Cultivating Change: Case Study Analysis of Agricultural Resistance in Whatcom and Skagit Counties, Washington

Dana Bronstein

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Cultivating Change:  
Case Study Analysis of Agricultural Resistance  
in Whatcom and Skagit Counties, Washington

By

Dana Bronstein

Accepted in Partial Completion  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts in Environmental Studies

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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GRADUATE SCHOOL

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Master’s Thesis

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Cultivating Change:
Case Study Analysis of Agricultural Resistance
in Whatcom and Skagit counties, Washington

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of
Western Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Environmental Studies

by
Dana Bronstein
May 2024
Abstract

My thesis delves into the intricate relationship between agriculture, social justice, and ecological sustainability in the United States. I argue that understanding the history of agriculture necessitates examining the systemic inequities embedded within the food system, stemming from discriminatory and ecologically harmful agricultural policies established and perpetuated during the Dust Bowl era. Drawing on a political ecology framework and insights from eco-Marxism, feminist political ecology, and critical environmental justice, this study investigates alternative agricultural practices that challenge the status quo and promote equitable access to land and resources. Using a multi-scalar case study approach focused on Whatcom and Skagit Counties, Washington, the research examines grassroots organizations and farms led by people of color and women, using semi-structured interviews, to capture insights from underserved and minority farmers and organizations dedicated to stewarding land, supporting ecosystems, and supporting a thriving food system. I interviewed 17 (n=17) participants; questions focused on how these entities regenerate soil, foster equity, and promote social justice through their missions. The qualitative data analysis used the research questions as a focus for coding and theme generation. The findings reveal persistent barriers concerning land and resource access, racial inequities, and ongoing disparities in support and technical assistance, disproportionatley affecting women and farmers of color, consistent with the findings outlined in the literature review. Additionally, the findings demonstrate the strengths of agricultural alternatives stemming from community support, coalition building, and innovative funding mechanisms. By analyzing the strengths, motivations, barriers, and successes concerning social justice within agricultural alternatives, this study identifies pathways to amplify the voices within the agricultural sector that have the potential to influence overall environmental and community health. I conclude by advocating for opportunities for further research including continued interviews with producers and service providers, to nurture relationships and build trust. By doing so, producers, service providers, advocates and policy makers can address historical injustices and support small-scale, sustainable farming practices, cultivating a more equitable and resilient food system for future generations.

Keywords: Farming, Farmland, Equity, Alternative Agriculture, Policy, Environmental Justice, Political Ecology
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<th>Full Form</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USDA</td>
<td>United States Department of Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WSDA</td>
<td>Washington State Department of Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRCS</td>
<td>Natural Resource Conservation Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NASS</td>
<td>National Agricultural Statistical Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NYFC</td>
<td>The New Young Farmer Coalition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIPOC</td>
<td>Black, Indigenous, and other people of color</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HU</td>
<td>Historically Underserved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA</td>
<td>Technical Assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WFT</td>
<td>Washington Farmland Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFL</td>
<td>American Farmland Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WSU</td>
<td>Washington State University Extension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE</td>
<td>Political Ecology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EJ</td>
<td>Environmental Justice</td>
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Leah Thomas, the founder of Intersectional Environmentalist and a leading figure in the environmental justice movement, articulates a powerful message: "Social injustice and environmental injustice are fueled by the same flame: the undervaluing, commodification, and exploitation of all forms of life and natural resources, from the smallest blade of grass to those living in poverty and oppressed people worldwide" (Thomas, 2022, p.5). This sentiment perfectly encapsulates the critical need for changes in food systems, particularly within agricultural production practices and policy, to address both the social and environmental impacts and harms. Despite the agricultural sector's contribution of just under a quarter of all anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions (Smith, 2014), the specific social implications and harms are often underestimated. However, they are deeply intertwined with environmental impacts and deserve equal attention, care, and research.

In the past century, the agricultural landscape of the United States has undergone many significant changes, defined by a decrease in the number of farms and an increase in size (Cai, 2019; Ferguson, 2021). Since 1920, the number of farms has decreased from almost 6 million to just over 2 million today, with the average farm acreage tripling (Ferguson, 2021). This shift towards larger and fewer farms, known as farmland consolidation, is driven by government policies and market practices, prioritizing high yields of specific crops and rapid exploitation of farmland (Ferguson, 2021). These policies initiated a period marked by significant scaling-up, farm and equipment consolidation, and increased international commodity trading. Federal funds primarily benefitted large landowners and in contrast, farmers, tenants, and sharecroppers were marginalized as the focus shifted towards larger operations, greater mechanization, and reduced labor per acre. (Daniel 2013; Horst & Marion, 2019). This intense emphasis on productivity has led to adverse social consequences, such as limited opportunities for marginalized farmers and increased environmental impacts of agriculture practices (Ferguson, 2021). The Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933, a cornerstone of New Deal policies was introduced to address post-World War I crop price declines and the challenges of the Great Depression and Dust Bowl (Marion,
Evolving into the modern farm bill, these policies, overseen by the USDA, heavily favor larger farms through federal subsidies (Berry et al., 1979; Cai, 2019). Consequently, white farmers have disproportionately benefitted from these agricultural shifts, leading to a decline in Black farm owners from 14% in 1920 to 1.6% in 2017, due to discriminatory policies that favor larger farms as well as consolidation and exclusion pressures (Haines et al., 2014). Additionally, even though white farmers between the 1980’s and early 1990’s were grossing almost five times as much as black farmers, black farmers received less than a third of the subsidies than white farmers (Marion 2019; Reynolds 2002). These New Deal policies as well as pervasive discrimination of the time initiated an era characterized by consolidation of land, devaluing smaller family farms, exclusion of marginalized farmers and farm owners, and subsidizing monocropping larger, industrialized farms (Horst & Marion 2019; Reynolds 2002).

The persistence of discriminatory and inequitable policies and practices raises critical questions. How do marginalized farmers and their advocates confront and resist these entrenched practices? Through the lens of political ecology (Blaikie 1985; Bryant, 1998; Gaard 2015; Robbins, 2004; Walker 2005), I aim to delve into the firsthand narratives of producers and advocates who are challenging prevailing norms and advocating for socially and ecologically sustainable farming practices in the distinct agricultural landscapes of Whatcom and Skagit Counties, Washington. To achieve this, I conducted an exploratory case study focusing on organizations and farms led by people of color and women actively engaged in these endeavors.

This thesis draws upon a political ecology framework (Blaikie 1985; Bryant, 1998; Robbins, 2004; Walker 2005), with theoretical insights from eco-Marxism (Buttel, 2004; Holt-Giménez 2011; Schnaiberg, 2004; O’Conner 1988), ecofeminism (Gaard, 2015; Jaroz 2011; Shiva, 1988; Warren, 2000), and David Pellow’s critical environmental justice (Bullard, 1983; Minkoff-Zern 2016; Pellow, 2017; Pimentel, 2006) to further expose the failures of the current conventional agricultural systems prevalent in the US. I build on the existing knowledge affirming the failures of policies, specifically the Farm Bill -
governed by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), as well as other state and federal agencies - in facilitating equitable farmland access and maintaining healthy ecosystems. I analyzed local alternative farmers and organizations in Whatcom and Skagit County, Washington, along with relevant national and various state-wide organizations, as case studies. These organizations, hereafter referred to as agricultural alternatives, respond to and resist harmful policies and emerge in response to conventional U.S. agriculture, aiming to address gaps created by generations of discriminatory and ecologically harmful agricultural policies.

Through a multi-scalar case study analysis using methods of semi-structured interviews, and content analysis, my research identifies ways in which these organizations and farms are directly working towards their goals of equity and conservation. These agricultural alternatives respond to and resist harmful policies and trends while addressing the intersectionality of sustainability and equity in agriculture.

1.1 Research Problem

A 2019 paper, “Racial, ethnic and gender inequities in farmland ownership and farming in the U.S”, by Meagan Horst, Food Systems Professor at Portland State University and Amy Marion, PhD student at PSU, provides a clear critique of the USDA, the major agency in charge of regulating lending for farmers seeking to obtain viable farmland through the programs allotted by the Farm Bill. While the USDA has made steps towards supporting marginalized it is still “insufficient in reversing centuries of unequal treatment and opportunity. They also do not appear to be sufficient in countering other policy direction and pressure by agribusiness towards larger and more industrialized farming” (Horst & Marion, 2019, p.2). Marion and Horst lay out direct policy interventions and recommendations for creating long-lasting, equitable change that addresses historic discriminatory disparities and provides accountability, and a means for supporting small farms that wish to preserve and protect farmland (Horst & Marion, 2019). Drawing from relevant literature, I crafted a research methodology for conducting a multi-scalar case study analysis. This study investigates five regional agricultural alternative organizations, one
national organization, and ten regional farmers who exemplify resistance to the current state of the food system.

According to the 2017 National Agricultural Statistical Services (NASS) report, white males account for almost 83% of all farmland ownership in the United States, compared to 5.4% Hispanic males, and 3.2% Black males, while white females account for 13% of all U.S farmland ownership compared to 0.8% Hispanic females and 0.7% Black females (Horst & Marion, 2019; NASS 2017), as seen in Table 1. As the NASS statistics demonstrates, “altogether, the agricultural history in the United States is one of centuries of racialized and gendered capitalism” (Horst & Marion, 2019, p. 11). As described previously, farm policies enacted during the New Deal era encouraged corporate control and consolidation which has led to an increase in large industrial farms. These policies initiated a period that established a stark contrast in who was able to maintain farmland ownership and thus begin to obtain generational wealth and who was not. (Daniel 2013; Horst & Marion, 2019).

Table 1: Farmland Owners by Race and ethnicity, 2017 NASS data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Acres</th>
<th>1-49 acres</th>
<th>180 to 499 acres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White only</td>
<td>1,963,286</td>
<td>846,687,737</td>
<td>560,001</td>
<td>306,977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black only</td>
<td>32,910</td>
<td>4,097,857</td>
<td>11,879</td>
<td>3,547</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino only</td>
<td>77,416</td>
<td>26,041,600</td>
<td>27,828</td>
<td>7,259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaska</td>
<td>42,705</td>
<td>52,578,979</td>
<td>10,253</td>
<td>4,794</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native only</td>
<td>15,826</td>
<td>23,39,053</td>
<td>5,354</td>
<td>1,112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian Only</td>
<td>25,37</td>
<td>557,353</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table made with data from National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) table 68 and 60: Selected Farm Characteristics by Race, 2017

Due to systems of racialized and gendered hierarchies such as discriminatory lending practices and corporate-oriented agricultural subsidies, inequitable access to farmland ownership remains the status quo in the United States despite recent and historic USDA efforts to address issues of equity through various programs and titles funded and controlled by the Farm Bill as well as executive orders like the
Inflation Reduction Act (Fischer, 2022). The New Young Farmer Coalition (NYCF) 2017 report outlines the challenges facing young farmers, especially farmers of color and women, in accessing farmland ownership due to unfair lending practices, as well as resources for conserving farmland in the United States (Ackoff et al., 2017; Bigelow et al., 2016). This research in part examines gaps that continue to exist within supporting, black, indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC) as well as women and beginning farmers despite programming and increased funding. Figure 1 also demonstrates the trend of corporate consolidation in the United States which has perpetuated inaccessibility to new, BIPOC and women farms, and which in many cases leads to intense soil and ecosystem degradation (Ferguson, 2021). This thesis highlights the alternative models and social movements that have formed in response to inequitable dynamics through examination of lived experiences, success and gaps as addressed by interview participants.

*Figure 1: Corporate Consolidation of Farmland in the US*

(Heins, Fishback and Rhode, 2021, Union of Concerned Scientists, USDA NASS)

Just as important, we must recognize the environmental repercussions of agriculture. According
to the 2007 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report, “the Agriculture, Forestry, and Other Land Use (AFOLU) sector is responsible for just under a quarter (~24%) of anthropogenic GHG emissions, mainly from deforestation and agricultural emissions from livestock, soil, and nutrient management” (Smith, 2014, p.816). Large mono-cropped farms became the norm in the United States around the end of WWII, when access to chemicals became readily available, and the modern plow became a means for excessive tilling of the soil to increase yields (Montgomery 2017; Russel, 2001). This inherently requires using more fertilizers as monocrops deplete soils more readily, have fewer natural systems of defense against pests and do not absorb water as easily as polyculture systems (Montgomery 2017; Pimentel, 2006; Russel, 2001). As most industrial monocropping farms do not cover their fields after harvesting (a system known as cover cropping), this creates more opportunities for exposed soil to erode, which in turn leaves farmers no choice but to simply abandon their farms that have hence become unproductive due to erosion and excessive chemical use.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), released a report in 2011 entitled, 'The State of Land' through their natural resource strategic assessment and planning authority, The Soil and Water Resources Conservation Act (RCA), affirming the linkage between shrinking farm size due to corporate consolidation, inaccessibility for small farmer, especially BIPOC and women farmer to own land, as well as soil degradation particularly in the mid-western parts of the United States (RCA 2011). According to this report, given the erosion and soil damage caused by industrial agriculture, new generation farmers could hold the key to soil conservation strategies, if only the policies were made to support them (Ackoff et al., 2017).

Reports from the Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society, the Rural Advancement Foundation International, (RAFI USA), and the New Young Farmers Coalition (NYCF) demonstrate that the Farm Bill and USDA continue to operate within an inherently unjust and inequitable system which continues to promote ecologically and socially destructive farming practices in the United States (Ackoff
Therefore, the research design was inspired by the political ecology framework (Robins 2014) which recognizes environmental challenges as manifestations of political power imbalances, shaping socio-ecological dynamics at local, regional, and national levels. With this framework, I aim to investigate the effectiveness of alternative models that have emerged in response to the disparities and environmental degradation prevalent in the agricultural system in the US. This thesis operates on the premise that federal, and state agricultural policies continue to favor white farm owners and socially and environmentally detrimental large, corporate and white owned monocropping farms, emphasizing a multi-scalar approach, to understanding and addressing these systemic issues (Ackoff et al., 2017; Horst & Marion, 2019; Hossein et al., 2015).

To explore solutions to the issues facing new young farmers of color and women farmers, I performed a multi-scalar case study analysis specifically examining the work of regional organizations in Whatcom and Skagit Counties (WA) such as the Washington Farmland Trust (WFT), Viva Farms Incubator Farm and Washington State University Extension (WSU). I have carefully identified and selected these organizations and specific farms and farmers based on my network of knowledge of the important and diverse organizations and individuals doing radical and nationally recognized work within agriculture. I find myself incredibly lucky and well positioned to be doing this research in such a rich agricultural state that is also paving the way for nationally recognized alternatives to the industrial conventional food system. The alternative agriculture organizations and farmers chosen for this study demonstrate potential for equitable and regenerative transformation of the U.S. agrifood system. This research relies heavily on qualitative research methods, particularly semi-structured interviews and content analysis – to conduct a multi-scalar case study analysis. The use of semi-structured interviews allows for additional nuanced understanding of the inherent goals and impacts of alternative agricultural organizations as well as national policy organizations (like the USDA) and their role or lack thereof in supporting agriculture alternatives.
1.2 Research Question

With the research problem in mind, I aim to address the following research questions guiding this exploratory, inductive, multi-scalar research:

How do regional farms (Whatcom and Skagit counties, Washington) and alternative agricultural organizations resist and respond to dominant practices that are both ecologically and socially harmful?

Through the creation of the research methodology, it became clear that it was necessary to address the following sub question:

Why do regional farms in Whatcom and Skagit counties, Washington, along with alternative agricultural organizations, resist and respond to dominant practices that are both ecologically and socially harmful?

These questions focused on a multi-scalar understanding of agriculture. I work to examine the motivations, strengths, barriers and mission of regional farmers and local and national advocacy organizations working towards socially and ecologically sustainable food systems changes.

