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All's Well That Ends Well: How Alabama Farmers Marketers "Last Stand" Against Modernity Was Finally Resolved

Abstract

Farmers markets are inextricably tied to local politics, culture, and individual feelings and behaviors about food and community. Just as the farmers market can be a site for community integration and bonding, it can also be a site of contention–especially when long-standing traditions are threatened. When city planners in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, decided to relocate the modest but long-established farmers market to a new indoor facility along the revitalized Black Warrior Riverfront, vendors and their clients rebelled, worried that a new facility would cater only to upscale shoppers. Ethnographic interviews with all key players were conducted to determine the values and needs of each interest group, with the hopes of reaching an optimal solution to the problem of supplying fresh fruits and vegetables to all citizens. This article features an analysis of points of convergence and divergence among farmer and customer opinions and presents the epilogue to this drawn-out conflict. [farmers market, conflict, ethnicity, class, urban planning]

The site of this research is Tuscaloosa, Alabama, a mid-sized city that serves as the economic and cultural hub for northwestern Alabama and eastern Mississippi. A vendor-only farmers market has been in operation at various locales in Tuscaloosa County for nearly a century. The market has historically benefited the community by providing access to untaxed,[1] fresh, local produce to all segments of society at prices equal to or lower than those at grocery stores. When the City proposed to move the market as part of their riverfront development plans, the farmers uniformly protested, as did most of their customers.

What could possibly be wrong with this project? From the city's vantage point, there was no downside. However, the farmers, usually a docile lot, were up in arms. The city, getting wind of this, wondered what on earth for. At this point the authors, all applied anthropologists and avid participants in the local sustainable food movement, decided to wade into the fray. Our efforts to engender greater understanding and cooperation between the city and the farmers began with informal interviews and a survey of opinion about the proposed relocation, in order to hopefully "grow consensus" on the matter. Our previous research has documented the saga as it has unfolded (----------). Here we report the denouement, the final chapter in the story of how, as the plans took shape, a divergence of opinion formed among the farmers and how the issue was ultimately resolved. This narrative has implications for farmers markets everywhere, as conflicts are prone to develop, especially as cities take a greater interest in directing the development of farmers markets as urban assets.

Framing the Narrative

This is an account of how elected government officials attempted to, and ultimately did, shape food access by relocating a farmers market site, and of the conflict it engendered. It may seem, on the face of it, like a simple case of updating a market's physical shed to attract more consumers. Scratch the surface and intersecting issues of tradition and modernity, ethnicity and class, distance and social space become apparent as well. This case illustrates the interplay of local government, farmers market stakeholders, and their customers in this process.[2] It is a tale in three parts—

the historical, the relational, and the interactional, to borrow a framework from Schiavoni's (2017) work on the contested terrain of food sovereignty.

Tradition and Modernity

The number of farmers markets in the US has exploded to 8,677 from a low ebb of 342 in 1970 (USDA 2017a). Parallel to this growth, distinct market types have emerged that cater to specific consumer preferences associated with class, ethnicity, and age, consistent with Bourdieu's notions of socially structured taste (----------). Despite the wide taxonomy of types (for a complete discussion see ------), farmers markets are rather uniformly portrayed in recent literature as "experience markets" catering to the urban elite consumer looking for heir- loom tomatoes and home-brewed kombucha (Edge 2017; Guthman 2008), while low-key, traditional, producer-only, or "indigenous" venues that tend to offer a limited variety of staples garner little attention. It is imperative to first determine what type of market is being discussed when exclusion is in question, as access and consumer comfort-level highly depend upon the market type (----------).

Conflict

To keep current with national trends, cities may feel pressure to rehabilitate their traditional markets (e.g., ----------). Given that patronizing the local farmer's market, supporting local and sustainable food resources, and (re)connect- ing with the local agro-food system can be ideal means of boosting nutritional and environmental health (Larsen and Gilliland 2009), it would seem that any efforts to promote or improve a farmers market would be a positive move. However, as Chrzan (2008, 2010) discovered when she developed a farmers market in Pennsylvania, the market is not an isolated entity but rather one inextricably tied to local politics, culture, and individuals' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors about food and community. Divergent notions among both vendors and consumers as to the proper structure, form, and function of a farmers market (e.g., management, standards, location, architecture, goods allowed, producer-only status, etc.) have often led to disputes and conflicts documented by anthropologists and others (Andreatta and Wickliffe 2002; Anguelovski 2015a,b; Chrzan 2008, 2010; Counihan 2015; Jarosz 2008; Smithers, Lamarche, and Joseph 2010). Just as the farmers market can be a site for community integration and bonding, it can also be a site of contention, especially when long-standing traditions are threatened. It was our purpose to examine the shared beliefs and knowledge about the farmers market in Tuscaloosa to better understand the impact of the relocation.

Ethnicity and Class, Distance, and Social Space

Alternative food networks, such as community-supported agriculture (CSAs), co-operatives, and farmers markets, aim to improve food access, typically in urban, especially inner city, areas (Lambert-Pennington and Hicks 2016). Despite the best of intentions to increase the availability of wholesome locally grown food for all (Larsen and Gilliland 2009), these entities have been documented to be exclusionary on the basis of ethnicity and income (Lambert-Pennington and Hicks 2016; also see Anguelovski 2014; Guthman 2008; Passidomo 2014; Slocum 2007; Slocum and Cadieux 2015). Ample concern has been registered over the degree to which local food movements in general, and farmers markets in particular, are privileged white middle-class spaces that exclude Blacks, immigrants, and other minorities (Alkon and McCullen 2011; Pilgeram 2012; Ruelas et al. 2012; Slocum 2007, 2008), and the resistance by some to acknowledging this (Lambert-Pennington and Hicks 2016). At times, the exclusion is intentional, as Guthman (2008:393) found when interviewing a CSA manager who made clear "he would not want to use strategies to attract low-income consumers because those strategies 'may discourage the high-end consumers that we cater to.'"

Part of the issue appears to be an inadvertent lack of comprehension on the part of food system agents that perceptions of social space and belonging can differ markedly depending on the demographic characteristics of clients (Lambert-Pennington and Hicks 2016; ----------). Less attention has been paid to class than to ethnicity, though Markowitz (2010) has observed problems in establishing farmers markets that serve the low income, and Kasper (2015) showed that most Memphis farmers market patrons came from wealthier neighborhoods, rather than from the poorer ones located closer to the market. Accessibility issues, especially concerns about transportation and costs, as much as knowledge or alternative ideology, may determine if the less well-off attend. One indicator, subtle or not, of the true extent to which farmers markets reach out to low-income shoppers is whether or not the markets and/or individual vendors accept vouchers from the Senior Farmer's Market Nutrition

Program (SFMNP), the WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP), and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (e.g., Lambert-Pennington and Hicks 2016).

On both the issues of class and ethnicity, we believe that our farmers market case study is a unique one, for reasons that will become apparent.

