

**Combating Structural Racialization in the Agriculture
Industry: A Case Study of Hmong Social Capital and
Collective Entrepreneurship in the Twin Cities, MN Region**

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By

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Over the past several decades, the United States agricultural industry has witnessed considerable change in the makeup of its production sector. Beginning in the 1980s, the small family farm that once dominated the industry began to disappear, as large-scale, corporate-owned farms became the new norm. Every five years, the National Agricultural Statistics Service conducts a survey of all U.S. farms and ranches producing over \$1,000 of goods or products, and the organization's documents demonstrate this trend of farm consolidation. Between 2007 and 2012, the year of the most recent Census of Agriculture, the amount of land dedicated to farming remained constant but the total number of farms fell. At the same time, these farms grew in average size (USDA NASS, "Farms and Farmland," 1). Those producing on a large scale, both family- and corporate-owned, were responsible for approximately 49.7 percent of the United State's total agricultural production value but accounted for only 4.7 percent of the farming population (Ayazi & Elsheikh 2015). The majority of farmers in the U.S. operates on a small scale and maintains low incomes; In 2012, 75 percent of farmers sold less than \$50,000 in goods and 57 percent sold less than \$10,000 (USDA NASS, "Farm Demographics," 4). These statistics suggest a possible correlation between the consolidation of farmland and the consolidation of farming income.

In addition to an overall decrease in number, the farming population has also changed in terms of race, gender, age, and experience. Since 2007, the number of female farmers has decreased by 6 percent and the average age of a farm's principal operator has increased to 58.3 years from 57.1 years. The number of new or beginning farmers declined by 20 percent, and more farmers were forced to supplement their income off the farm (USDA NASS, "Farm Demographics," 4). Diversity in agriculture has increased, but farmers of color still account for only 7.2 percent of the total farming population. For example, Hispanic, Native American, Black, and Asian principal operators account for only 3.1%, 1.8%, 1.4%, and 0.7% of the farming population, respectively (USDA NASS, "Highlights"). Thus, the agricultural industry in the United States remains dominated by white, male farmers of advanced age.

The demographic trends present in the U.S. agricultural industry result from structural factors influencing market access for farmers of color. Although formal institutions, like the USDA and FSA, recognize the unique challenges posed by agriculture as a profession and have worked to provide supportive services and programs in order to ameliorate these challenges, their operations have historically failed to include minorities and/or marginalized populations. As a consequence, it is difficult for people of color to purchase and retain land, resources, and support in the agricultural industry—a problem that has been documented by a wealth of research

concerning traditions of inequity and discrimination in agriculture (Bedialko 2013, Brown et al. 1994, Gottlieb & Joshi 2010, Hill et al. 2013, Schein 2006, and Wood and Ragar 2012). In their report for the Haas Institute on the U.S. Farm Bill, Hossein Ayazi and Elsadig Elsheikh identify this trend as “structural racialization” (2016). Structural racialization “refers to the set of practices, cultural norms, and institutional arrangements that are reflective of, and help to create and maintain, racialized outcomes in society—reinforcing group-based advantages and disadvantages” (Ayazi and Elsadig 2016, p. 13). It is possible, then, to understand the racial makeup of agriculture in the United States as an outcome of the structural racialization of the industry.

Despite the barriers facing minorities in agriculture, Hmong growers belong to an ethnic group that has made significant contributions to small-scale agricultural production throughout the U.S. In areas boasting a large Hmong population, farmers belonging to this ethnic group constitute a majority of the vendors at farmers markets. An example of this is the Twin Cities area, which has been called the “Hmong capital of the world” (Vang 2010), where at least 40 percent or more of the vendors at both the Minneapolis and Saint Paul Farmers Market are Hmong (Slocum et al. 2009). The success of this ethnic group in penetrating and participating in spaces typically dominated by white groups provokes a further questioning of the

consequences of structural racialization for particular agricultural entrepreneurs of color.

Seeking to better understand the demographics of the U.S. food system's production can generate a long list of questions for social science research. We may look to answer: as land becomes less available for the small-scale farmer, in favor of the large-scale corporate-type farm, and therefore more competitive, is there an increase in market access problems for beginning-farmer entrepreneurs? Additionally, how does structural racialization affect entrepreneurial opportunities for small-scale farmers of color and the industry? As we know, despite the challenges they may face, there are groups of minority farmers that have developed practices for successfully acting in the agricultural market, such as the Hmong farmers of Minnesota. Their presence and success then provokes the question: how do the Hmong growers overcome the barriers to participating in U.S. agriculture as a minority, immigrant/refugee, and/or beginning-farmer? By answering these questions, we may be able to better explain the relationship between structural racialization, entrepreneurship, and the agricultural economy.

