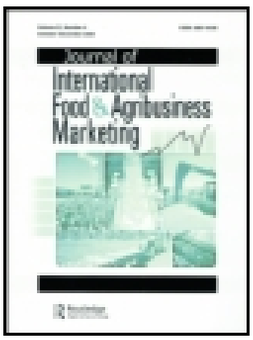

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Barriers to and Motivations for Building More Sustainable Food Markets: The View and Role of Brazilian Organic Food Farmers

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ABSTRACT

Building more sustainable markets requires a combination of resources and motivations to overcome the structural barriers that exist at the different social levels. Farmers are powerful agents who can overcome these barriers to promote more sustainable food systems. By adopting the theoretical perspective of markets as aggregate systems, this study aims to present the barriers faced by farmers and the motivations that stimulate them to act toward forming a more sustainable market system. Our empirical research comprises in-depth interviews with 21 organic food farmers in the southern region of Brazil. The results suggest a complex relationship between structure and agency at the different social levels, which can lead to particular motivations for a sustainable food production system. Finally, we theorize about producers' roles and how they act to realign different social levels to build more sustainable food markets.

KEYWORDS

Barriers; farmers; food market dynamics; organic food; sustainable food markets

1. Introduction

The process of building markets has historically been described from the perspective of the company. This perspective considers companies as actors capable of combining the resources needed to create markets and economic value by recognizing opportunities (Lusch & Vargo, 2014; Moran & Ghoshal, 1999; among others). Even if this process is market-oriented, it assigns consumers a passive role or, in case of value co-production, the company maintains control of the process (Cova & Dalli, 2009). More recently, this company-centered view has been broadened recognizing that consumers' resistant and rebellious actions have ultimately led to a change in the market (Giesler, 2008; Weijo et al., 2018). Moreover, Martin and Schouten (2014) observed that consumers—as well as companies—act in

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building a socio-material network that shapes the market without necessarily engaging in resistance behaviors. Thus, contemporary market studies recognize market dynamics as a multifaceted process that is not fully controlled by companies.

However, it is necessary to recognize the real motivations behind consumer actions in building markets, especially more sustainable markets. For instance, when describing the construction of a particular food exchange system called community-supported agriculture, Thompson and Coskuner-Balli (2007) identified that consumers can create alternative food consumption structures as a countervailing market response to the corporatization of the food market. In another recent study, Weijo et al. (2018) detailed consumers' motivations for changing corporative and governmental barriers in Finland's food market. When they created the "Restaurant Day" campaign, consumers were not aiming to build a new market but rather to find a creative way of changing the norms and laws that limited entrepreneurship opportunities.

Thus, even though consumers are an important group in terms of controlling market dynamics (Giesler & Fischer, 2017), they are not necessarily motivated to reject contested markets and build new exchange structures. For example, previous studies have described consumers' limited capacity to protest about products and companies that cause environmental damages, identifying that companies tend to incorporate environmental preservation into their corporate speech, thus maintaining the same market structures (Crittenden et al., 2011). Moreover, in the case of sustainable food markets, consumers may not have enough power to change the food market structures, and other actors may need to support the adoption of more sustainable consumption practices (Dalmoro et al., 2020).

Like with sustainable consumption (Giesler & Veresiu, 2014), building markets that do not provide immediate individual gains—such as sustainable markets—relies on the motivation of different people to act in favor of a cause that is greater than a mere economic exchange and who are capable of overcoming the barriers imposed by established market structures. For example, in addition to companies and consumers (Giesler & Fischer, 2017), governments can act through public policies to remove barriers and stimulate a more sustainable food system (Galli et al., 2020). Additionally, small farmers can incorporate their ideologies into the market (Press et al., 2014) and guide companies and consumers' actions toward more sustainable markets (Dalmoro et al., 2020).

Looking at the particular context of the organic food market, previous studies have presented some evidence of different market actors' roles in overcoming barriers to reshape the market from a more sustainable perspective. In one of these studies, concerning strategic orientation in the

introduction of organic agriculture, Press et al. (2014) identified that organic farmers follow a different strategic logic from the one used by conventional farmers. They maintain an ideology that values sustainability despite the traditional strategic market orientation (Press et al., 2014). In this sense, organic food farmers have the agentic capacity to reject established production and market structures that are seen as environmentally unsustainable, as well as the ability to provide a food supply that is recognized as more sustainable. As well as them lacking the resources of large corporations that dominate the agri-food market (Howard, 2016) and the consumer's capacity to enforce changes in company practices (Glickman, 2009), organic food producers also need to overcome the lack of financial interest in adopting organic production practices (Dalmoro et al., 2020). They need to act to promote new exchange structures (Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007), reshape market practices and how the market is constituted (Schouten et al., 2016), and establish their political role in the food system (Ploeg, 2008). In this sense, we are particularly interested in understanding organic farmers' role in sustainable food market dynamics and their capacity to instigate changes at all levels of the market system. For this, we explore the barriers faced by farmers and their motivations for building a more sustainable market system.

To that end, the subject of this study is the organic food market or, more specifically, the dynamics of the production and marketing of this type of food. This agricultural production model rejects the use of pesticides and synthetic fertilizers, as well as seeking to incorporate a more environmentally and socially sustainable perspective into productive activities (Willer et al., 2020). Thus, the organic market represents an alternative to conventional food farming, reducing the environmental impact of agricultural activities (Seufert et al., 2012). The organic market accounts for around $90 billion in global retail sales (Willer et al., 2020) and directly impacts the food shopping routine of various consumer groups and the planet's food production as a whole.