The Historical

This episode ostensibly begins in 2007 with the city planners' discussion to move the modest but long-established farmers market from its existing shed to a new, large, indoor-outdoor facility along the revitalized Black Warrior Riverfront of Tuscaloosa[3]; however, the story has deeper historical roots.

In 2007, a farmers market had been in continuous operation in Tuscaloosa County since 1924, and the Tuscaloosa Truck Growers Association had been in existence for over 40 years, operating in the same location since 1982 (see Figure S1). Their vendor-only "indigenous" market sat at a central crossroads–the confluence of Martin Luther King Boulevard (the main artery through Tuscaloosa's historically black neighborhood, Westside), Jack Warner Parkway (the riverbank northern border of downtown), and the northern terminus of Greensboro Avenue (which demarcates the Westside from downtown) (see Figure S2). As mapped by the USDA Food Access Research Atlas, about half of the Westside neighborhood is a food desert (USDA 2017b). Only three states have higher rates of food insecurity than Alabama (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2016). So, in a real sense, the Tuscaloosa Farmers Market—operating two to three days a week from March through November—served as an intermittent grocery for West Tuscaloosans.[4]

The red-roofed market shed was a rather small and modest affair, but the market had a large and loyal customer base. In 2008, the Farmers' Association consisted of 42 vendor members, of which nine were board members. The board carefully enforced the association's rules and regulations and monitored the origin of produce sold by making visits to members' property at random or when a complaint was lodged. Traditional fresh vegetables and seasonal fruits were piled high—greens, squash, tomatoes, corn, nothing heirloom or fancy. While fresh produce made up the bulk of available items for purchase, some jams and canned goods, soap, baked goods, eggs, sunflowers, and honey were also available. No meat, cheese, dairy products, beverages, or prepared foods were sold until 2010, when one of the vendors began to offer beef. Three critical features to note for later reference in Figure S1 are the ample parking, the room for farmers' trucks to back up to the shed, and the overflow of vendors onto the tarmac.

In contrast with the demographics of other markets (c.f. Govindasamy et al. 1998; and Tiemann 2008), the Tuscaloosa Farmers Market served a diverse customer base representative of the population. It was a vibrant site of diversity in which everyday social barriers of class, race, age, and gender were temporarily suspended as people were drawn together by the same desire: to eat fresh, local food. Blacks and Whites predominated, with Asian, Latino, and other ethnic groups also attending. Many customers benefited from USDA Farmers' Market Nutrition Programs for the low income and the elderly, in which nearly all vendors participated. Likewise, the farmers were black as well as white, and the group that formed the original association included a black couple.

There were two previous iterations of the farmers market before the Farmers' Association started. The first was the Curb Market on Greensboro Avenue in front of the Federal Courthouse (Figures 1 and S3), founded in 1924 (Harris 1925:15). Note the black and white vendors and customers intermingling at the Curb Market in this 1935 photo. The apparent lack of segregation captured in this image has been validated by numerous interviews with current farmers who sold at the market when they were younger.

When discussing historical race relations in Tuscaloosa's food economy, it is important to distinguish between production, distribution, and consumption. Without idealizing the social relations of field production in the early 20th century Deep South, it is instructive to note that the working farm remained, after emancipation, a site of mutual, if not equal, labor (Edge 2017). Though often over-looked, distribution in venues such as the farmers market appears to have been similarly free from segregation in Tuscaloosa. However, food consumption, both private and public, was an altogether different matter. The intimate, even sexualized, connotations of the eating and sharing of food was something white Southerners found intolerable (Cooley 2015). Cooley (2013), in *The Customer is Always White*, describes the strict segregation of eating establishments in the Deep South until the 1960s. The images of fierce, violent resistance over lunch counter integration in neighboring Birmingham, where one

Figure 1.
Curb market on Greensboro Avenue, Downtown Tuscaloosa, circa 1924.

such anti-desegregation battle reached the US Supreme Court, are indelible. In contrast, neither the customer nor the vendor was always white at the Curb Market. Due no doubt to the attractiveness of cheap black toil, production and distribution were not constrained by the same societal avoidance rules as consumption, nor are they today. A key point is that farmers markets appear to have been a rare space of inclusion across the various strata of ethnicity and class before the Civil Rights Era. Thus, the much written about whiteness and racial exclusion of the new experience markets (Alkon and McCullen 2011; Guthman 2008; Kasper 2015; Lambert-Pennington and Hicks 2016; Pilgeram 2012; Slocum 2007, 2008) is actually a recent phenomenon that applies selectively to experience-type markets.

In short, the Tuscaloosa Farmers Market has historically been a space that offered an antidote to two of the Deep South's most intractable problems: racial segregation and the obesity epidemic exacerbated by poor diets.

The city leased the red shed market site to the Farmers' Association for $1 a year, since it was a property of marginal utility. An 1887 photo (Figure S4) indicates where the shed was built nearly a century later, atop a landfill formed from townspeople tossing their garbage over the bluff into what was then Lake Stallworth, an oxbow of the Black Warrior River. The trash dump discontinued operation in 1952. The EPA considers the site a "brownfield" (contaminated soil), and city planners told us this would be an obstacle for reuse. In building the small shed, the farmers had to sink pilings 30 feet deep to hit solid ground. (In Figure S1, one can observe dips in the river road due to the land instability). The site was deemed worthless until the city decided it would be better utilized as a parking lot for a state-of-the-art outdoor amphitheater being built across the road as part of a massive riverfront development initiative. This became the push factor for moving the market. The pull factor was that the city wanted a market that was modern, multiuse, and more appealing to the public, in general following the national trend and specifically modeling it after a new experience market they had visited in Little Rock, Arkansas.

The new River Market was originally intended to be part of the amphitheater complex across the road, with both funded through municipal bonds. The farmers balked, mainly for fear they would lose control of operations. When the city decided instead to move it 'only' a half mile down the same riverside road to a more 'central' location, farmer and customer support evaporated completely.. .initially. Culturally and conceptually, it would be nowhere near the current site. City planners were totally flummoxed, as they could not grasp why the farmers would not like the bigger and better place. One city planner, showing a total lack of understanding of farmer concerns, complained bitterly, "Why don't the farmers appreciate what we're trying to do for them?"

Due to the ceaseless energy of Tuscaloosa's mayor, River Market construction forged ahead through the recession of 2008, as well as the devastating 2011 tornado that left over 12 percent of the city in ruins, and the grand opening was held on May 5, 2012.

The Relational

In this section we briefly introduce the actors involved in the relocation and discuss how we accessed them, before moving on to an analysis of the content and social space of their interactions. The four groups of key players consisted of the city officials (mayor, planners, and councilmen), the farmer-vendors, the consumers, and the architect contracted to build River Market. As anthropologists, we dropped ourselves in the middle as ethnographers and negotiators (Figure S5). To document and understand the explicit and implicit values and needs of each interest group, we carried out informal, structured, and consensus analysis interviews, in addition to ongoing

participant-observation. Our ultimate goal was to help reach an optimal solution to worsening tensions over the market relocation so that the free flow of locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables to all citizens would not be impeded.