1.3 Why Whatcom and Skagit? A History and culture of strong agricultural support

While Washington state is renowned for its iconic mountain ranges and breathtaking coastline, it also generates a significant revenue from its thriving agriculture industry. The state's agriculture sector contributes “some $6.4 billion annually...in particular, the North Puget Sound region is among the largest agriculturally productive areas in Washington State west of the Cascades” (Berardi, Green, & Hammond, 2013, p. 317). Whatcom County, which borders British Columbia to the North, is well known for its dairy and berry production (Figure 2, Study Area Map). Similarly in Skagit county, which borders Whatcom to the south, agriculture is the leading industry, producing more than $200 million through a variety of over 90 diverse crops including blueberries, strawberries, tulips, and daffodils - more than any other U.S county (WSU Extension).
Skagit County's flourishing agriculture owes much to its physical geography, particularly the Skagit River, which flows from British Columbia to the Puget Sound, and stretches over 158 miles and deposits over 4 million tons of nutrient-rich sediments and soils annually (Lee, 2011; WSU Extension, 2017). This fertile floodplain facilitates a robust farming industry supported by frequent flooding and draining of sediment that contains rich silt loam and other fertile soils (Lee, 2011; WSU Extension, 2017).

Historically, this area was inhabited by Coast Salish tribes, such as the Straits, the Clallam, Lummi, Samish, and Semiahmoo, as well as the Lushootseed, including the Tulalip Tribes, Lummi, Swinomish and Upper Skagit (Upper Skagit Tribe Government), who thrived on abundant natural resources, notably varieties of salmon such as Chinook, Chum, Coho, Pink, and Sockeye from the Skagit River (Upper Skagit Tribe Government). European colonization and the introduction of industrial agriculture significantly changed the landscape of the delta region in the late 19th century. Advanced systems of dikes and tide gates were implemented to safeguard crops, leading to the transformation of the area.
predominantly into farmland (Collins, 1998; Lee, 2011; Upper Skagit Tribe Government). In 1996, Skagit County voters approved the Farmland Legacy Program, a program in effect today, which focused on funding for conservation easements, thus protecting farmland in perpetuity for production and wildlife habitat (Rousso, 2021). Skagit County's agricultural sector experienced demographic shifts as well during World War II, with the influx of Mexican migrants under the Bracero program, an agreement between the U.S. and Mexican governments which allowed Mexican workers to take temporary agricultural work in the United States. This program as well as the success of Skagit’s agriculture sector has led to a significant Latino population, as the 2019 Census reported, almost 20% of the population in Skagit’s residents identified as Latino (Rousso, 2021). These agricultural developments have profoundly shaped both the physical and human geography of Skagit County, leaving a lasting legacy.

Similarly, Whatcom County, directly to the north of Skagit county, boasts a robust agriculture industry, primarily with berries and dairy farms. Since time immemorial, indigenous groups have lived and thrived in the Whatcom County area, primarily the tribes of Lummi, Nooksack and Semiahmoo (Nooksack Indian Tribe; Rousso, 2021). The tribes of the Skagit River, these tribes relied heavily on the bounty from the Nooksack River, particularly Chinook, silver salmon, steelhead, pink and dog salmon (Nooksack Indian Tribe). The river, which is the northernmost river in Washington extends 75 miles and is commonly known for its three main tributaries; the north, middle and south forks begin at the high peaks of the Mount Baker Wilderness and flow into the Puget Sound (Rousso, 2021). The South Fork has particular significance for the agricultural success of the area as a floodplain and wetland habitat (Rousso, 2021). At the turn of the century, dairy farmers, hoping to increase sales, formed the first creamery in the County which led to the creation of the world's largest dried milk plant. Similarly to Skagit County, the increase and boom in agriculture success also created a wave of migrant labor emigrating to this county to work on the dairy as well as berry farms and seasonal and year-round pickers (Gamboa, 2000).

Additionally, these counties are leading the way for agroecological, sustainable farming models seeking to reverse the social and environmental impact from years of unhampered conventional production, exclusively creating wealth for the select few (Berardi, Green, & Hammond, 2013; Warner,
2007; WSU Extension). This agricultural success has fostered a vibrant and unique agricultural community fueled by enthusiasm, distinguishing them from other Puget Sound counties. Skagit County, in particular, stands out for its substantial funding of Farmland Protection, notably through the Farmland Legacy Program (Washington Conservation Commission). Moreover, Skagit County has implemented strategic zoning decisions, with agricultural zoning permitting one house per 40 acres, a notable departure from neighboring counties where the ratio is one house per 10 acres (Washington Conservation Commission), allowing for small farms to continue to thrive unlike other counties in the state (Figure 3: Study Map with USDA data).

Skagit and Whatcom County's unique soil quality further enhances their agricultural success, particularly in cultivating high-value cash and seed crops. The County's commitment to zoning regulations and farmland conservation, as well as the presence of indigenous tribes that rely on a healthy watershed, and support from Washington State University Extension programs, highlights its thriving agricultural community's sustainability. Thus, this thesis is well situated to highlight the importance of these small farm meccas that are paving the way for a national shift.
1.4 Positionality Statement

An important and common process of qualitative research is addressing the researcher's positionality, especially in relation to the research subjects or participants (Bourke, 2014; England 1994). My own identity and the intersecting identity of the research participants can influence the research methods, analysis, and results (Bourke, 2014). Thus, positionality, personal biases and worldviews must continually be addressed and reflected upon throughout the research process to ensure a true in-depth telling of the experiences and responses from the participants themselves, with minimal influence of the researcher (Bourke, 2014; England 1994). Inevitably, my own identity is an important aspect of the way in which I conducted and analyzed my research, and one to keep reflecting on, especially when dealing with a topic regarding race, and structural inequities.
During the data collection process, I recognized the insider-outsider perspective, known as the Emic-Etic dichotomy within qualitative research, as described by Ravitch and Carl (2016). As a Caucasian Latin American, Jewish, female-identifying immigrant, the intersectionality of the issues facing the U.S food system are not lost on me. As a woman who has tried to be a farmer and recognized the challenges of acquiring land, I see the inequities that are a foundational part of how agriculture functions in this country providing a crucial emic, or insider perspective. Yet the privilege I have over non-white immigrant female farmers who wish to own their own land, as well as my own unique immigration context situates me as an outsider to many of the Latine farmers’ experiences. While my position as a native Spanish speaker provided a pivotal step towards building trust with the Latine farmers I interviewed, many of whom are undocumented, I was committed to remaining attuned to the differences in our immigration context, language, and power differential within the research and using my outsider perspective as a way to remain detached and analyze the transcripts as “an outside observer” (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 144). I moved to the United States at age five for my father’s well-paying job and was able to become fluent in English through my elementary education within a few short months. I aimed to demonstrate to participants a deep desire to understand their experience and context of farming in the United States, without assuming to have any prior knowledge or understanding of it. Simultaneously, I worked carefully to center the participants’ voices in the telling of their stories to ensure my research which focuses on structural inequities does not add to the marginalization and discrimination of the participants (hooks, 1990, Smith 2021).

Additionally, before entering graduate school, I worked in many agricultural settings as a farm hand, and then became involved in various organizations aimed at supporting increasing food security and health care access for migrant farmworkers. My work with mostly undocumented farmworkers led me to this research question that aims to examine the experiences, struggles, successes and goals of marginalized farmers, farmworkers, and advocacy organizations in the region. Thus, throughout the research process and particularly within writing the results, I highlight the experience and voice of the
participants as best and as unbiased as I could. My goal was to “reflect the voices of those who participate in research” (Bourke, 2014, p. 3), and minimize any sense of white saviorism or researcher hierarchy with this research.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

This study understands the social and ecological impacts resulting from centuries of detrimental agricultural policies and practices and thus aims to examine the grassroots movements focused on resisting these harms. To understand and contextualize these issues, I draw upon theoretical frameworks such as political ecology (PE), which analyzes how power and politics influence environmental issues (Blaikie 1985; Bryant, 1998; Robbins, 2004; Walker 2005), feminist political ecology, which examines the intersection of gender and power dynamics in environmental contexts (Gaard, 2015; Jarosz 2011; Shiva, 1988; Warren, 2000), and environmental justice, which advocates for equitable treatment and protection from environmental hazards for all communities (Bullard, 1983; Pellow, 2002). These frameworks are essential for framing the multi-scalar approach, inspired by PE to examine environmental issues across various scales, such as local, regional, and federal, to understand how power dynamics and socio-ecological interactions operate and influence each other in different scopes.

2.1 Political Ecology

The framework of PE contends with the idea that, “environmental change and ecological conditions are the product of political process” (Robbins, 2004, p. 11). PE has seen many shifts and transformations since its inception in the 1980’s by scholars such as Piers Blaikie and Raymond Bryant that affirmed the need for a discipline that combines geography and cultural ecology, focusing on environmental issues (Blaikie, 1985; Bryant, 1998). Additionally, while the framework began as a structuralist movement that was concerned primarily with biophysical issues, it has transformed into a post-structuralist one that incorporates the social and political factors influencing and perpetuating environmental harms (Walker, 2005). As a multidisciplinary approach that frames environmental issues as political power imbalances, a political ecology framework lends itself well for this thesis which aims to address the effects of federal policies on local and regional environmental and social issues. Environmental changes, benefits and costs are inequitably distributed by political power structures and continually reinforced throughout history (Blaikie 1985; Bryant, 1998; Robbins, 2004; Walker 2005).
Deepening the understanding of environmental degradation, its social implications, and its multi-scalar impacts is a fundamental aspect of the post-structuralist interpretation within the framework of political ecology. One strand of post-structuralist approaches to PE described by Paul Robbins (2004) as ‘the environmental identity and social movement theses explains the ideas of environmental regimes within politics and management and thus political action or resistance that has formed due to these power structures” (Robbins, 2004, p. 14). My thesis contends with this aspect of political ecology research as a multi-scaled issue as my question highlights the environmental identities that have formed due to a need to resist and respond to these political power imbalances that has created a socially and ecologically harmful agricultural system. This framework is thus pertinent to my research goals in understanding the social movements “and interactions that have delimited, modified and blunted otherwise apparently powerful global political and economic forces” (Robbins, 2004, p. 15).

One of the earliest political ecology scholars, Piers Blaikie authored a groundbreaking book, *Political Economy of Soil Erosion in Developing Countries* (1985), which bonded the frameworks of political economy and ecology using a case study of farmers in Nepal and Africa. Blaikie’s book attributed the cause of land degradation and soil erosion not to the farmers and the agricultural practices of the local communities, but to the policies and imperial powers benefitting from unsustainable land practices (Blaikie 1985; Blaikie 1987). Blaikie's contributions to the field have set a precedent for political ecologists to understand and uncover environmental problems from a multi-scalar approach, understanding how local communities are harshly impacted by policies that only benefit the wealthy few (Blaikie 1985; Blaikie & Brookfield 1987). This framework, enriched by a political eco-feminist perspective, informs and guides the goals and visions of this thesis, particularly in advocating for agriculture alternatives that prioritize social equity and ecosystem health. Recognizing the critical role of soil health in sustainable agriculture, this approach seeks to address not only the socio-economic disparities but also the ecological impacts of conventional agricultural practices, aiming to foster resilience and regeneration within agricultural landscapes (Blaikie 1985; Jaroz 2011).
Political ecology investigations have uncovered the intricate relationship between soil degradation and community health, shaped by social, political, and economic frameworks that impose exploitative strains on soil quality and farm ecosystems (Andersson et al., 2011). These studies have shown the power of resistance movements, grassroots actions and community engagement as powerful efforts that can impact and shift federal policies towards more socially and environmentally responsible outcomes. For example, many PE research focuses on inequitable resource access for indigenous and peasant communities (Davis and Sauls 2017; West 2016), and emphasizes the importance of local governance, economic support and federal policies focusing on conservation efforts specifically impacting and supporting marginalized communities that have been bearing the brunt of environmental harms (Davis and Sauls 2017; West 2016). Researchers in political ecology have delved into the connections between sustainable soil management methods and the well-being of producers via reducing dependence on agricultural inputs, fostering healthy relationships within the agricultural community, and enhancing mental and physical health by minimizing synthetic pesticide usage overall (Friedrichsen et al., 2021; Friedrichsen et al., 2022). This framework, often referred to as the integrated soil well-being framework focuses on the mutually beneficial relationship between the social-ecological processes within farming and ranching and other environmental work (Friedrichsen et al., 2022; Janzen et al., 2021), highlighting the importance of a multi-scaler perspective on environmental issues such as land degradation. As such, these approaches are often used to provide policy recommendations, linking regional and local producers, service providers and national policy makers, prioritizing local cultural perspectives working towards sustainable solutions (Sterling et al., 2017).

2.2 Feminist Political Ecology

Similarly, feminist political ecology scholars seek to reveal how male-dominated capitalist systems perpetuate oppressive and environmentally harmful policies, while also marginalizing and oppressing women in contemporary society. (Gaard, 2015; Jarosz 2011; Shiva, 1988; Warren, 2000). Feminist political ecology scholar Lucy Jarosz rejects the mainstream feminist environmentalist ideas
about the intrinsic “naturalness” of women and thus their connection to mother nature. Instead, this approach argues that “the access and distribution of natural resources are differentiated through gender within societies” (Jaroz 2011, Sapra 2017, p. 2), combining feminist activism and the mission of political ecologists.

Karen Warren in her book *Ecofeminist Philosophy, A Western Perspective on What it is and Why it Matters*, makes a similar claim that historically, agriculture and food systems policies have failed to recognize women's contribution especially regarding development and natural resource management which continues to favor growth and expansion as opposed to protection and conservation (2000). As such, a feminist political ecology approach is vital in examining issues regarding gender disparities in farmland ownership and the intersection with soil degradation. This concept closely ties with the ideas of environmental justice which will be later addressed, that most if not all environmental harms will be felt most by people of color and women, due to political distribution of dis-amenities, and the agriculture industry is no exception (Gaard, 2015; Jaroz 2011; Shiva, 1988; Warren, 2000). A critical feminist political ecology perspective, supported by the political ecology framework, provides insights into the gendered and racial impacts of the industrial agricultural complex's oppressive and environmentally damaging effects.

2.3 Political Economy and the challenge for small Farmers

Because political ecology examines power relations across multiple scales, concepts and theories from political economy including the Treadmill of Production theory (TOP), and eco-Marxism and has also informed this thesis. The TOP theory describes how a constant (treadmill) search for economic growth and technological advancements leads to enormous environmental harm (Curran 2017; Schnaiberg, 2004). Further expansion of this critique comes from Eco-Marxism. Although Marx considered primarily labor issues in relation to political economy, his writings also helped formulate an understanding of how politics shape and form ecological and social struggles. As Marx famously claimed, “all progress in capitalist agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the worker, but of
robbing the soil” (Marx, 1990, p. 329; O’Conner 1988; Robbins et al., 2014). This is a foundational concept in Eco-Marxism; the environmental degradation led primarily by capitalist values and policies is not solely an environmental concern, but bridges together the social, gendered, class-based, labor movements into inseparable concerns and struggles (Benton 1999; Buttel 2004; O’Conner 1988; Winter, 1999).

Building from Marx, the TOP and a general critique of industrial agriculture, Fredrick Buttel argues that the rise of the agribusiness model has replaced and destroyed the agrarian family farm model, which predated the technological and industrial revolution (Buttel 2004; O’Conner 1988). This shift marked the rise of corporate consolidation for farmland in the United States (Buttel 2004; Hamiliton 2014). Such a major change in the food systems market produced a system where farmers who wish to restore the soil and conserve farmland, are unable to access land as easily as corporations that degrade soil, produce destructive monocropping systems with excessive inputs, abuse the labor market, and even receive government subsidies (Buttel 2004; Hamiliton 2014).

2.5 Environmental Justice

The past and present agribusiness model also serves as a site of environmental injustices as it is yet another instance where environmental amenities and dis-amenities are not distributed equally in the United States (Bullard, 1983). Land inaccessibility for small farms especially for farmers of color, women, and historically marginalized communities' affects not only these communities and individuals, but the land itself. If farmland is only accessible to large farm firms, healthy topsoil will continue to degrade much in the same way it did during the dust bowl (Horst & Marion, 2019; Minkoff-Zern 2016; Pimentel, 2006;). Critical environmental justice scholar Pellow makes this connection clear by arguing that environmental issues and mitigation strategies are not distributed equally among or within populations (Hurley, 1995; Pellow, 2002; Pellow & Park, 2002; Walsh, Warland, & Smith, 1997), a key concept in understanding the principles of environmental justice. Dr. Robert Bullard, widely regarded as the father of environmental justice, progressed the formalization of the EJ movement’s framework into a
field of study through his data collection and various prominent publications. His work revealed what many activists and people of color had already known and been living through: that systemic racism is the root cause of most if not all environmental injustices (Bullard, 1983). Scholars and lawyers have employed methods similar to those used by Dr. Bullard to show ongoing institutional discrimination, resulting in the current homogenous and exclusionary pattern of farm ownership in the United States. (Gottlieb, 2005; Harvard, 2001; Horst & Marion 2019 Korobkin, 1994).

