Thinking and Practising Values:
Community Enterprises in the Food Sector

Report on the 'Community Enterprises in the Food Sector' Workshop

Jenny Cameron
(with Josephine Gerrard)

Thinking and Practising Values:
Community Enterprises
in the Food Sector

Report on the 'Community Enterprises in the Food Sector' Workshop

Jenny Cameron
(with Josephine Gerrard)

Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Those who work in community enterprises and those who research community enterprises are busy people, who already give their time generously to the community and institutional contexts in which they work. My thanks therefore go out to the workshop participants. It was a leap of faith to give up a day (or two, in the case of those who travelled some distance to get to Newcastle) for the workshop. I hope you found it worthwhile. That one participant had his mobile phone on so he would know when it was time to attend the birth of his child, reminds us of the commitment of people who work in this field.

I particularly want to acknowledge the generosity of John Pearce, who so willingly agreed to an initial (and vague) invitation earlier in the year (when something in August in Australia probably seemed far, far away, and certainly not anything that would involve a late evening flight and a very early morning start!).

I would also like to acknowledge the work of Jo Gerrard who looked after the technical side of things and did the initial transcribing of the workshop tapes. Jo did this work unpaid as part of a work placement course.

Thanks also to those who read and provided feedback on an earlier draft (particularly Ann Hill). The document is certainly sharper because of your comments.

Finally, the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies (especially Professor Pauline McGuirk and Dr Louise Askew) supported the workshop in so many ways—I will pay you back (promise!).

1.0   INTRODUCTION

This report summarises a community enterprise workshop that was held on Friday 29 August, 2008 at the University of Newcastle (Centre for Urban and Regional Studies). One aim of the workshop was to bring together community enterprise practitioners and researchers to explore some of the features of community enterprises in the Australian setting, particularly:

- characteristics of enterprises
- challenges faced
- strategies to address the challenges.

The workshop focused on community enterprises in the food sector, including community gardens and Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs) initiatives.

A second aim of the workshop was to open up a space of reflection and discussion in which participants would be able to learn from each other. The workshop program (see Appendix 1) was designed to be relatively unstructured so that discussion could be shaped by participants' interests and concerns. From an academic point of view, the intention was to generate 'data' that could be used to further understand community enterprises, and to do so in a way that benefited the participating community enterprises.

The impetus for the workshop was a visit to Australia by John Pearce (a community enterprise researcher from the UK, and author of *Social Enterprise in Anytown* and *At the Heart of the Community Economy: Community Enterprise in a Changing World*), and John's willingness to travel to Newcastle to meet with community enterprise practitioners and researchers.

Practitioners and researchers were then primarily selected through three processes. Jenny Cameron (University of Newcastle) and Bill Roberston (Fig Tree Community Garden) identified Newcastle-based community enterprises that might be interested in being part of a conversation about community enterprises (out of all the Newcastle enterprises invited only one was unable to attend).

Second, Jenny Cameron contacted academic researchers interested in community enterprises and invited them to attend, and to "bring a friend" (in other words, to bring a community enterprise practitioner they thought would like to be a part of the conversation). Unfortunately Jo Barraket (from Queensland University of Technology), Ruth Beilin (from The University of Melbourne) and Louise Crabtree (from University of Western Sydney) were unable to attend, but they provided introductions to two community enterprises who did attend.

Third, several community enterprises were specifically targeting because of the connection between their activities and those of the Newcastle-based enterprises. Overall participants were invited on the basis of building connections between community enterprises (include locally-based ones and those from other parts of Australia) and community enterprise researchers.

The workshop was attended by:

- **nine community enterprise practitioners:**

  Pablo Gimenez (Brotherhood of St Laurence, Community Enterprise Development Initiative, Victoria)

  Kristina Gluschke and Rhyall Gordon (The Beanstalk Organic Food, Newcastle)

  Julian Lee (Organic Buyers Group, Sydney and Imago Forest, via Singleton)

  Craig Manhood and Bill Robertson (Fig Tree Community Garden, Newcastle)

  Michael Mobbs (Food for the Future, Sydney)

  Robert Pekin (Food Connect, South East Queensland)

  Tom Toogood (Permaculture Hunter and Sustaining our Suburbs,

  Newcastle)

- **four researchers:**

  Robert (Bob) Fagan (Department of Human Geography, Macquarie University)

  Katherine Gibson and Ann Hill (Department of Human Geography, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University)

  John Pearce

The workshop was organised and facilitating by Jenny Cameron (Centre for Urban and Regional Studies, The University of Newcastle), and was recorded and partly transcribed by Josephine Gerrard (Development Studies student, The University of Newcastle).

The workshop was divided into two parts: first, participants gave an overview of their enterprise or their research; and second, participants brainstormed the key points that had come up during the overviews and these then served as the basis for more detailed discussion. The Appendices contain the workshop program and the complete list of key points that were brainstormed.

This summary begins with an overview of the community enterprises represented at the workshop, and the researchers and their research interests. The content in this section is based on an audio-recording of the workshop and is largely a summary of what each participant presented in the first part of the workshop. The next section then discusses the main themes that emerged through the discussion:

1.   **Diverse economic practices**

2.   **Diverse economic practices shaped by the values of the enterprises**

3.   **Diverse legal structures shaped by the values of the enterprises**

4.   **Communicating the values of the enterprises**

5.   **Monitoring and reflecting on the values of the enterprises**

6.   **Approaches to growth**

7.   **Approaches to planning**

8.   **Learning and support**

9.   **Framing community enterprises.**

Again, this section draws heavily on the audio-recording and quotes from participants, with the material organised and discussed by Jenny Cameron. The final section, the conclusion, identifies the key points that emerge. A draft of this document was circulated to all participants for their comments and feedback.

2.0 OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITY ENTERPRISES AND RESEARCH INTERESTS

2.1 Community Enterprise Development Initiative, Brotherhood of St Laurence (Vic)

- The Community Enterprise Development Initiative supports groups across Victoria to establish community enterprises (not necessarily food-related ones, although around ¾ are food-based).

- This unique program is funded through the state government, and through the program groups are assisted with things like conducting feasibility studies and once an enterprise seems viable, more detailed planning.

- There is a focus on developing community enterprises in marginalised areas, especially those that are the focus of urban renewal programs.

- There are also a range web resources and support materials that can be downloaded (including a work book on how to set up a community enterprise) (see link below).

- The main issues that seem to arise for groups who use the program are:

  o groups are small and do not have a formal legal structure which can create problems with getting leases, contracts and so on

  o often members of the groups are eager to start the project and are less concerned with insurance, council permits and so on.

- In terms of food-related projects, groups have found it difficult to source organic or sustainably produced produce (particularly for people who are on low incomes). As a result the program is now looking at the feasibility of a wholesale distribution and production enterprise to assist smaller community enterprises who want to access organic food.

2.2   The Beanstalk Organic Food (Newcastle)

- This enterprise was started in 2004 by a group of friends wanting affordable organic food in Newcastle. The enterprise has grown considerably and currently has around 150 members, with a waiting list of people wanting to join.

- The cooperative buys organic locally grown fruit and vegetables, and each Tuesday evening around 80 to 90 people come in to pack and pick up their box of fruit and vegetables. Not all members put in an order each week.

- The cooperative also has cheese, eggs, milk, bread, honey and dried goods (most Australian but some from overseas).

- There is one paid staff position; all other labour is volunteer.

- The group is based on a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) model which means building strong relationships with and supporting the farmers who supply their produce.

- The group aims to not only provide affordable organic food but to be a community initiative that brings in a cross section of the community. One important aspect of this is that the group relies on volunteer labour to help keep the cost of the fruit and vegetables comparable to large supermarkets.

- One issue for the group is that of growth. There is more demand for organic fruit and vegetables than the group (and the farmers they are linked to) can cater for. So the group has to decide how big they want to grow—indeed, whether they want to grow at all (for more on this see Section 3.6).

- Even though the group calls itself a cooperative it is not legally a cooperative (although in the near future the group may register as a cooperative).

See http://www.beanstalk.org.au/

2.3   Fig Tree Community Garden (Newcastle)

- Initiated in 2004 by a small group of friends living in the area who were keen to start a community garden. Each person came to the idea with different interests, including environmental interests, horticultural interests, social welfare interests, and community development interests.

- One member of the group worked for a local council and knew that it would be a lengthy process to negotiate a site with council so instead the group approached other landholders so they could get started more quickly. The local bowling club agreed for the group to use part of their site, and the group then placed an ad in a community newsletter inviting people to come along for an initial working bee. Forty people turned up.

- That first working bee was the start of the community garden and since then it has continued to meet on the last Sunday of every month. On average 30 people turn up.

- After 1½ years the bowling club closed and the group had to move to another site (another bowling club). The pattern of having the last Sunday of the month as a working bee continues, and other activities have developed on the site including, a chicken run, bees, vegetable gardens, bush food gardens, play areas for children, pizza oven.

- The group has also encouraged other community groups and non-government organisations to use the site. Groups who regularly use the site include Work for the Dole and a Home Schooling group.

- There is one part-time worker funded through a Federal Government program and potential to use more of the site for a commercial herb farm.

- The garden is described by one representative as "a small little community garden with a big community interest". One aspect of this is that the garden serves as a meeting place for people who are concerned about other community issues.