Six city officials (including the mayor, council members, and senior staff of the Office of City Planning and the Office of Economic Development), 22 vendors, 66 actual and potential customers, and one architect were interviewed in total throughout all stages of the research. Thirty-three consumers were interviewed at the farmers market, and the category of potential customers consisted of an opportunistic sample of 33 members of the general public encountered by researchers at three area malls and two public parks. Open-ended questions were asked of an initial fifteen members of the general public and the four vendor respondents to construct the Agree/Disagree statements used for later cultural consensus analysis (Table 1). Twenty vendors and 33 of their customers were interviewed for the consensus analysis as a part of a longer survey. We had intended to include city officials in the consensus task, but we chose not to do so when it became apparent that they had no understanding of the market or how it functioned.

Cultural consensus analysis (Romney, Weller, and Batchelder 1986) is a comprehensive statistical routine based on factor analysis designed to assess the degree of agreement between respondents on a specific domain of knowledge. An identical series of questions or items is put to all respondents, usually in statement form, to which they can agree or disagree, answer true or false, apply a rating, or choose the best answer. The technique is ideal for small numbers of respondents and does not require random sampling. The statistical routine more heavily weights the answers of those most knowledgeable or "culturally competent," that is, those who are most often in agreement with the group on each question, to produce a cultural answer key. When the ratio of the eigenvalues of the first and second factor exceeds 3, the group is said to achieve consensus, or share a cultural model of the given domain. Individual competence scores are also produced, as well as a "best answer" key. At the same time, the technique tests for intracultural variation, or differential distribution, of the cultural model within a group, that is, the degree to which members of a group or community differ on certain concepts. Here, consensus analysis was employed to assess the agreement among the sample with respect to their attitudes, preferences, and expectations regarding the relocation and operation of the proposed new market. The advantage of consensus analysis over a standard survey of preferences is that it gets at how people integrate various aspects of farmers market knowledge and experience into a comprehensive model.

Twenty-three consensus questions, all prefaced with the phrase "At the new market. . .," were built from our ethnographic interviews; these illustrated the chief concerns that we heard (Table 1). For the consensus analysis, sample characteristics of the consumers (n = 33) were a mean age of 47 (R 21-79), with 58 percent women and an ethnic breakdown of 39 percent black and 61 percent white. The farmers sample (n = 20), all white, ranged in age from 22 to 81 ($\bar{x}$ = 55) and consisted of 65 percent men. While there were differences in opinion between farmers and their customers on some items, there was overall consensus among them, with a mean competence of 0.63 and an eigenvalue ratio of the first to second factor of 3.7. A plot of the first and second eigenvalues helps to visualize the strong level of agreement (Figure S6). One notable feature here is the handful of outliers, one farmer and several customers, which turned out to be prophetic–although the importance of their disagreement was not apparent at the time. Some points of disagreement among the farmers are evident, likely helping to seed the split that we describe shortly. Disagreement notwithstanding, the cultural answer key for farmers and customers alike was identical on most items, with the exception of whether there would be "more variety in items for sale" and "afternoon hours" at the new market. Also, while slightly over half of customers (n = 17) thought the market was fine as-is, the "culturally correct answer" was to disagree, putting them at odds with farmer consensus on this point.

The Interactional

An interactional perspective allows us to examine political communications among linked actors and emphasize the mutual influence of authorities and citizens on the ultimate shape of food systems. "It situates these interactions as moving through time, both shaped by history and shaping history… interactions… that serve to drive forward–or block or constrain–food sovereignty (Schiavoni 2017:3)." From our vantage point, we could see a serious lack of communication between the city officials and the farmers.

Table 1.
Cultural Consensus Analysis Statements About Expectations of the Proposed New Market, Showing Overall Agreement or Disagreement Based on the Cultural Answer Key

Statements	Farmers	Consumers
1. There will be plenty of nearby parking for customers.	AGREE (17-3)	AGREE (30-3)
2. Vendors will have easy truck access to their stalls for downloading produce.	AGREE (12-8)	AGREE (29-4)
3. There will be handicap access for customers.	AGREE (17-3)	AGREE (31-2)
4. The size of the new facility will be too large.	DISAGREE (3-17)	DISAGREE (6-27)
5. The new location will be less convenient than before.	DISAGREE (9-11)	DISAGREE (7-26)
6. Only products grown or made by the vendors themselves should be sold.	AGREE (20-0)	AGREE (29-4)
7. Vendors who resell produce grown by others [i.e., middlemen] will not hurt the sales of local farmers.	AGREE (20-0)	AGREE (27-6)
8. The variety of products available at the new location will be greater.	DISAGREE (8-12)	AGREE (25-8)
9. Meat, fish, cheese, and prepared foods would be a nice addition to the products offered.	DISAGREE (9-11)	AGREE (24-9)
10. The Farmer's Market Nutrition Program should continue at the new location.	AGREE (19-1)	AGREE (32-1)
11. The hours of operation should remain as they are now.	AGREE (19-1)	AGREE (31-2)
12. More afternoon hours should be added to the schedule of operation.	AGREE (10-10)	DISAGREE (14-19)
13. The farmer's market should be open all day for most of the week.	DISAGREE (4-16)	DISAGREE (8-25)
14. The average price of produce at the new location will be more expensive than before.	DISAGREE (3-17)	DISAGREE (8-25)
15. Low income people will be less likely to shop at the new location.	DISAGREE (3-17)	DISAGREE (6-27)
16. More advertisement will be needed for the new farmer's market.	AGREE (17-3)	AGREE (30-3)
17. Direct contact with farmers will continue to be a benefit of buying at the new location.	AGREE (20-0)	AGREE (30-3)
18. The existing Farmer's Market Association should continue to set the rules and regulations of operation.	AGREE (19-1)	AGREE (32-1)
19. The City of Tuscaloosa will be a better manager of operations than the current Farmer's Market Association	DISAGREE (4-16)	DISAGREE (6-27)
20. Current producer-vendors will not be able to compete if middlemen are allowed to sell.	AGREE (19-1)	AGREE (27-6)
21. Current vendors will gain new customers at the proposed new location.	AGREE (14-6)	AGREE (29-4)
22. Current vendors will lose their repeat customers at the proposed new location.	DISAGREE (3-17)	DISAGREE (4-29)
23. The Farmer's Market is fine as it is—there is no need for change.	AGREE (14-6)	DISAGREE (17-16)

Bolded items highlight differences between groups. Numbers in parentheses show the frequency of Agree versus Disagree statements within each subgroup.

While the Mayor himself took an interest in the dispute, met with us, and facilitated our entrée with other city officials, being the busy man he was, he delegated responsibility. When we began our study, none of the officials charged with refashioning the operation had ever even been to the farmers market, despite the fact that their office location was only three blocks away.