In this project, I integrate grounded theory on ethnic entrepreneurship, social capital and collective action with fieldwork observations and interviews to present a case study of Hmong farmer entrepreneurship in the Twin Cities, Minnesota region. Specifically, I investigate the social capital available to the network of Hmong growers

operating in the local farmers markets and evaluate the benefits of belonging to a formal organization focused on empowering this ethnic group. As a result of my research, I argue that the Hmong American Farmers Association (HAFA), through the work of its founding entrepreneur, enhances the opportunities available to the individual entrepreneurs that are its members and serves as an example of the successful use of collective practices to overcome the challenges associated with structural racialization in the agricultural economy.

Beginning in the next section, I communicate my findings using an archival strategy to further contextualize the problem of structural racialization in U.S. agriculture and provide background on Hmong immigration and settlement in Minnesota. Next, I explain my project's grounding theories. Following this, I review the challenges facing Hmong growers and relay my conclusions drawn from using observation and interviewing strategies of individuals in the Hmong and local agricultural communities. Then, I continue my analysis with a focused investigation of Hmong growers' social networks before commenting on the operations of HAFA's organizational form. Finally, I discuss my expectations for the future of the organization and its membership and state my project conclusions.

Chapter 2: Environmental Context of the Study

Hmong Settlements in the United States

During the Vietnam War, the American government enlisted the help of Hmong individuals to act as guerrilla fighters in opposition to the Vietcong. Under the direction of General Vang Pao, an officer in the Royal Lao Army and a celebrated member of the Hmong community, 39,000 troops engaged in jungle combat resulting in the casualties of thousands of Hmong men and young boys (Weiner 2008). As the U.S. began to disengage from the conflict in the mid-1970s, the Hmong people faced persecution from the communist parties retaining power. A massive outpouring of Hmong refugees began in the region as families fled through the jungles of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia to U.S. bases in Thailand and the surrounding region. Although those involved or affected by participation in the War were granted refugee status if they could reach the base, the journey to access American support was long and arduous. Additionally, the documentation process could often take months and refugee camps were known as sites of significant hardship. In an interview with the New York Times, Larry Devlin, a CIA officer involved with the recruiting of Hmong participants, said of this time, “we let the Hmong down terribly” (Weiner 2008).

Years	Arrivals of foreign born Hmong	% of Total persons
1965-69	89	0.1%
1970s	14,404	15.2%
1980s	43,598	46.0%
1990s	36,581	38.6%

Table 1. Immigration of Hmong individuals through the years (Vang 2010, p. 46)

the 1980s and 1990s, with the majority of resettlement occurring during the 1980s (Vang 2010). A detailed break down of immigration numbers by decade can be seen in Table 1.

Beginning in 1976, Hmong settlements began to form throughout the United States. Earlier waves of immigrants numbered in the low thousands but increased in size towards the late 1970s. By 1980, nearly 47,430 Hmong immigrants had resettled in the U.S. This process continued throughout

As Hmong refugees began to establish settlement communities in the U.S., they faced the challenge of navigating a culture different than their own. At times, this process resulted in pushback from the mainstream community, which can be seen in the persistence of negative stereotypes attached to people of Hmong descent, such as those that suggest Hmong individuals are ill-prepared to succeed in modern society, are focused solely on maintaining cultural heritage, and fail to fully assimilate in American culture (Her & Buley-Meissner 2012). These perspectives, however, do not address the complicated mix of identity that may develop during the immigration process

and the growth of strong community networks and organizations that empower these immigrant individuals.

Acculturation

The recent development of literature concerning first and second generation acculturation has complicated earlier perceptions of the group's immigration processes. In *Hmong America: Reconstructing Community in Diaspora* (2010), Chia Youyee Vang describes a "multifaceted process" of community building where immigrants combine relationships, like family, clan, business, school, and formal institutions, into a dense, shared network (p. 2). This network allows for resources to pool amongst community members and inspires concerted efforts for decision-making and experience sharing to occur (Her 2012). These communities do not have static identities, however, but instead, they have grown and changed over the years.

Today, Hmong and Hmong-American networks allow for the maintenance of cultural heritage and behavior, but have moved away from operating primarily as a refugee support system. Her & Buley-Meissner (2012) stress the impact of the "one and a half" and the second generation in furthering the acculturation and assimilation process in the United States, "this country has become their permanent home" (p. 3). Unfortunately, this does not mean that Hmong and Hmong-American individuals do not continue

to struggle with conceptualizing their place in the U.S. social context. In a contribution to a collection on Hmong identity, Gary Lee (2012) writes:

Being Hmong is having many identities, starting at birth and continuing throughout life. Sometimes these identities are clear-cut, but often they clash with each other. As we mature, most of us learn, although it is not easy, to navigate through this maze of confusing self-images. We just accept it as part of our life, of belonging to a minority living on the margin, and of having to accommodate the demands of majority groups we live with (p. 81).

