



## **Motivations, Reflexivity and Food Provisioning in Alternative Food Networks: Case Studies in Two Medium-sized Towns in the Netherlands**

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**Abstract.** Grow your own is emerging as a trendy urban activity. Becoming involved in ‘farming’ inside the city is framed in the media, on the Internet and in policy discourse as an emergent food movement. In this article we look at food provisioning practices inside cities and situate these in the literature on alternative food networks, responding to two of Treager’s main critiques. We use the concept of ‘food provisioning practices’ to overcome the critique of producer–consumer dichotomy since the concept treats people holistically as people undertaking activities. Rather than assuming that involvement in AFNs does or should represent a radical political act for any of its participants, we disentangle the multiple beliefs and motivations – including the most mundane – of the actors involved in two cases. We find that, because people are required to be actively involved in the production of their food, participants of both cases are neither only producers nor only consumers; they are both. The gardens show a ‘sliding scale of producership’. Our research also shows that, although reflexive motivations are present, many participants are unwilling to frame their involvement as political, nor do all participants see themselves as part of a movement. Hence, although personal choices may become political, we have to be careful not to ascribe attributes to participants that they themselves do not formulate. Moreover, we found that mundane motivations are important as well, and that political articulations do not predict actual involvement perfectly. This means therefore, unlike what Watts et al. argue, that reflexivity is not necessarily connected to the strength of the network.

### **Introduction**

Grow your own is emerging as a trendy urban activity (Corrigan, 2011).<sup>1</sup> Allotment garden associations have been around for decades, but recently the diversity of growing activities has expanded, including community gardens, city farms, and rooftop farms. Also, the market for balcony growing cushions, soil-filled window curtains

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and vermiculture compost boxes is booming.<sup>2</sup> Growing activities inside or at the fringe of cities are collected under the heading of 'urban agriculture'. However, it is not only the urban location that is implied with the current use of this term. On a symbolic level, practices of urban agriculture are thought to communicate strategies of 'doing things differently'.<sup>3</sup> In the media, on the Internet and in policy discourse, becoming involved in 'farming' inside the city is framed as an emergent food movement.<sup>4</sup>

In this article we look at urban food-growing practices and situate these within the debate on alternative food networks (AFNs). These practices function as a mirror to reflect on the nature of alternative food networks. It also helps us to respond to two of Tregear's (2011) main critiques on the AFN debate. Tregear found four deadlock arguments that cease to be productive in bringing this body of knowledge further. She argues that the AFN literature has an over-reliance on 'fuzzy concepts': key concepts are insufficiently clear and consistent. There is also a tendency to make assumptions about inherent qualities of AFNs, i.e. that local food is inherently healthier or safer. Third, there is insufficient acknowledgement of the problems of marketplace trading: buyer–seller interactions are surrounded by beneficial claims. Finally, there is a lack of consumer perspectives (Tregear, 2011). Besides these critiques Tregear notices that, although AFNs can be beneficial, they can also be problematic or adverse. There may be problems with how they interact with and impact on wider systems and economies, with how actors internal to AFNs relate to each other and, notably, with personal values and motivations of AFN actors; motivations to be involved in AFNs are not necessarily radically different from or in opposition to those associated with mainstream food systems (Tregear, 2011).

We closely studied two cases of food production within the city: a shared allotment garden and a 'harvest it yourself' garden. These cases have features similar to but also crucially different from the main body of AFNs thus far described, most notably the fact that the people that eat the food grown take part in growing it. Hence, we focus specifically on consumer perspectives, moving beyond the producer–consumer dichotomy. Moreover, we study people's motivations for being involved in 'urban agriculture', including the extent to which these are embedded in strategies of doing things differently. Our cases show that growing food within the city is not necessarily politically motivated and that political motivations do not always lead to actions.

## **Beyond the Producer–Consumer Dichotomy**

### *Alternative Food Networks*

To date the debate on alternative food production and consumption has focused largely on the market, where new producer–consumer relations are crafted and contested. Examples of AFNs are farmers' markets, box schemes and community-supported agriculture. Being mainly producer-oriented, a consistent criticism is that the consumer perspective has been largely neglected (Goodman and DuPuis, 2002; Winter, 2003; Holloway et al., 2007; Cox et al., 2008; Eden et al., 2008; Tregear, 2011). Even where work has been done on consumption, this often concerned 'the sign and "imaginaries" of marketing and advertising' and not on how products 'are bought and eaten' (Eden et al., 2008, pp. 1046). Indeed, the AFN literature assumes a separation between 'producer' and 'consumer', who are being reconnected in 'physical

and topological space through shorter supply chains' (Eden et al., 2008, pp. 1046). The market is assumed to be a necessary means for trading goods between producer and consumer (Tregear, 2011), so that 'food networks' cannot escape commodification (cf. Hinrichs, 2000). They operate within the rules of the market economy – not as an alternative but as a differentiation. This orientation on the producer requires the construct of 'consumer'; it presumes both a market where the producer offers their goods and an exchange value for which the consumer receives the goods.

Tregear identifies this dual construct of producer and consumer as a deadlock conceptualization:

'The term "consumer" has been applied to denote actors who are typically the recipients of outputs from food systems, as distinct from those invested occupationally in production... it may be argued that this term conveys a rather reductive view of such actors [and] in the future such actors should be researched more holistically as "people", in all their complexity, ambiguity and multiple social contexts' (2011, p. 9).