We met with city planners at various moments throughout the study. When we met with them early on to relay concerns about prices remaining affordable and maintaining the current broad socioeconomic status and ethnic mix of consumers, we were told that "the city would like to see built what people and the vendors desire, not grumblings." The puzzlement on

their faces over the social concerns about the venture revealed that these issues were not on their mind. Despite the farmers' acute fears about the future operational plan, the city's feasibility study pertained only to the site and the structure, and they conceded, "We're not working toward management at this time."

Statements on the consensus analysis interview, such as "There will be plenty of nearby parking for customers" and "There will be handicap access for customers," encapsulated the frictions. Figure S1 illustrates the ample parking available at the shed. The initial architect's rendering of the proposed River Market, in contrast, had very little parking, most of it at a distance and none of it adjacent to the market, as it was to be built on a narrow strip of land running between the road and the river (Figure S7). Farmers had many customers with diabetes or other disabilities, who would pull up next to the red shed for curb service without having to leave their vehicles; it appeared this would not be possible in the future location. Another consensus statement to which respondents were ask to agree or disagree was "Vendors will have easy truck access to their stalls for downloading produce." As visible in Figure S1, trucks are backed up to the shed, which allowed easy restocking of the tables under the roofline. Farmers would arrive with their trucks loaded with hundreds of pounds of food. The new market design would not accommodate trucks backing in; instead, landscaping would surround the perimeter of the market (Figure S8), with the expectation that farmers would use hand trucks to transport goods from the parking lot. How this was to be handled with a steady stream of customers, especially if one was working alone, baffled the farmers. When the dispute arose, the head city planner made her first-ever visit to the site only to exclaim, "I was at the Farmers Market last week and there were these *big, old muddy trucks*!" She clearly found the vehicles aesthetically displeasing, or following Bourdieu, disgusting (*desgoust er*: dis + taste), and did not want to see them at the new River Market.

Another statement, "The Farmer's Market Nutrition Program should continue at the new location," addressed the worries that this voucher program, in which all vendors participated, would be disbanded. This statement related to other concerns about market management expressed by the items, "The farmer's market should be open all day for most of the week," "Only products grown or made by the vendors themselves should be sold," and "Current producer-vendors will not be able to compete if middlemen are allowed to sell." The city intended the market to be open daily and to welcome anyone who wished to sell, be they wholesalers or retailers, regardless of whether they grew the crops themselves. When the Head Planner was asked if it would be a producer-only market she said, "No, the general consensus is that it can't be exclusively local farmers. It will be more of a large, diverse, planned market. No group would be excluded from participating, even if a group should want an exclusive area on certain dates and times."

Talk like that panicked the farmers, who knew they would not survive in a competition with mass-market resellers of cheap bulk produce from Florida and Mexico. Customers and farmers alike worried that the price of goods, which had remained low due to their tacit agreement to avoid competition among themselves and ensure sufficient demand across the broad socioeconomic range of their clients, would rise to the point that only upscale shoppers would patronize the market. If they lost control over market management to the city, they would also lose control over prices. The new non-producer vendors would likely not honor the FMNP either. Also, as farmers put it, they could not be at the market daily *and* have time to work their fields (Andreatta and Wickliffe 2002:173 also note problems with daily markets for small farmers). Further concerns assessed included, "The city will be a better manager of operations than the current TFM Association." While the city would now own the River Market, and thus need to manage it and set the rules, the farmers feared the city did not understand farmers markets. "Low income people will be less likely to shop at the new location" was an item based on some farmers' fear that current customers of modest means would not feel comfortable interacting in the elite new space and would thus avoid it.

Worried that they would get priced out of the market and lose current customers, farmers demanded the following: Operationally, the market must be (1) grower only, (2) self-governing, and (3) open half days, two to three days a week, *not* daily. Architecturally, the market must have (1) a permanent structure; (2) a larger pavilion than the current shed; (3) enough space to back trucks up to the tables; (4) full shade from the sun for truck beds; (5) an open-air design on all sides, with a high roof; (6) a center aisle or plaza for customers, with the vendors facing each other; (7) ventilation from overhead fans; and (8) plenty of nearby parking and drive-up handicap access. Many of the farmers' regular patrons were also unhappy. In a *Tuscaloosa News* "Sound Off" entry dated Oct 14, 2009, an anonymous

citizen stated, "Talk about government mucking things up or running amok. What are our city fathers and mothers thinking of? We have a perfectly good farmers market now."

The young architect assigned the job of designing the new market facility was a natural ethnographer and perhaps the unsung hero in the saga. Early in the process, the architect flew with a city delegation to Little Rock to study the model market there. When his original plan, based on the city's ideals, was coolly received by the farmers, he visited the Saturday morning farmers market and observed it from the bluff above, taking notes about its size, the volume of customers, traffic flow, and shed design features both good and bad. He also listened to feedback from the farmers. Shortly after, we submitted a report to the city detailing the farmers' and customers' major operational and structural concerns.[5] The mayor forwarded it on to the architect, who did his best, given the physical constraints of the available property, to incorporate the recommended structural features. Meanwhile, city planners could not come to grips with farmer concerns. According to one, "100 percent will never be pleased. There comes a time when decisions have to be made. I believe that's the point the city is at. I think the city has spent a lot of money trying to redesign it, and they're still not satisfied. If they don't want to participate, they don't have to. The naysayers will be in the trees above Queen City Park [across the road] looking down saying, 'I wish I could participate.'"

The standoff culminated in a city council meeting at which the new design was presented and the farmers and others (including one of the authors) stated their concerns. However, city planners and council members remained deaf to these pleas, and the meeting widened a crack that had formed in the farmers' previously united front. Roughly half left the meeting satisfied that it was worth giving the new locale a try, largely due to the architect's re-rendering of the physical plan and some promises by the city about market governance. The other half dug in with an all-or-nothing stance, evincing little confidence in the city's promises. With hindsight, it became evident that the one farmer outlier in the cultural consensus model had slowly garnered the support of a growing number of customers, and eventually, other farmers, who fissioned off from the association to establish an independent market elsewhere.

Bourdieu's (1984), and more recently Finn's (2017), arguments about taste, distinction, and capital provide insight into what was happening here—social capital being who you know, cultural capital what you know, and economic capital what you own (see figure 2 in ----------). In brief, the current farmers market catered to those with moderate to no economic capital, whether or not they had cultural capital. These folks were looking for filling, nourishing, and cheap fruits and vegetables, nothing fancy. The city's proposed market was intended to serve those with economic and cultural capital, that is, the white, upper-middle class elites looking for an experience and a fulfillment of their refined, healthy tastes. At this point, we predicted—as the farmers and their customers intuited, if they did not articulate it in so many words—that if the city went ahead as planned, there might be unintended consequences. The transformation of their more inclusive social space into one that aimed to please a more highly 'capitalized' crowd might reduce access for those with less economic capital. The market's gaining of a wealthier and more educated clientele might come at the expense of the established low-income clientele, especially black and immigrant consumers. Farmers specifically feared losing both their cultural identity as farmers and the social capital they held with their regular customers.