Highlighted here is the idea that although the lines may be blurred, Hmong individuals have an understanding of their status as outsiders. As refugees, immigrants, Asians, Hmong, or Hmong-Americans, members of these groups can feel marginalized by the mainstream community and continue to think of themselves as “the Other.”

Socioeconomic conditions reinforce Hmong feelings of difference. A typical measure of assimilation compares the economic status, occupation, educational attainment, and inter-marriage rates of host and immigrant populations. Hmong-Americans fail to match the mainstream measurements in all of these categories, which suggest a slower assimilation process relative to other immigrant groups (Quincy 2012). Additionally, of other Asian groups, Southeast Asians, such as Cambodians, Hmong, and Laotians, typically maintain a lower socioeconomic status than their continental peers (Sakamoto & Woo 2007). When Hmong refugees are placed in urban, low-

income neighborhoods as a part of the assimilation process, as is typical of most resettlement programs, Vang (2012) suggests this forces them into “downward assimilation” by providing them with less opportunities and greater competition for support and resources.

Hmong and Hmong-American identities and economic circumstances have interesting implications when applied to the notion of the American dream and conceptions of entrepreneurship. Gary Lee (2012) sees an alignment of Hmong values of competition, performance and improvement and the opportunities of American society. Vincent K. Her (2012), in his piece on Hmong identity in multicultural America, expressly notes that the efforts of the Hmong community have “been motivated by a belief in the American dream that Hmong, too, can climb up the socioeconomic ladder as citizens of this country” (p. 40). To achieve, then, Hmong individuals must engage with the American marketplace and social sphere. By participating in farmers markets, Hmong and Hmong-American individuals join the nation’s oldest industry—agriculture—and act as its original entrepreneur—the farmer.

Many Hmong immigrants brought agrarian skills with them to the United States and pursued agricultural endeavors as the main source of their livelihood upon arrival. In their article, “Beyond ‘Place’: Translocal Placemaking of the Hmong Diaspora” (2015), Michael Rios and Joshua Watkins describe the way agriculture links the past and present for a Hmong individual’s management of dual identity, especially when assimilation

proves difficult. Farming allowed immigrants to gain independence and be their own boss—it proved to be an entrepreneurial opportunity (Interview, Vang). Gary Lee (2012) explains:

Hmong people understand how important it is to make the most out of a good opportunity, whether a fertile piece of farmland or a profitable market. Wherever they settle, they need to feel that they can help themselves; they can make use of their own two hands to feed their families (p. 95).

The Hmong community is praised for its hard work and innovative attitudes in business. During an interview, a second-generation Hmong woman said, “they’re still very much laborers. They don’t balk at that hard work” (Interview, Vang). This assumption perfectly parallels the American idea of “bootstrapping” associated with entrepreneurship and has important implications for the close relationship between immigrant identities, economic agency, and entrepreneurship in agriculture.

Hmong Agricultural Entrepreneurship in the Twin Cities

Minnesota was one of the first states to openly welcome Hmong refugees, and continues to act as a homeland for refugees and immigrants. Today, Minnesota has proportionally fewer newcomers than the total population of immigrants in the U.S., but the Minnesota population of foreign-born is increasing faster than the national average: it has tripled

since 1990 while the national average has only doubled. In total, 428,000 people in Minnesota are born outside the United States and approximately one out of every six children has a foreign-born parent (Minnesota Compass 2012). The development of diverse immigrant networks fosters continued resettlement by foreign populations of all types, with the primary ethnic groups being: Hispanic, Hmong and Somali.

With a plethora of supportive programs catering to its diverse populations, the Twin Cities area became one of the largest settlement regions for Hmong immigrants in the United States. The 2010 census measured 63,000 Hmong residing in the state with approximately 62,000 living in Minneapolis and St. Paul (Linehan). Of the Twin Cities population, about 23,661 are foreign-born who have been living in the U.S. for longer than 21 years, but the community is getting younger as second- and third-generation Hmong-Americans are born. Approximately 22,227 Hmong are native-born children. Overall, the population is split fairly evenly between men and women, with women being slightly greater in number. Additionally, the Hmong community in the Twin Cities display the standard measures of a population that has assimilated into the mainstream culture fairly well: 63.6% speak English well or very well, the median income is \$49,475 (in 2014 dollars), and 60.9% of Hmong individuals are employed (Minnesota Compass). This information does not, however, mean the assimilation

process has been easy or painless, especially for those trying to make their living as agriculturalists, as many Hmong individuals do.