See http://www.figtree.org.au/

2.4   Food Connect (Brisbane)

- This Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) initiative currently has seventy core farmers involved (but growing), and these are all approximately within five hours of Brisbane. Around 1,500 active consumers purchase around 900 boxes of produce each week. There are 80 city cousins who are spread across the city of Brisbane (which has been dividing into three paddocks—the top paddock, the hill paddock and the south paddock). The city cousins are the drop off points for the boxes of produce and pick up points for consumers.

- There are 30 paid staff working primarily as packers and delivery drivers. There are only two pay scales for all staff—$15 /hour or $17/hour—irrespective of people's background and abilities. There are no volunteers.

- The enterprise now has a catering arm with a sliding scale whereby customers pay according to their ability (for example large corporations are charged more than small non profit groups).

- Equity is the enterprise's underlying value base. For example if a farmer works on a public holiday then the employees work on the public holiday.

- To build equity across income groups, the enterprise has a Food for All initiative (for more on this see Section 3.2).

- Each organic box is around 20 per cent cheaper than the equivalent conventional produce from large supermarkets.

- The enterprise has a number of environmental initiatives. Household waste is taken back to the farms, and the enterprise is currently working with a large corporation to take all their waste back out to the farms. All boxes are recycled back to the farms.

- All produce from the farms is accepted without being graded, washed or cleaned. The enterprise uses PGS (Participatory Guaranteed System) for certifying that produce is organic.

- The enterprise is about to establish a land trust to buy land back from developers, with Food Connect acting as a custodian (rather than owner) of the land.

- There is an Australia-wide young farmers pathway program to support young farmers. The Gun Farmers project showcases small (less than 10 acres) but highly diverse farms, particularly those that are building in environmental innovations such as grey water efficiencies.

- The enterprise has also has a "supported mutation model" to help other communities adapt the Food Connect model for their places.

See http://www.foodconnect.com.au/

2.5   Food for the Future (Sydney)

- This new initiative is based around a street of ninety people in inner Sydney, which has been planted out with fruit trees and other edible crops. It is now expanding to set up direct links between local restaurants and households, and farmers in the Sydney Basin region.

- Not only do farmers bring their produce into the city, but waste from restaurants (and households) is being taken out of the city for use on farms. For example, coffee grounds are being used around citrus trees to reduce the risk of fruit fly.

See http://www.foodforthefuturefair.org/

2.6 Imago Forest (via Singleton)

- This is biodynamic farm that sells directly to the public via a farmer owned outlet open one afternoon a week.

- Other organic food is purchased from other farms or wholesalers for on selling.

- All profits go back to the farmer to support development of on farm production.

- Imago Forest is moving towards a full Community Support**ing** Agriculture model. This is different from Community Support**ed** Agriculture in that it is explicitly a two-way relationship between farmer and consumer (and so does not have overtones of charity towards farmers).

- Customers pay in advance and are involved in the production through field days and weekly newsletters.

- The model is designed to be easily replicated by other farmers.

See http://imagoforest.com.au/

2.7 Organic Buyers Group (OBG) (Sydney)

- OBG buys organic produce from wholesalers and distributes to members without mark-up or profit.

- There are currently three branches in Sydney, and they operate independently but under the collective banner of "Organic Buyers Group".

- OBG is volunteer run and has no legal structure.

- With sufficient buying power, the aim is to approach one or more of the 2000 Sydney market gardeners and offer to buy from them direct if they convert to organics.

- There are supporting materials for any groups that would like to establish their own organic buyers group in their area.

See http://groups.msn.com/SydneyOrganicBuyersGroup

2.8   Permaculture Hunter and Sustaining our Suburbs (Newcastle)

- Permaculture is concerned with developing more sustainable forms of agriculture that draw on lessons from the natural ecosystem.

- Permaculture is now used in a variety of settings including community gardens, back-yard gardens, organic farms, roof-top gardens and container gardening.

- Sustaining our Suburbs is a joint initiative between Permaculture Hunter and Adamstown Uniting Church, and has support from Uniting Care.

- The initiative targets people on low incomes and draws on permaculture principles to assist people grow their own produce.

2.9   Research Interests

Associate Professor Jenny Cameron (Discipline of Geography and Environmental Studies, The University of Newcastle)

- Interested in learning from community enterprises in various phases of development, and learning about how the enterprises operate (particularly how the values of the enterprise are reflected in practices), the challenges faced, the ways that challenges are responded to, and the ways that "success" and "failure" are understood.

- This interest has come about out of action research projects with groups in marginalised neighbourhoods in the Latrobe Valley (Victoria) and Logan City (South East Queensland), where the research initiated a number of community enterprises, some of which continue and some of which have folded.

- The intention with the community enterprise research is to conduct the research in a way that not only produces academic benefits but also has direct benefits for the community enterprises involved by providing enterprises with the opportunity to reflect on what they are doing and to hear from other community enterprises about what they are up to.

See http://www.newcastle.edu.au/school-old/environ-life-science/our_staff/cameron_jenny.html

See http://www.communityeconomies.org/

Emeritus Professor Robert (Bob) Fagan (Department of Human Geography, Macquarie University).

•   A long interest in researching food systems on a global scale (e.g. the banana industry), and an interest in developing understandings about scale that are more empowering.

•   Currently a Deputy Director of the Social Inclusion Centre and one of the interests in the Centre is to look at the issue of food security, particularly through a proposed project called Feeding Sydney. One of the things this project would look at is the supply of food for Sydney. Currently around 1/3 of Sydney's fresh vegetables comes from the Sydney Basin, yet this productive land is being developed for housing.

•   Currently also working on a research project with Australian Red Cross evaluating the community capacity building component of two local place-based projects that are being implemented in disadvantaged areas (the Good Start Breakfast and Food Cents programs).

See http://www.es.mq.edu.au/humgeog/staff/fagan.htm

Professor Katherine Gibson (Department of Human Geography, The Australian National University)

•   Interested in rethinking the economy and bringing to light the range of diverse labour practices, forms of transactions and enterprises that are prevalent even in supposedly capitalist economies. In this diversity of economic practices people are taking back the economy to make the world a better place to live in.

•   Involved, over a number of years and in a number of places (Bowen Coal Basin and the Latrobe Valley in Australia, and Bohol and Mindanao in the Philippines), in community and action research working with communities to build more ethical communities and more ethical community economies that take on the issues of how much do we need to live on (necessity); how much and want do we want to consume; what happens to the surplus we produce in our societies (how does it get appropriated, how does it get distributed); and what are we doing with our commons (our common property and knowledges) (for more on this see Gibson-Graham, 2006).

- One aspect of the research has been working with communities and other academic researchers (including Jenny Cameron and Ann Hill) to develop community enterprises that embody ethical economic decisions, and that build on the resources and skills that can be found even in seemingly poor and deprived communities.

- Interested in taking community out of its usual local framing and building ethical community connections (in terms of our social and economic responsibilities) with people in other parts of the world. So using a place-based politics that connects people across space.

See http://rspas.anu.edu.au/people/personal/gibsk_hg.php

See http://www.communityeconomies.org/

Ann Hill (Department of Human Geography, The Australian National University)

- Interested in looking at community food in terms of a community food economy and in building intentional conversations to include those who produce food and those who buy and consume food.

- Interested in a series of key questions: What might constitute a community food economy, including at different scales? What potential is there to use web-based technologies to link people who might not normally have ready access to each other so they can have intentional conversations about food economies? How do people involved in community food economies view what they do—do they see themselves as part of a broad and diverse economy, or as oppositional or alternative to a global economy? What sorts of personal transformations take place through community food economies/initiatives? What kinds of partnerships support community food economies/initiatives, including those with governments?

- Starting to work with an allotment garden scheme in a poor area of Mindanao in the Philippines, and looking at the potential for more collective forms of gardening and enterprise in what is currently an individualised approach.

See http://www.communityeconomies.org/

John Pearce

- Concerned with three issues at the moment. The first is an issue that is emerging in the UK around a shift from what might be called community enterprises to social enterprises. Where community enterprises are concerned with community change and community activism (particularly for people in disadvantaged communities who have used community enterprises as a means of gaining some control of their lives and neighbourhoods), social enterprises tend to be focused on delivering government services. This has resulted in two interrelated changes: private enterprises are increasingly able to badge themselves as social enterprises; and social enterprises seems to be developing as just a slightly different business model and as something quite different from community enterprises.

- The second key issue is the importance of social accounting and the need for community enterprises to be able to demonstrate the impact that they are having, and the difference that they are making, particularly in terms of how they are doing things differently from the public and private sectors.

- The third key issue is how important it is that we not only learn from successful community enterprises but that we also learn from failure. In a previous study looking at four case studies of failed enterprises in the UK, four insights emerged:

  1. securing high levels of support, funding and publicity at the outset can be risky when there may not be a secure enterprise foundation, especially if the enterprise is not likely to be viable in the longer-term

  2. the importance of making sure that there is a fit between the social purpose of the enterprise and the business activity

  3. a lack of the right balance of skills (e.g. having a manager who has too strong a business focus and is unable to take into account the social goals of the enterprise)

  4. government entities cam be reluctant to trust the local community to be able to run and manage things, and so retain too much control.

See http://www.gulbenkian.org.uk/news/press-releases/2003/new-publication-social-enterprise-in-any-town

See also http://www.socialauditnetwork.org.uk/

3.0   THEMES FROM THE DISCUSSION

There was considerable discussion around the idea that community enterprises are characterised by an emphasis on social (and environmental) values over and above economic concerns. People described these values in terms of key words and phrases like:

- equity

- trust

- cooperativism

- community involvement

- inclusion

- development of values

- learning.