Resolution

By 2012, two markets were functioning in place of the original one (Figures 2, S9, S10), both keeping the two to three times a week schedule, with the River Market now operating year round. The renegade vendors established a new Northport Farmers Market across the river in a sister city. While the River Market, located a half mile up the road from the old red shed, was five times closer to the former site than the new Northport Farmers Market, it was much further away in terms of social distance.

For several years, operational and structural problems remained at the River Market. While allowances had been made for trucks to back into the south side of the structure, farmers had to bring smaller trucks so two vehicles could share each bay. Shoppers who needed assistance walking from the parking lot to the market were picked up by a golf cart, but this solution created long wait times. Parking spaces were also at a premium during peak times, forcing some to park across a busy four-lane road and negotiate the return with heavy purchases in hand. To their credit, near-market parking spots were later converted to handicap

only spaces, and trucks are now allowed to pull in on both sides of the structure. Experiences, however, were to be had in abundance, with live music, inflatable children's amusements, and plenty of ready-to-consume beverages (Figure S11). By 2018, according to a River Market vendor with a long history in the association, the novelty had worn off and the throngs subsided. While the traffic was still steady, certain River Market vendors did not withstand the decrease in attendance. For example, a dairy farmer who came to the new experience market and did rather well at first selling cheese, stopped coming after few years when his sales dropped. He now sells at a market two hours southeast of Tuscaloosa.

Meanwhile, the Northport Market site started with individual canopies, which were quickly replaced with a large, simple (but beautiful) wood and aluminum shed built by the vendors using their own funds and contributions from other private and public entities. The Northport sign declared it to be "The *Real* Farmers Market," a not-so-subtle jab at the River Market (Figure S12). Another sign read "*Fresh from our Farms*: grass fed beef, cage free eggs, vegetables, fruits, nuts honey baked goods, flowers, seasonal products, and more!," alluding to the wholesaling that was now occurring, despite the city regulations, at the River Market.[6]

Our cultural consensus analysis revealed points of agreement and disagreement among farmers and customers about their initial concerns for the new experience market. Some farmers and customers were not convinced that the new market would remain convenient and affordable, and they worried that the changes would negatively impact their current customers, especially those with lower incomes. They also did not think the city would be better managers than vendors themselves. These points of contention eventually led to the formation of two separate markets with key operational and organizational differences.

Figure 2.
Northport farmers market.

Since the new markets started, the numbers of produce vendors has doubled at both locales, while farmer incomes have stayed the same or increased. Several factors likely account for this. Both markets are situated in highly visible locations—Northport on a heavily traveled road en route to the airport and River Market along a central city artery. While the previous market engaged in virtually no advertising, the city advertised the River Market heavily and both locales started Facebook pages. The steady, year-round flow of customers at the River Market likely made up for some of the decrease in crowd volume over time. The continuing upward trend in the popularity of farmers markets nationwide may have also contributed to stable or increasing sales at these two markets.

Perhaps the biggest concern for vendors and farmers was whether or not the previous broad diversity of clientele would persist at the city's new locale. At first, the majority of black customers gravitated to the Northport Market. Reports from vendors that the demographic distribution had started to balance out led us to carry out an observational study to assess customer demographics in the summer of 2017. While it was not possible to assess socioeconomic standing, we counted ethnic group membership three mornings over two months, choosing two Saturdays and one Thursday at the beginning, middle, and end of each month.[7] Patronage at the River Market, in the more central location, was twice that of Northport. However, 36 percent of the Northport crowd was minority (33 percent Black, three percent Latino or Asian) compared to ten percent of River Market's. In absolute numbers, there were over twice as many minority shoppers at Northport. While some black customers had trickled back to River Market over the five years of its existence, Northport continued to be the favored locale. As in the past at the red shed, the first hour of business was dominated by older black female patrons purchasing produce for their weekly larder and for winter canning, with later hours better representative of the cross-section of the population. Vendor ethnicity was more matched between the two markets; eight percent were black at Northport, compared to six percent at the River Market.

During one of our observation periods, a visibly frustrated older black woman caught our attention, complaining that her nutritional vouchers were "no good" at the River Market. She had to inquire at six

different stalls before she found a vendor who would accept them. Her frustration is understandable. Only 42 percent of River Market stalls sold fruits and vegetables, compared to 95 percent of those at Northport, and instead featured more 'experience' items such as arts, crafts, and baked goods. Of these produce vendors fewer than half at River Market accepted vouchers, while all of the Northport vendors did.

In summary, upscale customers had different tastes, which the River Market accommodated, while most minority and lower income patrons were not as comfortable attending this new experience market. With the emergence of the Northport option, local food sovereignty narrowly avoided the hit it might have taken when city officials intentionally ignored public concerns. The Northport vendors did not feel they had lost their cultural identity as farmers, nor had they sacrificed any of their social capital with customers. Their market's distinction as a grower-only space helped to save their livelihoods. The ultimate solution of two separate market spaces–unforeseen during the years of turmoil–turned out to be fortuitous for all involved and may provide a model for other cities undergoing similar transitions. Although our title reads "finally resolved," we should add "…for now," as all such institutions continue to evolve and change. Our data can only truly represent a snapshot in time.

Acknowledgments

We are indebted to the Tuscaloosa Farmers Market vendors and customers for their openness and patience. Mayor Walt Maddox deserves recognition for supporting our research and arranging interviews with city planners. This work would not have been possible without our research assistants, Frank Manzella, Brooke Leichtweis, Elizabeth Hazen, Hannah N. Smith, and River Copeland. We also thank Bill Dressler, Hannah N. Smith, John Blitz and anonymous reviewers for their invaluable critique of earlier drafts.

Notes

1. Alabama's regressive tax system charges nine percent for food. Alabama is one of the few remaining states to tax food, despite repeated efforts at repeal.
2. This paper was presented in a 2017 Society for Applied Anthropology session organized by Lisa Markowitz exploring how popular accounts of food system failures often overlook the role governments play in shaping them through policy and regulation.
3. As with most urban centers, Tuscaloosa originally took shape along a major travel route, the navigable Black Warrior River, which empties into the Mobile-Tensaw River Delta.
4. As this manuscript was being finalized, the city was in negotiations with a corporation to open a grocery store on the now-vacated red shed site, a proposition which seems both ironic and implausible given the expensive toxic clean-up that would be necessary.
5. Our report was based upon an extensive literature review of various markets types in the U.S. and local interviews covering many topics, including organizational structure, management, pricing, fees, etc. The report included vendor and customer suggestions about the ideal design of the new building based on their needs, observations, and experience. The research team also visited four successful and innovative farmers markets in the region (FestHalle, Cullman; Pepper Place, Birmingham; Crescent City, New Orleans; and Red Stick, Baton Rouge) to examine their facilities and interview market managers.
6. Several vendors were suspected of wholesaling; one who sold wholesale tomatoes and non-USDA inspected meat was finally expelled.
7. We fully acknowledge the limitations of optic ethnic categorization. This imperfect method allowed us to crudely estimate the demographics of each market's customer base. However, further research is necessary to analyze these dynamics more fully (e.g., using surveys that allow customers to identify their own race and/or ethnicity).