The largest agricultural markets for small-scale growers in the Twin Cities are the Minneapolis and Saint Paul Farmers Markets, and both host high numbers of Hmong growers. In fact, approximately 40 percent of each Market's number of stalls is rented to Hmong growers (Slocum et al. 2009). These Markets act as direct retail to the, predominantly, urban consumer; they sell to thousands of local customers each week throughout the growing season (April-September), and reach a diverse audience of consumers. This is unusual for local food markets as authors have called the typical U.S. farmers market a "white space." Instead, Alkon and McCullen (2011) describe farmers markets as "empowering spaces for a form of food politics that reflects liberal, affluent, white identities and positionalities" (p. 939). Therefore, spaces for the sale of local produce like farmers markets can exclude people of color, like Hmong farmers, and further the installation of racial discrimination in agricultural markets. To fully contextualize this phenomenon and understand its impact on Hmong growers, it is important, then, to examine the legacy of structural racialization in the United States.

The History of Discrimination in U.S. Agriculture

Beginning in the nineteenth century with the seizure of Native American lands and Civil War Reconstruction, the social and political

environment of U.S. agriculture became a site of structural racialization. Samuel K. Bedialko presents a thorough retelling of this problem in his master's thesis, "Increasing Diversity of the Farm Population in the United States: An Analysis of Trends and Prospects for Minority Farmers." He begins his story with General William T. Sherman's 1865 Field Order #15, which gifted black families "40 acres and a mule" and attempted to foster economic opportunity for Black families in South Carolina and Florida. Although the Freedman's Bureau similarly followed by opening 45 million acres of public lands throughout the South to settlers, future environmental disasters and prejudiced lawmakers minimized the success of the program (Bedialko 2013). Boll weevil infestations, eminent domain, lack of knowledge of financial opportunity and the dangerous repressive racial and ethnic climate forced Blacks off their land (Ayazi and Elsadig 2015). In fact, from 1920 to 1997, the Black farm population decreased by 98 percent (Bedialko 2013).

The United States Department of Agriculture played a key role in contributing to the marginalization of farmers of color. Beginning in 1965, the US Commission on Civil Rights found evidence of systematic discriminatory policies in USDA programming. This trend continued to surface throughout the 1970s and 1980s and contributed to the organization earning the nickname "the last plantation" (USDA, "Civil Rights at USDA," p. 1). In 1994, the Office of Civil Rights found that 94 percent of the Farm Service Agency County Committees, a subsidiary of the USDA responsible for

determining recipients of loans and financial support, included no women or people of color. The 2002 Farm Bill addressed this issue by requiring that the Committees be representative of all farmers in the serviceable area and hear claims from “socio-economically marginalized communities” (Ayazi and Elsadig 2015, p. 56-7). This does not, however, ensure that the Committees are representative of the *total* population because farmers of color still constitute a very small percentage of farming populations and would need to cluster to receive FSA representation. As a result of a legacy of discriminatory policies, Ayazi and Elsadig (2015) write that the USDA “undermined the economic capacity of farmers of color to anticipate and respond to rapid consolidation and specialization, such as limited capacity to adopt scientific and technological innovations in agricultural production, and greater vulnerability to price volatility” (p. 55). With their ability to adapt to a changing economy damaged by the institutional environment, people of color struggle to retain ownership of agricultural land.

Although the land tenure system in the U.S. creates a land access problem for all beginning farmers and ranchers, it affects farmers of color, especially. The 2012 U.S. Agricultural Census Highlights reports that of operator landlords, 41 percent acquire their land by purchasing from a non-relative, while 54 percent are able to purchase their land from a family member or receive it through an inheritance or a gift. Of those not operating their land, in other words leasing their land, only 31 percent purchase their

land from a non-relative and 65 percent purchase from a relative or receive it through an inheritance or gift. Operator landlords expect to transfer only 15 percent of land in the near future, and even less in the case of non-operator landlords. As the majority of landowners are white, it is possible to understand from this study how U.S. agricultural land remains in the hands of white farmers or landlords and provides little room for new landownership by farmers of color.