Thus, we need a different view on the producer–consumer dichotomy and a different orientation when studying food networks, also because of the constant evolution and increasing heterogeneity of AFNs. The number of networks where the distinction between consumer and producer is obscure or irrelevant is increasing, especially within cities. Therefore, rather than investigating market-based producer–consumer constructions, we follow Tregear (2011) and study people, their actions and their decisions with regard to food. We use the concept of 'food provisioning practices' as this includes all activities related to eating:

'Food provisioning is a construct that extends food choice research by examining the sociocultural and environmental context in which food consumption actually occurs... It includes a breadth of complex activities, including the acquisition, preparation, production, consumption and disposal of food, where technical skills (e.g. growing, shopping, meal planning, food preparation, cooking) and resources are tacitly coordinated by a primary food provider within the social context and demands of household members, as well as the broader environment in which they live' (McIntyre and Rondeau, 2011, pp. 117–118).

The concept of food provisioning practices enables us to overcome the producer–consumer dichotomy, as it does not confine people to either one of these categories but treats them holistically as people undertaking activities. Food growing is one such activity that people may undertake as part of their food provisioning practices. Hence, urban food-growing spaces such as neighbourhood gardens or allotments are places where the boundary between consumer and producer is vague and/or irrelevant – people can be both at the same time.

### *Food Growing within Cities*

Urban food growing is no new phenomenon (Pothukuchi and Kaufman, 1999; Berg et al., 2010), but for a long time productive gardens did not receive the positive attention they receive now. Until recently food production and cities were not seen as a fit spatially and mentally. Largely ignored in the industrialized West (Kortright and Wakefield, 2011), 'urban agriculture' was seen as a significant food provision-

ing activity in urban centres in the Global South (Mougeot, 2000), contributing to food security of poor households. However, while a significant activity inside these cities, it was not treated as such but rather as unsuitable for a city and was seen as the 'antithesis of modernisation' (Hampway et al., 2007, p. 557). Allotment gardens were tolerated rather than championed and neither their production aspect nor their share in food provisioning practices were taken seriously.

However, the value of food production inside cities is being reframed. 'Urban agriculture' symbolizes the mental shift towards a revaluation of the growing aspect of productive city gardens.<sup>5</sup> These include newer activities as bee- and chicken-keeping and balcony gardening, as well as the exchange, networking and learning around it. Hence, the term 'urban agriculture' signals activities 'that are somehow different from the mainstream' (Tregear, 2011, p. 5). This difference makes it worthwhile to study food-growing activities in cities as part of the debate on AFNs. However, keeping Tregear's critique in mind, we have to prevent reifying the inherent 'goodness' as well as the inherent 'politicalness' of this new trend in its reframing process.

The concept of 'urban agriculture' knows many definitions (Moustier and Danso, 2006; Thornton et al., 2010; Hodgson et al., 2011), with differences regarding the activities it entails, what is being produced, the place where the activities occur, who is involved, and whether the activities are public or not. Moreover, the word 'agriculture' may invoke connotations to farming or producers. Not only does this implicitly bring back the producer-consumer dichotomy, it does not resonate with how urban gardeners see themselves either. Apparently, 'urban agriculture' is the next 'fuzzy concept' at the horizon. For both reasons we do not use the term 'urban agriculture' but deconstruct it by looking more closely at what happens in urban food-growing spaces, exploring urban food growing as part of people's wider food-provisioning practices. By studying two food-growing initiatives and the food-provisioning practices present, we can better grasp different degrees of involvement in AFNs, thus bridging the gap between producer and consumer. Moreover, those instances where the consumer is to some extent producer as well have received little attention in the literature so far (Kortright and Wakefield, 2011).

### **Personal Values and Motivations of Urban Residents**

The second critical point of Tregear's (2011) review is the way in which the AFN literature deals with personal values and motivations of actors involved. Are these really 'radically different from, or in opposition to those associated with mainstream food systems' (Tregear, 2011, p. 423)? There is a tendency to see food production and consumption practices that can be marked 'alternative' as morally superior to 'unreflexive' practices, and as a critique of industrialized food (Guthman, 2003). If a higher morality is the assumption behind the label 'alternative', then studies are prone to be biased towards finding authenticity amongst its participants. Therefore the 'alternative' label has been questioned as problematic (Guthman, 2003; Holloway et al., 2007; Eden et al., 2008). Both consumers and producers have been prone to the critique that their practices are not necessarily representing a deeper morality beyond making a difference in the market. For instance, Hinrichs (2000) argues that farmers' markets do not challenge the commodification of food. Others have argued that the local branding of 'typical' or farm-direct products is better understood in terms of strategic niche marketing (Watts et al., 2005; Qazi and Selfa, 2005; Cox et al., 2008; Jarosz, 2008).

Instrumental economic versus more highly regarded reasons to participate can also be found in Watts et al.'s (2005) distinction between stronger and weaker forms of AFNs, which they base upon AFNs' engagement with and potential for subordination by conventional food chains. They argue that there are differences between alternative *food* networks and alternative food *networks*. In the former, the networks are 'weaker'; the use of labels to communicate the product's speciality – such as PDO (Protected Designation of Origin) or PGI (Protected Geographical Indication) designated products – is founded on the same logic of competing in markets as any other product of the food industry. Such foods then become vulnerable to subordination. Hence, Watts et al. argue that AFNs focusing on quality labelled food 'can be considered as niche market foods whose production does not challenge the current trend towards standardised and globalised food production' (2005, p. 30). Alternative food *networks* on the other hand, focus on the networks around food, minimizing their involvement with conventional food chains. They create alternative networks, either vertical or horizontal, in which trust plays an important role. This means that stronger alternatives can be built by revalorizing short food-supply chains. These are potentially alternative spatially (shorter distances and reaching food deserts), socially (traceability, personal interaction and community integration), and regarding their produce (a wider range, including little processed foods). Foremost, however, these networks operate outside the norms of capitalist evaluation since they may be run by people 'whose commitment goes beyond "making a living"' (Watts et al., 2005, p. 33).