The analysis of the organic food market allows us to describe the peculiarities of a globally relevant market in terms of its social, monetary, and environmental impacts. It reveals complex relationships between structure and agency at different social levels, capable of imposing particular motivations for a more sustainable food production system. Thus, our study makes advances from a theoretical perspective regarding the building of a food market (e.g., Dalmoro et al., 2020; Press et al, 2014), highlighting particular actions of organic food producers at different social levels of the market—including the macro-, micro-, and meso-social order.

Additionally, by using the theoretical lens that considers organic food as an alternative for building a more sustainable market system (Prothero,

2019; Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007), our study presents the barriers faced by farmers and their motivations for fostering an organic food market system. We observe that farmers' motivations are triggers capable of overcoming structural barriers, extending their agentic capacity beyond the micro-social level, and also causing transformations at the meso- and macro-social levels. Our findings reveal that small organic farmers are important actors in sustainable food policy, given that they act in realigning different social levels to build more sustainable food markets. In the next section, we develop a theoretical discussion about sustainable markets and present our empirical investigation into organic farmers in the south of Brazil.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. The dynamics of the market system

The contemporary market literature understands and expands the structuralist and functionalist description of the market, recognizing the market as a dynamic system that involves cultural (Giesler & Fischer, 2017), social (Slater & Tonkiss, 2013), and ideological (Press et al., 2014) aspects that go beyond the classic economic perspective. Market dynamics have been described from the perspective of consumers and their ability to change, include, and transform markets (Martin & Schouten, 2014; Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013). Recently, Lusch and Watts (2018) proposed that market dynamics involve a "shared understanding," that is, a complex relationship that involves both process (understandings, processes, and market practices) and results (e.g., transactions, services, ideas, etc.).

Empirically, some studies have discussed the changes in the understanding of some actors and, consequently, their desire to change the form of exchange. For instance, Thompson and Coskuner-Balli (2007) describe the case of community-supported agriculture, a market model of smallholder farmers that aims to value organic farming while generating economic resources for the farmers. The authors focus on describing how producers, with the help of consumers, seek to reconfigure forms of trading to build a macrostructure capable of preventing the co-optation of the organic market by large corporations. This dispute at the macro-level of the market is also analyzed by Giesler (2008), who describes how new technologies open up room for market changes. Giesler (2008) identifies changes in the music market due to social transformations resulting from the transformation of the trading strategy. This process is described from the perspective of the social drama analogy.

Complementarily, Thompson and Kumar (2018) analyze consumption according to the "slow food" movement and identify how slow food

enthusiasts assume the role of ethical agents. Consumers reconfigure practices at the micro-social level to reposition themselves in a corporate-controlled, industrialized food system. Additionally, a few studies have focused on identifying the impact of these practices on meso-level reorganization. For example, Weijo et al. (2018) describe the case of the "Restaurant Day" movement in Finland, in which different actors have created a culinary festival outside the standards set by Finnish law. The festival organizers are working to change the institutional framework comprised of norms, laws, and rules that regulates the restaurant market, aiming to allow the entry of new entrepreneurs. Kjeldgaard et al. (2017) also describe consumers' actions in regulating the Danish beer market. In this case, small beer producers are working together with consumers and other entities to build a fairer market for all producers and prevent the dominance of large corporations.

These cases present different situations in which small producers or even consumers alter the social structure at different levels: including the macro-, micro-, and meso-social order. Social order is embodied in social relationship patterns and can be observed at multiple levels (de Munck, 1994). Market dynamics are produced through the agentic and relational dynamics of market actors immersed in social orders (Giesler, 2008). Consequently, market dynamics operate at one or more social order levels. The micro-level involves individual interactions in the market, such as daily shopping actions and interactions between buyers and sellers. These interactions also involve the role that a specific actor plays in the market and the outcome of actors' actions in shaping the market. The meso level involves normative and institutional models that structure the market. Observations at this level can reveal features of social groups, levels of organization, and the institutionalization of structured norms that provide an interface between actors and the market structure. Finally, the macro-level involves large-scale institutions, technologies, and social structures such as the media, laws, and government, operating on a global scale. Market analysis at the macro level involves complex structures that influence the wider population (Jepperson & Meyer, 2011).

The link between these multiple social order levels allows us to observe the market as a relational dynamic that involves actors, institutions, and social structures. Market system dynamics, especially those of sustainable food markets, are thus better understood by considering the multiple levels of social order. In the sustainable food market, actors such as organic food farmers operate at an individual level of interaction in the market but also base their practices on ideologies aligned with a macro-level perception of sustainability (Dalmoro et al., 2020; Press et al., 2014). Next, we discuss the potential of organic food as a sustainable market system.

2.2. Organic farming as a more sustainable food production model

Even in a market that operates on a global scale, organic foods—especially those produced in alignment with the philosophy of agroecology (Altieri, 2018)—involve a model that is opposed to the hegemonic mode of production characterized by monoculture, with its intense use of pesticides and synthetic fertilizers. This hegemonic model was built during the Green Revolution, when the introduction of technological resources aimed at expanding production consolidated the use of pesticides in agricultural production (McMichael, 2009). In response to these changes, movements have emerged that have sought to replace the patterns imposed by the Green Revolution, especially its environmental and social impacts, by reconstructing production and marketing formats that favor ecologically-oriented processes, biodiversity, and the production cycles of each location (Altieri, 2018). Within this context, organic agriculture represents a sustainable alternative to the agricultural standard imposed during the Green Revolution (Altieri, 2018).

It is necessary to understand the production and consumption of organic foods as a unit in which all elements of nature interact in the pursuit of sustainability as a whole (Lampkin, 1994). This more sustainable production model is aligned with the search for more sustainable development models that combine economic growth with environmental preservation and social balance (Hopwood et al., 2005). The recognition of organic foods as a more sustainable alternative has contributed to the growth in organic food consumption (Feil et al., 2020; Forssell & Lankoski, 2015).

Today, the most mature markets can be found in the European Union and the United States of America (USA), where organic products are widely distributed across different distribution channels (Willer et al., 2020). In peripheral markets—such as Brazil—organic food mainly involves short distribution channels and is supplied by small farmers, using a family workforce and following the principles of agroecology (Altiere, 2018). In peripheral markets, the government is a powerful actor in the task of institutionalizing the rules and norms to guide other actors' practices. For example, in Brazil, the government established a law that defines what comprises organic food and how to produce and certify it. The Brazilian government defines organic agricultural production systems as those that adopt specific techniques for optimizing the use of natural and socioeconomic resources and that respect the cultural integrity of rural communities (Brasil, 2003). The concept of an agricultural and industrial organic production system is broad and includes ecological, biodynamical, natural, regenerative, biological, agroecological, and permaculture aspects. The definition of organic in Brazilian law is vague compared with that offered by the U.S. government, for example. However, the law and some other

specific normative instructions do describe the production, processing, storage, distribution, and marketing parameters, providing details of authorized cultural, biological, phytosanitary, and mechanical methods and forbidden synthetic materials, genetically modified organisms, and ionizing radiation.

Organic food conformity can be certified by three different types of bodies, allowing for the use of labels and marketing materials with the official seal of Brazilian Organic Conformity: (a) third-party certification bodies accredited by the National Institute of Metrology, Quality and Technology (INMETRO); (b) participatory conformity assessment bodies (OPACs) certified and supervised by the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food Supply (MAPA); and (c) social control bodies (OCSs), which is a simplified mechanism restricted to small farmers selling directly to consumers and supervised by MAPA (FIBL, 2021).

These combinations of alternative food systems, environmental gains (Hughner et al., 2007), and the efforts of the market and non-market actors—such as the government and certification bodies—in the (re)definition of meanings and rules allow for organic food to be configured as a more sustainable system (Ploeg, 2008; Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007). However, even if organics have been globally recognized as an icon for food sustainability (Prothero, 2019), building an organic food market system is not a barrier-free process.

2.2.1. Barriers to building a more sustainable farming model

The literature analysis regarding the constitution of organic food as a market system reveals that this process causes ruptures in multiple social order levels (Press et al., 2014). Consequently, the adoption of organic production models needs to overcome barriers at the micro, meso, and macro levels. For instance, at the micro-social level (i.e., the organizational level), organic producers face technical barriers. Since the existing technical support is mostly geared toward conventional production, producers lack specific feedstocks, such as organic seeds, but mainly technologies that enable pest control. There is also a lack of information on the type of products allowed and not allowed for organic agriculture, as well as a lack of skilled labor (Uematsu & Mishra, 2012). According to Constance and Choi (2010), production concerns also include decreased yields (especially during the transition period), fertility problems, weather issues, pest problems, available inputs, the cost of inputs, a lack of technical assistance, compatibility with current farming operations, changing labor needs, and the types of equipment needed.

At the meso level, institutional frameworks for organic farming are met with distrust among farmers themselves, who fear they will be unable to obtain economic support if they adopt this type of production

(Ploeg et al., 2019). Marketing concerns also occur at the meso level and relate to the transactional environment surrounding the organizations. They include concerns about the availability of reliable buyers, the need to obtain premium prices, the stability of organic markets, the possible distance to organic markets, and a lack of organic marketing networks (Constance & Choi, 2010). Moreover, the fact that organic production requires conformity certification (organic certification), as well as the costs involved and the lack of knowledge to adapt to the institutional norms of this type of production, all represent barriers to the adoption of organic agriculture (Altarawneh, 2016).

From a macro-social perspective (contextual environment), some authors identify low educational levels, a lack of knowledge about the health hazards of pesticides, and limited awareness of the benefits of organic products by society as a whole (Altarawneh, 2016). The literature also points to flaws in the government support system for agricultural production. In Brazil, for example, the National Policy for Agroecology and Organic Production (2013) aims to promote and strengthen agroecological and organic production in the country, and there is a consensus that structuring public policies (such as using "green credits" and other forms of financing for productive and commercial infrastructure) is essential to achieving this. These "green lines" of rural credit play a fundamental role in changing socio-technical standards, but De Aquino et al. (2017) recognize that the number of contracts in these special modalities is still very limited and unknown by many producers. These political aspects could be counterbalanced by a collective organization capable of overcoming the lack of knowledge and securing political support for organic agriculture (Altarawneh, 2016).

2.2.2. Motivations for building a more sustainable farming model

In contrast to the barriers, the literature also points to motivational aspects that can help producers seek more sustainable markets. Based on a systematic literature review, it was observed that motivations also work at the personal (micro), organizational (meso), and ideological (macro) levels.

The first level mainly consists of personal interests in adopting more sustainable agricultural practices. Farmers can earn economic rewards by adhering to these practices (Sutherland, 2013). In the case of organic foods, previous studies have found that economic drivers are motivating conventional farmers to consider converting to organic farming (Dalmoro et al., 2020; Sutherland, 2013). These involve premium pricing, as well as access to a specific market gained through the marketing of products that have sustainable appeal (Jouzi et al., 2017; Karki et al., 2011).