The number of minority participants in agriculture today reflects the impact of this history of structural racialization in policy and behavior. Although every racial and/or ethnic category has seen an increase in the number of farmers between 2007 and 2012, minority farmers continue to represent a tiny fraction of the overall farming population. Growers of Asian descent make up the smallest percentage of all U.S. farmers at a mere 0.7 percent, even after a 21 percent increase, while the largest group of minority farmers is the Hispanic population at 3.1 percent of the population. Typically, minority farmers also have less access to the Internet, farm on a fewer number of acres, and have smaller average sales than White growers, with only a few exceptions (USDA NASS, "Census of Agriculture"). Additionally, farmers of color typically produce commodities like tomatoes, strawberries, or beef, which are more labor intensive and less profitable than commodity crops, like corn and soybeans. Today, approximately 97.8% of payments from the government to farmers, for crop insurance and conservation

practices, are distributed to white farmers. The average amount of these payments is \$10,022 per farm while payments to Black farmers averages only \$5,509 per farm, which is a reflection of the value of assets belonging to white farmers as opposed to black farmers (Ayazi and Elsadig 2015).

Table 2. Production Trends by Race and Ethnicity

Race	% Change since 2007	% of Total	Average Age	Top Commodity	Percent with Internet Access (Y/N)	Percent of Farmers Using <50 Acres	Percent of Farmers with Average Sales <10,000	Percent of Farmers with 10+ Years on Farm
Black	+12%	1.4%	61.9	Beef (48%)	55/45	49%	79%	77%
Asian	+21%	0.7%	54.7	Fruits and Nuts (36%)	68/32	71%	43%	78%
Hispanic	+21%	3.1%	57.1	Beef (36%)	61/39	58%	68%	78%
Native American	+5%	1.8%	58.1	Beef (36%)	46/54	57%	78%	78%
Total	-3%	N/A	58.3	Grain and Soybeans (>50%)	70/30	39%	56%	78%

USDA NASS, 2012 Census of Agriculture

% change since 2007 is change in number of farmers of that race in 2007-2012 span

% of total is percent of total farmers that are of that race

Several minority groups have sought recourse for the structural factors leading to their unequal treatment through legal channels. In 1999, Black farmers filed a class action suit against the USDA. The iconic case, *Pigford v. Glickman*, led to other similar filings by a group of Native American farmers (*Keepseagle v. Venaman*, 2001), women farmers (*Love v. Johanns*, 2006), and Latino farmers (*Garcia v. Vilsack*, 2010). Although *Pigford v. Glickman* was resolved with the Claim Resolution Act of 2010, which provided \$100 million in funding for repayment (Bedialko 2013), a recent evaluation of discrimination litigation and settlements by the Minority Farm Advisory Committee requested a continued review of the adjudication process for the Latino and women farmers. In a letter to Secretary Vilsack on September 24, 2015, the committee wrote that the USDA failed to deliver “justice” through the administrative system it used for granting claims (Garcia 2015). Although this reflects the option of legal action in case of discrimination by a government institution, it is also important to remember that many groups may not have access to legal advice or representation due to barriers of a financial, cultural, or social nature.

Due to the work of the Office of Civil Rights and the numerous court cases it faced as a result of the Office’s inquiries, the USDA became better apprised of its role in implementing a structurally racialized agricultural economy and began new programming intended to better support farmers of color. In 2009, the USDA began its “Know Your Farmer Know Your Food”

(KYF) Initiative as a part of a broader plan to enhance local and regional farm industries. A key component of this plan is providing better opportunities for socially disadvantaged farmers in local food systems—the organization’s term representing individuals that have been marginalized by the structural racialization of U.S. agriculture. The program hopes to build new markets, increase access to healthy food, and promote the conservation of, and the sustainable use of, farmland. Because the KYF Initiative requires the cooperation of multiple government agencies, the USDA has difficulty producing exact figures representing the program’s financial support. However, the 2016 USDA budget explains that \$15 million will be allocated for local foods and another \$15 million will be dedicated directly to farmers markets (USDA, “FY 2016 Budget Summary”).

As a result of this compilation of archival research, it is possible to understand the environment that farmers of color, like the Hmong growers in the Twin Cities, may encounter. The agricultural policy and practices of U.S. institutions cause socially disadvantaged farmers more difficulty in engaging with entrepreneurial ventures in the agriculture industry. Additionally, the burden of navigating an immigrant/refugee status increases the challenges that Hmong growers face in agricultural production. It may be hypothesized, then, that because they are excluded from the resources mainstream individuals have, Hmong growers must rely on the knowledge of agrarian techniques passed through cultural ties and the assistance of the

strong social networks built in immigrant communities. Moving forward, I will address this question with an explanation of my methodology and grounded theory before turning to a discussion of the results of my investigatory research.

Chapter 3: Approach and Grounded Theory

Methodology

Studying entrepreneurship in agriculture allows us to understand the structural and social processes of entering markets that are instrumental to establishing food security in our communities. The alternative agricultural practices of the local foods movement, such as the small-scale production of fruits and vegetables for farmers markets, may strengthen a region's food security (Allen 2004). This suggests entrepreneurship in small-scale, local agricultural production may contribute directly to the availability of local foods and the health and nutrition of local consumers. As themes in food security continue to generate interest from academics and policy-makers alike, it is imperative that we establish a better understanding of the realities of the local foods movement, especially in terms of its opportunities for entrepreneurship and future economic growth in rural and/or urban regions.