The problem with identifying stronger and weaker alternatives is that this judgement, based on the importance of network relations over market relations, inscribes these 'stronger' networks with a high/higher morality for producers (Watts et al., 2005) and – although not mentioned in their article – their customers, on whose ability to see this deeper morality the network is founded. Tregear argues that such conceptualisation leads towards 'screening for authenticity' by researchers (2011, p. 6) and an 'either/or' situation where instrumental economic reasons and other reasons mutually exclude each other. The way out of this seems to reside in unpacking idealized ideas on what reflexivity is and the connection between reflexivity and political activism, which is often implicitly made. Reflexivity itself can degenerate into a fuzzy concept if not defined explicitly. DuPuis defines the reflexive consumer as someone who 'listens to and evaluates claims made by groups organized around a particular food issue, such as GE [genetically engineered] foods, and evaluates his or her own activities based on what he or she feels is the legitimacy of these claims' (2000, p. 289). Hence, the reflexive consumer is someone who thinks about what they buy and eat, making conscious decisions about their food behaviour. Or, in the words of Guthman, 'the reflexive consumer pays attention to how food is made' (2003, p. 46). Still, reflexivity itself may also involve 'false consciousness' – the tendency to be moved by advertisements or status purchases (DuPuis, 2000). Moreover, the fact that the reflexive consumer makes conscious choices does not mean that these are always the 'best' choices (e.g. most environmentally sound). Furthermore, the convention theory approach showed how different conventions can lead to trade-offs between green and more 'mundane' domestic conventions (Evans, 2011), indicating that reflexive behaviour is situation specific and contingent. Therefore, there are many things that the reflexive consumer is not: he or she is not necessarily a social activist, nor necessarily committed to a particular point of view or ascribing to the ideologies of social movements around food (DuPuis, 2000). This means that

even though people may have reflexive thoughts about why they make certain decisions, if they do not link these to their own political goals we cannot assume that this reflexivity is political. As Starr argues 'the meaning people are making when they make shopping (or farming) decisions *might* be political' (2010, p. 480, emphasis added), but this needs to be asked. Hence, rather than assuming that involvement in AFNs is or should represent a political act (Tregear, 2011) for any of its participants, we need to carefully disentangle the multiple beliefs and motivations of the actors involved - including the most mundane.

## Methods

We used case studies to look at the motivations of people involved in urban food growing and the extent to which these can be considered political. Cases were selected by scoring a range of little-studied Dutch urban food-growing initiatives on several characteristics (i.e. participation, ownership). We selected two cases with divergent characteristics: Witte Vlieg and Bioakker. Witte Vlieg is a group of eight people who farm a plot of 2,300 m<sup>2</sup> together. Each individual works one morning per week on the plot; the produce is shared amongst each other. Bioakker is run by an entrepreneur, farming a plot of 6,000 m<sup>2</sup>. Members harvest the vegetables themselves and pay for them on the Internet.

Several research methods were used to study the two cases. By combining their results, findings could be compared and tested, thus becoming more valid. Participant observations were used to understand the dynamics of the gardens and to get to know participants. From November 2010 until December 2011 both gardens were visited regularly. One of the authors spent 10 mornings working with the gardeners of Witte Vlieg. In addition she participated in the three social activities organized during the fieldwork time. Bioakker was visited seven times. Reports were made of all individual visits. Participant observation was supplemented by a questionnaire (Bioakker) and semi-structured interviews (both cases). The questionnaire was used to shed more light on the motivations of people involved in the garden and their harvesting behaviour. The semi-structured interviews made it possible to delve deeper into the findings and to unravel the various different motivations for being involved.

The members of Bioakker (144 in total)<sup>6</sup> received an email with a link to an online questionnaire, preceded by an announcement of the entrepreneur. Sixty-one participants filled out the questionnaire (42%). Respondents were asked whether they could be approached for further research; 12 of those who answered positively were interviewed. However, as the entrepreneur felt that this sample did not include enough members who harvest little, he suggested two other respondents. One of these agreed, leading to a total of 14 interviews, including the entrepreneur. Eight current and two former participants of Witte Vlieg were interviewed, again including the initiator of the garden. All interviews<sup>7</sup> were recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions were analysed in an iterative process, reading back and forth through the material. Field-visit reports and additional documents (leaflets, websites, and emails) were screened for information about motivations and critical understandings of the industrialized food system. Table 1 gives an overview of some characteristics of the cases and the methods used to study them.