This emphasis on social values was seen as distinguishing community enterprises from private businesses and the public sector, and has implications for all aspects of how community enterprises operate, as discussed in this section.

3.1 Diverse Economic Practices

One of the key characteristics of the community enterprises is the extent of economic diversity. Certainly, the enterprises operate in what we usually think of as "the economy". For example the Organic Buyers Group purchases fruit and vegetables through mainstream wholesale fruit and vegetable markets. Food Connect is staffed only by paid workers, while The Beanstalk Organic Food and Fig Tree Community Garden have one to two paid workers (see Figure 1, Row 1). But alongside these regular market and labour practices, the enterprises also use a range of other economic practices.

TRANSACTION	LABOUR	ENTERPRISE
Market • Wholesale markets (Organic Buyers Group)	**Wage** • Paid workers (Beanstalk, Food Connect, Fig Tree)	**Capitalist**
Alternative Market • Community Supported Agriculture (Beanstalk, Food Connect) • Community Supporting Agriculture (Imago Forest)	**Alternative Paid** • Discounted produce (City Cousins in Food Connect) • Produce for Labour (Volunteers at Beanstalk who receive a free box in return for work; Chook Roster at Fig Tree) • Work for the Dole (Fig Tree) • Volunteer Cash Payment (Sustaining our Suburbs).	**Alternative Capitalist** • Food Connect (not for profit company) • Imago Forest (social business)
Non-market • Gift-giving (Fig Tree) • Self-Provisioning (Sustaining our Suburbs)	**Unpaid** • Volunteer (Food for Sydney; Organic Buyers Group; Fig Tree, Beanstalk,)	**Non-Capitalist** • Fig Tree Community Garden (Incorporated Association) • The Beanstalk Organic Food & Organic Buyers Group (Loose cooperatives with no legal structure)

Figure 1: The Diverse Economic Practices of the Community Enterprises

For more on this Diverse Economy Framework see Gibson-Graham, 2006, p. 71; Cameron & Gibson-Graham, 2003; and Community Economies Collective, 2001.

There are a variety of alternative and non-market transactions (Figure 1, Column 1). For example, Beanstalk and Food Connect are Community Supported Agriculture initiatives, which means they develop direct relationships with farmers, rather than indirect relationships that are mediated through the wholesale fruit and vegetable markets (see Row 2). As will be discussed in other parts of this document, this direct connection means that the enterprises recognise their interdependence with the farmers and actively seek to build relationships that reflect this interdependence. Imago Forest is based on a Community Supporting Agriculture model, which again is based on building a direct relationship between farm producer and consumers.

There are also a range of non-market transactions (Row 3). Fig Tree is characterised by various forms of gift-giving. For example, neighbours and local restaurants gift their waste to the chickens and the worm farm, a local mowing service gifts their grass clippings to the compost piles. The garden itself is a gift for people to use—people drop by to pick the evening's salad, a home school group uses the site for educational activities, the beekeeper who monitors the port keeps his hives on the site, people turn up every second Friday evening or the last Sunday in the month for pizza cooked in the pizza oven (and for the pizza, people bring gifts of food and the garden itself contributes its produce). There is also self-provisioning with participants in the Sustaining our Suburbs project growing fruit and vegetables for their own consumption (Row 3).

In terms of labour arrangements (Column 2), people are "paid" for their labour in a variety of ways. For example, City Cousins who are the distribution centres for Food Connect are remunerated through discounted produce (Row 2). At Beanstalk people who volunteer (on tasks such as cleaning up, setting up, working on the newsletter) receive free produce (usually 1 free box for each month of volunteering). At Fig Tree people who are on the weekly roster looking after the chooks (chickens) are remunerated in the eggs they collect. At Sustaining our Suburbs volunteers receive a cash payment of either $30 a day or $15 for ½ day, not enough to constitute a wage but a sum of money that recognises the contribution of volunteers. Most of the enterprises also use volunteer labour, ranging from the actual labour of running the enterprise (e.g. Organic Buyers Group and Food for the Future) through to behind the scenes organisational work on committees of management (e.g. Fig Tree and Beanstalk).

In terms of the structures of the enterprises, Imago Forest and Food Connect can be characterised as alternative capitalist enterprises. Food Connect has a company structure, but with not for profit articles. So unlike other capitalist enterprises it is not driven by profit-maximisation (and as will be discussed throughout this document, there are other concerns that drive Food Connect). Similarly Imago Forest operates as a social business guided by a social ethic:

> **Julian Lee (Imago Forest)**: For me a social business would only charge the True Price for goods and services. This is calculated by working out the actual costs of production, including labour and any overheads to keep the business running now and in the future. Not more. Not less. On books, the company may show a small profit but this is just to ensure its future stability. Its purpose is not to make money but to have demonstrable social outcomes.

As an incorporated association with a strong emphasis on communal and self-directed work, Fig Tree is a non-capitalist enterprise. And Beanstalk and the Organic Buyers Group are also non-capitalist forms of enterprise with a focus on communal and cooperative principles.

3.2 Diverse Economic Practices Shaped by Values

The diverse economic practices that characterise these community enterprises are shaped by the enterprises' values, particularly their social and environmental values. Indeed, this is a defining characteristic of community enterprises—economic practices serve social and environmental goals.

To take one example, The Beanstalk Organic Food uses volunteering as its primary form of labour, and has only one paid worker. For Beanstalk, the economic practice of volunteering serves a number of social goals. As one member of Beanstalk explains, organic food is only one element of the enterprise:

> **Rhyall Gordon (Beanstalk)**: [I]t's not just about individual health reasons, it's about healthy communities and people participating.

For Beanstalk volunteering is a way of building healthy communities and encouraging people to participate:

> **Rhyall Gordon (Beanstalk)**: [W]e're mostly volunteer based and that in itself is an ethic and something we want to promote from a kind of community development point of view

But volunteering also enables Beanstalk to achieve another goal—providing affordable organic food:

> **Rhyall Gordon (Beanstalk)**. The idea of participation, in terms of Beanstalk, it's a big issue for us, and the purpose of participation, because essentially the fact that we have volunteering is the reason why we have affordable organic food.

So in Beanstalk volunteering is an economic practice that serves multiple goals—participation, community building and affordability.

Like Beanstalk, the other Community Supported Agriculture initiative, Food Connect, also has affordability as one of its goals, but it uses a very different economic mechanism to achieve this. In Food Connect consumers have to purchase a minimum of four weeks boxes in advance, as this guarantees markets and an income for farmers, even if crops fail. So unlike Beanstalk where consumers can pay on the day (or a week in advance), Food Connect has to find a different strategy to incorporate low income households. Through a scheme developed in conjunction with Foresters ANA Friendly Society, low income earners can pay weekly but over four months they pay an extra $2 a week. By the end of the four months they have accumulated enough to start buying a month's subscription in advance. So this Food for All scheme gives low income households a chance to catch up with other households and buy advance subscriptions.

For Food Connect the advance purchase of produce is a way of enacting the Community Supported Agriculture goal of building strong relationships between consumers and producers. Because Beanstalk has a pay on the day (or a week in advance) system, it uses different economic practices to build relationships with farmers, for example:

Rhyall Gordon (Beanstalk): We're very keen on the idea of Community Supported Agriculture … and for us it's just that idea of building better relationships with the farmers. We've done quite few things already, quite small, but I guess they're first steps for us. Just this winter there was one of our farmers who suffered quite a bit with the rains and we on average were paying him about $400 a week. What he could supply to us dropped and what we did was just to continue to pay the $400 so it was our way of trying to support him through difficult times. And he returns that favour, or whatever you want to call it, in many ways. So there's a very good relationship there and we want to try and develop that across the board. And there's different things we do as well in terms of working bees for farmers. We go out and plant garlic and work in the farms and stuff like that. And one time we went to a struggling farmer where there was a bit of a crisis after floods and weeds and stuff like that. So as another form of Community Supported Agriculture there's an opportunity for a group of labourers who can go out and support farmers, and that's something we want to expand.

So Beanstalk has helped farmers who are in difficulty by gifting money and organising volunteer labour.

In these two examples, very different economic practices are being used to achieve the same outcomes of affordability and fostering strong relationships between consumers and producers. The one key difference is that Beanstalk has a community development emphasis and encourages civic participation via volunteerism. Whereas Food Connect has a social and economic justice emphasis and provides work opportunities for marginalised groups. As part of this social and economic justice focus, equity is a key value and this is reflected in the practice of having only two pay scales for all workers ($15 or $17 per hour) irrespective of people's background and ability.

What is important here is not that one approach to Community Supported Agriculture is better than the other; rather, the two approaches are equally valid with each being shaped by the distinctive values of the enterprise (participation and volunteerism in the case of Beanstalk, and social and economic justice and equity in the case of Food Connect). These two enterprises therefore demonstrate ethical economic decision making. In other words, they demonstrate how choices, or decisions, about economic practices are shaped by the overriding values, or ethics, of the enterprise.

Each of the community enterprises represented at the workshop engages in ethical economic decision making. For example, in Imago Forest, the practice of True Pricing—of charging enough to cover all necessary costs plus a small amount of "profit" to sustain the enterprise into the future—is an ethical economic decision to foster a mutually beneficial and supporting relationship between farmer and consumer. In Sustaining our Suburbs, the practice of paying volunteers a small sum of money for a full or half day's work is an ethical economic decision that reflects the values of social and economic justice.

Ethical economic decision making is not something that occurs only once in the life of a community enterprise; ethical economic decision making is an ongoing process. For example, Fig Tree Community Garden started with the intention of developing a place for people, where values could be nurtured and developed:

> **Craig Manhood (Fig Tree)**: We actually started [Fig Tree] with no thoughts about money, it was more about the community involvement and what it gave to people in terms of values and what people learnt. An example of just a really basic outcome would be all the kids that just come and look at the chickens and go "Wow!" and that's it.

The emphasis on fostering community, means that the enterprise is based on economic practices like gift giving, with garden plots being shared and people encouraged to take what they need (even neighbours and passer-bys who don't contribute to the gardening). At times, however, Fig Tree has contemplated taking a more commercial and market oriented approach, such as selling more produce to raise revenue for materials and equipment. But the concern is that this will compromise the values and character of the garden:

> **Bill Robertson (Fig Tree):** As soon as we start charging … does that kill the magic?

So far, the decision has been to steer away from a commercial focus. In so doing, the ethical economic decision has been to prioritise the social values associated with gifting even if it compromises other aspects of the enterprise's operations (such as holding off on purchasing materials and equipment, or finding other ways to secure needed inputs). Nevertheless, Fig Tree may well return to this ethical economic decision and reconsider whether to develop more commercial activities, and if so, how such activities might be developed so they match the values of enterprise, or indeed, whether the values of the enterprise might need to be modified to accommodate a more commercial orientation. These types of considerations are the ethical economic decisions that community enterprises are always engaged in.

These ethical economic decisions mean that enterprises can end up with an array of economic practices—and not just practices like paid work, volunteering and gifting, that sit comfortably with ideas of community. Ethical economic decision making can sometimes mean accommodating what might be described as economic misbehaviour, like theft:

> **Ann Hill (The Australian National University):** What sort of values, like equity, and trust, how important are those for Fig Tree?
>
> **Craig Manhood (Fig Tree)**: Oh, paramount. But then if people breach that, so what?
>
> **Bill Robertson (Fig Tree)**: We deliberately haven't had a problem if someone comes along and takes some vegetables then that's good, isn't it? That's what it's about. We had one instance where we found one person taking lots of pumpkins and selling them. But you know, so what.
>
> **Robert Pekin (Food Connect)**: Yeah we have the same attitude. If someone's broken in and stolen a lot of money well obviously they need the money. That's a social problem not their problem.

Ethical economic decision making can also mean taking a more hard line stance and saying "No" to potential clients or negotiating relationships so they match the values of the community enterprise:

> **Robert Pekin (Food Connect)**: Yeah, if you're dealing with politicians or corporates, we won't have anything to do with a corporate that doesn't want to be judged at those higher levels. So you can go to the mission statement and look at the mission statement and point it out to them and say … "Unless you're willing to deal with us at that level then we'll go and talk to someone else". So you're always, all the time, being hard-nosed about those higher values. And then lots of discussion comes out of that, lots of learnings—even if nothing comes out of it in terms of a material contract or partnership or alliance, it's always pushing.
>
> [For example,] we're in a partnership with Connell Wager, a big engineering firm that deals with lots of mines. And they want us to supply fruit because we give them a tick in the Buying Local box, and also taking all their food scraps back, and it's a great resource. It completes the cycle for us. It's a fantastic win for us. But I'm not going anywhere with them until we can actually have an impact with all of their CEOs, all their management staff, about what real sustainability is, and a chance to speak. So they said "Righto, we want you to come in at these various times". We want also to cater for them at the highest level. So we sort of look at that top line … we want to filter our values up ... [and] through that catering event they experience something different. That experience, whether it's through osmosis or through verbal, is something - we won't do anything with them until they're open to saying "Yes you can do this and yes you can do that".

This ethical economic decision making is by no means easy, particularly when an enterprise is reliant on external relationships, as one participant describes:

> **Pablo Gimenez (The Brotherhood of St Laurence)**: [Y]ou have to have really good strong ethics and systems in place to be able to say "No, we're not going to take your money because of x, y and z".

> Most agencies will take the money and not even think about who they are
> dealing with. And a lot of that is because of the pressure that they just
> want to continue or there's a lot of paid staff involved.

This dilemma is particularly evident in the UK with the move away from community enterprises that are relatively autonomous to an emphasis on social enterprises as a means of delivering funded services for government:

> **John Pearce**: I think in the UK but perhaps not unique to the UK, when
> governments start seeing social enterprises as a useful tool to deliver
> services then it puts people into quite a difficult situation because it
> compromises the independence that they seek, or have sought in the
> past.

With community and social enterprises attracting more government attention in Australia ethical economic decisions about funding sources may well become more of a concern in the future (see also Barraket, 2008).[1]

What emerges from the discussion is an understanding of how the diverse economic practices that characterise the enterprises have been developed to reflect the enterprises' values. Through this ongoing process of ethical economic decision making the enterprises are redefining what we usually imagine the economy as being. They use regular paid work and market transactions, arrangements that sit in Row 1 of Figure 1, and they also use the diverse practices in Rows 2 and 3. They are innovating with this economic diversity in order to foster interconnections between people, sustain communities, address issues of social and economic inequity, and develop environmental practices.

---

[1] Indeed, one community enterprise in South East Queensland made the difficult decision not to become a provider of government services and to maintain their independence. In the end this meant the enterprise folded, but members felt this was the ethical economic decision to make (see Cameron 2009).

3.3 Diverse Legal Structures Shaped by Values

As well as innovating with economic practices, community enterprises innovate with legal structures and governance arrangements as a means of reflecting values. For example, Food Connect is a Proprietary Limited Company (Pty Ltd), but with not for profit articles:

> **Robert Pekin**: We're a Proprietary Limited Company. And I'm the only shareholder or I was [as employees are in the process of becoming shareholders]. We wrote into the constitution that this business is not for sale and this business is not to benefit anyone individually from a profit point of view … And what we've created is a really unique little model. We don't have to have a board. Not for profits have to have a board. So we have a Board of Concerned Elders who are then freed up to not think about legal and fiscal responsibility to the rest of the community; us as the employees all do that. So now we've got five people who are about to become shareholders and then the rest of Food Connect will become shareholders in that Pty Ltd with not for profit articles.

Some community enterprises like Fig Tree Community Garden operate as an incorporated association (which again means that the enterprise is not for profit). Like Food Connect with its Board of Concerned Elders, Fig Tree also innovates with the requirements for incorporated associations in order to reflect the values of the garden:

> **Bill Robertson (Fig Tree)**: [W]e have the Annual General Eating rather than the Annual General Meeting, and Fun Raising Committees rather than Fund Raising Committees. That sort of language is really important.

The other community enterprises have no legal structure. For example:

> **Julian Lee (Organic Buyers Group)**: They're just bunches of people who get together each fortnight.

This approach of informal governance is even supported by advisory groups:

> **Rhyall Gordon (Beanstalk)**: And I spoke to the Association of Cooperatives and we had a great conversation and at the end they advised me that we probably don't need to incorporate. There's not any advantages and in many ways there's more risks. We're going to have to spend more money on insurance and so on.

So in each of these examples, the community enterprises are using their legal structure or governance arrangements to match their values.

3.4 Communicating Values

One key issue is how to communicate the values to new members. Fig Tree Community Garden has a very definite strategy:

> **Jenny Cameron (The University of Newcastle)**: How do you educate people about what you are doing? What sort of processes are there for people to learn about the values?
>
> **Craig Manhood (Fig Tree)**: Very simple. Step one. Take them for a walk into the garden. Have a little conversation. Pick them some food. And let them chew on a piece of celery while you tell them what this is about. And then the connection is more than what they hear.

However, it can be difficult to communicate values to new members, as The Beanstalk Organic Food is finding:

> **Rhyll Gordon (Beanstalk):** I guess there's a lot of people out there who just want to get cheap organic food.
>
> **Kristina Gluschke (Beanstalk)**: And they're taking advantage of the Beanstalk philosophy of volunteering and capitalising on other people's work.
>
> **Craig Manhood (Fig Tree)**: You would have had a conversation about differential pricing – if you put this much time in you pay less.

Kristina Gluschke (Beanstalk): We do the free vege [vegetable] box thing for people that volunteer and we've also discussed mandatory volunteering so every member, when you sign up, you have to donate an hour a month.

Pablo Gimenez (The Brotherhood of St Laurence): Which is part of the cooperative principles that you need to actively participate in the cooperative in order to be a member.

Jenny Cameron (The University of Newcastle): Or it could be that you elect to not do any volunteering and therefore –

Multiple voices: – pay a premium. Yeah.

Jenny Cameron (The University of Newcastle): So people who are prepared to put their volunteer work in benefit from the extra money that other people are prepared to pay.

Craig Manhood (Fig Tree): Because there would be people who would just say that up front "I'm not about volunteering. Here's some extra money".

Robert Pekin (Food Connect): And then you could take it to the next level, to a higher equity level and say how many months should they be a participant by volunteering before they actually get the benefit. So there's an equity for the pioneers that started it. That's a respect mechanism, where you could relate the value of the people who pioneered this to 3 months of volunteer effort and then – so with our City Cousins no-one ever knows that they get 50 per cent off their boxes paid for because it's not advertised until they say "I want to be a City Cousin and I meet all the requirements". Their driveway's fine and all that sort of stuff. And then we say "Guess what". So it's taking the next step. And I suppose it's always asking are you really, are you really in this for the right reasons.

…

Katherine Gibson (The Australian National University): And would you not allow someone to be part of the coop [if they didn't want to volunteer]?

> **Rhyall Gordon (Beanstalk):** We don't go in that direction because it's an opportunity to teach them about what we do and why we do it. We never turn people away because they say they just want cheap organic food. It's a role we see ourselves as fulfilling about educational awareness, organic food – it's not just about individual health reasons, it's about healthy communities and people participating.
>
> **Katherine Gibson (The Australian National University):** And you could ask people "What's stopping you from being more involved in the cooperative". And you might find a whole lot of interesting things about making their lives more interesting and thinking about changing. So asking them "What's the reason?". And it might be "I just don't care about anyone else". Or it might be that "My life is so complex caring for all these other people, I just don't - ". Or whatever and it might be part of an interesting way –
>
> **Kristina Gluschke (Beanstalk):** Oh I guess people do say "I've got kids and I can't come, or I'm working until that time and I can't come or I've just got too much stuff on".

This extended discussion from the workshop is an example of ethical economic decision making in practice. The participants consider the various options open to an enterprise like Beanstalk in order to make the values of the enterprise (in this case the values of cooperation and volunteering) more transparent in the economic practices and in the process of 'inducting' new members. Again, it is not that there is one right or best pathway for an enterprise like Beanstalk to take; rather, there are different economic options, each of which will reflect something of the values of the enterprise. Making ethical economic decisions involves weighing up which economic practices will most strongly communicate the values that the enterprise prioritises.

3.5   Monitoring and Reflecting on Values

Another key issue that emerged is that of community enterprises monitoring and reflecting on how they are faring in terms of their values. On the one hand there was discussion about how important it is to capture the distinctive contribution that community enterprises make:

> **John Pearce:** Community enterprises, social enterprises, need to be able to demonstrate the impact they're having on people, on communities, on the local economy. And I think that whole area of finding ways in which organisations can develop effective reporting mechanisms is absolutely crucial … it's crucially important to think about how can community enterprises, social enterprises, demonstrate the impact that they're having, and in a sense the difference they are making, and also in the same breath illustrate how they are different from the private sector and indeed the public sector.

> **John Pearce:** But it's those sort of outcomes [providing a community garden space where people can just interact] that we do need to find ways of recording, documenting, reporting. Otherwise they get lost. It's absolutely crucial that we find ways of doing that … There is a process [social accounting] that's being used extensively in the UK, not just the UK, which allows organisations to think through what their values are, what their objectives are, what they're actually doing in order to get there, who their stakeholders are, what data (information) they need to collect which allows them to report both quantitatively on what's been done, and qualitatively on the effects its had, the impact its had, what people think about it, the way that they're doing it and whether it's appropriate etc. etc. etc. And increasingly it's important for the sort of things that you've been talking about to be captured, and valued – and valuing it doesn't necessarily mean putting a dollar value on it. But making sure that the effect of what you've done is known.

On the other hand, even though the importance of monitoring and social accounting was acknowledged by participants, some pointed out how difficult it can be:

> **Craig Manhood (Fig Tree):** That's a real dilemma there … I just hate paper work. I just want to garden.
>
> …
>
> **Robert Pekin (Food Connect):** I guess what Craig's saying and I come from the same point of view, is that we don't have time to do that. We're all doers.

There were two responses to this dilemma. One was that by not accounting for the impact and distinctiveness of what they are doing, community enterprises are missing out on an important opportunity to reflect on their values:

> **John Pearce:** I think all social or community enterprises ought to be, need to be doing it to satisfy themselves that they are doing what they set out to do, that what they're still doing is relevant and appropriate to the people for whom they're doing it, that they're living up to their values, that the values are still appropriate. And that is part of the planning process, the reflective process of running the organisation that needs to be done. Organisations that keep some form of social accounts end up understanding and seeing that their social accounting process, their planning process and their reviewing process all get rolled into one continuous process of "How can we improve what we're doing?". And if you start from doing it just because you want to prove to other people in order to get their support you probably will get pretty frustrated. But if you see it as something which is relevant, valuable to you, I would say that if at the end of the day social accounting isn't useful and valuable to you then there's no point in doing what you're doing.

If we take seriously the idea that community enterprises are characterised by an on going process of ethical economic decision making in which they seek to reflect their values in their economic practices, then social accounting becomes important to monitor how well they are faring and to feed into the ethical economic (and other) decisions that community enterprises make.

A second and more pragmatic response was that paradoxically, even though community enterprises place a far greater emphasis on their values, it is the financial aspects of the enterprise that are almost unquestioningly monitored and reported on:

> **John Pearce:** My argument to that is that you have to keep accounts, financial accounts, and you find the time to do that … My point there is that you keep some sort of figures.
> **Rhyall Gordon (Beanstalk):** Yes, we do.
> **John Pearce:** Everybody does. So we say we must do it for the money, so it's curious that we don't look at the social. That's the point I'd make.

One possibility raised was that community enterprises be required to produce social accounts:

> **John Pearce:** We just finished a piece of research on looking at the experience of social accounting over the last 10 years in parts of the UK … one of the things we came out with as a recommendation, which is a bit controversial, is that it should become a compulsory requirement for organisations. Most people draw their breath in. But the reason for this is that a lot of organisations have done social accounts once because they were required by a program which paid for the support to do it; didn't do it again, because they couldn't prioritise it and they had all sorts of other things to do. And they didn't have the money and they couldn't afford to do it, and so it slipped off out of their actions. And when we talked to them they were saying "Actually we'd like to routinely do it. We thought it was a brilliant idea; we just haven't prioritised it. But if we had to do it, which we don't, then of course we'd do it in the same ways we keep our financial accounts". So we've come to the conclusion then why not make it compulsory.

Of course, as participants pointed out, if community or social enterprises have to report on social accounts, why not other sorts of enterprise and even government?:

John Pearce: The interesting point is that what's beginning to emerge is that social accounting is something which people think social enterprises should do, but there's not a lot of talk about businesses generally doing it, or indeed the public sector.

Katherine Gibson (The Australian National University): It could be a really important political issue there.

John Pearce: It is kind of important. People will tell you about the nice, neat, new building. But we're not going to bother to tell you about the impact that everything else is having. It's a different sort of way of doing things.

Katherine Gibson (The Australian National University): The fact that we don't have social accounting of mainstream business. We're arguing for social accounting for community enterprises, but what kind of social accounting actually gets applied to mainstream businesses? So the idea of social accounting should be across the board because it brings up questions of what's not in pricing, for instance. Broadening out that social accounting to be not just about this sector but all.

There was also discussion of how social accounts might be kept, particularly the role of story telling, although there were cautions around this:

Bill Robertson (Fig Tree Community Garden): So I start to wonder if we can report like you say in different ways and should we be more into storytelling and –

John Pearce: Those different ways take time as well. People sometimes think that using a camera or using a tape recorder or whatever is not time consuming. It actually takes a lot of time. And you still have the process that if you come up with something you have to process it as well. It does take time. You can't suddenly gather information, process it, use it without taking time.

3.6 Approaches to Growth

Two main issues were discussed in relation to the idea of growth:

- Questioning the merits of growth, particularly the unsettling impact that growth can have on the values of a community enterprise
- Developing different models or approaches to growth, particularly to align growth with the values of the enterprise.

One view was that growth is not necessarily beneficial to community enterprises, and may well undermine the values of the enterprise:

> **Bill Robertson (Fig Tree):** [H]ow big do you want to go? At Fig Tree we have these conversations all the time, and we're probably better staying small and making sure our values stay central than going bigger and burning ourselves out. As soon as it stops being fun then why do it?

This is certainly the challenge that The Beanstalk Organic Food is facing at the moment when they are growing at a relatively rapid rate for a small enterprise:

> **Ryall Gordon (Beanstalk):** We've still got quite a lot of demand. People just rocking up and saying "We want to be members" when we don't actually have the capacity to deal with it at the moment. So the potential is there. Certainly in the Newcastle area it seems like there's a huge potential for us to grow. It's just that we have to decide how we want to grow, and even if it's appropriate for us to grow.
>
> **Kristina Gluschke (Beanstalk):** We've come to the stage where we are growing quite fast and we probably need to start thinking about how we are going to deal with that. As Rhyall says we have people turning up each week saying "Can we sign up! Can we sign up!" … And we have a waiting list because our farmers just can't keep up with us at the moment so that's the challenge that we're facing at the moment – how we're going to adapt and cope with growing bigger and bigger, It's one thing running it with forty boxes a week but now that we're nearly up to one hundred it's going to be [inaudible].

Of concern to Beanstalk is the impact of this growth on the values of cooperation and volunteering:

> **Rhyall Gordon (Beanstalk):** [As] we've grown we've had a lot of people come in that are just there to take advantage of the cheap food and aren't volunteering so it's that matter of do we reward the volunteers more, do we have more paid employees, that type of thing. And promoting the whole aspect of community development, which is very important to us, and how that fits.
>
> **Kristina Gluschke (Beanstalk):** Sometimes I think that the challenge is that people don't want to understand that it's a community enterprise project they would rather that it was a business and then they wouldn't have to contribute anything more than money.