After observing the farmers markets of the Twin Cities, Minnesota region as a consumer, I formed the research question for this project with the motivation to contribute to a growing body of literature relating local production to the improvement of food security in urban areas. Specifically, my interest laid in better explaining the role of Hmong growers in contributing to a local foods market as immigrants and/or refugees. Their

dominance in the area's local farmers markets poses an interesting challenge to the concept of farmers markets being a generally White space. Therefore, I began my project with the question: What are the barriers to participating in U.S. agriculture as small-scale growers and individuals of color, and how do the Hmong growers overcome them?

In order to answer my research question, I intended to form a qualitative study and relied heavily on the research strategies presented in the 1994 edition of Miles and Huberman's *Qualitative Data Analysis* to build my plan. I chose to perform a qualitative study for its ability to construct strong, detailed conclusions as opposed to the results a quantitative study may provide, and used archival, non-participant observation, and interviewing strategies for data collection. As my research question required knowledge of the Hmong culture and immigrant/refugee experience, I used the archival strategy to establish a base level of knowledge before forming my interview questions. Additionally, I found it important to incorporate greater comprehension of the history of minority involvement in U.S. agriculture into this background preparation. Then, I observed and interviewed a diverse group of individuals to thoroughly conceive the problem and setting, and worked to draw conclusions that could be presented in an academic form.

Throughout the project, it was important for me to respect my role as the researcher and the way my experience may affect the assumptions I bring

to the project. Because race and ethnicity are important themes of my research, I tried to remain cognizant of how my race, class, and gender would affect the outcome of the research. For this reason, I chose not to use participant observation. Instead, I wanted to give my interviewees a chance to give their perspective and tell their story. Their testimonials also allowed me to pursue a snowballing technique to locating informants. I began my search with a diverse group of actors, including academics, activists, and government agents, and allowed them to extend my reach of interviewees to include individuals working at the Hmong American Farmers Association. During this stage, I understood that my research question concerning the individual Hmong farming entrepreneur could be answered with a triangulation of my archival, observed, and interview data. The informants of my study are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3. Named Informants

Name	Profession	Date of Interview
Dr. William Moseley	Professor, Geography, Macalester College	4/28/2016
Dr. Pa Der Vang	Professor, Social Work, St. Thomas University	4/28/2016
Mark Pfeifer	Director, Programs and Development, Hmong Cultural Center	4/28/2016
Dr. Paul Hillmer	Professor, History and Political Science, Concordia University- St.	4/29/2016

	Paul	
Bob Patton	Supervisor, Energy and Environment Section, Agriculture Marketing and Development Division, Minnesota Department of Agriculture	4/29/2016
Becky Balk	Land Use Program Manager/ Principal Planner, Agriculture Marketing and Development Division, Minnesota Department of Agriculture	4/29/2016
Dylan Kesti	Program Coordinator/Organizer, Land Stewardship Project	4/29/2016
Dr. Dan Trudeau	Professor, Geography, Macalester College	4/29/2016
Pakou Hang	Executive Director and Founder, HAFA	7/8/2016
Vong Thao	Loan Officer/Business Consultant, Asian Economic Development Association	7/22/2016

Table 4. Anonymous Informants

Name	Profession	Date of Interview
Staffer #1	HAFA	4/28/2016
Staffer #2	AgStar Financial Service	10/7/2016

With my interviews, I was able to confirm the assumptions I assembled from my archival data. Over time, informants from varying

backgrounds seemed to tell the same story concerning the barriers to participating in agriculture. Several interviewees discussed their involvement in assistance programs for beginning farmers serving a large number of Hmong growers, including Bob Patton and Becky Balk from MDA, Dylan Kesti from the Land Stewardship Project, and a staffer from AgStar Financial. From this, I could assume there is a growing awareness in the community of the challenges facing Hmong growers, but any support lacks widespread comprehensive planning. Most programs are understaffed and fail to reach a large Hmong population. Additionally, I learned of social and cultural phenomenon in the Hmong culture that may challenge the effectiveness of support programs. At this time, my interest turned to the Hmong American Farmers Association and their work as a cooperative to improve the opportunities given to Hmong growers.