**Table 1.** Characteristics of the cases.

Characteristic	Witte Vlieg	Bioakker
City	Assen ( $\pm$ 65.000 inhabitants)	Zutphen ( $\pm$ 47.000 inhabitants)
Size (m <sup>2</sup> )	2,300	6,000
Amount of members	$\pm$ 8	$\pm$ 144
Starting year	1995	2009
Farming style	Organic, manual work	Organic, vegan
Organizational system	Members pay €20 to €35 annually and agree to work in the garden one morning a week. Harvest is shared.	People become a member by paying €100. They subtract the value of their harvest from their 'account'.
Important values	Sharing of work and labour, anyone can join	Organic food for all, responsibility, trust
Questionnaire	–	61 respondents
Semi-structured interviews	8 current and 2 former participants (including initiator)	13 current participants

### Witte Vlieg: Food Growing as Provisioning Activity

Witte Vlieg is a group of eight people who garden a plot of 2,300 m<sup>2</sup> together, situated on an allotment complex in the city of Assen. The garden started in 1995; only the initiator, Gary,<sup>8</sup> has been part of the group since the beginning. He started the garden based on anarchist principles. In those days he was associated with a 'leftist anarchist squatting community' (personal communication).<sup>9</sup> The garden was to be a production site for people on a minimum income only, like himself. Working according to 'cooperative principles', such as voluntary membership and democratic management, was the most important feature of the garden at the time – organic production methods fitted this ideology. The garden had, however, never a big appeal to people with low incomes. Therefore, soon after the start, any new member who wanted to participate could join. Nowadays people on a minimum income are hardly represented and the garden no longer targets a specific group.

For all current participants growing food is one of the weekly activities in their wider pattern of food-provisioning practices. Participants have the (informal) obligation to work in the garden either Tuesday or Saturday mornings. People stick to the schedule and only stay away occasionally, after notifying Gary, who is informally in charge. This means that acquiring their weekly supply of vegetables costs each of them half a day's time and labour – apart from the activity of shopping for additional products elsewhere. Hence, the people producing the vegetables are also the ones consuming them. With the exception of one participant, who joined the garden to meet others in an informal setting, all participants and their families eat three to five meals a week from one morning's work. Clearly, it is impossible to distinguish between producers and consumers in this case.

Gardening at Witte Vlieg is organic and almost all the work is done by hand. In theory, most participants are responsible for one of the six vegetable beds, although in practice this responsibility is little felt or acted upon. Each gardening morning the garden is evaluated, mainly by Gary. He decides what work is required and assigns tasks accordingly. Harvesting is done collectively at the end of the morning; harvested produce is laid out in heaps around an improvised coffee space. The vegetables are divided equally amongst those present, according to taste. There is no system to keep track of who takes what. People take what they like and need for

a few meals. In times of abundance people harvest more; vegetables are frozen for winter or given away.

The garden shows minimal relation to market logic. In its starting phase there was a detailed registration system for hours worked and harvest taken, but this is no longer needed. Participants pay a small annual fee to cover expenses such as seeds and tools, which is kept as low as possible. A few times per year small plants and vegetables are sold at local markets. Sometimes vegetables are sold – a local household receives a weekly food box – but excess harvest is given to a food bank as well. In some years expenses exceed income, which is registered as a loan from Gary. Currently the garden is in debt because in the last season some larger investments had to be made while income was low due to limited opportunities to sell on markets. Therefore the gardeners decided to raise the annual contribution and participants are free to give a €50 loan to the garden so that Gary is not the only one responsible. Interestingly, it was the participants themselves who brought this up; they felt uncomfortable with the situation.

### *Participants' Motivations*

There are a few reasons why participants joined Witte Vlieg. First of all, the social component of this garden is vital (see Table 2). For all participants it is important that the gardening is carried out collectively. It is about gardening together, meeting others and relating to people from various backgrounds. Working together is more fun, and easier – work is continued when one is away and to some it is a solution for their limited knowledge about gardening. Also, most respondents mentioned that because the group is a mix of characters, the group itself is interesting as well. Second, participants like the activity of gardening. Interviews show that the garden is foremost a hobby; people like gardening as a leisure-time activity.

There are several things to be said about whether or not the motivations of the participants can be seen as reflexive. We defined reflexivity as making conscious decisions about food behaviour. There are three signs of reflexivity in the explanations people gave in the interviews. First of all, although the garden is clearly a hobby, it does fit a lifestyle in which ideas and concerns about the environment and sustainability are important. People gave evidence of environmental awareness; almost all respondents mentioned aspects of environmentally conscious behaviour, such as recycling waste or cycling.

**Table 2.** Why did you join the garden?

I like to work in a group	9
– More fun/social contacts	9
– Easier	4
I like the food	6
– Organic	5
– Healthy	1
I like gardening	4
I like eating food I grew myself	3
I like making an effort for my food	2
Gives me something useful to do	1

*Notes:* n=9; more than one answer possible.

'I have a car, of course, and I live in a house, and when I am out of petrol I go to the petrol station, but I would really like to have an electric car... I want to act decently in many aspects of my life. Keep the earth as it is... In my work, you know, paper with paper, plastic with plastic... They are little things, but...' (WV4).

'I try to do things for the environment, use the car as little as possible, everything by bike, separating my waste. And well, the energy here, we don't heat our house very much. Those are the things we do' (WV2).

The social activities that are organized occasionally reveal an orientation towards an environmentally conscious lifestyle too. For instance, members went away for the weekend to prune trees in the garden of a befriended activist leading an 'environmental information centre'. During another excursion organic farmers with close producer-consumer linkages were visited. The second point of reflexivity is that the organic produce coming from the garden is an important reason for people to join the initiative. The garden is situated in the corner of a traditional allotment complex where people have individual plots and where spraying and other conventional methods are allowed and indeed regarded as normal. (Organic production and consumption has been a small niche in the Netherlands until its recent rapid market increase; in 2010 organics accounted for only 1.7% of total sales; Ministerie van Economische Zaken, Landbouw en Innovatie, 2011.) Hence, organic gardening principles signal beliefs that divert from mainstream gardening and agriculture. Many of the participants – though not all – buy organic products in the shops as well.