The issue of farmworker access to land ownership has become a central concern for environmental justice groups and scholars. This is evident in numerous lawsuits filed against agencies such as the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) over discriminatory lending practices. (Horst & Marion 2019; Minkoff-Zern 2016). While over two-thirds of farmworkers today are from Mexico (Horst & Marion 2019; Strochlic et al. 2013), there has been little progress in avenues and supportive institutions for minority farmworkers to transition into landowners due to perpetual discriminatory and exploitive values, demonstrated in these active USDA lawsuits. Horst and Marion present significant data and analysis that bolster the assertion that white men in the nation, particularly those who have inherited wealth over generations are profiting considerably from increasing land prices and policies that incentivize consolidation (Horst & Marion 2019). The numbers support this claim; as seen in the fact that white men own almost 98% of all farmland in the US (Figure 1; Horst & Marion 2019). The agribusiness model, past and present, not only perpetuates environmental injustices but also exacerbates land inaccessibility for marginalized communities, further deteriorating the health of both communities and the land itself. Dr. Robert Bullard's pioneering work in environmental justice sheds light on systemic racism which he defines as “any policy, practice or directive that differentially affects or disadvantages (were intended or unintended) individuals, groups or communities based on race.”, as the underlying cause of these injustices, highlighting the urgent need for transformative change in farm ownership patterns and equitable access to land (Bullard 1990).
2.6 Conclusion to Literature Review

Understanding the interconnectedness of all environmental issues to the cultural, social and political structures is a key aspect to political ecology and the work of feminist political ecology activists. Recent scholarship in political economy and feminist political ecology, provides frameworks for guiding this multi-scalar thesis that highlights the ongoing resistance taking place on a regional scale with serious implications. This thesis addresses how and why political structures that value profit over conservation and equitable acquisition of agricultural land in the United States have been able to persist through a descriptive story telling of local marginalized farmers and advocacy organizations.
Chapter 3: Methods and Analysis

As highlighted in the introduction, unlike many agriculturally rich counties and states throughout the US, Whatcom and Skagit Counties are notable for having a significant number of small to medium-sized farms (less than 50 acres), according to Washington State University Extension. This distinct trait has led to a specific emphasis on enhancing land access for BIPOC farmers on smaller plots, with the potential to impact biodiversity and ecological sustainability. The flourishing small agriculture trends in these counties have directly contributed to their emergence as leaders in the alternative agriculture movement at the national level. Whatcom and Skagit counties are at the forefront of promoting agroecological and sustainable farming models, actively working to reverse the environmental impact stemming from years of unbridled conventional production (Berardi, Green, & Hammond, 2013; Warner, 2007; WSU Extension).

3.1 Study Population

For the initial recruitment of the farmers and organizations, I applied purposeful and snowballing sampling techniques (Miles & Huberman, 2014; Kuzel, 1992; Morse, 1989) to obtain a rich and diverse narrative of BIPOC and women farmers as well as farmer advocacy organizations. These methods, frequently used for the initial formation of qualitative research data collection, allowed me to systematically choose an initial list of farmers and organizations deeply involved in alternative agriculture in Whatcom and Skagit county that I knew of, shown in Table 2. From there, a recruitment email and text were drawn up and I began cold calling and emailing potential participants. As with most qualitative case study research, this created a snowball, or network effect (Kuzel, 1992; Morse, 1989), that led me to interview people and organizations not originally on my list but gathered from insightful recommendations given by the first set of samples reached out to. Additionally, as this study was bound by some constraints of time, I decided that 15-20 interviews would be sufficient in gathering a diverse perspective range from organizations and individuals in this region.
Table 2: Farmers and Organizations chosen for research interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Number of interviewees</th>
<th>Mission</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NYCF (National Young Farmers Coalition)</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Leading organization in the movement fighting for a more equitable and sustainable agriculture system by way of lobbying, education, stewardship, litigation and much more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington State University Agriculture and Natural Resource (ANR) Extension Program</td>
<td>Washington State</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Washington State University Agriculture and Natural Resource (ANR) Extension Program: The ANR is housed within the college of Agricultural, Human and Natural Resource Science within Washington State University. This program focuses on agricultural resources including environmental stewardship, economic aspects to agriculture, and farm management amongst many other program goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington Farmland Trust (WFT)</td>
<td>Washington State</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>The WFT aims to connect farms to farmers with a foundational goal to conserve and protect farmland. The aim is to support farmers in improving soil, water and habitat and ensuring farmland is not destroyed and developed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viva Farms</td>
<td>Skagit and King County, Washington</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>An incubator model provides aspiring farmers with essential resources to establish a successful farm business. Viva Farms operators in Skagit and King County, offering bilingual assistance in Spanish and English. By lowering barriers to entry such as access to land, capital training, infrastructure, marketing and community support, Viva aims to empower experienced farm workers and new growers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skagit County Government</td>
<td>Skagit County</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Representatives from Skagitonians to preserve farmland or Skagit county itself to discuss zoning and agriculture trends in the county.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Farms                                                                | Whatcom and Skagit                  | 1 representative from each farm | Silva Family farms  
Viva Farms based farms  
Lone Willow  
City Sprouts  
Arado Farms  
Silva Family Farms  
Esperanza Farms  
Flynn Farms                                                                                                                                 |

In total, I conducted interviews with 17 participants (n=17), representing a diverse group that included 10 individuals identified as BIPOC and/or women farmers. Among them, one participant self-identified as a woman, BIPOC farmer, and an organizer for a national organization. Additionally, five participants were affiliated with significant farmer advocacy organizations within the two counties, while one was a Skagit County government employee (Table 3). Six participants self-identified as Mexican,
with two of indigenous Mixteco descent, while six participants identified as minority farmers and women. This selection aimed to achieve a saturation of data, ensuring a sample size adequate to identify repetition in perspectives and themes during conversations, as well as diverse experiences and narratives. (Guest, 2006).

The utilization of the snowball sampling technique proved highly valuable for this study, particularly given the close-knit nature of most agricultural communities. This approach facilitated access to individuals with extensive knowledge of farming, particularly the alternative experiences of BIPOC farmers in these counties. As articulated by one participant, Robin Faye, Conservation Director of the Washington Farmland Trust, "Skagit [is] a very, very tight knit farming community. I mean, all farm communities tend to be pretty tight knit, but like [by any] standards really tight knit. And that's what has kept it an amazing place for farming. I mean, it's there's immense strength in that really cohesive, tight knit community” (Robin Faye, September 24, 2023). The comprehensive insights shared by these 17 participants, have enriched my understanding of alternative farming experiences, particularly those of BIPOC individuals, underscoring the strength, cohesiveness, barriers, and limitations of the farming communities in both Whatcom and Skagit.

Table 3: Name and Title of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Farm/Organization</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Tenure Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mauricio Soto</td>
<td>Arado Farms</td>
<td>Skagit</td>
<td>Leasing land from Viva Farms Incubator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ali Haj</td>
<td>Lone Willow Farms</td>
<td>Whatcom</td>
<td>Landowner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maura Vasquez</td>
<td>Silva Family Farms</td>
<td>Skagit</td>
<td>Landowner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rayna Flores</td>
<td>Farm</td>
<td>Whatcom</td>
<td>Renting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roselia Flores</td>
<td>Esperanza Farms</td>
<td>Skagit</td>
<td>Renting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steph Barnman</td>
<td>Barnman Cellars</td>
<td>Whatcom</td>
<td>Landowner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellie Duncan</td>
<td>City Sprouts Farm</td>
<td>Whatcom, Bellingham</td>
<td>Leasing from Kulshan Community Land Trust</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Savannah Flynn  Flynn Farms  Whatcom  Leasing from Cloud Mountain Incubator
Jesus Baldera  Farm  Whatcom  Renting
Eden Soya  Farm  Whatcom  Renting
Vero Vergara  Sweet Hollow Farm and National Young Farmers Coalition  National Organization + Farm in King County  Leasing from Viva Farms Incubator, King County
Robin Faye  Washington Farmland Trust, Director of Conservation  Statewide organization  Organization Representative
Kate Smith  WSU Extension, Small Farms Coordinator  Statewide organization  Organization Representative
Will Honea  Skagit County Civil Attorney  Skagit County  Organization Representative
Gabe Eperson  Whatcom Land Trust, Executive Director  Whatcom County  Organization Representative
Anna Chotzen  Viva Farms, Director of Farm Viability  Skagit County  Organization Representative
Bonnie Feldberg and Micha Anderson  Viva Farms, Farm and Education Manager and Farm and Education Assistant  King County based  Organization Representative

3.2 Data Collection: Semi Structured Interviews

Miles and Huberman, (2014) provide techniques for dealing with qualitative data and conducting rigorous analysis that I followed closely throughout the process. Qualitative content analysis, “offers the researcher the opportunity to go far beyond the usual "pattern matching", but … to enrich conclusions by several tactics for the generation of meaning, tactics for testing or confirming findings, and standards for the quality of conclusions.” (Miles & Huberman, 2014, p. 486). The use of semi-structured interviews within this case study research allowed me to extract a nuanced understanding of the lived experience of farmers, farmer advocacy organizations and government officials within Whatcom and Skagit Counties,
working towards a socially and ecologically sustainable agriculture system that aims to subvert the harmful status quo of the conventional industrial complex.

The use of semi-structured interviews allows for open-ended questions that engage and encourage interviewees to provide their own input and perspectives (Lune & Berg 2017). As each of the organizations and individuals I interviewed are different in their approaches and goals, this aspect of the data collection strategy is important; semi-structured interview techniques make for effective and structured use of time, but with space for both me and my interviewees to expand on thoughts and questions when necessary (Bernard, 2017).

Guided by an interview protocol, found in Appendix A, this research provided participants with the flexibility to discuss additional topics that could enhance the understanding of their experience as farmers in these regions. The interviews took place primarily on site on the farmers' land, or in a location chosen by the participants and usually lasted 60 minutes. A handheld SONY Micro recorder was used for recording the interviews and was purchased through a grant received by the university. Employing a semi-structured interview format allowed the questions to initiate deeper conversations, enabling participants to lead discussions towards nuanced narratives of their experiences. To foster openness and encourage participants to share more about their experiences, I incorporated additional follow-up prompts and probes, as well as space for participants to elaborate, aligning with established interview strategies commonly used in this interviewing technique (Bernard, 2017). These questions asked in the interview were primarily focused on their experiences as farmers and advocacy organization focusing the conversation on the how (strengths), why (motivations), barriers, and social justice themes that will be addressed in the analysis and results section. Once the interviews were completed, the English ones were uploaded to Otter.ai online software for a transcript and the Spanish ones were uploaded to Trint online software for a full transcript. Each transcript was then listened to and edited to fix any errors that occurred in the transcription. Once each transcript was ready, they were labeled and uploaded on ATLAS.ti 23 desktop software for analysis.
3.3 Content Analysis

Inductive methods of analyzing interview transcripts, such as thematic content analysis and narrative analysis, offer valuable approaches to derive meaningful insights (Landis and Koch 1977; Miles & Huberman, 2014). Thematic content analysis begins by minimizing biases and forming overarching impressions of the data (Miles & Huberman, 2014). As stated within my positionality statement, attempting to minimize bias and continually reflecting on my own positionality throughout this process, especially when drawing conclusions and results was a key part of the concluding process and addressing the research question. Thematic analysis thus encourages common themes and patterns to emerge organically from the context provided by the participants directly (Landis and Koch 1977; Miles & Huberman, 2014). Simultaneously, narrative analysis involves interpreting individual stories shared by interview respondents (Miles & Huberman, 2014). This qualitative data analysis technique enables the highlighting of critical points uncovered discovered by the collected data (Landis and Koch 1977; Miles & Huberman, 2014). Combining both thematic content analysis and narrative analysis allows for a robust examination, offering a nuanced perspective that captures both overarching patterns and the individual richness of stories within the dataset (Landis and Koch 1977; Miles & Huberman, 2014).

Thus, the next step in the process after collecting data, was to set up an initial codebook to begin coding each interview according to the themes set up by the original research question. The process of coding and analyzing my data collected was bound by predetermined themes that was the basis for my analysis done within ATLAS.ti 23 software. The major themes I began with were social harm, social good, ecological harm, ecological good. While some may view this process as merely part of data collection and preparation, as my research follows an iterative-open coding technique, I considered this step integral and useful in the analysis, as discussed by Cascio et al. (2019) and Miles & Huberman (2014). This technique of “iterative-inductive methods generate rich thematic analyses useful in sociology, anthropology, public health, and many other applied fields” (Cascio et al., 2019, p. 95). Unlike deductive methods, my goal was to understand the themes and patterns as they arose directly from the
data, rather than matching the predetermined themes and theories to the data (Saldana 2009; Creswell 1994). See Figure 4 for a full visual aid of the process, as inspired by the literature (Campbell et al., 2013; Creswell 1994).

**Figure 4: Visual Representation of coding process**

![Diagram of coding process]

The initial set of coding resulted in almost 50 individual codes with many transcription sections selected under multiple codes. After this, with the support of my advisor and more review of the data, the literature and my own research goals, a second round of coding was conducted, this time with the goal of creating meta codes and subcodes (or primary and secondary codes) to match the family of themes and subthemes gathered in the data, see Figure 4 (Campbell et al., 2013; Saldana, 2009). Thus, this next iteration I created four sub-meta codes named *Alternative Agriculture: how* (strengths), *Alternative Agriculture: why* (motivations), *barriers*, and *social justice*, which were all aptly named based on the words used by participants. From there each of these sub-meta codes were given their own subcodes.
In qualitative research, it is crucial for the researcher to establish a method for assessing reliability and rigor. As outlined by Campel et al. (2013), one common approach to gauge reliability in the analysis of semi-structured interviews involves intercoder reliability, evaluated using the statistical equation known as Cohen’s Kappa. (Campel et al., 2013). Intercoder reliability employs research assistants to ensure that different investigators, aside from the principal one, apply the same codes to the same part of the transcripts, thus enhancing reliability and enabling replication (Campel et al., 2013; Landis and Koch 1977). Thus, during the second round of coding, particularly as the principal investigator responsible for setting up and assigning codes, I enlisted the assistance of two research assistants proficient in Spanish and possessing knowledge of the research topic to enhance reliability in this phase.

The research assistants were each given a chart of 20 codes with their corresponding definitions and a second chart with quotes from the transcripts for them to match the codes to the corresponding sections of the quotes, see Appendix C for the protocol. From their coding, I assessed the interrater reliability of my codes and codebook, making necessary adjustments in case of major disagreements. Subsequently, I conducted a reliability analysis using Cohen’s Kappa (Campbell et al., 2013; Landis and Koch, 1977), which evaluates agreement and reliability among two or more raters or researchers (McHugh, 2012; Cohen, 1960). The extent of agreement among data collectors is called, 'interrater reliability' (McHugh, 2012). My reliability analysis using this statistic ($K = 0.82$) produced a result of “substantial” agreement between coders (Landis and Koch, 1977, p. 6).

In the end, I was left with a suitable and clean codebook that consistently referred to the research question, relied on the language of the interviewees, and encompassed the methods used by many scholars in an iterative open coding qualitative analysis technique (Campbell et al. 2013; Landis and Koch 1977; Miles & Huberman, 2014). See Appendix D for the final version of the codebook used in the analysis.

3.4 Ethics

Throughout this procedure, I adhered to Bernard's guidance to uphold a professional and ethical
interview approach (2017). This involved completing the mandatory Institutional Review Board (IRB) training and applying prior to recruitment. For IRB approval see Appendix B. Approval from the board, obtained in the Spring of 2023, determined that my application was exempt. Also, subsequent IRB approval allowed names to be used, which was made clear in the informed consent process with participants. The decision to include participants' names and farm names was based on the determination that the research resulted in minimal harm to them. Additionally, since the objective was to convey their stories and underscore their missions, it was deemed more authentic to include this identifying information. To ensure minimal harm to participants, everyone was afforded sufficient time to ask questions about the research and assured of their ability to terminate the interview or withdraw from the study at any point if they chose to do so. Additionally, I prioritized participant safety by outlining the risks and benefits of participation during the research and obtained verbal consent before each interview.