Another motivational aspect concerns producers' interest in building alternative organizational formats capable of ensuring greater economic

security and marketing products, such as cooperatives (Bravo-Monroy et al., 2016) and community-supported agricultural models (Uematsu & Mishra, 2012). The study by Karki et al. (2011) showed that farmer affiliations with cooperatives could increase bargaining power with the government and processors and facilitate access to certifications and group marketing actions. Added to this is the increase in social capital provided by these alternative organizational models (Jouzi et al., 2017).

In conclusion, at the macro level, the literature points to the importance of an ideological system involving principles and values rooted in society. Organic agriculture has grown in response to environmental awareness and due to its positive impact on the environment (Läpple & Van Rensburg, 2011). As society incorporates more environmental awareness (Sutherland, 2013) into agri-food models, organic forms of production will only increase. It is also worth highlighting that there has also been an ideological shift among producers toward preserving nature (Press et al., 2014).

2.2.3. In favor of a systemic analysis of the barriers to and motivations for the adoption of organic agriculture

The systemic character of building sustainable food markets is reinforced by identifying barriers and motivations at three different social levels. At the micro-level, there are human, managerial, and technical aspects, that is, interactions at the level of small groups whose individuals exercise their freedom of agency in their day-to-day human interactions. The macro-social level covers broader aspects such as political and social influences, in other words, the political and ideological system that guides human actions (Giddens, 2013). According to a classical perspective of social sciences, the meso-social level operates between these two levels, that is, in the interrelations that form the environment that institutionalizes the relationships between the actors of a social system, including forces such as organizations and communities. To use Giddens's (2013) perspective on the construction of a social system, it is important to emphasize that this division is an instrumental resource for providing a systemic and aggregate view of the barriers and motivations involved in building sustainable markets, rather than it being a sociological dichotomization. Social structures are both constituted by actions as well as being the very means of this constitution (Giddens, 2013), so any description of the process of building sustainable markets cannot refrain from observing the forces that determine actions in a society, nor fail to recognize the agency of individuals.

This also echoes recent marketing studies that understand that any description of the market requires consideration both of the structure and its effects, as well as the process and practices that create the market dynamics (Lusch & Watts, 2018). As the authors mention, markets are

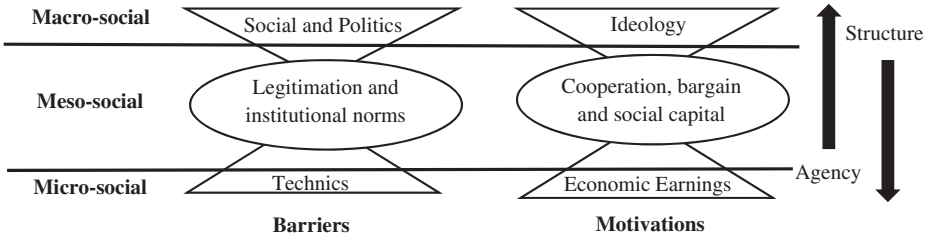

Figure 1. Theoretical framework on barriers and motivation. *Source:* Elaborated by authors.

constituted of exchanges and their rationality. They were previously described from a perspective that predominantly focused on the relationships that occur at the macro-social level; but they also involve the sharing of meanings, understandings, macro-social aspects, and institutional dynamics, which all add complexity to them. Thus, the search for sustainable models requires dynamism to incorporate the discourse of sustainability within the social structure, while granting human freedom to deviate from what is imposed, so that new, sustainable production is possible. Figure 1 illustrates the theoretical framework involving the barriers and motivations within the multiple social levels.

3. Method

In empirical terms, this study follows an interpretative approach and aims to describe the reality within a social space (Burrel & Morgan, 1979). This type of methodological approach is suitable for understanding organic markets as fluid realities (Dalmoro et al., 2020). Specifically, we sought to order a network of narratives and practices of farmers with some type of organic conformity certification.

In terms of the unit of analysis, our context is the organic market in the southern region of Brazil, in particular, Rio Grande do Sul state. Organic agriculture in this region has the original characteristics of agroecology (Altiere, 2018), which involves small properties characterized by family workers, diversified production, and direct marketing, such as through environmental trade fairs. These characteristics distance the south of Brazil from the organic food conventionalization process (Goldberger, 2011) found in other Brazilian regions. This specific context was also relevant because it is the main Brazilian region in terms of organic production and consumption (Organis, 2019).

We started our field immersion in January of 2016. This comprised two stages. The first stage aimed to familiarize the authors with the field through bibliographic analysis and contextual observation. We conducted a systematic review of research in scientific databases (SciELO, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar) by searching for the words "organic" +

"food" + "production." We analyzed a total of 51 studies that describe sociological, managerial, and behavioral aspects of organic food production to build a common interpretation of the field. In parallel, we carried out a set of visits to organic farms, companies, and organic fairs (public markets) in Porto Alegre (the state capital). The visits took place during the first semester of 2017 and allowed us to talk informally with producers and consumers. During the visits, we also took notes of personal observations of the context. Later, we shared these views in seminars that included the authors and students involved with the project, enabling the triangulation of different personal interpretations and contributing to the reliability and validity of the field interpretation (Kirk et al., 1986).

