive any cash or gift for your participation in this research project.

Subject's Rights: If you have read this form and decide to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue your participation at anytime without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer specific questions. If you agree to participate, your biographical information will be anonymously available for use in the Capstone paper of Tomokazu Utsugi.

I give consent for my general biographical information to be used in written material (use of this information will not include your actual name or the actual name of people you mention in your interview unless the person is already a public figure or the specific location of where you live now) Yes _____ No _____

I give consent for tapes and videos resulting from my interview to be used in full or excerpted format in the capstone of Tomokazu Utsugi. Yes _____ No _____

Additional requests and/ or stipulations from participants:

The extra copy of this consent form is for you to keep

Signature:

Date: