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Anthropology Honors Thesis Proposal
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Life as an Organic Farmer in Georgia: Motivations & Challenges in a Growing Profession

Organic farming is the fastest growing sector of agriculture in the United States (Organic Farming Research Foundation), and there are more than 4 million acres of organic farms in the United States. However, according to Georgia Organics, Georgia's premier nonprofit supporting sustainable agriculture, the state only has 1,700 acres in organic production. Georgia Organics strives for more farmers to join organic farming. However, very little research has been completed about life as an organic farmer, and GA Organics has expressed the need to fill this research gap in order to encourage new farmers to enter the profession. Demand in the region for local, organic produce is high and growing rapidly, and this research will help assess barriers to adequate market growth of organic farming.

This research project will focus around two main research questions to fill this research void.

Research questions:

1. What are farmers' motivations for becoming and remaining organic farmers, as opposed to conventional farming or other professions?
 - a. What factors enabled them to begin organic farming (e.g. family money/land, a spouse with a job, money saved from previous career, no kids)?
 - b. For those who quit, what factors were responsible for that decision?

2. What is life like as a Georgia organic farmer?
 - a. How do farmers balance quality of life and income?
 - b. How is success measured by organic farmers?
 - c. What are the challenges of organic farming?
 - d. What are the key challenges to appropriate organic production practices?
 - e. Who is carrying out the manual labor of farming? What role does hired labor play?
 - f. How do family concerns and spousal income affect farm survival?

My academic courses have prepared me for successful completion of an honors thesis. Specifically, Anthropology 250: Fast Food/Slow Food provided me with the historical and current status of the organic movement. Additionally, I have developed my research skills and experienced the IRB approval process in several courses, including: Concepts and Methods in Cultural Anthropology, Field Studies Seminar (taken while abroad in Uganda), and Social Research Methods.

After obtaining IRB approval, I will complete the bulk of my ethnographic research this summer through weekly visits to approximately ten to fifteen certified organic farms near the Atlanta area. Data will be collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and informal interviews.

The final product of my research will be utilized as a tool by GA Organics to inform and persuade individuals to begin organic farming and to identify key roadblocks to expanding this market. I will work in close conjunction with GA Organics to compile the research in a form appropriate for dissemination.

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