For Spanish-speaking participants, the interviews were conducted entirely in Spanish, leveraging my proficiency as a native Spanish speaker. Moreover, based on the literature, I opted to present participants' quotes in their original language, accompanied by my translations. Studies indicate that translating participants' quotes may compromise the depiction of specific context and the inherent meanings in their expressions when conveyed in a different language (Younas, 2022). Hence, this approach aims to enhance cultural and linguistic transparency and communicate the contextual meanings of participants' statements (Younas, 2022). It also serves to bolster the rigor of qualitative research by enriching comprehension of my positionality as the principal investigator and translator (Younas, 2022).

To express appreciation for their time and effort, participants received a $30 gift card after each interview, paid for by the Graduate Research and Creative Opportunities Grant awarded to me by Western Washington University.
Chapter 4: Results

In this chapter, I demonstrate major themes and patterns that emerged from the interview coding process. The following section, discussion and conclusions infer deeper meaning from these findings and refer to the original research question, methodology and theoretical frameworks.

As described in Chapter 3, this thesis began with the overarching themes or meta codes of social harm, social good, ecological harm, ecological good, and then divided into four essential sub meta codes of:

- Ecologically Aware Farming
- Alternative Agriculture Methods: How (Strengths)
- Alternative Agriculture Methods: Why (Motivations)
- Barriers
- Social Justice.

These sub-meta codes were key themes discussed in the interviews and created during the iterative process. Table 4 describes the frequency and summary regarding the key themes and most frequently used codes. As can be seen in this table, the most frequently discussed methods for supporting alternative farms were through coalition building as well as means of creative funding structures, such as land trusts, incubator farms, cooperatively owned farms and working with food hubs and restaurants directly. For reasons why producers chose to work towards socially and ecologically sustainable practices, mention of supporting community health and access to healthy food, stewarding the land, and a desire for autonomy were the most frequently mentioned. Regarding topics of barriers, farmers and members of organizations discussed land access and racial inequities most frequently.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Farmer or Org?</th>
<th>Summary</th>
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<td>“Alternative Agriculture Methods: How: Creative/Alternative Funding”</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>• Land trusts and organizations like Viva Farms and Cooperative models and partnerships with organizations and agencies.</td>
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<td>• Efforts to create cooperatively managed farm worker-owned projects and creative land and capital access models.</td>
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<td>• Market access is important, and collaborations with food hubs and restaurants have been successful.</td>
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<td>“Alternative Agriculture Methods: How: Coalition Building”</td>
<td>24</td>
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<td>• Importance of grassroots organizing and building partnerships to achieve goals.</td>
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<td>• Technical assistance to individuals and collectives and their intention to be a worker-owned cooperative.</td>
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<td>Alternative Agriculture Methods: Why: Mission Driven Work</td>
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<td>• Partnerships with nonprofit organizations and their mission to provide quality, affordable food to those in need.</td>
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<td>• Long-term relationships with hunger justice organizations and their commitment to sustainable farming practices. Working with Sea Mar or within food deserts.</td>
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<td>Alternative Agriculture Methods: Why: Search for Autonomy</td>
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<td>Barriers: Land Access</td>
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<td>• Highlight the inequality in land ownership and the challenges faced by young farmers, particularly farmers of color.</td>
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<td>• Land access and structural inequity, such as the impacts of water access on salmon populations and the exclusion of BIPOC farmers from opportunities and support.</td>
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<td>• Frustration with the lack of action and support for BIPOC farmers and the privileging of white farmers. Challenges faced by Latino farmers due to language barriers and a lack of support and resources.</td>
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<td>Ecologically Aware Farming: Stewardship</td>
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<td>Category</td>
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| Ecologically Aware Farming: Climate Change | 10   | Both      |             | - Balancing farming and fisheries and the need to protect natural resources for food production and ecological services.  
- Belief that if farmers have access to affordable land and capital, they will farm sustainably and take care of the soil. |
| Social Justice: Land Access | 43   | Both      |             | - Impact of climate change and the need to address it through farming.   
- Challenges faced by farmers in the face of climate change and their importance in building a resilient food system.  
- Increase in pests due to higher temperatures. |
| Social Justice: Technical Assistance | 33   | Both      |             | - Issues of equity in the local farming community, particularly in relation to water access and land ownership. Struggles faced by young BIPOC farmworkers, who are unable to buy or live on the land.  
- Challenges in accessing land and equipment due to not having generational wealth or local connections. Lack of support and land access for BIPOC farmers in general.  
- White farmers seem to have an easier time accessing resources and making connections with landowners. |

### 4.1 Ecologically Aware Farming

The commitment to building a resilient food system and addressing climate change is a central theme for all participants, reflecting its importance as a primary recruitment criterion, while their individual perspectives on stewardship and sustainability underscore the uniqueness and significance of their narratives, providing valuable insight into their objectives, barriers, and strengths.

The genuine dedication to these principles is evident in their stories, as Anna Chotzen, director of Farm Viability at Viva Farms expressed, when asked about the farmers in the incubator program, "they're really committed to building a resilient food system, they're really committed to, like climate change mitigation. And that's like, genuine" (Anna Chotzen, October 25, 2023). As defined in Table 2, Viva Farms is an incubator model which provides aspiring farmers with essential resources to establish a successful farm business By lowering barriers to entry such as access to land, capital training, infrastructure, marketing and community support, Viva aims to empower experiences farmworkers and new growers and has been identified as a leader in the incubator movement in the U.S, providing useful
and nuanced narratives from representatives and farmers working within Viva.

The narratives paint a picture of ecologically aware farming, encompassing soil vitality, conservation initiatives, and holistic understanding of ecosystem services, as Ellie Duncan, one of the owners of the beloved urban farm in Bellingham, City Sprouts, describes her cover crop, “This year. We grew Celia and clover in tandem as a cover crop, which I'm so excited about this pairing...it’s this beautiful, fast growing purple flower, that it's also called bee's friend. And it's this huge pollinator attractor. And so, it was like this amazing resource for all the neighborhood pollinators. And then it creates this nice stand that then the clover has enough shade to grow under and now the clover is coming up and the Cecilia has died back. That was a really cool little farm ecosystem aspect this year” (Ellie Duncan, September 19, 2023). The shared commitment to sustainability and resilience demonstrates a cohesive vision for a more environmentally conscious and responsible agricultural future.

Maurico Soto, owner, and mastermind of Arado Farms, one of Viva Farms' most successful incubators, exemplifies this genuine desire to farm sustainably. Mauricio’s success as a farmer is deeply rooted in his unwavering work ethic and his fervent dedication to sustainable farming practices. He adamantly eschews chemical inputs, prioritizing a harmonious balance between work and life, and nurturing a profound connection to both community and land. Hailing from a lineage of farmers and stewards, Mauricio is determined to perpetuate the tradition of cultivating food in a manner that is both environmentally sound and socially responsible, ensuring that affordable, culturally appropriate, and accessible food remains within reach for his community. After proudly showing me one of the largest tomatoes I had ever laid eyes on, I asked him about his farming practices and his journey to farming in this country. Taking hearty bites in between his words, he shared that he arrived in the US when he was 20 years old and reflected on how he only realized the organic nature of his upbringing upon moving here:
Entonces me di cuenta aquí que nosotros nacemos, crecemos comiendo orgánico y no me di cuenta hasta que estaba aquí... Así que ahora, con la educación que he tenido este, me acuerdo que empezaron a llevar fertilizantes, fungicidas, herbicidas, no necesariamente que se ocupan... Es el mercado mundial que no le importa. Sí. Ahorita hay mucho diabètis. Hay plantas que se extinguieron, ya no están. Este sabor orgánico bien importante. Nosotros no hacemos orgánicos... Tu naciste. Es orgánico” (Maurico Soto, October 1, 2023).

[Translation: “I realized here that we are born, we grow up eating organic...So now, with more education, I remember that they began to carry fertilizers, fungicides, herbicides, not necessarily with regard to care... It's the world market that doesn't care... Right now there is a lot of diabetes. There are plants that are extinct, they are no longer there. This very important organic flavor. We don't do organic. You are born. You are organic].

Yet, Mauricio's journey has not been without its challenges. As an immigrant navigating the complexities of language barriers, he understands firsthand the arduous path he has traversed to establish his own farm and build a successful business. Despite these hurdles, his commitment to passing down the wisdom of sustainable agriculture to future generations remains unwavering. Mauricio is driven by a fervent desire to instill in the next cohort a profound appreciation for the interconnectedness between people, place, and the land he stewards.

Likewise, Ali Haj, who owns and operates Lone Willow Farm, a small diversified production on Mount Baker Highway in Whatcom County, expressed a strong awareness of his farm's role within the broader ecosystem. He demonstrated a tangible sense of responsibility for the farm's environmental impact, particularly in relation to potential effects on salmon habitat.
“I mow twice in the early spring, summer. And then I just leave it edge. 10 feet, I don’t mow at all because when that rain comes, yeah, the previous owners used to mow it to the edge just erodes and I just do so because the salmon live on the other side of those trees right now. There’s salmon like jumping. Like I kid you not there, you know, two feet long. And I was very involved the year I was off at the hatchery... And so we do pretty well with like integrated management, which I did by birds. Like in the early spring, I put up bird feeders and as soon as the crop turns out apply to remove the feeders and the birds come through and just bugs” (Ali Haj, September 25, 2023).

In his stewardship of Lone Willow Farm, Ali Haj exemplifies a deep commitment to environmental responsibility, particularly evident in his mindful land management practices aimed at preserving salmon habitat. His conscientious approach demonstrates the interconnectedness of his farm with the broader ecosystem, reflecting a dedication to sustainable agriculture and conservation efforts.

Steph Barnman of Barnman Cellars Vinyard also located on Mt Baker Highway in Whatcom County, seconds that sentiment, sharing that for her, sustainable farming: “it's really about, I think for me stewarding it...so that was literally one of the first things I did was... figure out how do we how are we going to rehabilitate this section of the stream...So for me, it's like, how can we exist? Like, without pure monoculture? Like how can we grow things in kind of a dynamic way, using our ecosystem around us?” (Steph Barnman, September 27, 2023). Like Ali and other farmers, I spoke to, Steph Barnman's approach to farming encapsulates a commitment to stewardship and ecological restoration, as demonstrated by her desire to restore the streams and protect salmon habitat. By prioritizing biodiversity and sustainable land management practices, she seeks to cultivate a dynamic agricultural ecosystem that coexists harmoniously with the natural environment, fostering resilience and preserving critical ecosystem services.

The Whatcom Land Trust, situated in Bellingham within northwest Whatcom County, is dedicated to preserving land and conserving farmland in order to establish and safeguard healthy, thriving
ecosystems. As The Executive Director, Gabe Epperson told me, regarding the one of their main conservation programs in tandem with the Washington Conservation Commission, “So they [Conservation Commission] basically pay any ag land that has salmon streams, sort of running through it or along it, they can have a buffer along that that they come in and the plant doing, you know, riparian, these kind of wetland plantings, and they essentially lease they pay the farmer, they'll do a 15 year contract, and say we'll plant this area” (Gabe Epperson, October 17, 2023). The Whatcom Land Trust’s integration of ecosystem restoration and habitat protection on farmland demonstrates the interconnectedness of social-ecological systems like agricultural lands, whose techniques and mechanisms can cause serious damage to wildlife and vulnerable habitats if not managed and supported properly.

The impact of a changing climate and a need for farmers to adapt and create resilient strategies was exemplified in many of the participants responses to questions regarding their stewardship practices. Eden Sonya expressed that he has already seen “todo este cambio de temperatura, sobre todo más calor en el verano, hace que haya más plagas. Sí, porque las plagas que se le invaden los vegetales. Por lo regular este vienen con el calor...Pues... Por ejemplo, en el verano tratamos de evitar sembrar lo que son greens, los como ensaladas, porque esas son muy vulnerables al calor (Eden Soya, October 11, 2023).

[Translation: all this change in temperature, to more heat in the summer which creates more plagues. And those plagues kill the vegetables and they mostly come during the heat. So, for example, in the summer we try to avoid planting greens like salads because they are very vulnerable to heat]. Ellie Duncan seconds this sentiment, sharing that one of the biggest challenges as a small-scale farmer includes:
“The cost of that veggies [being] so low, and the inputs are high and the work is challenging, and you are at risk of so many things out of your control, whether that's weather or your market or your customer base or the economy, or Climate change” (Ellie Duncan, September 19, 2023). As Eden, Ellie and other farmers vividly illustrate, the pressing reality of climate change highlights the urgency for farmers to adapt their practices and develop resilient and ecological strategies to mitigate its effects on agricultural production.

This sense of responsibility to the soil and to the land as a farmer was also best exemplified in Anna Chotzen’s pointed words when I asked her why and how the sustainability piece is an important aspect to the work of Viva Farms, the answer, she said “is that if farmers had like, access to land and capital, like true access to like, really affordable land...like secure tenure on land that was affordable and then access to capital when they needed it at rates that were like that's appointed them as opposed to like exploited them. So, like, access to land and capital, then they would farm sustainably, right? Because, yeah, like you talk to any farmer like they don't want to destroy their land, right? Farmers know better than anybody that you have to, like take care of your soil” (Anna Chozen, October 25, 2023). Anna’s response articulates the intrinsic understanding among farmers that soil stewardship is paramount, emphasizing the need for equitable access to resources to uphold environmental sustainability within agricultural communities.

The dedication to the principles of sustainable and ecologically aware farming is evident in the words of the participants, as expressed by participants like Anna Chotzen, Ellie Duncan, and Maurico Soto, highlighting a shared commitment to building a healthy food system and mitigating climate change. Their narratives depict an integrated approach to ecologically aware farming, emphasizing soil vitality,
conservation initiatives, and ecosystem stewardship, exemplifying a tangible sense of responsibility toward their land and the greater ecosystem.

4.2 Motivations

Regarding the overarching theme exploring participants' motivations for engaging in alternative agriculture, a clear pattern emerged highlighting reasons beyond mere business operations or job pursuits. Each farmer explicitly expressed desires for community and personal health, land stewardship, autonomy, and a strong commitment to ecologically responsible farming, often stemming from negative experiences with conventional farming. Furthermore, representatives of the organizations interviewed cited resource access and ecosystem management as their primary motivators within their roles.

Like other Latine and female farmers I interviewed, Mauricio Soto, a highly experienced farmer, expressed a profound longing for autonomy—the desire to work independently on their own land, nurturing their soil through various innovative methods and support systems when I asked him about his reasons and goals for his farming outside of a conventional system. This inclination diverges from the dominant trend of large, conventional farms that deplete the soil and often are owned by agri-firms devoid of community connection to the land:

“Por qué el inmigrante ocupa trabajar toda su vida en el campo? Bueno, pues porque no aprende el idioma. Eso es una. La otra es porque no le dan trabajo en otros lugares donde se requieren los documentos legales. Pero por qué si le dan trabajo en el campo? Porque hay más necesidad...Entonces en realidad te marginan... Pero como te vas educando, la gente va viendo. Sí, y eso es parte de la educación.” (Mauricio Soto, October 1, 2023). [Translation: “Why does the immigrant spend his entire life working in the fields? Well, because he doesn't learn the language. This is one. The other is because they do not give him work in other places where legal documents are required. But why if they give him work in the field? Because there is more need... So, they actually marginalize you... But as you educate yourself, people start to see.”]

Mauricio’s sentiments echoes that of other Latine and female farmers interviewed, highlighting a deep-seated yearning and motivation for autonomy and connection to the land. His desire to cultivate his own soil through innovative methods stands in stark contrast to the prevailing model of large, conventional farms, often detached from community ties and detrimental to soil health. His insights shed light on the
challenges faced by immigrant farmers and the importance of education and advocacy in fostering a more equitable agricultural landscape.