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional Supporting Information may be found in the online version of this article:

Figure S1 The red shed farmers market, built in 1982.

Figure S2 Past existing, and future sites of the farmers market in Tuscaloosa.

Figure S3 Scene at the Tuscaloosa Curb Market.

Figure S4 Oxbow landfill, atop which the red market shed (marked with x) was built a century later.

Figure S5 The principal actors involved in the farmers market relocation.

Figure S6 Plot of the first and second eigenvalues demonstrating cultural consensus among farmers and consumers on desirable traits of the proposed farmers market.

Figure S7 Architect's market design with very insufficient parking space (circled) most of it at a distance and none of it adjacent to the market.

Figure S8 Architect -proposed market design, with landscaping around the perimeter, limiting access for handicapped patrons and farmers' trucks.

Figure S9 River Market exterior.

Figure S10 River Market interior.

Figure S11 Entertainment at entrance to River Market.

Figure S12 The *Real* Farmers Market in Northport.

Supporting Figures

Figure S1: The red shed farmers market, built in 1982.

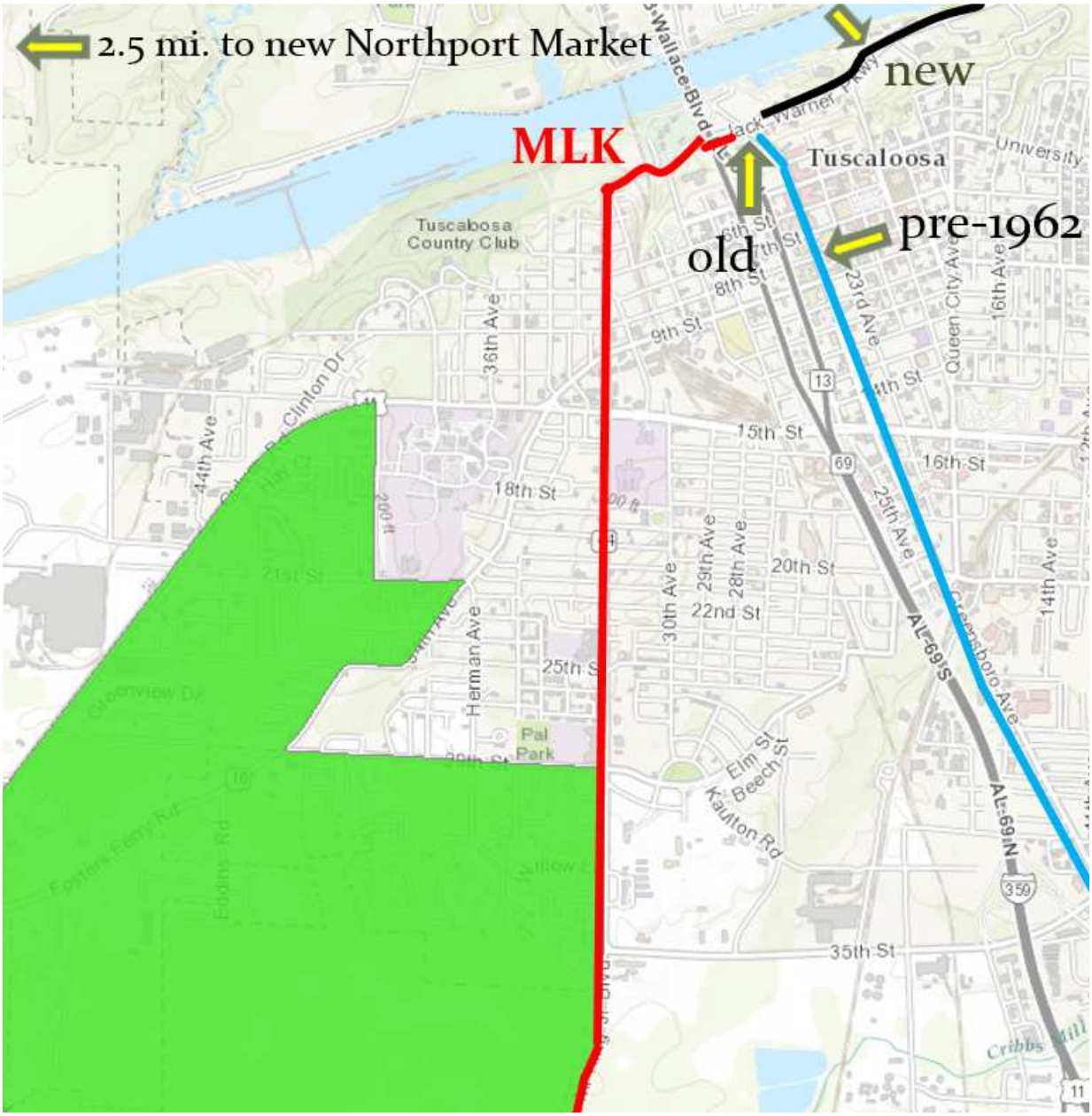


Figure S2: Past, existing and future sites of the farmers market in Tuscaloosa. The green indicates low income census tracts where a significant share of urban residents are more than one mile from the nearest supermarket. MLK Boulevard (red) runs through the heart of Westside, with Greensboro Avenue (blue) demarcating the west side from the downtown, and Jack Warner Parkway (black) bordering the downtown to the north. (Base map from USDA Food Access Research Atlas, 2017b).