The growth is even impacting on decisions about the legal structure of the enterprise:

> **Rhyall Gordon (Beanstalk):** We've got to the stage where we've grown so much we need to revisit [staying as an unincorporated association, with no legal structure]. So I think that it might be a necessary evil. We're growing and growing, and I think we will have to look at it.

To manage these sorts of challenges that can be associated with growth, some of the enterprises have developed various models or approaches to growth. These fall into three main models or approaches—replication, deepening and organic growth.

Replication

The replication approach is used by the Organic Buyers Group in Sydney. There are currently three groups that operate separately, but recognise a shared connection. There are also materials people can use to replicate the Organic Buyers Group set-up. Similarly Food Connect is developing what they call a Supported Mutation Model so others can replicate their approach. The possibility of replication is one option for The Beanstalk Organic Food to use:

> **Rhyall Gordon (Beanstalk):** If you're out there applying for money as well, I think the implication is there's an expectation that you're going to grow and that growth is necessarily a good thing. And we're still struggling with that idea ourselves, whether it's something we want to do. We have the opportunity of possibly replicating even within the one area or replicating in other areas.

Replication need not necessarily be through a formalised arrangement. For example, Fig Tree Community Garden encourages replication through an informal approach of simply providing advice and encouragement to others who are interested:

> **Craig Manhood (Fig Tree):** [O]ther groups come to us and they say "We'd like to do what you're doing over there". And we've had quite a lot of that, so while the scale of our enterprise and our involvement seems relatively small, it is actually quite a big ground-swell of outcomes which don't necessarily have a dollar value.

Growing by Deepening

Growing by deepening is used by Food Connect, and it happens across all aspects of the enterprise. It happens in terms of the business side of the enterprise:

> **Robert Pekin (Food Connect):** We want to empower as many people to be as free-thinking and as independent as possible … Judy Wicks from the White Dog Café [http://www.whitedog.com/] was so impressive when she came this year and said "You drive deep into your business, you don't think about growth as getting big, you just drive deeper and deeper".
> …
> We're always unpacking every single part of the economy, the business, distribution, production. We minutely unpack every single aspect of what makes business do business as usual and destroy the world.

Deepening can also be about refining the values of the enterprise:

> First you've got a high integrity as you keep driving deeper and deeper ...
> Deeper in terms of what you're about, what your purpose is about.

It can also be about the people in the enterprise:

> But also for the people who come into the organisation if you drive deep,
> you sort of get triple the value out of a person … so at Food Connect
> you've got a job for life, so what is it that they really want to do? Do they
> want to be the best compost maker in the world or have that delivery
> system absolutely sussed out, back to the farm, or whatever it is that
> there's passion for. Once you mobilise that passion within the business,
> that's driving deeper both at that social level and at how you impact.

Even if the person wants to do something different, outside of Food Connect, the
enterprise will support them:

> What do I really want to do in my life? And that's equally as valued at
> Food Connect as the purpose of Food Connect. So this person might
> want to be a homeopath so what are the opportunities within Food
> Connect and what's the training we can do within and without Food
> Connect that's important to them becoming a homeopath and when
> you marry those two together you have a powerful drive for change, **for
> potentialising life.** [Added emphasis]

Growing by deepening also extends to the farmers, and Food Connect is interested
in helping farmers do what they want to do.

> **Robert Pekin (Food Connect):** [W]hen we do the questionnaire with
> farmers the first question is "Why do you farm?". And sometimes we get
> a farmer who says "I don't really want to farm". Whereas if you had of
> gone – what's their methodology then you'd never find that out.

Katherine Gibson (The Australian National University): So what happens if they say "I don't want to farm?".

Robert: Well that's the whole purpose – the beauty – what is it you want to do with your life? Go and do that! Sell that farm, hand it on to your son. Whatever it is that you want to do. What is the purpose of your life?

Katherine: So if he says he doesn't want to be a farmer can you still deal with him?

Robert: He has a conversation with his wife and kids and makes other plans. So the first question is Why do you farm? Why are you here? What books do you read? What courses do you do? What excites you about farming? It is very personal.

…

Katherine: What's the outcome of that? Oh well, if you're not into it we don't want to deal with you?

Robert: On no. If they don't want to farm then that's another whole discussion. We will work with them while they decide what they want to do.

Organic Growth

Similar to the growing by deepening approach, Fig Tree uses an organic growth approach:

Craig Manhood (Fig Tree): I think similar to what Robert is talking about, I've sort of come to realise this phenomena about organic growth, its not organic in the sense of chemical free, but organic in the sense that – I'll make the analogy with the bush regeneration principle where you start with one tree in a paddock right? Birds land in that tree and drop a few seeds around and that tree provides a bit of shelter for new seedlings to sprout, then it grows into a forest, an amazing thing, it's an amazing forest, but there was no plan. The seeds just dropped and

grew, and that's how Fig Tree's worked. I mean there was a plan, sure. But the plan was only a guide to start with and then we did what you just talked about. When people came to us, we asked "What do you want? What do you want out of this?". Then we catered to that. **We let their ideas flourish and develop**. And then the end vision is very different to what us as individuals might have seen at the beginning. [Added emphasis]

Organic growth in this view means working with and responding to those who come along to the enterprise, so where Robert Pekin (Food Connect) talks about opportunities "for potentialising life", Craig talks about letting other people's ideas flourish and develop.

Craig also provides an example of how this approach to growth works on a practical level:

> **Craig Manhood (Fig Tree):** Yesterday I was a bit exhausted because it was one group after another. I'll give you an example. Two groups that approached me yesterday. Three mothers from Hamilton North Public School who want to start a community garden in the School and a woman and her husband who is doing a herbal medicine course and the teacher has nicely written into the coursework that the students must do 20 hours volunteering at Fig Tree. But that will work really nicely because that's another string to our bow. But oh, I don't know. It's like that organic theory. People just come from all different places and you don't know where they're going to come from next. And you just say "Oh, yeah, sure. Let's do that". Another guy that came and approached us keeps bees. But he keeps two hives to monitor the port here at Newcastle. They monitor the port for mites that might come in, and they send samples off to the CSIRO. And he needed somewhere to put his hives. And it's just fascinating. And I said "Yeah, put 'em there".

Each of these instances shows not only how organic growth leads to networks and relationships between built, but how the development pathway for the garden is shaped by the participants in this organic way.

3.7 Approaches to Planning

Related to the different models or approaches to growth, these community enterprises are rethinking the process of planning in a way that poses questions such as: What is the role of planning? What forms of planning are appropriate to community enterprises? When is planning appropriate? Are different forms of planning appropriate to different moments in an enterprise's development?

For example, in Fig Tree Community Garden, planning has been low key:

> **Craig Manhood (Fig Tree):** We had no plan but we thought that if we do this [plant trees around the perimeter] it's not going to be a problem later on. So from that very first last Sunday in the month the community garden began and ever since then we've meet on the last Sunday of the month and that group I'd say an average of thirty people turn up each time. Sometimes you get fifty-sixty. Sometimes you get fifteen turning up.

> **Bill Robertson (Fig Tree):** We have been approached quite a few times by people who are really keen to get involved, and when they see that we like to run things very loosely they run away and say "There's not enough structure". And it's a real dilemma because we would really like to see more people involved, but we don't want our heads in planning all the time, because maybe then you don't get all that organic stuff that we've been talking about. It's a real tricky balancing act.

As Craig and Bill describe it, planning is if anything characterised by a learning by doing or a trial and error approach that is consistent with the enterprise's organic approach to growth. Nevertheless, as Bill points out this can be a 'a tricky balancing act', one in which the enterprise has to weigh up some people's desires for more structured forms of planning against the opportunities that emerge from the organic and less structured approach.

What was clear from the discussion is that community enterprises are concerned that too much planning can stymie energy and creativity, particularly when imposed from an external agency and when applied uniformly:

Participant: There's this case of a community gardens in the Council where I work and the community is putting out emails to all these Council representatives. And one of our community planning people wrote back and said "Look, for a start you need to refer to a plan of management and you may need to develop a new plan of management". And they put out this big list of stuff, just this wall of bureaucracy that they have to get through and then – and I just cracked up – because the last line was "And this process from previous experience and is likely to take up to two years".

Bill Roberston (Fig Tree): Martin Luther King didn't have a strategic plan, he had a dream.

Participant: So I went around and I said to that person and I tried to smooth it over. And I'm trying to convince all those colleagues at Council that we need to take a hands-off approach and let the community do what it does best.

Likewise there were concerns that planning for community enterprises should not resemble business planning, but should be distinguished by an emphasis on values:

Robert Pekin (Food Connect): And I looked at organisations that started 4 or 5 years ago that started off with a grand plan and all sorts of processes. And they're still nowhere.

Pablo Gimenez (The Brotherhood of St Laurence): I think people say "business plans" like a dirty word. We've got to be careful. Planning is really, really important. I don't even call it a business plan I call it a community enterprise plan because a business plan is different to a community enterprise plan because you're looking at a whole range of social purposes in there as well as the other initiatives.

John Pearce: But the problem has been that people do think that business planning is just about business and not having the social stuff in there. And then time and again the plan for a social enterprise, the judgement that is made about whether it's supported or not

is on the business plan which only looks at the business stuff and which doesn't record all the other stuff. So you're absolutely right about how we've got to get away from using that term and call it a community enterprise plan or a social enterprise plan or whatever.