Similarly, when I spoke to Roselia Flores of Esperanza Farms, it was immediately clear that her narrative of sustainable farming unfolds as a dedication and an intimate bond with the earth. In our conversation, Roselia emanated a remarkable blend of grace and humility as she shared her aspirations for owning her own farm. Walking me through the lush diversity of crops across two greenhouses and about four acres of workable land, all meticulously tended to by her alone, she unveiled a vibrant tapestry of fresh produce. Within Skagit County, Roselia nurtures an array of peppers, tomatoes, tomatillos, maize, berries, and thrives in cultivating cacti, or nopales, within her greenhouses. Remarkably, this farming is currently one of two full time jobs, similar to most of the farmers I spoke with. Roselia’s deep-rooted connections within the local farming community and her amicable rapport with her employer, from whom she currently rents her land, underscore her commitment to stewarding the land and feeding her community. With a smile, she shared her grandest ambition: to secure a substantial plot of land, complete with her own home, enabling her to expand her cultivation, increase her sales, and extend her reach to those in need of access to nutritious foods. When I asked her why she named her farm Esperanza, [Hope], she told me that:
“este es una gran esperanza muy grande para mi. Mi meta es esperanza. Y esa Esperanza va ser el nombre. Porque es mi esperanza, salir para adelante” (Roselia Flores, September 22, 2023). [Translation: this is a very big hope for me. My goal is my hope. And Hope will be the name. Because this is my hope, to succeed and get ahead]. In Roselia’s vision, Esperanza Farms embodies the ethos of a hopeful steward of the land, steadfastly navigating the path toward her dreams, reconnecting with her cultural roots while maintaining an unwavering optimism about the journey ahead.

Mauricio, Roselia Flores of Esperanza Farms, Rayna Flores, Maura Vazques of Silva Family farms, Eden Soya and Jesus Baldera, based in Whatcom County, all agree that owning and maintaining their own land is crucial not only for personal and community health but also for understanding the significance of stewardship and caring for the natural ecosystems affected by their production methods. Additionally, they emphasize a fervent desire for autonomy in their farming endeavors. Maurico exemplifies this desire for land ownership stating, “Básicamente nosotros que venimos de otros países, básicamente nosotros no trabajamos para otras personas en nuestras raíces. Trabajamos nuestra propia agricultura. Aunque no hay dinero (Maurico Soto, October 1, 2023). [Translation: Basically, we who come from other countries, basically we do not work for other people in our roots. We work our own agriculture. Although there is no money]. Jesus Baldera, the humble, innovative farmer based out of the Everson Valley in Whatcom County, shares similar sentiments to Maurico regarding a healthy and thriving ecosystem and community. Jesus currently tends to a four-acre plot nestled behind his brother’s residence as a secondary occupation. His recent efforts, he told me was to create a system of dikes around his plot to retain water and protect his crops from flooding, as well as bringing seeds from Mexico,
systematically growing them to adapt to Washington climate. Jesus’ vision extends far beyond personal gain; Jesus aspires to cultivate an abundance of produce substantial enough to fill numerous truckloads for his local food bank. As we conversed, he and his brother busied themselves loading one truck, a routine they repeat twice a week to support two different food banks in the vicinity. Reflecting on their journey from Mexico, they emphasized the vital assistance and sustenance provided by the food bank and church upon their arrival, fueling their commitment to giving back. Jesus harbors dreams of eventually farming on his own land, liberated from the constraints of renting, and securing crop insurance. Telling me about their experiences navigating the unpredictability in Washington’s climate, he and his brother are acutely aware of the inherent risks associated with farming, highlighting their desire for greater stability and security in their agricultural dreams. He especially spoke fondly of his ability to feed his family with fresh and healthy foods:

*Picture 5: Jesus Baldera, captured by Dana Bronstein during interview.*

“Pues yo pienso que ya viene de nuestros padres, nuestros familiares en México, que ellos cultivaban todo y nos gustaba ir, agarrar las cosas frescas, nos gustaban la diferencia, pues de lo que cultivan aquí es mucha diferencia. Lo cultivas a lo que compras en la tienda, entonces pues nos gusta comer, así que dice bien y y es por eso que lo hacemos y tratamos de tener lo suficiente para nuestra familia (Jesus Baldera, October 24, 2023). [Translation: Well, I think it comes from our parents, our relatives in Mexico, that they grew everything and we liked to go, grab fresh things, we liked the difference, because what they grow here is a lot of difference. You grow it to what you buy in the store, so we like to eat, so it says good and and that's why we do it and we try to have enough for our family].

Similarly, Rayna Flores, family farmer based out of her rented home and plot in Whatcom County, Rayna confided her passion for cultivating organic produce reminiscent of the vibrant stands she frequented in Oaxaca, Mexico, her homeland. It was evident speaking to her that her connection to the land ran deep, infusing each squash seed she handled with a sense of purpose and nostalgia. Rayna’s infectious smile lit up the moment we met. Seated in the cozy shed nestled between her home and the sprawling field of tomatoes and tomatillos, she sifted through a sack brimming with squash seeds as we talked. Rayna, alongside her husband and daughters, poured their hearts and souls into
nurturing their farm business, channeling their efforts into seed preservation and fortifying their farm stand. She told me with pride when I asked her why she chooses to farm organically:

"Sí, por la gente me da mucho ánimo lo que ya están diciendo. Ellos querer consumir lo que es orgánico....quiero sembrar verduras, que sea que le ayude la gente, porque mis productos son medicina, son medicina para uno cuerpo como hierba mora. Es muy bueno para cáncer" (Rayna Flores, September 22, 2023). [Translation: Yes, because of the people, what they are already saying gives me a lot of encouragement. They want to consume what is organic. I want to plant vegetables that can help people, because my products are medicine, they are medicine for people like mora buena [herb]. It is very good for cancer]. Rayna's story embodies a profound connection to the land, driven by her passion for cultivating organic produce reminiscent of her homeland in Oaxaca, Mexico. With each squash seed she handles, she infuses a sense of purpose and nostalgia, reflecting her deep commitment to nurturing her farm business and providing healthy, medicinal foods to her community. Rayna's story illuminates the transformative power of sustainable farming practices and the profound impact it can have on both individuals and communities.

Another recurring theme I noticed as mentioned in the introduction, was a keen commitment to non-conventional farming practices, stemming directly from negative experiences of working within conventional agriculture. Maura Vasquez, a business savvy farmer and owner of Silva Family Farms based out of Skagit County, stands as a beacon of inspiration and foresight in the realm of sustainable farming and an unwavering commitment to stewarding her land. Her palpable connection and pride in her land, evident in the lush expanse of blueberries and strawberries she cultivates, resonate as she navigates her farm with a profound sense of reverence. Her path to land ownership unfolded unexpectedly when a
former employer entrusted Maura with taking over the five-acre diversified blueberry farm—an opportunity she and her husband seized eagerly. With a lifelong aspiration to establish their own agricultural enterprise, they uprooted their lives and relocated their entire family, laying the groundwork for their blueberry farm. Six years on, their venture has blossomed into a thriving success story, propelling them to explore avenues for expansion, and a desire to find a larger plot of land to continue their growth. Fueled by their aspirations, Maura and her husband envision a future where their farm operates a U-Pick operation, offers homemade marmalade, and continues to prioritize organic growth. Their journey to this point has been colored by past experiences, including laboring for large conventional berry farmers where Maura's husband was tasked with nighttime herbicide spraying. It was this encounter with the realities of conventional farming that spurred them to chart their own course, prioritizing their health and principles in pursuit of their entrepreneurial dreams.

Picture 7: Maura Vasquez captured by Dana Bronstein during interview.

"Pues aquí vivimos y los niños llegan de la escuela y de repente van allá y estand comiendo y no tenemos de como la preocupación de que hay quemicos...no hay peligro de salud... antes de que nosotros empezáramos este negocio trabajábamos con una compañía que es puro convencional, puro pesticidas y mi esposo era uno de los sprayadores de la pesticida que se usaba mucho allí y hasta llegó un punto que esa misma pesticida que él estaba usando le estaba haciendo daño” (Maura Vasquez, September 26, 2023).

[Translation: "Well, we live here and the children come home from school and suddenly they go there and are eating and we don't have to worry about there being chemicals...there is no health danger... Before we started this business we worked with a company that is pure conventional, pure pesticides and my husband was one of the sprayers of the pesticide that was used a lot there and it even got to the point that the same pesticide that he was using was causing him damage "]

Maura and her family's journey from unexpected land ownership to the flourishing success of their blueberry farm epitomizes the transformative power of determination and vision. Motivated by a desire to prioritize their health and principles, they have overcome past challenges and set their sights on expanding their enterprise while maintaining a commitment to organic growth and community well-being.
Similarly, Eden Soya, owner of Eden farms based in Whatcom County describes how when he worked on a conventional berry farm, and was the main worker in charge of spraying, and he noticed soon after that “me ardía mucho mi nariz. Yo desde ese tiempo dije si trabajo en el campo voy a tratar de no trabajar usando químicos” (Eden Soya, October 11, 2023). [Translation: “my nose would burn a lot. From that time on I said if I work in the fields, I will try not to work using chemicals]. Eden's decision to prioritize his health and well-being by eliminating chemical usage on his farm reflects a broader shift in agricultural practices towards environmental and personal health and sustainability. His commitment to organic farming not only resonates with his values but also demonstrates an awareness about the importance of minimizing chemical exposure and preserving environmental health for future generations.

Kate Smith, the Northwest Small and Latino Farm Support Coordinator of WSU Extension, and one of the main sources of connection for recruiting participants for this research, shared a similar motivation for the work she does as a nexus of supporting small farmers and climate change mitigation and ecological services.

Sustainable agriculture, ecological production methods, and the preservation of cultural crops. Additionally, the Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR) Extension Program Unit, is one of three programs within the College of Agricultural, Human, and Natural Resource Sciences (CAHNRS) at the land grant university, Washington State University. This extension program focuses on spearheading interdisciplinary initiatives in local food systems and regional food policy, fostering economic opportunities for farmers and consumers which is worth noting as this is a unique perspective of a land grant universities support for small and marginalized farmers. Kate’s dedication to supporting small farmers extends to fostering connections
between climate change mitigation, local food access, and cultural preservation, highlighting the integral role of education and research in empowering farmers to thrive economically while preserving ecological integrity. Through collaboration and knowledge exchange, Kate's work emphasizes the unique and mutually beneficial relationship between a land grant university like WSU and farmers' ecological expertise, paving the way for a more resilient and sustainable agricultural future.

Overall, the motivations, the why participants discussed dedicating their lives and organizations to the goal of alternative agriculture methods among farmers, particularly Latine and female farmers, and advocacy organization extend far beyond economic considerations. The desire for community, personal health, stewardship of the land, and autonomy emerges as a common thread among individuals like Mauricio Soto, Rayna Flores, Maura Vazques, Eden Soya, and Jesus Baldera. These farmers share a commitment to cultivating their own land, reflecting their cultural roots, and providing fresh and healthy food for their families and community. Many farmers deliberately reject conventional farming practices, influenced by negative experiences working on large-scale conventional agricultural production.

4.3 Strengths

For the meta-subtheme, Agriculture Methods: How, (Strengths), I noticed a general trend of experiences with sustainable and organic farming practices in Skagit County due in part to strong community support as well strong partnerships and programs aimed at protecting farmland and promoting sustainable agriculture. Despite various barriers and challenges, Skagit County farmers remain resilient and continue to improve their practices for ecosystem services. The narratives of farmers and organizations exemplify the importance of partnerships, coalition building, non-profit support and technical assistance (TA), with acquiring grants, which all emerge as crucial instruments in safeguarding farmland and championing sustainable agricultural methods. On the other hand, a few farmers and organizations focused on creative funding solutions as their biggest strength that looked to various market innovations.
Regarding partnerships, coalition building, and non-profit support, this emerged as an integral part of farmer and advocacy organizations' methods for meeting their goals. As Kate Smith, of WSU Extension mentioned, “I think that the strength…it's like social capital. And, and that social capital that, like a farmer applying who has the organization knows has the support of me that they that like, I already have a relationship with that organization (Kate Smith, October 13, 2023). Ellie Duncan, of City Sprouts Farm in Bellingham also emphasized the importance of community support when asked about how they came to be involved with the farm, answering “I just feel like we really fell into this niche and, like, everything we were able to do was because of the community that we're in, in the partnerships we were able to make” (Ellie Duncan, September 19, 2023). As emphasized by Kate Smith and Ellie Duncan, the strength of community support and social capital plays a pivotal role in fostering success and sustainability within the agricultural landscape.

Technical assistance (TA) support including grant writing for example was also mentioned as one of the major aspects of success for a farmer. Mauricio Soto, of Arado Farms mentions, “Este tractor me costó. Gracias a la conexión con la comunidad, las ventas, Viva es Parte de eso Sí, en parte” (Mauricio Soto, October 1, 2023). [Translation: This tractor cost me. Thanks to the connection with the community, sales, Viva is Part of that Yes, in part]. Likewise, Savannah Flynn, owner of Flynn Farms within the Cloud Mountain Incubator program, in Whatcom County a non-profit education center, providing equipment, access to irrigation, barn space, propagation space, and access to market outlets, shared the sentiment of the importance of community partnerships and support. I spoke to Savannah sitting in front of her various crop plots, crates overflowing with colossal squash scattered about. She shared with me her concerns regarding the state of the food system: its triumphs, its shortcomings, and her role within it. As a participant in Cloud Mountain Farm's incubator farm program, Savannah finds herself in a precarious situation.

When we conversed, the program was facing an imminent threat of dissolution, without any consultation including the farmers who had toiled the land. Firmly rooted in a cooperative farming model,
Savannah staunchly believes that she and her fellow farmers deserve a seat at the table during the decision-making processes governing the establishment, maintenance, and future planning of their shared space. For her, true sustainability can only be achieved through inclusive and participatory practices. Savannah's aspirations extend far beyond mere sustenance. Her dream encompasses a vision of genuine sustainability, free from the fear of leases being abruptly revoked, enabling her to provide food banks and her community with wholesome, fresh, and culturally appropriate produce. Through her tireless dedication, she strives to forge a future where the bounty of the land is both accessible and equitable for all, emphasizing the immense support gained from community partnerships.

*Picture 8: Savannah Flynn captured by Dana Bronstein during interview.*

Savannah Flynn demonstrates the benefit of close collaboration with various nonprofit organizations, particularly those focused on supporting the food bank and food access for underserved community members. One such organization, Sea Mar, a Statewide Community Health Center specializing in care for Latinos and low-income households, operates the Food Farmacia program in Bellingham, which provides weekly free produce distribution. Savannah emphasizes the significance of this partnership, noting that it enables her farm to secure stable funding each year, through a contract with Sea Mar that pays her before the growing season begins, allowing her to grow culturally appropriate fresh produce for patients at the clinic. This collaboration has fostered a long-term and mutually beneficial working relationship that supports her farm, ecological sustainability, and community health.

Additionally, Anna Chotzen's perspective sheds light on the broader impact of regional small farmers, with Viva Farms emerging as a national leader in the incubator movement. As she explains, there are various incubator farms throughout the country, albeit much smaller in acreage size, and they are "nowhere near the, like revenue that the farmers here are generating. So, it's just like smaller scale in
general... But we're definitely one of the leaders... like, we are the veterans in the room (Anna Chozen, October 25, 2023). As exemplified by Chotzen's insights, the success of such initiatives extends beyond local contexts, demonstrating their significance on both regional and national scales in fostering sustainable agriculture and community resilience.

Vero Vergara's journey as a small-scale farmer and coalition organizer underscores the multi-scalar impact of small farming, particularly in advocating for worker-owned cooperatives and fostering community resilience, stating that her farm:

has always held the intention of being a worker owned cooperative and [we] started our business from that framework. Over the years we've been affiliated with the US Federation of worker cooperatives, towards that goal...So yeah, you know, our farm has done lots of different types of work, I'd say we have kind of made a name for ourselves as a catalyst farmers specifically. And it was clear, as soon as we started farming, that we were going to be really screwed if we did not start playing the advocacy game and understanding how to build power and organize with people in similar positions to us. So, I also have a nourishing food systems career that I think started before farming...it's grown into, you know, my focus on anti-oppressive Community Food Systems Development (Vero Vergara, October 17, 2023).

Her dedication to anti-oppressive Community Food Systems Development exemplifies the transformative potential of grassroots advocacy and collective action in shaping a more equitable and sustainable food system.

Despite the inevitable barriers faced by farmers in Skagit and Whatcom Counties, perseverance, a desire to collaborate and find creative and innovative solutions emerges as a defining trait among them and stands out as their biggest strength, the how of alternative agriculture methods. Their unwavering commitment to overcoming challenges serves as a testament to their dedication to continual improvement of their business and their healthy, thriving ecosystems. The narratives coded under this meta-code, depict the ethos of Skagit and Whatcom County's alternative agricultural landscape—a beautiful blend of community support, strategic partnerships, and the pursuit of sustainable farming practices that encompass a desire to foster a healthy community. Through their experiences, they offer a glimpse into the tenacity and adaptability of farmers in the region, showcasing their ability to thrive in the face of
challenges, the status quo of large-scale agriculture, whilst remaining certain in their journey towards an alternative.