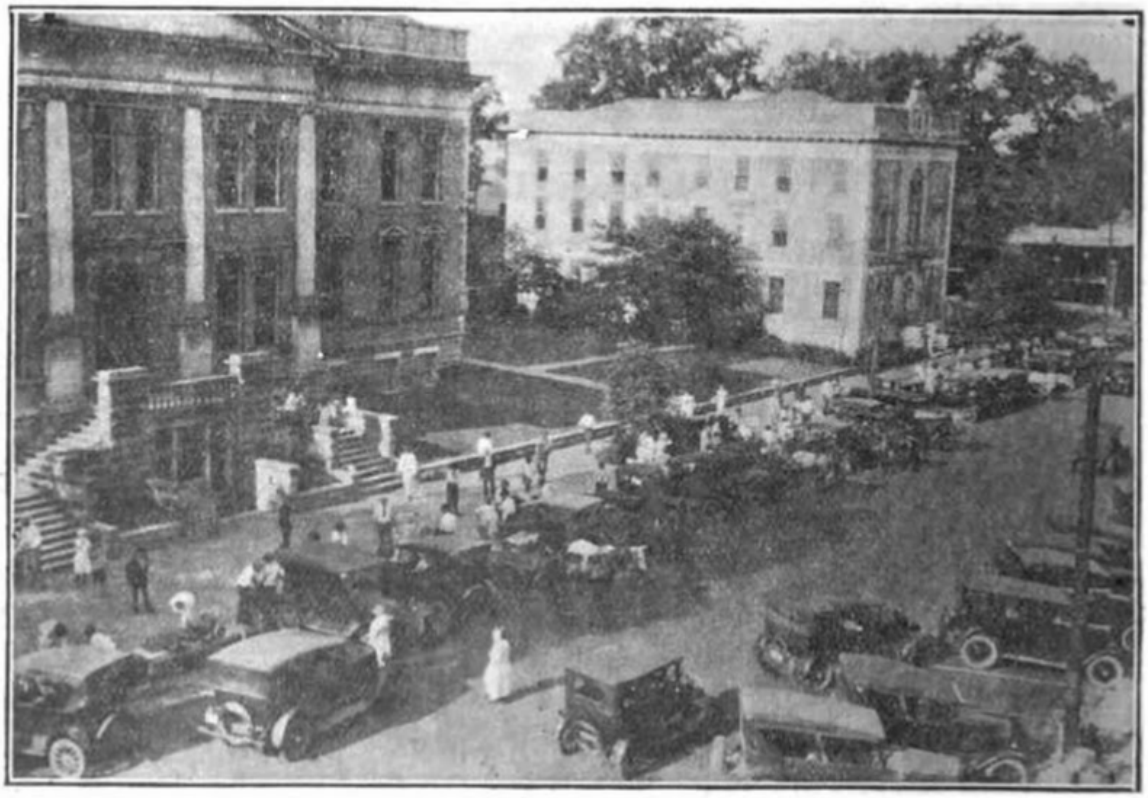


Figure S3: Scene at the Tuscaloosa Curb Market

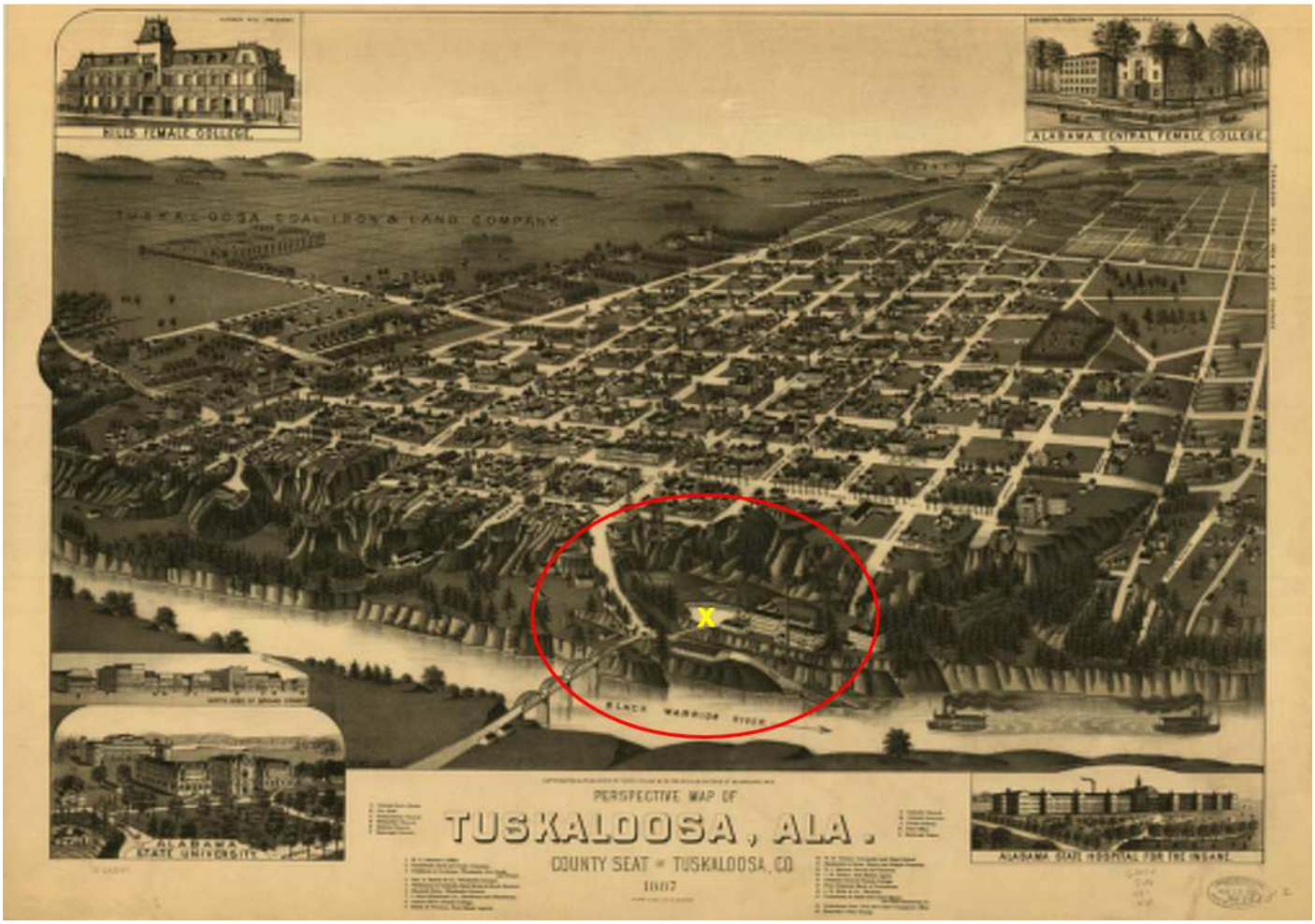


Figure S4: Oxbow landfill atop which the red market shed (marked with x) was built a century later.