It was also clear that some form of planning, however lightly undertaken, is a feature of the enterprises:

Robert Pekin (Food Connect): But you don't need anyone to say these are all the steps because no business plan has ever gone according to plan … It's always a constant dilemma because I consider ourselves very lucky, we've attracted some really good people, we've got a line up of people wanting to work for us, we've managed to attract a lot of good farmers. We were simply in the right place at the right time. Two weeks ago I was standing on the corner of the street and the CEO of Brisbane City Council, one of the largest local councils in the world, [came by] and we talked and so within 5 minutes we had our first inner city, mid-week farmers market, farmers only farmers market, right in the middle of the city, mid-week, midday, in corporatesville and we just landed that without anyone even thinking there's a strategy. Well there was a strategy in our dream, but there wasn't really a strategy of how we were going to achieve it, and all of a sudden we had it. There were a lot of other things and then suddenly we had this.

Pablo Gimenez (The Brotherhood of St Laurence): But you have documented – I'm a bit concerned that the importance of planning – you have to have a plan that is flexible. You did have the dream. You shared it. You might not have written it down but there is a shared dream and I think that it is really important that people do take the time out at the start to say "This is the dream", and so you can take people back when people might be going down a another track and so can say "Lets go back and think about what the initial–

Robert Pekin (Food Connect): Yep, that's right.

In this instance a plan for a community enterprise might be as simple as an agreed vision or dream that participants or members can come back to as a point of reference. Indeed as John Pearce described earlier, this process of coming back to a shared vision to reflect on what has been achieved is itself "part of the planning process". The shared vision might also play an important role in finding ways to respond to unanticipated events (such as the unanticipated growth that Beanstalk is currently responding to). Interestingly though, in one case the shared vision also emerged much more strongly as a result of an unexpected event:

> **Craig Manhood (Fig Tree):** The Morrow Park Bowling Club closed down eighteen months later, and the land went back to Rail Corp. So it was railway land. So we had to clear out and we were all devastated. That was the end of the garden. But then again we learned something very important and that was that this community garden was not about the space or the place, it was actually about the people. And so we hunted around and we found another site at another bowling club about 200 metres away across Wickham Park, and that was the Croatian Wickham Sports Club, and so we approached them and they said "Yeah, no worries" and we shook hands and that was it. We were welcomed onto the site with a handshake.
>
> …
>
> [The first working bee at the new site] we all got together and sat around and did a planning session for the new site. Oh planning session, um [silence] um, just on your session you've planned today Jenny I really like the format, really simple and just a couple of straight forward questions. And that's what we did with our planning session. And then we packed up the tools and the wheelbarrows and we walked across the park to the new site.
>
> **All:** Laughter.
>
> **Craig Manhood (Fig Tree):** We planted a couple of trees, symbolically. The beauty of it was that the site was ten times better than the old site. And we made all these mistakes which we were able to learn from. So it all worked out really well.

Here the unexpected loss of the first site, although initially devastating, helped members learn and affirm that Fig Tree was "actually about the people". This value emerged more strongly through this apparent set-back. The second important feature of this unexpected event is the importance of relationships of trust where a new site was secured with a handshake (unlike the experience of the community garden where Council planning and management processes were likely to take two years).

3.8 Learning and Support

What also emerged from the discussion was the importance of learning from other people and from one's own experiences (including the mistakes). Earlier Robert Pekin (Food Connect) mentioned learning about the idea of growing by deepening from Judy Wicks from White Dog Café (http://www.whitedog.com/). Later he says:

> **Robert Pekin (Food Connect):** I've really learnt from stories, so when I hear a story I take bits out of it that I feel are really applicable to me and that I get inspired by and go with that. That's why mentors are so important, people come in and give you stories, examples, real-life examples.

> **Robert Pekin (Food Connect):** Ricardo Semler is my model and even though I've never met the bloke his books [e.g. The Seven Day Weekend] have just taught me so much and his stuff is just inspirational about where you have an organisation where you allow the integrity to rise and make those calls, even when there's a lot of money at stake and he's got amazing examples and I don't know how you cultivate it, I think it's just – I don't know, you've just got to let it flourish, and it takes leadership and I'll make some big boo-boos from time to time.

Along with learning from other people's stories and experiences and from learning by doing (the approach of letting things flourish and even making mistakes as a form of learning), reflection has been important:

Robert Pekin (Food Connect): It is important. It's such an important process to actually reflect. It's important from a spiritual angle, and you can't do it all in one go. So like I've got a whiteboard with a list of all the things I want to reflect upon and write about and put into a report, whatever the form. And research is a great opportunity. Researchers ring me up and I think this is a great opportunity to talk my head off and it gives me a chance to reflect on some of the achievements and some of the things that have gone wrong. And I wish I could do it on a regular basis as it gives me so much benefit, it really does. It really gives me so much benefit. It's a struggle to force yourself to do it when a researcher rings you up.

…

But if I could reflect on my own fears when people first come to me is that we tend to not want to talk about stuff that went terribly wrong but when you're forced to do it you actually reflect on - these were the great things that came out of it.

In this instance researchers play a role by providing an opportunity for reflection (even if it seems difficult to find the time) through one on one interview situations. Researchers were also identified as being able to contribute to learning and support by running forums such as the workshop that this document is based on:

Craig Manhood (Fig Tree): I would like to say that this forum has opened my eyes up to the potential of scale. We sort of do our own little thing and think that this is the limits of our project. "There's no way we can do anymore, you can't put any more in". But through various mechanisms … opportunities knock.

Ryhall Gordon (Beanstalk): The experience today, it's been really worthwhile and to have so many people around the table with different knowledge and experience and is it something that could be repeated in 6 months or a year. Even our neighbour, our ex-neighbour [Fig Tree], we've never really had a decent conversation about how we could work better together and we need to do that.

> **Katherine Gibson (The Australian National University):** Part of having this kind of meeting is a way of getting this knowledge out there, so it can be amplified and replicated in so many ways. It seems like to do it again and to do bring in other people is part of this whole job, furthering these values.

Nevertheless there were some cautions around how stories are told, particularly how stories can be framed in different ways, with very different effects:

> **John Pearce:** What is interesting in my experience of social accounting is that people are very honest, generally they're honest. And there is an audit process (which scrutinises what's been done) by a little panel. So if they have any concerns about the evidence for any of the statements, then they're going to dig deep to find out. What's interesting is they tend to focus therefore on the problems which have been brought out. And sometimes I find when I'm auditing, when I'm auditing a panel, we're actually saying to people "Look this is really great you've been incredibly honest, but you really need to include in this document some successes that you've had".
>
> **Katherine Gibson (The Australian National University):** We found this using the difference between the SWOT analysis for instance and the ABCD analysis [Asset Based Community Development]. The minute you put up the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, it's the weaknesses and threats that assume all the power. And so the whole doing the needs analysis first and getting it out of the way, and then going to the assets and strengths and really building on that is a way of having a totally different impact on how do you tell your stories. Because once you put all these things up together the failures and problems always stand out more whereas if you do this other mode, it's kind of a half empty, half full glass, you look at the half empty and everyone gets drawn to that, and then you look at the half full and it has a whole different effect. I think that's one of the problems of asking people to tell their stories without that slight intervention or conversation

because as John's saying if you don't pull out what the strengths and things are, people tend to [focus on the problems] it's a tendency we have in our culture to emphasise the negative rather than focus on the positive.

Robert Pekin (Food Connect): My own perspective is that we don't often enough [inaudible] we tend to judge ourselves against our ideals and we tend to downplay and we don't see that the small things that we're doing have a bigger impact and we should do that more and more. And we should be proud and support each other and acknowledge what we do. We tend to be the underdog.

3.9 Framing Community Enterprises

Finally, participants raised the issue of how community enterprises are framed. For example, in response to Robert Pekin's concluding observation above that "We tend to be the underdog", one participant commented:

Bob Fagan (Macquarie University): That's part of the whole language to make it seem like charity or the welfare end of the scale, also to make it invisible, to actually argue it out of existence "There's nothing happening, we've got no alternative but this Coles/Woolworths system".

This comment captures two ways in which community enterprises are framed as marginal. The first is that community enterprises are framed as being relevant to only one segment of the community. And this in itself takes two forms. On the one hand, community enterprises are sometimes associated with marginalised and disadvantaged groups:

Jenny Cameron (The University of Newcastle): One of the things that I get concerned about in the Australian context, because I think one of the things that is a real strength of what is happening at the moment is the amount of grass-roots community activism of people who are generating these things themselves, building initiatives that have got a lot of strength to them. And I worry about … things becoming the

flavour of the month, getting money thrown at them to develop them and what does that do to the community activism side of things? And what I'm starting to sense is what's very much happening in the UK is that it's about particularly providing jobs for groups who are marginalised …

Katherine Gibson (The Australian National University): That reinforces that stereotype, that these kinds of things are just for the poor people, and that there are different kinds of activities for different kinds of people. Real business is for those that are not [disadvantaged?].