4.4 Barriers

Regarding the meta-theme, barriers to reaching their goals of sustainable and alternative agriculture, the major topics that emerged were land access and racial inequities. Considering the research problem addressed in Chapters 1 and 2, these barriers were unsurprising. On the other hand, Steph Barnman of Barnman Cellars discussed weed pressure and weed control as her biggest challenge to a successful business, which is unsurprising as one of the only farmers I spoke to with secure land ownership.

When discussing land access barriers, the conversations revolved around farmers' frustrations with the lack of ability to own land and the challenges faced in accessing stable and affordable land for farming. As well as mention of the importance of land access and capital for farmers' success and sustainability. As Maura Vasquez of Silva Family Farm explained: “Por eso es que vemos ahí que si estamos así chiquito todo el tiempo, pues es es muy caro. Por eso están pensando que si tenemos tierra podemos plantar más y agarrar siquiera una máquina, aunque sea usada.” (Maura Vasquez, September 26, 2023). [Translation: That's why we see that if we are like this small [farm] all the time, then it is very expensive. That's why we are thinking that if we have [more] land we can plant more and not even get a machine, even if it is used]. Participants voiced repeatedly that land access and capital are fundamental to their success and sustainability. As articulated by Maura, the quest for expanded land is not merely about scale but about ensuring viability and resilience in her family's agricultural goals, demonstrating the critical importance of equitable land access policies and support mechanisms for small-scale farmers.

When I asked Savannah Flynn of Flynn Farms what her biggest barrier or challenge to achieving her goals, without hesitation she answered, “land access and equipment access, specifically, because I'm not a person who comes from generational wealth, or I'm not a local” (Savannah Flynn, September 18,
As Anna Chotzen from Viva Farms stated, “at the end of the day, if they don't have like, secure land, or it's like, too expensive, and then they go out of business, like none of the rest of the stuff is useful. So, I think that, at least right now that USDA knows that” (Anna Chotzen, October 25, 2023). The stories from farmers and advocates like Anna, demonstrate the critical importance of land access and affordability as key barriers for farmers striving to achieve their goals, emphasizing the urgent need for supportive policies and resources to ensure the viability and sustainability of small-scale farming enterprises.

The next most frequently mentioned barrier that participants mention was racial inequities. Various participants highlight the inequality in land ownership and the challenges faced by young farmers, particularly farmers of color and women. When asked about the biggest barriers farmers she works to support face, Kate Smith of WSU Extension mentions land access as well as equitable access to resources, such as participation in programs offered by organizations like FSA [Farm Service Agency: A customer-driven agency within the USDA working with farmers and ranchers mostly acquiring loans and grants] and NRCS [Natural Resource Conservation Service, agency within the USDA working on climate smart farming solutions and programs through grants and funding]. Kate mentions that historically, a major challenge has been determining eligibility for these programs as the extensive paperwork and processes required make participation difficult. Moreover, the lack of Spanish-speaking representatives in USDA offices adds yet another layer of difficulty. WSU’s capacity to act as intermediaries, handling communication, scheduling, and paperwork submission, can also significantly impact the speed and efficiency of the process, depending on their workload and other responsibilities. (Kate Smith, October 13, 2023). Kate’s insights reveal the various challenges farmers face, spanning from land access to participation in federal programs. These findings emphasize the pressing need for comprehensive reforms and support mechanisms to address disparities and ensure equitable opportunities for all farmers.

These challenges are only further strengthened by Mauricios sentiments of gratitude for programs like Viva Farms that has supported his business immensely as the program, “tenia facilidad de de equipo,
cosa que es un gran obstáculo para un principiante agricultor, especialmente inmigrante. Yo pienso” (Maurico Soto, October 1, 2023). [Translation: Has an ease of equipment, which is a big obstacle for a beginner farmer, especially an immigrant. I think]. Mauricio’s experience with Viva Farms incubator program highlights the immense support resource access programs provide, particularly in overcoming obstacles such as equipment access, especially for beginner immigrant farmers.

Maura shares this same sentiment that resource access and land access are much more difficult as an immigrant, especially as an indigenous Mixteco migrant, sharing that she believes this is because, “hay mucha gente de México, no hablan español, ahí es por un Mixteco y llegan aquí pensando que nomás vienen a trabajar para alguien más y nunca llegar ser ellos los dueños, porque piensan que nosotros no podemos hacer eso. Porque somos indígenas que ni siquiera español hablamos y no podemos. Pues es, es difícil, pero no es que diga o no se puede hacer” (Maura Vasquez, September 26, 2023). [Translation: there are many people from Mexico, they don't speak Spanish, there it is because of a Mixteco, and they come here thinking that they just come to work for someone else and they will never be the owners, because they think that we can't do that. Because we are indigenous people who don't even speak Spanish and we can't. Well, it is, it is difficult, but it is not that I say, or it cannot be done”]. Maura's perspective demonstrates the additional hurdles faced by immigrant farmers, particularly indigenous Mixteco migrants, in accessing resources and land ownership. Despite these challenges, her determination shows profound resilience within immigrant farming communities.

Similarly, Savannah Flynn, of Flynn farms has firsthand experiences of applying to grants and programs meant to serve historically underserved farmers and the gaps that still exist, mentioning, “and now I'm waiting on a grant from we feed Washington...they were looking for five BIPOC farmers to facilitate it's like a total of 12,000 or 5000 pounds of food a month for this BIPOC Yeah, grant for two-year grant. I haven't heard anything since July (Savannah Flynn, September 18, 2023). Savannah’s firsthand experiences with grant applications highlight the persistent gaps and barriers in support for historically underserved farmers, underscoring the urgent need for actionable solutions to address
systemic inequities and ensure equitable access to resources and opportunities within the agricultural sector.

Barriers to farmers and advocacy organizations included land access and racial inequities, financial, language, and inability to obtain TA and other supportive resources. These barriers are all linked and echo the findings discussed in the literature review and research problem. The significance of land access is demonstrated in Whatcom farmer Maura Vasquez's sentiments of the unaffordable cost of farming when limited by small plots. This same sentiment is voiced by Whatcom farmer Savannah Flynn, who identifies land and equipment access as pivotal challenges, emphasizing the disparities faced by those without generational wealth or local roots. The meta-theme of barriers to achieving goals in sustainable and alternative agriculture prominently features land access and racial inequities. Participants emphasized the importance of land access and capital for farmers' success and sustainability, echoing sentiments like those of Maura Vasquez and Savannah Flynn. Additionally, racial inequities emerged as a significant barrier, with participants highlighting disparities in land ownership and the challenges faced by young farmers, particularly farmers of color and women. These barriers, including financial constraints, language barriers, and limited access to technical assistance, are interconnected and reinforced by Mauricio Soto's remarks, emphasizing the obstacles faced by beginner farmers, especially immigrants. Overall, these insights shed light on the complex challenges within the agricultural sector and the urgent need for equitable solutions.

4.5 Social Justice

On the topic of social justice concerning alternative agriculture in this region, interviews revealed several key themes. One notable initiative involves the State Housing and Finance Commission recognizing challenges faced by land trusts and creating a funding program, as shared by Robin Fay, the Conservation Director for the Washington Farmland Trust. Leveraging its expertise in real estate finance, the Commission established a revolving loan fund, enabling land trusts to access capital swiftly for land purchases. Collaborating with The Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC), which works to
preserve natural resources within Washington state through voluntary and incentive-based programming, funded by the state legislature, they launched the Farm Protection & Affordability Investment Program (Farm PAI, 2022). The objective of this loan program is to assist eligible farmers in safeguarding important, at-risk farmland, ensuring its continued production, and reducing barriers to land access for novice or historically marginalized farmers and ranchers.

The theme regarding social justice in agriculture underscores the critical need for equitable access to resources and opportunities, particularly in terms of farmland accessibility for historically marginalized communities. Robin Faye highlights the Washington Farmland Trust's decade-long focus on affordability, utilizing strategies such as conservation easements to preserve farmland and make it more affordable for the next generation of owners. When addressing the gaps in farmland conservation strategies like conservation easements, Robin poignantly discusses how these common strategies, can benefit both the landowner and the community by preserving affordable land and facilitating generational transfer, yet it tends to exclude historically marginalized groups from accessing land, as it does not address affordability nor historical discrimination and exclusion. Additionally, Robin reflects on the organization's journey toward equity and diversity, acknowledging its historical lack of diversity and subsequent efforts to rectify this. He describes initiatives such as the "Farm to Farmer" program, initially designed for land linking but now evolving to address the broader challenges of land access and financing for new farmers. Additionally, he discusses a partnership with the State Housing and Finance Commission to create a funding program facilitating land access through low-interest loans for land purchase and conservation easements, focusing on working with coalition partners like the Black Sovereignty Coalition (Robin Faye, September 24, 2023). Robin Faye's insights into the WFT's changing priorities demonstrates an organizational shift towards addressing systemic barriers and promoting inclusivity within the agricultural landscape.

These efforts and gaps are also recognized by WSU Extension, as highlighted by my conversation with Kate Smith. The university acknowledges the need for individual TA, especially for beginning
farmers requiring bilingual support. This commitment aligns with a broader dedication to fostering social justice within sustainable land use practices. She mentions that “from the beginning [WSU] has been a partner in that and continues to this day partnering through many federal grant applications. And it was recognized that that need for individual technical assistance for beginning farmers and this specifically in for like bilingual, English, Spanish technical assistance, has been clearly a need and would be not only for participants at Viva but also needed beyond those participants” (Kate Smith, October 13, 2023). By prioritizing individual TA, especially for beginning farmers in need of bilingual support, WSU strives to ensure equitable access to resources and opportunities, thus fostering social justice within sustainable land use practices.

Vero Vergara, community organizer for the National Young Farmers Coalition and owner of a small diversified organic farm describes the connection between racial inequities and agriculture in very poignant ways, telling me that “until we can get on the same page, about how capitalism is structuring, and create, in these crises, policy about regenerative agriculture policy about land access for farmers....I want greater democratic processes across the board when it comes to food systems change. But the problem is structural” (Vero Vergara, October 17, 2023). By advocating for policy reforms that prioritize regenerative agriculture and equitable land access, Vero emphasizes the intersectionality of social justice and sustainable food systems, highlighting the importance of a balance of power in driving transformative change.

In the midst of these challenges, there are positive developments. Innovative programs like Farm PAI and national incubator conferences that Viva Farms participates in are emerging to directly support land access for historically underrepresented farmers and ranchers, reflecting a commitment to addressing gaps in the system and creating opportunities for those who have been historically excluded and who do not make up the majority of landowners in the United States.
Chapter 5: Discussion

This section is dedicated to exploring the significance underlying the results grounded by the literature examined in Chapter 2. The discussion chapter's structure is designed to parallel the results section and provide context for the data analysis. For cohesion, I combined the motivations and ecologically aware farming discussion sections as their results and meanings are inextricably linked. I conclude by discussing the limitations as well as opportunities for further research. It is thus useful to return to the original research questions: How do regional farms (Whatcom and Skagit counties, Washington) and alternative agricultural organizations resist and respond to dominant practices that are both ecologically and socially harmful? And: Why do alternative agricultural organizations and farms choose to remain alternative?

The main discoveries reveal a profound reciprocal relationship between community support and contributing to the community's well-being. Understanding the motivations behind these agriculture alternatives was a critical aspect to this narrative, as participants consistently expressed a firm commitment to environmentally conscious farming practices that prioritize habitat protection and community health. They actively reject conventional methods such as heavy pesticide use and monocropping, which degrade soil quality, decrease affordability and variety in food choices and contribute significantly to greenhouse gas emissions (Montgomery 2017; Pimentel, 2006; Russel, 2001). Instead, farmers and advocacy groups are embracing techniques that promote habitat conservation, enhance soil fertility through ecological approaches and diversified farming. Participants also emphasized their dedication to serving their communities by increasing food accessibility to combat food insecurity and offering culturally appropriate food options in areas increasingly compromised of food deserts or highly processed foods as the only affordable option.

Additionally, interviews revealed the importance of community engagement, nonprofit support, coalition building, access to creative funding opportunities as well as a need for policy advocacy for the success and sustainability of these agricultural alternatives. Participants view their role as sustainable
farmers as integral to supporting a healthier planet and community. Furthermore, they emphasized the significance of tackling systemic power imbalances that have led to the creation of unhealthy food systems, recognizing this as a crucial step for the success of small-scale farmers. This involves collaborating with influential institutions and organizations like WSU Extension and Viva Farms, Land Trusts, conservation commissions and county officials that have opportunities to shape policies through recommendations and provide essential resources such as connection to resources that provide pathways for sustainable land tenure, market access, technical assistance and engagement with federal grants and programs that specifically support underserved farmers. These resources play a critical role in nurturing an environmentally sustainable local food system that supports natural ecosystems while ensuring equitable access to nutritious and culturally relevant food for the community.

The research questions have played a crucial role in shaping the research methodology, the coding process, the analysis, and the ultimate communication of the results and discussion. Each participant contributed unique and essential insights for addressing the questions and anchoring it within the specific context of farming in Whatcom and Skagit counties, as well as insights into the successes and barriers that persist within alternative agriculture in the context of a conventional industrial agricultural complex that has created a socially and ecologically destructive food system.

5.1 Motivations

The narrative of Latine farmers' commitment to alternative agriculture and ecosystem preservation resonates strongly with the multi-scalar approach of political ecology, particularly in its consideration of scale dynamics. Farmers expressed their local efforts as a direct link to influencing broader political and environmental goals. By interacting with institutions that hold greater power, these farmers and advocacy organizations understand the greater impact their food systems change can have on the greater food system such as supporting food access initiatives in clinics and engaging with land trusts that focus on salmon restoration for example. Additionally, prioritizing cultural connections, and community well-being over profit-driven industrial farming, these farmers exemplify how local-level
actions intersect with broader socio-economic and environmental concerns. Political ecology's emphasis on understanding environmental issues within socio-political and economic contexts demonstrates the significance of grassroots actions like alternative agriculture in addressing systemic injustices, such as food insecurity among marginalized communities and racial and gender gaps in land ownership, and an inaccessibility into food markets and distribution (Alkon 2012; Korsunsky, 2020; Robbins et al., 2014; Smith, 2020). Moreover, the literature on immigrant food systems further illuminates how these initiatives not only preserve cultural identities but also contribute to community health and economic resilience, offering a stark contrast to the exploitative experiences commonly faced by migrant laborers in conventional agricultural settings, and those living in food insecure households or food deserts (Korsunsky, 2020; Mares 2011; Marte 2007; Smith, 2020). Thus, the narrative presented here aligns closely with political ecology's recognition of the interconnectedness of environmental issues, highlighting how localized efforts can have far-reaching implications in addressing and examining broader socio-environmental challenges.

Furthermore, numerous Latine farmers, drawing from their conventional farming backgrounds, not only voiced a strong inclination to move away from heavy pesticide use due to past negative experiences with harmful exposure but also demonstrated a keen awareness that the conventional versus organic farming divide is a foreign construct, originating predominantly from the United States, distant from the chemical-free subsistence farms of their native lands. This notion has been extensively studied by researchers, including investigations into the impact of global trade agreements such as NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement] that have detrimentally affected local agrarian producers in various regions of Mexico due to harmful corn subsidies destroying local producer prices, making it impossible for small farmers to earn enough to live on as before the trade agreements (Mares 2011; Marte 2007; Morris, 2014; Smith, 2020). The NAFTA agreements have been extensively researched for its negative and wide-reaching impacts on Mexican livelihoods. While NAFTA was expected to boost Mexico's economy and curb immigration, but it failed on both fronts. Economic growth stagnated, and
unemployment rates rose (Mares 2011; Marte 2007; Morris, 2014; Smith, 2020). Large corporations benefitted from cheap labor and lax regulations, while small farmers and industrial workers in Mexico suffered and as a result, migration from Mexico to the U.S. surged, creating demographic shifts and economic challenges in both countries (Mares 2011; Marte 2007). Subsequently, these migrant laborers, forced to look for viable employment in the U.S due to these agreements faced discrimination, horrific working conditions, and few changes for upward mobility, demonstrating yet another multi-scalar connection between harmful federal policies and its real implications for farmworkers like those interviewed in this study that are searching for sovereignty, community, environmental and personal health and sustainability.