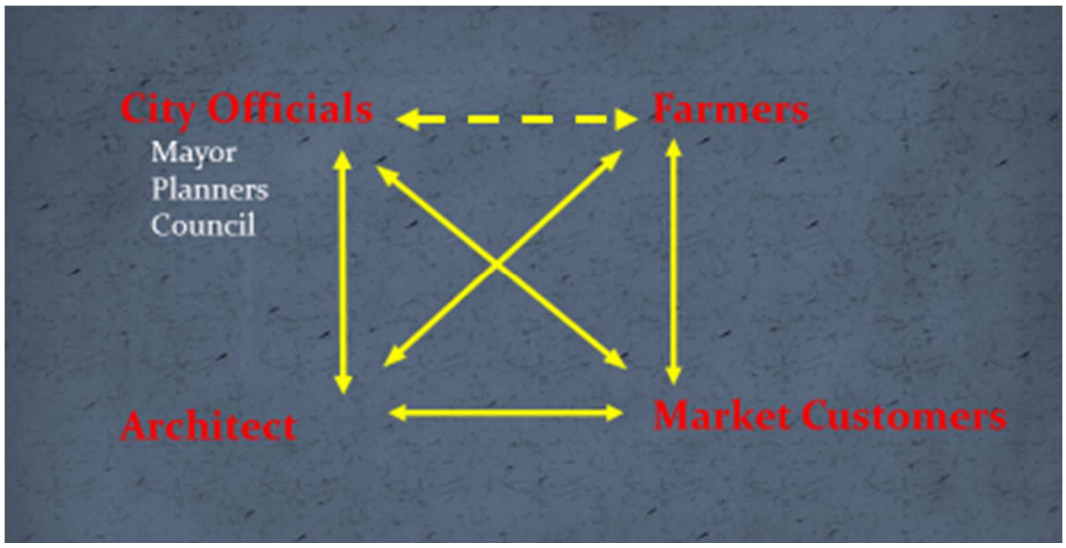


Figure S5: The principal actors involved in the farmers market relocation

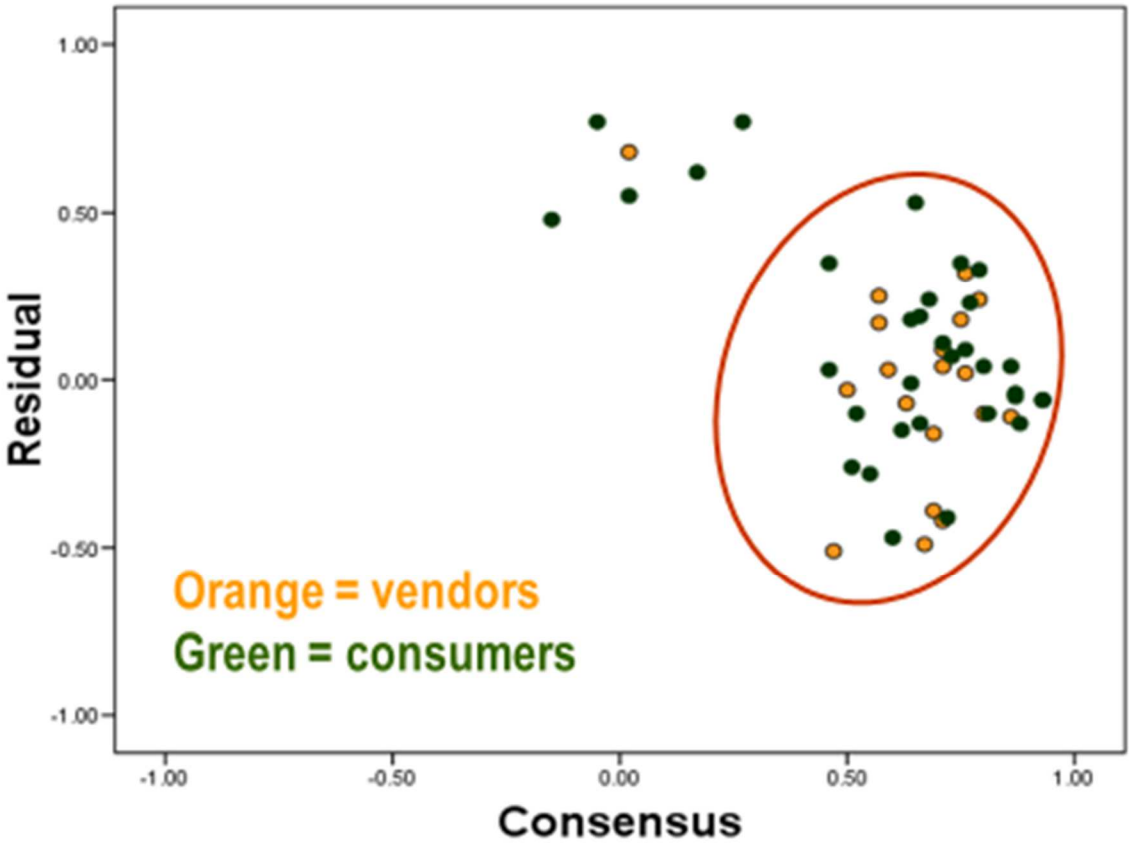
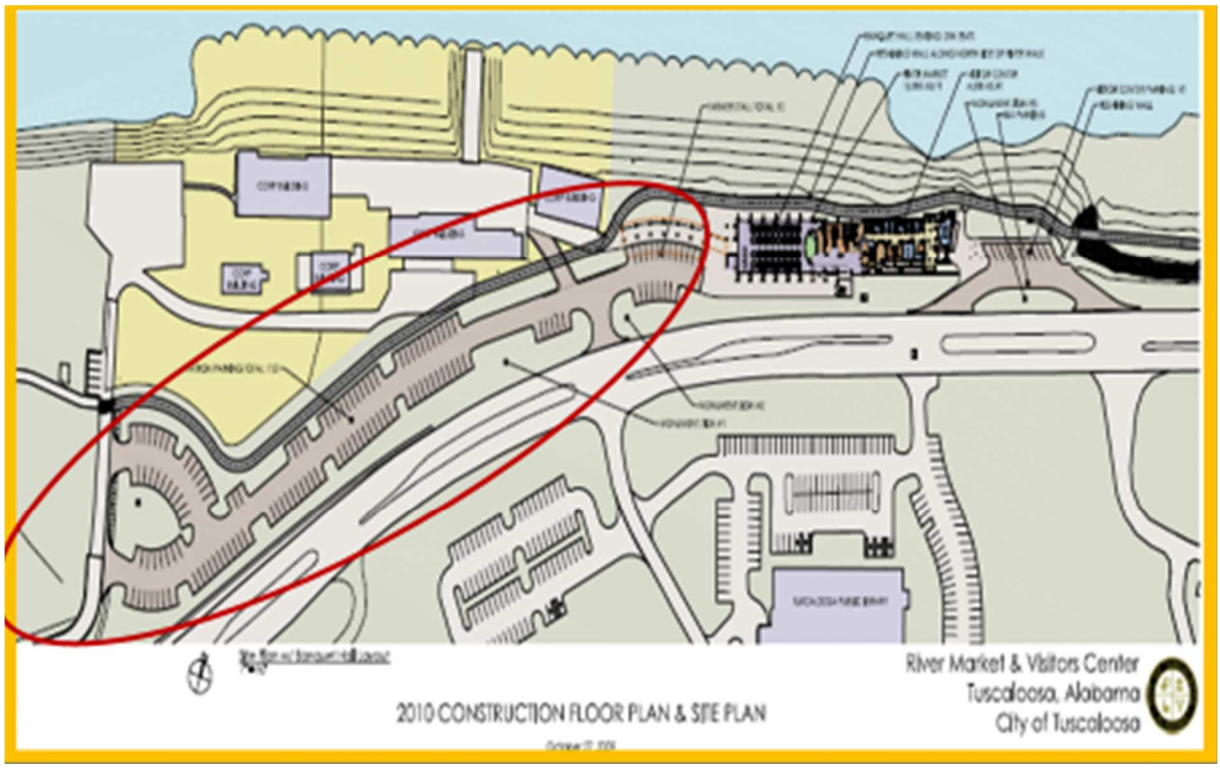


Figure S6: Plot of the first and second eigenvalues demonstrating cultural consensus among farmers and consumers on desirable traits of the proposed new farmers markets.



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