The second stage involved a set of long interviews (McCracken, 1988) to obtain the perspectives of the organic farmers. An interview guide was built based on two main themes: (a) views about organic food and its relationship with nature and conventional agriculture; and (b) motivations for and barriers to organic production and commercialization. The selection of interviewees considered whether the producers had some certification of organic production. Moreover, we chose farmers who followed the principles of agroecology, in that they adopted sustainable organic farming both as a production technique and philosophical orientation (Altieri, 2018). The chosen respondents differed in terms of city, gender, and age, but shared common location-specific factors. They were small farmers for whom food production is a "way of life," in which all family members are involved in the work and social life revolves around the farm. Their diversity of products included fruits and vegetables, in most cases sold directly to consumers at local farm markets—in line with the notion of alternative food networks (De Bernardi & Tirabeni, 2018).

It is important to mention that the three authors had previous experience in studies on the production and consumption of organic foods, which helped in contacting producers and in the subsequent data interpretation. The interviews were conducted in person, recorded, and later transcribed. The number of interviews followed the data saturation criteria (Strauss & Corbin, 1997) and totaled 25 interviews. The research subjects were organic farmers from the metropolitan region of Porto Alegre as well as from small towns and they grew different crops, such as grapes, horticulture, fruit, and tea. The interview data set was complemented by performing four additional interviews with experts in the organic context to confirm the data saturation. In total, our data set comprised 29 interviews, as detailed in Table 1.

For the data analysis, we followed the premise that each interview expressed the interviewee's views on the cultural field (organic food) in which they were involved (Thompson, 1997). We used the Nvivo 11

Table 1. Informant profile.

Name	City	Activity	Organic farming experience (years)
Organic Farmers			
1. Josita	Estrela	Horticulture	5
2. Márcio	Cruzeiro do Sul	Horticulture	8
3. Inês	Cruzeiro do Sul	Horticulture and orcharding	2
4. Daniel	Lajeado	Horticulture and baking	10
5. Márcia	Arroio do Meio	Horticulture	10
6. Arnaldo	Nova Santa Rita	Horticulture and grains	15
7. Ivandro	Cotiporã	Horticulture	5
8. Salete	Porto Alegre	Horticulture	12
9. Lorenço	Coronel Pilar	Horticulture	5
10. Sonia	Viamão	Horticulture and grains	14
11. Lucia	Viamão	Horticulture and grains	17
12. Lorita	Gramado	Tea	30
13. João	Eldorado do Sul	Horticulture	22
14. Clécio	Venâncio Aires	Horticulture	20
15. Alcione	Dona Francisca	Horticulture and grains	4
16. Raissa	Garibaldi	Horticulture and restaurateur	16
17. Cecilia	Garibaldi	Horticulture and orcharding	7
18. Gilmar	Antônio Prado	Orcharding, juice and sauce	22
19. Nivaldo	Eldorado do Sul	Horticulture and baking	22
20. Rodrigo	Pareci Novo	Orcharding	20
21. Laura	Cerro Grande do Sul	Horticulture and orcharding	5
22. Paulo	Garibaldi	Horticulture and orcharding	18
23. Inácio	Arroio do Meio	Horticulture and tea	20
24. Evandro	Rio Pardo	Horticulture	4
25. Floriano	Lajeado	Horticulture	3
Experts in organic market			
26. Cesar	Bento Gonçalves	Entrepreneur in organic market	5
27. Leandro	Ipê	Organic certifier	30
28. Marcos	Lajeado	Organic production agronomist	10
29. Luiza	Porto Alegre	Organic products store owner	3

software as an auxiliary data organization tool, following previously defined categories. This process was predominantly inductive. Our coding protocol was inspired by Saldaña (2015), firstly involving a holistic reading to obtain an overall understanding of the data set. After that, we re-read the data set and highlighted "in-vivo codes," words, or expressions that expressed the language of the respondents. We observed how the barriers and motivations worked at different social levels: macro, meso, and micro. The following chapter details the results of this process.

4. Results analysis

4.1. Motivations for organic farming

Our analysis starts with the macro-social aspects that led the farmers to adopt organic production. The interviewees' speech demonstrates an environmental and moral awareness of the organic production model. The respondents were unanimous in recognizing organic food as a more environmentally-friendly mode of production that is capable of providing gains for society. As the interviewee João stated, organic production guarantees a

balance in the ecosystem, making it a necessity for society: "Organic farming is a necessity for society; either we do it or we will descend into a cruel process and pay dearly for it."

Given the understanding that food production generates impacts on the whole of society, producers are motivated to implement a mode of agricultural production capable of minimizing these impacts. Some reports interconnect health, the environment, and agricultural production within the same social structure. As the interviewee Inês says: "To produce organics today, our minds need to be focused. It is necessary to relate nature and production." The interviewee José also understands that producers must "respect Mother Nature."

While the respondents understand nature as a structuring force that should guide agricultural practice, they also understand that organic production preserves the environment, as highlighted by the interviewee Floriano: "I've always been [environmentally] conscious, like my father when he went fishing and collected all the garbage from the water because we were very careful with the environment. I'm still involved in farming because I like it. Due to the better environment, bees and other animals that I had never seen before are appearing."

It is interesting to observe that the farmers understand the capacity to provide environmental and health gains for the population. For instance, the interviewee called Salete understands that her actions as a food producer need to enhance the lives of other people. She says that even before she was a farmer she already had an orientation toward agroecology, mentioning the fact that she started composting food scraps at home many years ago. At 50 years old, she decided to change her lifestyle and become an organic food farmer: "I thought I had to add something to people's lives. Therefore, I try to produce clean and certified foods. We can deliver a quality product to consumers who know it won't contaminate people's health." Thus, the feeling of respecting nature and people's health should guide organic production.