Another common and often referenced motivation I observed in the data was the aim to improve food accessibility and bolster community well-being. Many farmers underscored this as a significant impetus behind their adoption of sustainable agriculture practices. They expressed a profound aspiration to contribute to their community by providing access to culturally relevant and fresh produce, all the while striving to nourish their own families and the broader community. Similarly, organizations echoed this sentiment, emphasizing a shared goal of catalyzing change within food systems, with emphasis on increasing access to nutritious and fresh food options. This effort is grounded in the universal recognition and acknowledgment of food deserts created by harmful policies such as zoning laws and corporate supermarket control and the challenge many community members face in accessing fresh foods (Leslie, 2022).

While farmers I interviewed acknowledged a potential for higher yield, less weeds, less labor, and more profit within a conventional system, they remain staunchly against using chemical herbicides and fungicides like their larger ex-employers. These farmers demonstrate a powerful relationship to the land and desire for control and autonomy on their soil, regardless of profit and conventional funding for larger, higher yielding farms. As stated by Paul Robbins (2012) and Peet and Watts (1996), political ecology is a framework that delves into human-environment interactions, emphasizing issues surrounding access to
and control over natural resources, such as land tenure, water rights, conservation policies and agricultural practices (Peet and Watts, 1996; Robbins, 2012). PE research has explored the local and national impact of the adoption of agrochemicals, genetically modified seeds, and an increase in corporate control on equipment (Devine, 2020). This research similarly draws an understanding of the consolidation of farmland to the inevitable disharmonizing of the food system as small farmers are no longer able to access farmland, protect the ecosystems and feed their communities, as discussed by participants.

Therefore, these narratives highlight the profound motivations, the why of farmers choose to transform agricultural production away from an exploitive system that has been the norm in this country, (Buttel 2004; Hamiliton 2014), into an approach that embraces a holistic understanding of food production which encompasses community well-being, environmental stewardship, soil quality and the pursuit of autonomy all in spite of the political economic context. This research examines how and why grassroots initiatives, such as alternative agriculture, challenge dominant power structures and offer pathways towards more equitable and sustainable resource management in similar ways that other PE studies have examined agrarian and indigenous struggles to protect natural resources, a rejection of corporate patenting of seeds and an overall consolidated food system (Devine, 2020; Nelson, 2001; Rodríguez, 2015). It demonstrates the importance of recognizing the agency and motivations of local actors in shaping socio-environmental dynamics and highlights the potential for transformative change at multiple scales within the broader political-economic landscape.

5.2 Strengths

The innovation and collaboration, the how articulated by numerous farmers and organizational representatives exhibits the critical role of community engagement, coalition building, cooperative models, grants, and non-profit support in advancing sustainable agricultural practices. The intimate nature of the local and regional food system networks is exemplified in the critical support that organizations like Viva Farms and Land Trusts provide for farmers as a liaison to county, state and federal funding structures as seen with the Farm PAI program through the Conservation Commissions to address
equitable access to farmland or programs though the WSDA and NRCS to address environmental concerns. Without the farmers’ connection to local organizations like Viva Farms and Land Trusts, the farmers’ ability to access land and resources to farm sustainably is reduced as these organizations can support the acquisition of grants and federal programming whose application process can create further barriers for participation.

In this regard, this research intersects with the perspectives of feminist political ecology, which advocate for a more inclusive, collective, and equitable approach to environmental stewardship (Jarosz, 2011; Kirk 1997) by focusing non-profit and innovative funding efforts for historically underserved farmers. Feminist political ecology and environmental justice are particularly useful as their theoretical approaches aim to ground environmental harms as experienced and distributed unequally across races and genders due to political power imbalances (Bullard, 2008; Elias, 2021), thus, this research reveals the need for comprehensive responses that address the complexity of historical, social, and economic factors across various scales, ultimately shaping food systems, and creating a need for social movements and response like initiatives such as Viva Farms and Cloud Mountain incubator farm, which operate on cooperative principles. Additionally, creative funding mechanisms, such as those employed by the Washington Farmland Trust in partnership with the Washington Conservation Commission, alongside more traditional models like Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), play significant roles in promoting sustainable agriculture. Coalition building and community support reject the principles of industrial agriculture, which often lead to over-exploitation and the creation of destructive and disharmonized food distribution systems (Kirk 1997). Instead, these collaborative strategies prioritize social relationships and community and environmental care, similar to political feminist political ecology principles (Kirk 1997).

Participants emphasized the importance of community health and stewardship over exploitation and degradation of natural resources. This emphasis on inclusion and participation prioritizes
conservation of small acreage for biodiversity as opposed to large scale agriculture and promote accessibility to land ownership for more than just the elite few (Kirk 1997; Peet and Watts, 1996; Robbins, 2012), similar to other PE research findings that focus on farmer sovereignty and democratic processes to land management strategies to address environmental and social issues (Delvin, 2020; Kirk 1997; Peet and Watts, 1996). Thus, addressing the research question that seeks to understand how agricultural alternatives succeed in a system that has revealed various gaps and barriers.

5.3 Barriers

In discussions surrounding barriers, many participants underscored the challenges of land and resource access as recurring obstacles hindering the success of their goals in alternative agriculture. This discourse on significant barriers further highlights the thesis posited by scholars in PE, who contend that social movements emerge as responses to inequitable power structures that perpetuate environmental and social harm (Robins, 2004). Vero Vergara aptly encapsulated this sentiment, stating, "We need to reframe the common argument that farmers require access to land to practice regenerative agriculture. Instead, we must recognize that there are already farmers practicing regenerative agriculture who need long-term access to land to witness the outcomes of their farming methods and approaches" (Vero Vergara, October 17, 2023). Returning to the original research question is useful to synthesize the findings of this meta theme. The how and the why for alternative agriculture organizations and farmers has become clear in the previous sections, and yet even with coalitions, grant support and community engagement, participants were clear about the barriers that nonetheless persist only further deepening the mission of these environmental movements towards socially and ecologically sustainable alternatives (Robbins, 2004).

As frequently cited by participants, social justice, and racial inequities as compounding barriers towards their ultimate success, further confirms the findings of EJ researchers who argue that environmental problems and solutions are not evenly distributed among populations (Hurley, 1995; Pellow, 2002; Pellow & Park, 2002; Walsh, Warland, & Smith, 1997). The intricate challenges faced by farmers of color, particularly in accessing federal programs, resources, and access to farmland exemplifies
the core principles of environmental justice. While Robin Faye from the Washington Farmland Trust and Kate Smith from WSU extension agreed that for any beginning small farmer, getting a foot in the door for farmland access is extremely difficult, the challenges are much greater for women and BIPOC farmers, especially with added language barriers and not belonging to generational wealth. BIPOC farmers who face the most challenges in succeeding in alternative agriculture continue to hold a deep desire for a healthy and sustainable food system, despite the barriers. As was laid out within the Chapter 2, the inability to access land, particularly for small farms owned by people of color, women, and historically marginalized communities, impacts not just these groups but also the land itself. If farmland remains accessible only to large agricultural corporations, it will contribute to the degradation of healthy topsoil (Horst & Marion, 2019; Minkoff-Zern 2016; Pimentel, 2006). These insights add to the scholarship of environmental justice that emphasizes the importance of addressing systemic inequalities in environmental issues such as support for a more just and sustainable food system.

This argument lies at the intersection of the social and ecological aspects of the research problem, considering the multi-scaler significance of this issue. If farmland consolidation in the US persists, resulting in the loss of more small farmers like Mauricio, Maura, Ellie, and Jesus, and so many countless more, there will be fewer individuals with a deep passion for conserving farmland, protecting soil, and nourishing their communities. This could hinder the successful continuation of farming and the development of sustainable and healthy food systems across the country.

5.4 Social Justice

Continuing the discussion of social justice within alternative agriculture, interviews highlighted several key themes, particularly initiatives addressing land access and affordability for historically marginalized communities. Efforts also focus on ensuring equitable access to resources, grants, TA, and capital for underserved communities, emphasizing the need for individualized support, especially for beginning farmers requiring bilingual support, aligning with a broader commitment to fostering social justice within sustainable land use practices. This theme further highlighted structural challenges rooted in
Participants brought to light entrenched structural inequities, such as the plight of migrants who arrive in the United States solely as laborers, with no prospects for upward mobility. Others expressed frustration with grants and federal programs supposedly aimed at supporting underserved communities but instead perpetuating structural barriers through convoluted application processes or lack of language support. Despite these challenges, participants discussed the urgency of addressing such structural issues through policies promoting equitable land access to rectify historical injustices.

This discussion concurs with the findings of political ecology (PE), which advocates for restructuring political power imbalances and addressing structural inequities to effectively tackle local and regional environmental challenges. By focusing on issues of land access and affordability specifically for farmers of color and women farmers, stakeholders aim to challenge and influence dominant power structures and promote equitable and sustainable land use practices. Through collaborative initiatives and policy advocacy, such as the Farm Pai initiative and incubator programs like Viva Farms, efforts are underway to dismantle systemic barriers and foster a more inclusive and just agricultural landscape (Kirk, 1997; Peet and Watts, 1996; Robbins, 2012). These codes and themes answered the research questions that asked the how and the why of agricultural alternatives in the region, demonstrating the solutions, the profound desire for a healthier food system, and the gaps and injustices that continue to exist within these systems.

5.5 Limitations

This research reveals the importance of community engagement, coalition building, policy advocacy, innovative funding solutions and equitable resource access for underserved, small farmers in advancing sustainable agricultural practices that promote social and ecological health, in direct contrast to the status quo of the current food system. However, there are important limitations to acknowledge in this study. First, it is crucial to recognize that while Whatcom and Skagit counties offer potential for agriculture in the United States.
influencing national food systems change as leaders in the alternative agriculture movement, their unique geographic and political landscapes differ significantly from the rest of the country. For similar studies, researchers would need to consider factors such as the type of agriculture, historical context, and existing support systems for small BIPOC and beginning alternative agriculture farmers in the region.

Additionally, while I have endeavored to incorporate a diverse range of voices and expertise in my analysis, this study does not encompass the full spectrum of perspectives within the alternative agriculture communities of these counties. Particularly, the perspectives of indigenous farmers and community leaders and organizers would be a vital insight and perspective to include, however as relationship and trust building takes time and care, the time limit and my own network and identity limitations did not allow for me to include these perspectives. Instead, my research serves as an illustrative narrative exploration of some voices engaged in alternative agriculture within these specific communities.

Additionally, like other thesis research, there was a limitation created by the condensed two-year timeline and the lack of ability to follow up with participants due to this timeline.

5.6 Opportunities for Further Research

As evidenced by the data, numerous obstacles persist for farmers, particularly marginalized farmers in achieving success within alternative agriculture endeavors, a sentiment echoed by organization representatives. Therefore, the identified themes and codes from this analysis could offer insights for future research, potentially enhancing support for alternative agriculture in the region.

Agricultural policy and supportive institutions such as the USDA and NRCS play pivotal roles in facilitating farmers' pursuit of their objectives through funding and technical assistance. However, it is imperative that these entities prioritize the perspectives and experiences of marginalized groups, particularly farmers of color and women farmers. As reports from the National Young Farmers and American Farmland Trust highlight, these emerging BIPOC farmers are at the forefront of efforts to regenerate soil health and sustainably feed and uplift their communities (Ackoff et al., 2017; Bigelow et
al., 2016; Horst & Marion, 2019). Therefore, their insights into the persistent gaps and barriers within the agricultural landscape must be given precedence to truly achieve the goals outlined by the USDA, which include identifying and addressing systemic discrimination and ensuring equitable access to USDA programs and services.

Locally, stakeholders like Kate Smith from WSU Extension emphasize the pressing need for greater support for small BIPOC farmers in Whatcom and Skagit counties. Building trust and amplifying marginalized voices are essential steps to better understand the existing barriers and gaps and determine the support mechanisms within these counties. The data collected in this research can thus serve as a valuable model for eliciting diverse perspectives and crafting recommendations for organizations such as WSU Extension, Washington Farmland Trust, and the WSDA. Furthermore, it is crucial to prioritize programs within the NRCS and USDA designed to serve historically underserved communities (HUCs). This should be done with tools like the data collection methods used in this research to evaluate the effectiveness of these programs in supporting farmers in agriculturally rich counties. Adopting a PE multi-scalar approach which analyzes environmental issues from multiple stakeholder perspectives would allow for a full assessment of potential programmatic impact on regional farmers. Starting at the local scale using methods of semi-structured interviewing techniques as seen in this study, further research could identify more challenges found within the food system impacted by national and regional scales as seen in PE multi-scalar approaches.

Additionally, the PE approach advocates for restructuring effective program outcomes when engaging with marginalized populations (Devine, 2020). This approach highlights the importance of engaging local communities in defining successful programming metrics and identifying key factors that need to be monitored to ensure impact (Devine, 2020). This engagement with community leaders and representatives is vital for reducing power imbalances between local participants and service providers and grant institutions as seen in the Washington Farmland Trust’s work with the Black Sovereignty Coalition and Vero Vergara’s position as Coalition Organizer for the National Young Farmers' Coalition
and Kate Smith’s office at WSU Extension hiring a trilingual, Mixteco, Spanish and English community representative and employee. Rather than perpetuating existing inequalities, this approach aims to empower marginalized communities and ensure their voices are respected and considered in any program planning process. The recommendations provide guidance for interventions that address the specific needs and challenges faced by marginalized farmers, thereby promoting a more inclusive and equitable agricultural landscape at local, regional, and national scales.

5.7 Conclusion

Revisiting the initial questions and the theoretical frameworks explored to shape the research design, I uncovered profound insights within the coded transcripts. These revelations shed light on the present experiences of alternative agriculture producers and advocates in the region. The visual representation provided by Figure 8 serves as a simple graphical summary, where the size of words corresponds to their frequency. Notably, the larger words in the cloud, such as "land," "farm," "programming," "access," and "community," stand out as recurring themes. The consistent use of the word "land" highlights the fundamental importance that farmers place on ownership and stewardship of their own space, which is unsurprising given the literature addressed within Chapter 1.
As described in the literature review, Robbins (2004) lays out a useful understanding to the post-structuralist political ecology framework that emphasizes the emergence of a multi-scalar perspective on environmental identities as a response to the necessity of resisting and addressing political power imbalances that have given rise to a prevailing agricultural system with social and ecological repercussions (Robbins 2004, p. 15), and thus unveiling and understanding the methods – the how and the why of alternative agricultural producers and advocates are able to resist and respond to these structural systems and how the multi-scalar implications are felt on their own lands and soils. The key findings of this research focus on the importance of community engagement, coalition building, and policy advocacy in advancing sustainable agricultural practices among Latine and women farmers in Whatcom and Skagit counties and beyond. Participants emphasized the significance of farming as a means of cultural preservation and resilience in the face of climate change challenges. Their experiences also shed light on the structural barriers faced by farmers of color and women farmers, particularly in accessing land and
resources. It is clear from the voices of the farmers, service providers and advocates that emphasis on social equity for small farmers is pivotal towards food systems change.