'We have been going to the organic shop since I was twenty. So yes, that's our lifestyle I think, well, it has always been' (WV1).

'We started to buy more organics. That is because Albert Heijn [major supermarket] has many green brands now and it has just gotten more reasonable priced... We eat only a little meat, because we want it organic' (WV7).

Third, there is reflexivity about where food comes from and the environmental consequences of this. Participants showed a particular reluctance to buy products that are flown in from afar, relating this to the concept of food miles and seasonality.

'I have to say that I have stricter principles than my wife. I have the tendency to, well, when I see that the beans are from Ethiopia, then I think what nonsense, we won't buy them' (WV5).

'Yes, I think that vegetables determine [the meal] more because they depend on the season. I really think that, I feel that one should eat with the seasons. So that is what determines my meal... Beans from Egypt and so on, I don't think that's such a good idea' (WV8).

Hence, the participants grow food for a combination of reasons: some more mundane and personal, such as hobby and leisure time, some stemming from an environmental awareness that is expressed in activities to reduce one's own impact on the world. The question is whether these personal actions towards a reduced impact are also part of political 'acts of resistance' against the industrial food system, as Cox et al. (2008) found in their study. Political discussions were not part of the working days and problems in the food system were not debated generally; even when visiting organic farms these issues did not come up. Moreover, although peo-

ple spoke negatively and worriedly about the industrial food system when asked in interviews, they were reluctant to state that they are part of any countermovement:

'It is just a little against the current... I do not think like a movement, you know, but I think it is good to make the point'

'You do not see it as a movement?'

'No. No, I do not feel that' (WV5).

The participants of Witte Vlieg joined the garden because it fits their beliefs about what is a good thing to do. Motivations are part of reflexive lifestyles but also firmly rooted in searching social and leisure time. This is interesting particularly since the garden started from anarchist principles. According to Gary, and one of the participants who used to be a member of the anarchist community, those principles are still valid:

'It is still something that fits my anarchist ideas. By the way, I do not consider Witte Vlieg a pure anarchist project, just something that, as a supporter of anarchism, it is just logical that you would join' (WV5).

However, when asked in private, the other gardeners involved do not subscribe to or recognize these principles, nor are these ideas debated at all during working days. It is interesting to see that despite its anarchist starting principles, both individual political motivations and collective political identities are hardly articulated in this garden.

### **Bioakker: Food Harvesting as Provisioning Activity**

Bioakker is an organic 'harvest it yourself' garden of 6,000 m<sup>2</sup> in Zutphen. The garden is run by John, an entrepreneur. John does not live on a farm in the traditional sense of the word; he is an urban resident farming three plots in Zutphen and nearby towns, of which Bioakker is one. John uses the other plots to produce organic vegetables that he sells on the local market twice a week. One of John's main goals is to make organic vegetables available and affordable to everyone. The garden's vegetables are therefore relatively cheap – at approximately half the price that John sells them for on the market. Bioakker is organic and vegan: John does not use any manure on his lands. He feels that plant seeds contain everything a plant needs and that using manure is inefficient as cows take the most valuable parts from the plants they eat. Moreover, manure contains antibiotics and bacteria that are not good for people's health, and he feels that keeping cattle goes against animal welfare and nature itself. Manure is therefore 'one of the most traditional fairy tales from the history of agriculture' (personal communication).

There is a certain market logic to Bioakker. People become a member of the garden by paying an initial amount of €100. They can then harvest anytime they want and choose from whatever is being grown. Members pay for their harvest by subtracting the value of what they have taken from their initial payment. Product prices are published on the website. Leftovers of the market are also sold at the garden, but then members determine their own price. Nevertheless, Bioakker is far from a 'normal' market initiative. First of all, there is no control over whether members pay for everything harvested; the system relies heavily on trust. Second, Bioakker is not a general market initiative for John either. Although it is part of how he makes his living, it is not merely a strategy to market his produce. John is led by strong ideal-

istic motivations, wanting to give everyone, also those with limited resources, the opportunity to eat organically. He even gave some people a free membership; they can harvest produce without paying for it.

Members of Bioakker are invited to help with the work in the garden, on a voluntary basis. Most members do not volunteer, or do so in very limited way (see Table 3). This implies that the consumers of the food grown at Bioakker are not the same people as the producers of that food, as was the case at Witte Vlieg. John is the main producer, as he is responsible for all the work in the garden; he plans the vegetables to be grown, plants, weeds and waters. He organizes social activities and is the contact person when someone else wants to organize an event. He sends emails to all members about what is ready to be harvested and is available for questions. Finally, the fact that members pay him for the vegetables they harvest enhances his producer status, even if the payments are made out of sight (on the Internet). This does not mean that there is a producer–consumer distinction in the traditional sense of the word. Although members do not maintain the garden, they are engaged in food production; they harvest the vegetables themselves. Harvesting involves making an effort as it requires visiting the garden, looking for the vegetables, deciding what is good to harvest, digging the soil or picking the produce from plants, maybe getting dirty if it has been raining. Making people harvest their own produce is a conscious strategy of John’s; he aims not only to make organic food available, but also to encourage people to take responsibility.