The second level of analysis concerns the meso-level processes, that is, the organizational and institutional processes involved in organic farming. The interviewees expressed concern about the organization of conventional agri-food models: "soy and sugar cane are not sufficient to feed the world, they do not satisfy anybody" (Inácio). In this sense, they are motivated to offer different foods that minimize the risks associated with conventional agriculture. As Cecilia mentions: "I wanted to produce something different; a more sustainable and healthier product."

Yet, Paulo says that many consumers are unaware of what they consume, given that companies linked to traditional agribusiness do not talk about the health risks associated with conventional foods. Therefore, he warns about the importance of building organic compliance and assurance control systems

(organic certifications). Obtaining certification is a motivator as it is a way to attest to the quality of the products. As a result, many producers make use of participatory certification systems. These systems involve the organization of groups, within which there are inspections and all farmers attest to the conformity of all production processes. This type of system is organized based on notions of cooperation and social capital, demonstrating producers' agency capacity for devising alternative models based on social organization and mobilization to use more sustainable models (Ploeg, 2008).

Another aspect of the meso level is institutions that favor organic production models. The interviewee Lourenço highlights the role of religious institutions in building a support structure for organic production: "The church plays a fundamental role in any transformation of organic production, such as in its concern about using creole seeds." Thus, the support of the church—in particular Caritas, which is linked to the Catholic Church, and CAPA, which is linked to the Lutheran Church—is observed not only in social or spiritual terms but also in the construction of a technical structure capable of obtaining non-genetically modified seeds.

Alternatives such as creole seeds motivate what some respondents called "escaping market mechanisms." As the interviewee Arnaldo mentioned, farmers must reject the products imposed by large corporations and seek to be autonomous to choose what to produce and how to do it. Considering that conventional agriculture is organized around the acquisition of seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides from corporations that dominate the sector, growers understand the need to build alternatives via cooperation networks. It is evident from the data analysis that there is a search to build cooperative systems capable of enabling producers to find mutual help. The interviewee Daniel emphasizes the constant exchange of information and ideas between groups, even using digital resources such as social networks to clear up doubts and contact other producers, ultimately motivating the adoption of and permanence in organic agriculture.

Finally, the motivations also involve micro-social aspects, especially in the family environment and in terms of the possibility of family earnings. Since farmers are mostly family-oriented, in some cases the adoption of organic farming was a condition imposed by young people in order for them to stay on the property or even return after migrating to the city. As the interviewee Daniel explains, he gave this condition to his family because he no longer wanted any contact with pesticides. In other cases, the motivation came after some family members were contaminated, as mentioned by Lucia in her interview. She decided to pursue organic farming after her husband got intoxicated with pesticides in rice farming. This encouraged them to reflect on what kind of life they wanted in the future and they realized that the risks associated with pesticides did not outweigh the gains.

Lourenço says that "the motivation is linked to the fact that you can step on the ground without poison, you can take the children to the fields and put soil in your mouth like you used to do." However, the search for these health gains and quality of life also extends to consumers. Different respondents stated that they feel happy knowing that they are not contaminating anyone. This reveals that producers are concerned about the harm caused by the use of pesticides, mainly related to diseases and environmental health. That is, they produce organic foods to ensure the quality of life and a healthy environment for their family and the consumers of organic foods.

4.2. Barriers to building an alternative market

However, while the motivations for adopting organic agriculture involve aspects at the different social levels of the market, there are still some barriers during this process. According to the interviewee Lúcia, the political structures have led farmers to use a harmful agricultural model:

> When I was a child, the farming process was still organic, so we kind of knew how to work with these things. Later, the 'green plan[1]' encouraged production using pesticides. Small farmers left behind traditional production—free of pesticides—because it was easier to use poison (Lúcia).

Thus, by following the agricultural production patterns presented by the multinationals in the sector, farmers were framed within a productive structure that, while claiming to increase productivity, imprisoned the producer within that system. Migration from conventional to alternative systems—such as an organic one—requires producers to break away from this structure of control. However, they claim that they do not have government support, given that the government prioritizes conventional production. The interviewee Josita understands that the agribusiness industry influences the government and, therefore, the tendency is for agri-food policies to continue to focus on conventional rather than organic production.

The imposition of productive systems by large corporations ultimately acts as a barrier at the meso level. Conventional production is already institutionalized within the scope of agricultural production, that is, it already enjoys a shared understanding by the market (Lusch & Watts, 2018), and those who do something different from this norm tend to suffer social retaliation (Giesler, 2008). Some interviewees report the distrust they induce in neighbors when they say they no longer use pesticides, as well as pressures from the sellers of agricultural feedstock. This reinforces the difficulty of breaking away from the established institutional frameworks when adopting organic agriculture.

In addition to the barriers to the adoption of organic agriculture, the producers interviewed reported specific difficulties in marketing, especially involving the scarcity of trading mechanisms and consumer ignorance. The respondents report that products from organic farming need to compete with conventional products, both for physical shelf space and in terms of prices, and since consumers are unaware of what organic food is, they do not understand the differentiated value proposal behind this kind of food. Also, as the interviewee Antonio explains, many consumers still choose products—especially fruits and vegetables—for their appearance rather than quality. In this sense, the difficulties in obtaining a homogeneous product led to a loss of consumers.

To overcome these barriers, the respondents recognize the need to change institutional frameworks, especially by building new marketing arrangements that eliminate intermediaries. The interviewee Jorge explains that farmers' markets are the best tool for this, as they allow for a direct relationship with the final consumer, in which the producer can explain to the consumer the characteristics of organic foods and their benefits. Fairs, especially in large cities, are an alternative way of organizing the organic food distribution system that can reduce material and symbolic distances between producers and consumers. Consequently, they are an alternative for overcoming the barriers imposed by traditional systems.