As Edgar Franks, one of the co-owners of Cooperative Tierra Y Libertad (Land and Liberty Farm Cooperative), based out of Whatcom County stated in an interview, “efforts to retake the land and rebuild our communities require us to internationalize class and racial struggles, since capitalism and agrobusiness have intensified exploitation and land grabs across borders. [We want to] show the workers that they have the knowledge, the capacity, everything they need to run their own farm without exploiting people or the land. The purpose of production was not to become rich but to grow food that is accessible and culturally appropriate” (Hammer and Hope, 2023). These agriculture alternatives may not only serve as strategies for mitigating climate change but also represent a significant stride toward fostering a healthier, more holistic, and resilient food system that values the farmer, the land, and the community.
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Appendix A: Interview Guide and Questions

**Question Guide For Regional Organizations:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus of questions</th>
<th>Example of an interview question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experiences and behaviors</td>
<td>Tell me how you came to be involved in this type of work? What is the mission of this organization?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How did you come to acquire and farm this land?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What was easy about this? What was hard about this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinions and values</td>
<td>What is your role within the organization?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What is the biggest barrier and biggest strength within your organization for achieving your goals?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What are your goals regarding land access?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What are your goals regarding ecological sustainability?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One of the things I’m interested in is the racial and gender gap” How does this or does this not reflect your experience?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings</td>
<td>What do you think are the biggest barriers to these goals for alternative agriculture in general? And specifically, within Whatcom and Skagit countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>What are the funding structures for your organization?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensory observations</td>
<td>What are some of the sentiments of the farmers and networks you work with regarding your organization’s mission and goals?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Patton, 2002)

**Question For Regional farmers:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus of questions</th>
<th>Example of an interview question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experiences and behaviors</td>
<td>Tell me how you came to be involved in this type of work? What is the mission of your farm?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinions and values</td>
<td>What is your role within the farm?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Question For National Alternative Organizations:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus of questions</th>
<th>Example of an interview question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experiences and behaviors</td>
<td>Tell me how you came to be involved in this type of work? What is the mission of this organization?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinions and values</td>
<td>What is your role within the organization?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What is the biggest barrier and biggest strength within your organization for achieving your goals?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings</td>
<td>What do you think are the biggest barriers to these goals for alternative agriculture in general?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>What are the funding structures for your organization? What kind of projects does your organization fund?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensory observations</td>
<td>What are some of the sentiments of the farmers and networks you work with regarding your organization's mission and goals?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Patton, 2002)

**Farmer Interview Questions:**

1. Tell me how you came to be involved in this type of work?
2. What is your role within the farm?
3. Has that role changed much over time? Why or why not?
4. What is the mission of this farm?
5. What is the biggest barrier and biggest strength within your farm for achieving your goals?
6. How did you come to acquire and farm this land?
7. What was easy about this? What was hard about this?
8. How many people work on this farm?
   What do they do?
   Full time? Seasonal?
9. What are your revenue markets?
10. Where or how do you sell the most amount of produce?
11. How many pounds of food do you produce?
   Do you know how many people you feed/connect with through your farm?
   Do you have a CSA or farmers market, and do you know how many households you sell to or interact with there?
12. Any value added products?
13. Do you have a job outside of your farming work?
   Or does anyone in your household have another job to support the farm work?
   How many hours on each?
14. Any other revenue sources for your farm?
15. What are your goals/thoughts regarding farmland access?
   Is that something you think about? Tell me your experience with this if you have had any?
16. What are your goals/thoughts regarding ecological sustainability?
17. What do you think are the biggest barriers to farmers specific goals for alternative agriculture in general and for you specifically? Or specifically, within Whatcom and Skagit countries?
18. Where do you look for support for these barriers....
19. According to the 2014 National Agricultural statistical services report, white males account for 83% of all farmland ownership in the United States, compared to 5.4% Hispanic males, and 3.2% Black males, while white females account for 13% of all U.S farmland ownership compared to 0.8% Hispanic females and 0.7% Black females (Horst & Marion, 2019; NASS 2014).
   How does this Stat reflect or not reflect your experience as a farmer
20. What are some of the sentiments of the farmers and networks you work with regarding your organization's mission and goals?
21. What else should I know about your farm and your work?

Organization Interview Questions

1. What is your role within the organization?
2. Has that role changed much over time? Why or why not?
3. What is the biggest barrier and biggest strength within this organization for achieving your/the organizations goals?
4. Who are the people that you work the most with within your organization? Has this changed overtime?
5. What are your organizations goals/thoughts regarding farmland access?
   Is that something you think about? Tell me your experience with this if you have had any?
6. What are your goals/thoughts regarding ecological sustainability within the work that you do?
7. What do you think are the biggest barriers to farmers specific goals for alternative agriculture in general and for you specifically? Or specifically, within Whatcom and Skagit countries?
8. Where do you look for support for these barriers....
9. According to the 2014 National Agricultural statistical services report, white males account for 83% of all farmland ownership in the United States, compared to 5.4% Hispanic males, and 3.2% Black males, while white females account for 13% of all U.S farmland ownership compared to 0.8% Hispanic females and 0.7% Black females (Horst & Marion, 2019; NASS 2014).
   How does this Stat reflect or not reflect your experience as a member of this organization?
10. What are the funding sources for your organization?
11. What are some of the sentiments of the farmers and networks you work with regarding your organization’s mission and goals?
12. What else should I know about your organization and your work?

Entrevista para agricultores:
1. Cuéntame ¿cómo llegaste a involucrarte en este tipo de trabajo?
2. ¿Cuál es su posición dentro de la finca?
3. ¿Ese position ha cambiado mucho con el tiempo? ¿Por qué o por qué no?
4. ¿Cuál es su misión de esta finca?
5. ¿Cuál es la mayor barrera y la mayor fortaleza de su granja para lograr sus objetivos?
6. ¿Cómo llegó a adquirir y cultivar esta tierra?
7. ¿Qué fue fácil en esto? ¿Qué fue lo difícil de esto?
8. ¿Cuántas personas trabajan en esta finca?
9. ¿Qué hacen?
10. ¿Tiempo completo? ¿Estacional?
11. ¿Cuáles son sus mercados de ingresos?
12. ¿Dónde o cómo vende la mayor cantidad de productos?
13. ¿Cuántas libras de comida produce?
14. ¿Sabes cuántas personas alimenta o con las que te conectas a través de tu granja?
15. ¿Tiene un CSA o un mercado de agricultores y sabe a cuántos hogares les vende o interactúa allí?
16. ¿Algún producto con valor agregado?
17. ¿Tiene un trabajo fuera de su trabajo agrícola?
18. ¿O alguien en su hogar tiene otro trabajo para apoyar el trabajo agrícola?
19. ¿Cuántas horas en cada uno?
20. ¿Alguna otra fuente de ingresos para su granja?
21. ¿Cuáles son sus objetivos/pensamientos con respecto al acceso a las tierras agrícolas?
22. ¿Es eso algo en lo que piensas? Cuéntame tu experiencia con esto si has tenido alguna?
23. ¿Cuáles son sus objetivos/pensamientos con respecto a la sostenibilidad ecológica?
24. ¿Cuáles cree que son las mayores barreras para los objetivos específicos de los agricultores para la agricultura alternativa en general y para usted en particular? ¿O específicamente, dentro de los países de Whatcom y Skagit?
25. Donde se busca apoyo para estas barreras....
26. Según el informe de los Servicios Nacionales de Estadísticas Agrícolas de 2014, los hombres
blancos representan el 83% de toda la propiedad de tierras agrícolas en los Estados Unidos, en comparación con el 5,4% de los hombres hispanos y el 3,2% de los hombres negros, mientras que las mujeres blancas representan el 13% de todas las propiedades de tierras agrícolas de los Estados Unidos, en comparación con el 0,8% de mujeres hispanas y el 0,7% de mujeres negras (Horst & Marion, 2019; NASS 2014).

¿Cómo refleja o no esta estadística su experiencia como agricultor?

27. ¿Cuáles son algunos de los sentimientos de los agricultores y las redes con las que trabaja con respecto a la misión y los objetivos de su organización?

28. ¿Qué más debo saber sobre tu finca y tu trabajo?
Appendix B: IRB Approval

To: Dale Bronstein
Faculty Advisor, Vanita Darby

Project Title: Cultivating Change: Case Study Analysis of Agricultural Assistance in Whatcom and Skagit Counties, Washington
Protocol Number: WWU000/2023
Date: 6/27/2023

The Western Washington IRB has determined that the study referenced above qualifies for Exemption as defined by 45 CFR 46.101(b) Categories of Exempt Human Subjects Research.

Exempt Category 2

This exemption is given under the following conditions:

1. The research will be conducted according to the protocol. Please be sure to use any IRB approved recruitment, informed consent forms or information letters.

2. The research will be conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of Justice, Beneficence, and Respect for Persons, as described in the Belmont Report, as well as with federal regulations and University policy and procedure.

3. All research personnel remain up to date with CITI training through data collection.

4. IRB approval will be obtained prior to making any modifications that change the research project. This includes changes to study personnel, research participants, recruitment methods, compensation, consent process procedures or documents, or changes in study materials that deviate from the approved scope.

5. All research records will be maintained in accordance with WWU's guidelines for document retention.

6. The IRB will be promptly informed of any issues that arise during the conduct of the research, such as adverse events, unanticipated problems, protocol deviations, or any issue that may increase the risk to research participants.

Thank you for your attention to these details. If you have questions at any point, please contact a Research Compliance Officer.
## Appendix C: Intercoder Reliability Check

Table for Research Assistants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Agriculture Methods, Why: Connection to Culture and Family</td>
<td>Mention of farming as a means for connection to roots, culture and family and the importance of this connection including knowledge of farming from this cultural connection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Agriculture Methods, Why: Community and personal Health</td>
<td>Mention of growing alternatively for focus on personal and community health.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Agriculture Methods, Why: Mission driven work</td>
<td>Mention of farming or advocacy as mission driven work i.e., growing food just for the food bank or for community to have more affordable access to healthy, fresh, culturally appropriate foods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Agriculture Methods, Why: Negative experience from working with/on conventional farms</td>
<td>Mention of farming ecologically or alternatively because of a direct negative experience with conventional farming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Agriculture Methods, How: Coalition Building</td>
<td>The importance of building coalitions to achieve goals of alt farming (non-conventional social and ecologically harmful).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Agriculture Methods, How: Farm/Organization Goals</td>
<td>Overall farm/Organization goals and missions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers: Harmful Policies</td>
<td>Mention of state/fed policy as direct barrier to achieving goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers: Land Access</td>
<td>Ownership of land as direct barrier to achieving goals of alt farming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers: Racial Justice Inequities</td>
<td>Discriminatory instances as barriers to achieving goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regenerative Farming: Farming Knowledge</td>
<td>Ecological knowledge and farming experience that enhances the ecological health.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regenerative Farming: Stewardship</td>
<td>Stewarding the land. Should this and climate change and farming knowledge be one?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Justice: Equitable Policies</td>
<td>Policies aimed at addressing barriers specifically due for BIPOC farmers that have experienced barriers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Justice: Land Access</td>
<td>Directly focused land access strategies that aims to address social equity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Justice: Language</td>
<td>Language access focus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Justice: Technical Assistance</td>
<td>TA programs and support directly for BIPOC community members.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Where there's been this dynamic where a farmer has a has a problem that includes, but you know, that is completely framed by structural inequity that they're experiencing at an interpersonal level.

And that's beginning with a collective of Hmong farmers and.... The woman has been really kind of spearheading the effort is named Friendly. But I think their entity name is like Pacific Northwest bipoc Farmland Trust.
office. And then we have also contracted another Mixteco interpreter to provide interpretation, awesome at for the Viva farms practicum.

Okay, I got my five acres. Yeah. And, you know, freedom of the West and all that, as a first generation immigrant who never thought like, I could blast Persian music in Deming, Washington.

comencé a plantar en en viva. Escuché del programa que había facilidad de de equipo, cosa que es un gran obstáculo para un principiante agricultor, especialmente inmigrante. Yo pienso.

Pues la misión de de nosotros, la meta. La mayoría de esta de nuestros productos va a los bancos de comida que está ahorita en Burlington y Mount Vernon.... Porque cuando les digo el recién nosotros llegamos aquí fue muy duro la vida y nosotros queríamos mucho a los bancos de comida, nos daban mucha

Pues por nuestra salud y por la de los demás, de la gente, porque pues hay mucha gente que no le importa los demás y ponen todo lo [químico] que a las papas, a la fresas le ponen muchísimas químicos y no les importa

Yo recuerdo donde trabajaban los campos que nos decía de hoy mañana no vas a poder entrar hasta tal hora. Y ponían una falta de fumigar, y ponían pesticidas o corren todos totalmente. Cómo sabes tú que en esas 24 horas ya todo eso que pusieron? Porque es exacto, es una cosa que todavía lo pienso, no entiende. Y allí hay muchas personas que agarraron cáncer y que están enfermos, por eso no me gustan y casi me da se cómo se dice un poco de miedo de tirar este pesticidas o poner cosas así porque no sabes que te puede resultar.
# Appendix D: Final Codebook

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Comment</th>
<th>Code Groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Agriculture Methods: How</td>
<td>The method by which farmers and/or organizations are able to achieve their goals in terms of ecological and social health and success resisting conventional farming methods and systems that are both ecologically and socially harmful.</td>
<td>Resistance and Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Agriculture Methods: How</td>
<td>The importance of building coalitions to achieve goals of alternative farming (non-conventional social and ecologically harmful).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Agriculture Methods: How</td>
<td>Engaging with the community or network in order to achieve goals.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Agriculture Methods: How</td>
<td>Creative ways of obtaining farm land access or farm goals that are a part from conventional methods ie, conventional farming and federal funding.</td>
<td>Resistance and Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Agriculture Methods: How</td>
<td>Farming Knowledge/Farm Success/Strength</td>
<td>Ecological knowledge and farming experience that enhances the ecological health.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Agriculture Methods: How</td>
<td>Farm/Farmer Strength</td>
<td>Resistance and Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Agriculture Methods: How</td>
<td>Grants/Government Support</td>
<td>Mention of grants or gov support direction focused on social justice and equity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Agriculture Methods: Why</td>
<td>● Market Solutions</td>
<td>Resistance or methods that are focused on market solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Agriculture Methods: Why</td>
<td>● Non-Profit Support</td>
<td>Mention of working with non-profits and getting or giving support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Agriculture Methods: Why</td>
<td>● Connection to Culture and Family</td>
<td>Mention of farming as a means for connection to roots, culture and family and the importance of this connection including knowledge of farming from this cultural connection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Agriculture Methods: Why</td>
<td>● Farm/ Organization Goals</td>
<td>Overall farm/ Organization goals and missions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Agriculture Methods: Why</td>
<td>● Mission Driven Work</td>
<td>Mention of farming or advocacy as mission driven work ie, growing food just for the food bank or growing riparian trees to enhance the estuaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Agriculture Methods: Why</td>
<td>● Personal and Community Health</td>
<td>Mention of importance and focus on personal and community health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Agriculture Methods: Why</td>
<td>● Search for Sovereignty</td>
<td>Desire for land access and alt farming as a means for sovereignty and the importance of it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Agriculture Methods: Why</td>
<td>● Trauma from Conventional Farming Experience</td>
<td>Could rename....but mention of farming ecologically or alternatively because of a direct negative experience with conventional farming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Barriers</td>
<td></td>
<td>Barriers for farmers and organizations in achieving their goals for land access and / or means of supporting alt farming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers</td>
<td>Financial Barriers</td>
<td>Mention of finances as biggest barrier to achieving goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers</td>
<td>Harmful Policies</td>
<td>Mention of state/fed policy as direct barrier to achieving goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers</td>
<td>Institutional Barrier</td>
<td>Mention of intuitions as cause of barrier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers</td>
<td>Land Access</td>
<td>Ownership of land as direct barrier to achieving goals of alt farming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers</td>
<td>Language Barriers</td>
<td>Language inaccessibility or language as barrier for achieving goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers</td>
<td>Need for Multiple jobs</td>
<td>And cultural barriers ie.. migrants having it engrained that they are only meant to be farmworkers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers</td>
<td>Racial Justice Inequities</td>
<td>Building trust as an important part but also a barrier for new farmers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecologically Aware Farming</td>
<td></td>
<td>Focus on the ecological health of farms and impact of ecologically healthy and regenerative farms on the overall environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecologically Aware Farming</td>
<td>Climate Change</td>
<td>Direct focus on impacts of farming on climate change ... harmful and mitigator?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecologically Aware Farming</td>
<td>Flavor</td>
<td>Importance and mention of flavor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ecologically Aware Farming</strong></td>
<td>● <strong>Goals</strong></td>
<td>Goals for farms and organizations talking about the ecological aspect of farming</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ecologically Aware Farming</strong></td>
<td>● <strong>Stewardship</strong></td>
<td>Stewarding the land. Should this and climate change and farming knowledge be one?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Justice</strong></td>
<td>● <strong>DEI within Organizations</strong></td>
<td>Internally focused DEI work within networking and organizations and farms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Justice</strong></td>
<td>● <strong>Equitable Policies</strong></td>
<td>Policies aimed at addressing barriers specifically due for BIPOC farmers that have experienced barriers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Justice</strong></td>
<td>● <strong>Land Access</strong></td>
<td>Directly focused land access strategies that aims to address social equity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Justice</strong></td>
<td>● <strong>Language</strong></td>
<td>Language access success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Justice</strong></td>
<td>● <strong>Technical Assistance</strong></td>
<td>TA programs and support directly for BIPOC community members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Justice</strong></td>
<td>○ <strong>Tribal Perspective</strong></td>
<td>Tribal perspective and/or focus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>