When my focus shifted from the challenges facing individual growers to those facing an organizational body, I pursued an additional research question. This question was: how does HAFA use a cooperative organizational form to benefit its membership? In order to answer this question, I needed to understand the difference between the work done by the organization's founding entrepreneur, Pakou Hang, and the benefits that come from the cooperative organizational form itself. Additionally, I needed to understand the role of individual farmer identities in their relationship with the functioning of the cooperative and their individual business

decisions. Because there has been little academic research incorporating these differing research challenges in one project, I needed to synthesize the work of previous authors before drawing my own conclusions.

When doing research, it is sometimes difficult to determine cause and effect between socio-cultural factors and an individual event. In the art appreciation world, we call this process “separating the ground from the figure.” This phrase suggests understanding the focal point of a piece cannot be done without examining the painting as a whole—we must use the surrounding environment. In my research, I employ grounded theory to separate the environmental socio-cultural factors, such as structural racialization, from the cooperative’s functioning as an organization, and the individual’s economic action of participating in a farmers market. Specifically, I rely on the academic literatures concerning ethnic enclaves, food justice, social networks, collective action, cooperatives and collective entrepreneurship. With the help of these theories, I was able to infer the value a cooperative may have for an individual farmer of color and predict how it may affect their economic choices for the future. As a conclusion, my research could be used as a preliminary study for future investigation in which I consider the effectiveness of forming collectives and/or cooperatives as a potential solution to barriers of entry for beginning farmers of color in small-scale agricultural production. In the pages that follow, I will present

the standard literatures to be used as grounded theory for the remainder of this report.

Theoretical Foundations

Ethnic Enclaves

The ethnic entrepreneurship literature relies on several overlapping theories to explain the experience of entrepreneurship in ethnic communities. Authors, Sanders and Nee (1996) recognize that immigrant groups bring resources with them in the form of financial, human, and social capital, but that their value does not transfer to the new mainstream economy. In his piece, "Race, Labor Market Disadvantage, and Survivalist Entrepreneurship: Black Women in the Urban North During the Great Depression," Robert Boyd continues this theme. He suggests that isolated ethnic groups may often be considered "resource disadvantaged" because they lack access to the goods and services that a mainstream community provides, like human or financial capital, cultural values or institutions that assist in the entrepreneurial process, and representation in policy development. This resource scarcity then affects economic choices in entrepreneurial ventures (p. 648).

Entrepreneurs of ethnic backgrounds' limited choices have prompted the adoption of a disadvantage theory in ethnic entrepreneurship literature.

Boyd (2000) develops this theory, which suggests that individuals in ethnic groups may be forced to choose either unemployment or self-employment because of situational factors (p. 648). Other authors expand upon his work, including Assudani (2009) and Wang (2010). Their arguments typically focus on “push factors” or reasons that ethnic individuals are excluded from working as laborers in the mainstream economy and pressured into entrepreneurship. Shinnar and Young (2008), similarly address the development of ethnic entrepreneurs, but instead of focusing on “push factors,” they address the “pull factors”: reasons individuals are attracted to entrepreneurship, like flexible hours, higher wages, or community respect. The authors explain how “pull factors” follow Knight’s Theory of entrepreneurship, as both focus on resources motivating individuals *into* entrepreneurship as opposed to *away* from traditional employment (p. 246).

The ethnic entrepreneurship literature typically relies on a “cultural argument” to evaluate the resources available to individuals and how their environments may affect economic choice. Ibrahim & Galt (2011), Illhan-Nas et al. (2011), Rath & Kloosterman (2000), and others use this “cultural argument” to investigate the ethnic network, which they call the “enclave.” The enclave, as adapted from Waldinger, Aldrich and Ward (1990), is defined as: “a set of connections and regular patterns of interaction among people sharing common national background or migration experiences” (Assudani 2009, p. 198). This community forms an internal economy in opposition to

the mainstream economy and periphery, although it may share the characteristics or features of the primary or periphery economy (Wilson & Martin 1982). Here, the entrepreneur relies on family and friends from within his or her ethnic group to provide labor, informal economic resources and business support (Aldrich & Waldinger 1990), which he or she then invests directly back into the enclave economy (De Freitas 1991). With the help of others in an enclave, entrepreneurs have greater economic choices than the disadvantage theory suggests, which means that pull factors may play a greater role than push factors in acting entrepreneurially in an enclave (Shinnar and Young 2008).