Finally, at the micro-social level, the comparison between conventional and organic production techniques reveals differences that act as barriers. For example, the interviewee Inês understands that her neighbor's form of farming is easier and that the path she chose is the most difficult: "If you look at a neighbor who uses glyphosate and herbicide, it's easier to produce in a conventional way because in the organic way you need to hoe, sow, and take care of the crop. It's a harder job." The producer states that organic production requires more effort and, consequently, demands much more labor. Labor thus becomes a scarce resource, since this type of cultivation occurs mainly in properties characterized by family farming; that is, the tasks are performed by family members and there is no hired labor.

The complexity of the certification process also emerges as a barrier, especially given the fact that in conventional agriculture it is not necessary to "prove anything" and that in organic agriculture everything must be proven, as the interviewee Floriano points out:

> The biggest difficulties in producing organically are in the law, but not because of the producer because everything is right with the property. But many face issues and need to prove that they do not use pesticides and everything. But conventional producers do not have to prove anything, and they even use pesticides that are prohibited (Floriano).

What is interesting here is the analysis of the barriers to organic production and facilities provides by conventional production system. Nevertheless, the

organic farmers say they have not chosen this path because it is easier, but because it is the right one, as it provides health and environmental gains. Next, these empirical results are analyzed in light of market theories.

5. Theoretical discussion and practice

The analysis of the barriers and motivations surrounding the adoption of organic agriculture exemplifies the complex task of representing and considering different agents' actions in a market. Specifically, in the context of organic farmers, we can see a complex relationship between structure and agency, operating at different social levels, which stimulates or imposes difficulties on the construction of the organic market. The representation of this dynamic reveals a relationship between farmers, the market, and society at large. Building a sustainable food market is a dynamic process involving behavioral, cultural, socio-political, and economic idiosyncrasies. Farmers contribute to these distinct social elements alongside the consumers and other market actors that make up a market system more oriented to nature preservation, health, and social relations.

5.1. Market realignment toward sustainability

The analysis of the introduction of organic agriculture by farmers shows that the adoption of a sustainability perspective—either agricultural techniques or market actions—occurs dialectically to the hegemonic perspective, that is, the production and commercialization of conventional food. The study's first finding is that the construction of a more sustainable market requires the rejection of that hegemonic perspective, which is seen as unsustainable. This is not a simple process, as it requires a realignment of all the social levels that structure the market.

The macro-social level requires an ideological realignment capable of breaking with the dominant structure in favor of a new productive orientation. When studying the strategic orientation of organic and conventional wheat growers in the United States, Press et al. (2014) identified that farmers build ideological arguments that reinforce their dogmas regarding a structure that rejects the use of pesticides and challenges conventional models of agricultural farming. However, while in the study by Press et al. (2014) the farmers' ideological orientation includes the search for profitability, in the context studied here the orientation also breaks with the economic notion of agricultural production (Burton, 2004) to value elements of sustainability and health.

Thus, while conventional food production has adopted a productivist logic, based on a macro-social structure that values aspects such as profit maximization, widespread use of chemicals, monoculture, technological

development, and mechanization (Burton, 2004), organic food farming seeks to build an environmentally-oriented structure to address the problems generated by conventional production. The break with established structures and finding new ideological orientations are fundamental steps toward building sustainable markets.

Realignment at the meso level involves using organic foods as a trading element and building the spaces for these trades. Entrepreneurial action is an important vector in the construction of institutional frameworks that favor sustainability. Mars and Schau (2017) point out that organic farmers' entrepreneurial capacity contributes to the modeling and sustainability of alternative food production systems. In addition, Nicholls and Huybrechts (2016) point out that entrepreneurial action goes beyond the frontiers of farming, affecting the market as a whole. The producers' institutional enterprise affects the consolidation of a social and material network around an object (organic food), the viability of this type of production, the opening up of spaces for commercialization, and the consumption action itself.

Thus, these networks involve building and institutionalizing a specific framework around organic agriculture, with its own institutional discourses, artifacts, and practices, in search of a shared understanding among the actors (Lusch & Watts, 2018). In addition, institutions such as the church shape behavior through frameworks that guide farmers' actions. In the case of organic food, while converting production requires breaking with coercive aspects imposed by the global agribusiness model, such as the acquisition of transgenic seeds, farmers are also under coercive pressure from the rules of organic production, imposed by certifying bodies or participatory certification groups. Understanding how producers deal with this change in the coercive pattern may be important to explain the barriers to and motivations for building sustainable markets. The key in this process is to recognize how conventional institutional frameworks are rejected and alternative market institutional frameworks are legitimized as being more sustainable.

Finally, it is undeniable that building sustainable markets requires a realignment of micro-social relations. Farmers are agents of their own changes and are capable of transforming the world around them. While previous studies have indicated consumer action in this transformation process (such as the study by Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007), farmers make similar efforts to those described for consumers; that is, even with low bargaining power and technical capacity, they try to create alternatives that will generate collective profits and not just individual benefits. Building sustainable markets at a micro-social level require overcoming the dichotomy between the company-centered and the consumer-centered perspectives, as well as understanding that both are part of a trading relationship and this relationship must be oriented toward more sustainable exchanges.