Bioakker plays various roles and has different degrees of importance in people’s food-provisioning practices. There are large differences between people regarding the number of times they harvest (see Table 4) and thus the amount of vegetables they eat from the garden. Most members also get vegetables from John’s market stall, in organic shops or from the supermarket. Hence, the degree to which Bioakker is part of people’s food provisioning strategies differs between members.

*Participants’ Motivations*

We found that there are roughly two to three reasons why people decided to join Bioakker (see Table 5). The first is that they enjoy the vegetables; people feel that

**Table 3.** Different volunteering behaviour.

Amount of times people volunteer	Respondents in questionnaire (%)
Several times a month	3%
Once a month	5%
Occasionally	30%
Never	60%

*Note:* n=61.

**Table 4.** Different harvesting behaviour.

Amount of times people harvest	Respondents in questionnaire (%)
Once a week or more	47%
Two to three times a month	23%
Once a month	11%
Less than once a month or never	18%

*Notes:* n=61; important to mention here is that according to John, there are far more people that do not harvest regularly than our figures show. It is possible that this is due to people harvesting less not filling out our questionnaire.

**Table 5.** Why did you join Bioakker?

Organic food is better for the environment	38
I like the initiative	36
It is nice to harvest one's own food	25
I want to support a sustainable project	22
The food is cheaper than in the supermarket	15
The products are more healthy	14
Other reasons	29

Notes: n=61; more than one answer possible; answers suggested; other reasons include, amongst others, good way to show children about food growing; nice to help in the garden; gain knowledge on gardening; garden offers different products than supermarket.

organic food is better for the environment (38 respondents) and more healthy (14 respondents), and that the food is cheaper (15 respondents). The second reason for people to join is that they 'like the initiative' (36 respondents) and they 'want to support a sustainable project' (22 respondents). Respondents feel sympathy towards the project and want to contribute to it. They like John, appreciate his courage and ideals, and want to support him in making the project work:

'He told me about the initiative. He also organized an information evening, and I thought that was so nice. Especially the fact that he was going to do that with so much faith, and the whole system is so much based on trust. You can just go there, take what you want, weigh it at home and pay over the Internet. I think that's special, that someone has the courage to do this with so much faith. So that was the most important reason, that I like him and I thought, that's really nice' (BA4).

A third reason for people to become a member is that they like harvesting; the hobby aspect is important here too. The next question is what these motivations reveal about the extent to which members' motivations can be seen as reflexive, as conscious decisions about food behaviour. We recognize similar signs of reflexivity as in Witte Vlieg. First, although the garden is also a hobby, being a member fits a particular lifestyle. A certain commitment to sustainability can be recognized; people use a bicycle, recycle waste and try to save energy.

'I have always been somewhat environmentally conscious. When I was 21, I was ringing doorbells with leaflets on environmentally conscious house-keeping. I was a member of Milieudefensie [Friends of the Earth Netherlands]' (BA5).

'We do not use the car that much. We don't do that. We do many things by bicycle, to the annoyance of our children because sometimes they say "mum, do we have to take the bike again?" Yes, you have to... Furthermore, I use organic cleaning agents as much as possible. All the time, actually' (BA9).

Second, an important reason for people to become a member is because the food is organic. All respondents buy organic food products, either at the market (at John's and other stalls) or in the supermarket or health shop. As we stated before, buying organic signals beliefs that divert from mainstream gardening and agriculture.<sup>10</sup> Some respondents find it also important that John doesn't use animal manure.

'I think the way he practices agriculture is very special and I can learn a lot from it. Because he doesn't use any manure and he says give to the earth and take from the earth. You know, what is left we dig it under and that just results in good things. I think that is very inspiring' (BA2).

A third testimony of reflexivity is people's concern with where the food they buy comes from. They are conscious about food miles, prefer to eat local and seasonal food and are well informed about the trade-offs in certain aspects of sustainability.

'You eat what is there and you do not think I want Egyptian beans today and so I go to the shop and look for Egyptian beans. And they are from Egypt and they take longer and they have a different... No. You eat what the season gives you, which in fact, that's how nature meant it to be. Those are the things that are good at that moment' (BA2).

'I think it is just insane when something is grown here, that I would buy it from North Groningen [part of the Netherlands]. Then I think that makes no sense. Or you hear that cattle go from here to Spain and are being slaughtered there... So I think it is important that people are a bit more conscious about what they are doing with the earth, with the environment, I think it is important to think about that together and to be a bit conscious about that. What kind of mess are you making of the earth? Can my grandchild also enjoy the earth in thirty years' time?' (BA4).

Hence, being involved in food growing by harvesting food is done for mundane and personal reasons, on the one hand, and environmental awareness, on the other. The respondents have negative feelings about the conventional food system and try to make a contribution to 'a better world'.

'It is something that I can do, in my own little circle. There is a lot in the world that I think could be better, but I do not have control over that. This I do control, in some way' (BA1).

'I think that by your own behaviour, by what you do, by your own acts, that's where it starts. So you can also be an example, or make a statement. In the past I may have pointed the finger and this and that and you have to this and that. Now I feel okay, I am just doing positive things myself, with my own behaviour. I can speak about it enthusiastically and then people have to make their own choices' (BA6).