On the other hand, however, community enterprises in the food sector that emphasise organic and locally produced food are sometimes marginalised as a form of 'middle class elitism'. Indeed, there was discussion during the workshop about whether these types of food based community enterprises are able to cater for low income groups. The examples of The Beanstalk Organic Food and Food Connect certainly demonstrate that affordability is achievable. Beanstalk's produce is comparable in price to conventional produce from large supermarkets; Food Connect's produce is around 20 per cent cheaper. Both enterprises achieve this affordability through various means—Beanstalk uses volunteering, a strategy that also has social and community benefits; while Food Connect uses what is essentially a savings scheme to give low income earners a chance to buy the advance subscription. The example of Imago Forest also demonstrates how farmers themselves are interested in developing direct relationships with consumers and using mechanisms like True Pricing so that both farmers and consumers get a 'fair deal'. And the example of Sustaining our Suburbs, with its Permaculture foundation, shows how low income consumers can become producers of organic and locally produced food (and in this case, the local is the backyard). These are only four examples of how community enterprises are developing innovative strategies to ensure that organic and locally produced food is also affordable.

The second way in which community enterprises are framed as marginal is through simply ignoring or minimising the contribution that they make. Another participant commented that it was therefore important to "[get] what we do really out there,

so we're not just on the fringe" (Julian Lee, Imago Forest). The marginalising of what community enterprise are and what they contribute is a critical issue not just because it downplays the current economic, social and environmental contribution and innovations of community enterprises but because it limits the vision of the role that community enterprises might play in the future (see also Gibson-Graham & Cameron, 2007).

In the workshop there was also discussion about another reason for why it is important to reflect on how community enterprises are framed. This was the framing of enterprises in relation to private business and to the public sector. There were concerns that community—or social—enterprises are being positioned as simply a variation on the standard business approach:

> **John Pearce:** It's absolutely essential that we are clear about what we mean by community enterprise in order to be absolutely clear about not so much what is a community or social enterprise, as what isn't. The slack definition in the UK means that essentially private enterprises can masquerade as social enterprises and badge themselves as social enterprises. What do we do all this for? … Are we doing it because ultimately there's a political concept at heart here, which is about doing things differently, and people in disadvantaged communities getting some control over their own space, their own lives and some political power? Is it about that sort of change? Or are we just a slightly different way of running business which really just tacks onto the business, the business model, the business dimension? And one of the things that gets bandied about the UK these days is the notion that social enterprise is simply a slightly different business model, but I think it's more than just a business model.

In contrast to the trend in the UK towards mainstreaming community enterprises as just another business model, there was a view at the workshop that community enterprises are quite different—indeed, that community enterprises are the antithesis of, and antidote to, the usual ways of doing business:

> **Robert Pekin (Food Connect):** [B]usiness is not in the debate, it's not standing up and saying "We need to do something about climate change, environmental solutions, social problems". We've made a definite stance that we're going to actually be a leader in business in saying that business can actually do a lot of great things …. We want to empower as many people to be as free-thinking and as independent as possible.
> …
> We're always unpacking every single part of the economy, the business, distribution, production. We minutely unpack every single aspect of what makes business do business as usual and destroy the world.

In terms of how community enterprises are framed in relation to the public sector, there were concerns that, at least in the UK, community enterprises are being framed as an extension of government:

> **John Pearce:** [T]he reality for so many community enterprises is because of what they do, they don't have that independence because many are involved in the service sector, providing human services, personal services for people and who pays for that? Government pays for that in some way or another. And that's the dynamic that people in the UK are facing because they want to get those contracts, they're pressing to be able to tender for those contracts and get those procurement arrangements but as soon as they get locked into that, then their ability to advocate, to stand up and say 'We don't like this' -
> **Katherine Gibson:** Because they're dependent on that source …
> **John Pearce:** Yes, and that diminishes instantly. And I think that is one of the huge dilemmas that's facing the social enterprise sector in the UK at the moment. And it's being encouraged more and more to deliver the services which in the past were delivered by the local government.

The concern is that if community enterprises are framed as another form of private business or another means of providing government services, then this ignores both the diversity and strength of existing community enterprises.

4.0 CONCLUSION

What is clear from the workshop is that community enterprises are addressing contemporary social, economic and environmental issues with considerable creativity and innovation. To do this, the enterprises have developed an array of economic practices, and these practices reflect their values. For example, the two Community Supported Agriculture initiatives—The Beanstalk Organic Food and Food Connect—share a commitment to food affordability and to strong farmer-consumer relationships. Yet, they have distinctive commitments—Beanstalk values participation as a form of community development, and Food Connect values social and economic equity and justice. As a result they use very different economic practices—Beanstalk is predominantly based on volunteer labour, and Food Connect is based on paid labour. As discussed in Section 3.2 neither of these approaches is better than the other or more true to the ideal of Community Supported Agriculture. Rather, these differences are indicative of the ethical economic decision making that characterises community enterprises. Divergent economic approaches reflect each enterprise's distinctive values.

The values of the enterprises shape not just economic practices. All aspects of the enterprises are shaped by their values and commitments. As discussed in Section 3, this ranges from the organisational structure and governance arrangements through to how the enterprises manage issues like growth and planning. What clearly emerges is that there is no one pathway for community enterprises to follow. Each enterprise has its own way of approaching these matters, and the approach reflects its values. So ethical decision making occurs not just in the economic arena, but in all areas of operation. If any one thing characterises these community enterprises it is that they are engaged in an ongoing process of thinking through and practicing their values.

Another key theme to emerge from the workshop is the importance of telling stories about the diversity of approaches. Telling stories is certainly a means for individual community enterprises to learn about what others are up to and to reflect on their own values and practices (and through reflection, enterprises might clarify and affirm some values and practices, and re-evaluate and reconsider others). It is also important to tell stories collectively as a means of building up a shared knowledge of community enterprises (or perhaps something we might want to start calling "the community enterprise sector"). This collective story telling is important for amplifying what community enterprises are doing, particularly so they might be replicated. It is also important to tell collective stories to better understand the characteristics of community enterprises, the challenges faced and the ways that challenges are being handled (or might be handled). This is particularly important in the current context in Australia, where some governments and community-based organisations are developing programs to support the start-up and ongoing operations of community enterprises. What might be learnt from the community enterprises that already exist? How might the values and practices of existing enterprises be incorporated into the programs that are being developed? If what characterises the community enterprises at this workshop is their diversity, how might the different approaches to economic practices, legal structures, governance arrangements, planning and growth be incorporated into programs, so that no one single development pathway becomes the accepted route for community enterprises, but so community enterprises are able to make the choices and decisions that best reflect their values and commitments?

REFERENCES

Barraket, Jo, 2008. 'Social Enterprise and Governance: Implications for the Australian Third Sector', in Jo Barraket (ed.) *Strategic Issues for the Not-for-Profit Sector*, UNSW Press, Sydney.

Cameron, Jenny, 2009 forthcoming. 'Experimenting with Economic Possibilities: Ethical Economic Decision-Making in Two Australian Community Enterprises', in Ash Amin (ed.) *Plural Economy, Plural Provision: The Social Economy in International Perspective*. London: Zed Press.

Cameron, Jenny & Gibson-Graham, J.K., 2003. 'Feminising the Economy: Metaphors, Strategies, Politics', *Gender, Place and Culture*, 10(2), 145-57.

Community Economies Collective, 2001. 'Imagining and Enacting Non-Capitalist Futures', in *Socialist Review*, 28(3/4), 93-135.

Gibson-Graham, J.K. 2006. *A Postcapitalist Politics*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

Gibson-Graham, J.K. & Cameron, Jenny, 2007. 'Community Enterprises: Imagining and Enacting Alternatives to Capitalism', *Social Alternatives*, Special Issue on Counter Alternatives, 26(1), 20-25.

Pearce, John, 2003. *Social Enterprises in Anytown*, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, London.

Pearce, John, 1993. *At the Heart of the Community Economy: Community Enterprise in a Changing World*, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, London.

Semler, Ricardo, 2003. *The Seven-Day Weekend: A Better Way to Work in the 21st Century*, Random House, London.

APPENDIX 1

Community Enterprises in the Food Sector

Workshop with John Pearce, Academic Researchers and Community Enterprise Practitioners

Friday, 29 August 2008

University of Newcastle

10.30 – 11.40   Welcome (Jenny Cameron) (5mins)

What are community enterprises? (John Pearce) (10mins)

Introductions (5 mins per person on research interest or

community enterprise)

11.40 – 12.00   Group brainstorm of the points that emerge from the

introductions, in terms of the following three areas:

- characteristics of the enterprises

- challenges faced

- strategies to address the challenges.

12.00 – 1.00   Group discussion of points within each area in more detail.

1.00 – 2.00   Lunch

2.00 – 3.00   Continued discussion of points.

APPENDIX 2

Key Points from Brainstorming Session (11.40 am – 12pm)

Purpose	Communication and Relationships
• Values o equity o trust o purpose o spirit o collectivity • Mainstreaming • Fairness to producers • Community development • Redefining food economies • Participation	•Challenging stereotypes • Affordability (food security & sustainability) • Advocacy of collective values • Means of communicating with government • Educating consumers • Inappropriate research
Legals	**Accounting**
• Accessing public land • Barriers from govt • Strategies for breaking rules • Crises in local govt business models • Reclaiming roads • Negotiating vested interests	• Challenging true price • Nonprofit/profit • Learning from "failure" • Affordability • Paying for labour (differential prices) • Self evaluation • Measuring outcomes • Social accounting across economy
Structure and Planning	
• Thinking vs(?) doing • Experimenting and learning by doing • Value of business plans • Whether to grow • Diverse models o of community enterprise o of CSAs o of intentions	

Centre for Urban and Regional Studies

University of Newcastle, Callaghan, NSW, 2308

Ph (02) 49215196

curs@newcastle.edu.au