5.2. Understanding market dynamics for more sustainable markets

By providing a theoretical perspective on the barriers to and motivations for adopting and propagating organic agriculture, the results also contribute to describing market dynamics from a systemic perspective. Previous studies on market dynamics use a poststructuralist perspective, i.e., they recognize the agency capacity of the actors in the production of symbolic resources that shape the market, involving the construction of a diverse institutional logic, power relations, and ideological disputes (Kjeldgaard et al., 2017; Press et al., 2014; Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007). However, it should also be recognized that market structures act as barriers to more sustainable production and consumption models. The frameworks that shape markets are continually being redefined, but when this process challenges hegemonic frameworks it is not barrier-free. This challenge imposes limits to the construction of more sustainable markets.

The analysis of the farmers' barriers and motivations allowed us to emphasize that companies and consumers do not act alone in the construction of sustainable markets, since farmers contribute to the technical and material viability of organic production, as well as to the structuring of the market. Understanding market dynamics from a systemic perspective means recognizing that different actors—such as farmers—are empowered and autonomous to act in favor of more sustainable markets. At the same time, this autonomy does not mean ignoring the preexisting social structures that serve as barriers. The interrelationship between the individual and the social levels in markets, the way individuals adopt more sustainable perspectives, and the ways they find to do so are the key dynamics in the search for more sustainable markets.

Just like consumers (Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013), farmers also contribute to building alternatives to barriers. From the specific perspective of organic food farmers, motivational triggers act as the driving force to overcome the barriers involved in rejecting the conventional model and building a new, more sustainable production and consumption structure.

5.3. Policy implications for building more sustainable markets

The results obtained lead to a range of interpretations and future lines of action. Specifically, regarding the institutions involved in the organic market, the results showed the importance of providing technical assistance and ideological guidance for producing organic foods. Technical support for producers is needed both to guide production and to build the institutional framework that forms this market. There needs to be an alignment between farmers and consumers since previous studies show (Hansmann et al., 2020; Vieira et al., 2013) that there are many consumers who would

like to buy organic foods, but for whom organics remain beyond their reach due to the high relative price premiums and other transaction costs associated with them (including a lack of accessibility to stores with organic foods, uncertain product availability and quality, and a lack of available information/trust regarding organic foods/certification, which could enhance familiarity with the product and comfort in acquiring it).

Government regulators, retailers, producer associations, and even non-profit institutions—such as the church—could be active agents in the promotion of this strategic alignment between stakeholders. Thus, the notion of institutional entrepreneurship should also be extended to these institutions because, in the case of organic agriculture, in addition to inspection, they play the role of providing encouragement and contributing to overcoming barriers as necessary conditions for the market to emerge. Institutional entrepreneurs are organized actors—with sufficient resources—who identify possibilities for creating and transforming institutions (DiMaggio, 1988).

Another practical aspect concerns the need to consider that leaving the responsibility for building a more sustainable market in farmers' hands puts a great burden on them. Through public policy, the government can assume its share of this burden. Consumers and intermediary companies are especially responsible for rethinking their practices and incorporating sustainability as strategic orientation, in alignment with what organic producers do (Press et al. 2014). In essence, support for organic food production involves not only the provision of technical resources—although this is important—but also the ideological orientation of these farmers, that is, being aware that adopting organic agriculture generally involves a different mindset from conventional production and involves more than simple profit maximization (Peterson et al., 2012). In this regard, Farmer et al. (2014, p. 167) situate the choice of organic production "in the context of a complex social-ecological system."

It is also important to recognize the role of institutional entrepreneurship, that is, the creation of an institutional environment around organic foods. This involves raising awareness among producers and consumers about the benefits of organic food consumption, resources, and marketing (e.g., see the report from Stephenson et al., 2017, regarding the transition toward organic farming). From the consumption perspective, the intervening agencies can overcome barriers by assisting in developing marketing mechanisms and expanding supply.

In the case of organic food, while converting production requires breaking with coercive aspects imposed by the global agribusiness model, such as the acquisition of transgenic seeds, farmers are also under coercive pressure from the rules of organic production, imposed by certifying bodies or

participatory certification groups. Taking action to change the coercive pattern may be relevant to enable producers to overcome this barrier.

Final considerations

This study analyzes the barriers to and motivations for organic farming from an ontological perspective that is unusual in market studies—which are usually centered on the consumer, businessman, or public policymaker figure. But it is equally revealing. The results indicate that producers recognize barriers that affect macro-social aspects, meso-social aspects, and market organization, as well as micro-social aspects and their relationship with consumers. It is understood that building more sustainable markets requires an agentic capacity to realign the different levels of social structure.

By adopting a broad social perspective, this study far from exhausts the debate about building a sustainable food market system. As they focus on the emerging organic food market in the south of Brazil, our results do not contemplate the role of organic farmers in shaping consolidated market systems, such as the North American and European ones. In those regions, organics markets can have particular dynamics. Additionally, the difficulties of conducting multilevel research need to be highlighted as a limitation of this study. Simultaneously observing multiple market levels is a challenge given the risk of ignoring particularities of the phenomenon. Thus, our framework cannot be taken as a definitive model for understanding sustainable food market dynamics, but rather as a reflexive and systemic perspective that can be used to describe the role of particular actors in specific food market dynamics. Using the notion of social systems to understand markets as aggregate systems revealed an important interconnection between the different social levels that shape the market structure. Future studies could extend the use of this multi-level notion to describe other elements that compose the dynamics of a particular market or even build an analysis based on other actors, such as consumers.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest. All procedures involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Note

1. Our interviewee uses the term ‘green plan’ as a synonym for the Green Revolution. It involves the policies implemented in semi-peripheral countries, including Brazil, in the

1960s and 1970s that favored of the use of pesticides, synthetic fertilizers, machines, and genetic manipulation of seeds (Da Costa et al., 2017).

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