Participants are thus making individual decisions to support 'a good cause'. For part of the participants, however, supporting a good cause is similar to donating money to NGOs; taking part in Bioakker is for some members not connected to going to the garden to harvest. These members feel that they are doing something good by supporting the garden financially, but do not translate this into their food-provisioning practices. Many of them know John personally and want to support him in his ideals. Although that sounds promising, this is actually problematic as it undermines the idea of the garden. John has to make sure that there is always enough produce to be harvested; when people do not harvest regularly, the vegetables waste in the field. John can partly overcome this problem by selling at the market, but members that do not use their payment also leave him in debt with them. Members are not always aware of this problem. Consider the answer from the interviewee who did not harvest regularly when asked whether she felt part of a countermovement:

'I rather feel that I support John, because he is an idealist and gets things done' (BA13).

An informal conversation with another member who did not participate in the harvest showed the same reasoning. He felt that he had contributed his share – financially. However, as Bioakker is not a charity but a garden that requires people to be actively engaged in the production of their food, it is not enough. The garden only functions if people take their contribution further and make the effort to harvest; the system only works if people treat it as the non-conventional system it is:

'You can be nice and sweet to your clients, to people that are positive towards you, but in the end this can cost you your business. John should make that clearer to the members. For me it's not a problem if he would say "you have to spend your €100 within a year, if you can't, you lose it" ... He should encourage people to harvest more, you know, I have to go harvesting or I lose my money. This way he cannot keep it up' (BA6).

Interestingly, this failure to commit to the harvesting system seems to be connected to the hobby aspect we mentioned earlier. We found that 38% of all questionnaire respondents like harvesting, while only 17% of the people that 'know John very well' like harvesting. Many people in this last group do not harvest regularly. Hence, there is a group of people that became a member because they know John, but as they do not like harvesting they find it hard to live up to their membership.

Like John, some members are involved in the local exchange trading system or the local transition towns division. These can be seen as expressions of social movements supporting an alternative lifestyle. Although not necessarily involving food, the initiatives claim to build or be involved in an alternative economy or society, referring to particular alternative ideologies such as local resilience. However, while there is a small group of participants that know each other through these networks, Bioakker itself hardly mobilizes people beyond vegetables. Harvesting does usually not result in meeting others and no meetings are organized to discuss or run the garden.

## Discussion and Conclusions

### *Beyond the Producer–Consumer Dichotomy*

Participants of both cases are required to be (more or less) actively involved in the production of their food. They are therefore neither only producers nor only consumers; they are both at the same time. Even in the case of Bioakker, where an entrepreneur runs the garden, he can be seen as facilitator rather than as sole producer of the garden. It is therefore not useful to draw a clear cut between producers and consumers, rather, there seems to be a 'sliding scale of producership'. We saw that participants of Witte Vlieg are more involved in food production than members of Bioakker. Even in the latter case, however, people have variant producing roles: some members harvest regularly and help out as volunteers, others harvest occasionally and are not involved in other ways. In that sense Bioakker is similar to a CSA farm, where the person picking up their weekly food basket is involved differently than someone who spends two mornings a week packing boxes. Hence, the debate in the AFN literature on producer or consumer bias needs to move beyond these catego-

ries, as 'producer' and 'consumer' are no straightforward terms in any case. Furthermore, these categories link to concepts such as 'market' and 'economic exchange', whereas much of the AFN literature is about aspects beyond the instrumental economic logic of buying and selling. Implicitly, the categories of 'producer' and 'consumer' lock us into this economic logic, indicating that judgments of 'good' and 'better' involve everything beyond pure economic instrumentality (beyond making a living, as argued by Watts et al., 2005). Witte Vlieg showed that the economic logic is not necessarily present in food growing. There is an economic system around Bioakker, but this does not relate to why some people harvest and others do not.

With current developments of citizens organizing themselves in solidarity purchasing groups all over Europe, the term food provisioning can be used to analyse the meaning of the various activities that these networks undertake and that are not making sense from the producer–consumer dichotomy point of view. For the future, it would be useful to study different ways of food provisioning, with which we have made a start in this article. Using and further elaborating on the concept of food provisioning is a useful starting point to tackle Tregear's critique on the producer–consumer dichotomy in the AFN literature.

### *Participants' Motivations*

A second point that Tregear (2011) recognized as being problematic in the AFN literature is the limited knowledge about personal values and motivations of the people involved in AFNs. This includes knowledge about the extent to which these motivations are embedded in strategies of doing things differently, in reference both to ideas on political consumerism (Micheletti, 2003; Sefang, 2006) and to food movements (Hassanein, 2003; Johnston et al., 2009). Our research shows that reflexive motivations – mainly environmental – are indeed present. Respondents are involved in the gardens as part of a wider set of choices to contribute to a 'better world'. The gardens fit their belief systems of what is right to do, and in that sense being involved in it is a moral choice. However, this involvement can be seen as a private activity. Considering this, being part of the garden is no political statement, it is a personal decision to make a small change. Such decisions can be seen as 'everyday acts of resistance', as described in the anarchist literature. Conscious differentiation towards what is seen as 'mainstream' is integrated in everyday life, thereby changing society (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006; Gordon, 2007). Even though this may seem to fit easily with theories on political consumerism, where personal choices become political, we have to be careful not to ascribe attributes to participants that they themselves do not formulate. We found that participants are not willing or at least very reluctant to frame their practices as political. Similarly, people were reluctant to frame their behaviour in terms of 'a countermovement'. There is a difference between the two gardens in this respect, however. Respondents of Witte Vlieg did not recognize themselves as part of a countermovement at all; at Bioakker the situation is more diverse as part of the participants were involved in alternative economy movements. However, while environmental reflexivity was articulated more strongly in political terms at Bioakker, members did not always manage to act upon their concerns.

This brings us to our next point: besides our conclusion that reflexive motivations are present – but that only a small number of participants frames these *politically* – the cases also reveal that being motivated to contribute to 'a better world' is not enough to be actively involved in the gardens. Hence, people's motivations are not

only and consistently about doing things differently. We found that in both cases simply enjoying gardening – or harvesting – is an important condition for successful involvement. For the participants of Witte Vlieg the pleasure of gardening is the most important reason to be involved. Also, members of Bioakker who did not enjoy harvesting had more difficulty visiting the garden regularly than members who did enjoy it. We conclude, therefore, that there are various motivations present at the same time, which are difficult to disentangle, and that political articulation is not necessarily connected to the success of an initiative. People may be politically motivated but not act upon it. People may join an initiative for hobby reasons with little reflexive thoughts. Practical motivations play a role too. Is there enough time to cycle to the garden? Will it rain today? (On the competing demands of day-to-day living, see Evans, 2011.) This is something that needs further study. What is clear is that motivations are complex, and that they need careful unpacking in order to fully understand them.

As public attention for ‘urban agriculture’ is rising, it is useful to deconstruct the initiatives of growing food in the city, in order to understand what these new phenomena are about. In contrast to most AFN cases so far, the initiatives of growing food in cities often have a different involvement with the market economy compared to farmers’ markets or other short supply chains. Since our entire society seems to be entrenched in the market economy nowadays, the absence of the market logic in these initiatives leads to perceptions of such spaces being (politically motivated) alternatives. But again, caution is needed. Witte Vlieg is being maintained by all participants equally without the use of a payment system, and the food producing commitment of the participants is strong – much stronger than that of the participants of Bioakker. However, in the way it is framed by some participants, Bioakker is more clearly a form of resistance. Respondents framed their involvement more strongly as acts of everyday resistance than participants of Witte Vlieg, and John is more overt in his statements than Gary. This means that while producers and consumers are being criticized about not necessarily representing a deeper morality, the opposite is also true: those that do represent this deeper morality do not always get to the action (of harvesting in this case), even when their reasons to be involved (in Bioakker) are articulated politically.

Less market involvement resonates with the findings of Watts et al. (2005) on food networks. We argue, however, that the ‘network’ is much more pragmatic than suggested by their analysis. Watts et al.’s distinction in weak and strong AFNs suggests that strong networks are in some way more reflexive, because they resist incorporation into the conventional food system. This is not in line with our findings; reflexivity is only one of the reasons for people to be involved, and may be stronger for some participants than for others. We explained that people have more mundane reasons to join these gardens as well, which is in fact an important driver behind these networks. Hence, even when reflexivity is present, political articulation of these reflexive motivations is not straightforward nor necessarily connected to the strength of the network. Therefore, we should be careful with the analytical category of ‘political consumer’.

Incorporating urban food-growing initiatives within the AFN literature broadens our vision on AFNs and what they are. The presented initiatives bridge the gap between producer and consumer and give more insights in participants’ motivations. That way we can make a start with tackling Tregear’s deadlock arguments, taking the literature further.

## Notes

1. See <<http://farmingthecity.net>>, <<http://cityfarmer.org>> and similar websites.
2. <[http://realtimes.com/rtpages/20110805\\_rooftop.htm](http://realtimes.com/rtpages/20110805_rooftop.htm)>, <[http://www3.telus.net/public/a6a47567/roofgarden\\_thesis.pdf](http://www3.telus.net/public/a6a47567/roofgarden_thesis.pdf)>.
3. In June 2011, *VNGMagazine* (a magazine for Dutch municipalities) writes: 'Eetbaar Rotterdam, Food and the City, Foodscape Schilderswijk: new-style allotment garden conquers the city using funky names. "Stadslandbouw", or urban agriculture because the mania started in the US, is not only seen as an alternative for "green to watch", but also as a way to counter the alienation from food, for social cohesion and many other things', <<http://www.vngmagazine.nl/archief/2576/stadslandbouw-nieuwe-rage-waait-over-uit-verenigde-staten>>. In August 2011, *Binnenlandsbestuur* (Internal Affairs) writes: 'A harvest-your-own garden in the urban park, allotments in the public gardens. More and more municipalities make space for "urban agriculture", the production of vegetables and fruit in allotments, parks and backyards for consumption by inhabitants', <<http://www.binnenlandsbestuur.nl/ruimte-en-milieu/nieuws/nieuws/nieuwe-trend-in-openbaar-groen-stadslandbouw.1638603.lynkx>>.
4. See contributions in the *New York Times* <<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/10/magazine/10FOB-WWLN-t.html>>, and the *Huffingtonpost* <[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/marcus-samuels/son/how-food-politics-can-aff\\_b\\_1165169.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/marcus-samuels/son/how-food-politics-can-aff_b_1165169.html)>. The search engine for newspapers Lexus Nexus delivers 316 entries for 'stadslandbouw' (urban agriculture), of which 182 in 2011.
5. See notes 3 and 4.
6. All the members at the time of the survey, except for 2 members with unknown email addresses.
7. Except for one; this respondent did not want the interview to be recorded. Notes were made instead.
8. All names have been changed.
9. All quotes from the case studies – emails, interviews, texts from websites – are our own translations.
10. Zutphen is a rather alternative and anthroposophical town, where many people buy organic; organic shops are more numerous than in other towns of this size.

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