A complete understanding of ethnic entrepreneurship literature, however, reveals the complicated nature of business ownership by ethnic individuals and suggests further analysis is necessary. Because these groups are isolated from the mainstream economy and often rely on survivalist decision-making (according to the disadvantage theory), the resources available to ethnic entrepreneurs are also severely limited. In a study of Moslem traders in the predominantly Catholic community of Estancia, Java, Szanton (1972) states, "horizontal ties to others of similar status are of limited value because they usually have few resources to spare, and more important, because they are often in competition with one another for support and aid from the same higher status figures" (qtd. in Granovetter 2005, p. 87). Khalid Nadvi similarly notes competition for resources in his

study of a surgical instrument cluster in Sialkot, Pakistan: “local rivalry sits side-by-side and is intermeshed with close social ties” (p. 143). Additionally, because individuals all have access to the same number and type of limited resources, opportunities lack uniqueness. Entrepreneurial ventures emerge and compete in the same industry until the market becomes oversaturated and provides little to no new economic opportunities (Sarachek 1980). The issue of internal competition thus suggests a greater investigation must be done to better understand the complicated nuances of individuals operating outside of the mainstream economy.

Recent publications in ethnic entrepreneurship literature promote case studies and in-depth analyses of individual settlements or enclaves in order to understand how the immigrant experience or marginalization may affect the development of entrepreneurial endeavors and markets. Ibrahim & Galt (2011) write: “to understand the representation of an ethnic group in self-employment, one needs to investigate the complex interrelation between the historical, economic, and cultural factors that underpin the socioeconomic context in which individuals live” (p. 611). This suggests moving past the “enclave” and resource “disadvantages” and on to the processes affecting individual growth, opportunity, and action. No ethnic group is the same, and using an “ethnic enclave” lens in research of entrepreneurship by ethnic individuals can be overly simplistic (Portes & Sensenbrenner 1993, p. 1328). Assuming individuals of ethnic backgrounds

are only able to enter an enclave economy denies the individual agency and limits the research's applicability; focusing solely on enclaves does not produce solutions to the problems of inequity in the mainstream economy. Instead, Ma et al. (2013) propose we: "examine ethnic entrepreneurs more from their dispositions as an entrepreneur and less from their ethnic background so as to provide more insights on their entrepreneurial activities' managerial implications for practitioners" (p. 44). Therefore, to fill the gap in the literature, researchers should investigate the barriers to participating in the mainstream economy for entrepreneurs from ethnic or marginalized groups and how their communities may provide the capacity to overcome these barriers.

Social Networks

In studying social networks, economists can examine the way individuals organize socioeconomic interactions in productive ways. Clare Hinrichs (2000), argues that markets are "socially structured institutions, infused with cultural norms and meaning," so that the basic assumptions of the Neoclassical economic actor may oversimplify the process of making economic choices. Instead of being influenced by rational decision-making, individuals actually rely on a complicated "extensive web of social relations" when navigating markets (p. 296). The role of cultural norms, social rules, and shared knowledge should not be underemphasized. Social networks

have a direct impact on inter-firm behavior and may determine whether a market operates competitively or cooperatively (Nadvi 1999). Additionally, social networks can provide the opportunity for new enterprise to develop. Several authors, including Ibrahim & Galt (2011), Illhan-Nas et al. (2011), and Rath & Kloosterman (2000), support the idea that social networks promote entrepreneurship by providing accessible labor, capital, and information through social norms of trust, reciprocity, and solidarity.

The sector of economic literature examining embedded networks considers the role of dense social ties in impacting economic choice. Beginning with the foundational work of Mark Granovetter (1985), in which he adds to the “markets and hierarchies” research of Oliver Williamson, economists look to the positive and negative consequences of organizing socioeconomic interactions in complicated relationship webs. Networks of close affiliations can promote feelings of “closure” through shared ethos in ways that lower the cost of producing an exchange, or the transaction costs of doing business (Nadvi 1999). The unique nature of the embedded markets can be difficult to replicate in traditional market exchanges (Uzzi 1997), and can lead to a comparative advantage for firms operating in industries with a rich history of relationship-based exchanges, like agriculture (Hinrichs 2000). As individuals continue to rely on the internal resources of their embedded networks, its closure, however, may be detrimental to their economic efforts. A closed network may provoke feelings of constraint or

limited access to external resources (Assudani 2009), similar to the effects described in ethnic enclave literature.

In an attempt to better understand the ways that networks can impact economic decision-making, the literature works to differentiate between embeddedness forms. Zukin and DiMaggio (1990) classify embeddedness into four forms: structural, cognitive, political, and cultural. Uzzi (1997) asserts that cognitive, political, and cultural embeddedness primarily maintain a “social constructionist perspective” while structural embeddedness thinking examines the “network architecture of material exchange” (p. 36). Structural indicators of embeddedness are the result of mental efforts so they are visual and more easily identifiable: roles, rules, procedures, and precedents that dictate how socioeconomic interactions occur. Uphoff & Wijayaratna (2000) suggest these *facilitate* collective action whereas cognitive forms of network embeddedness, like norms, values, attitudes, and beliefs, “predispose people to cooperate” and are *conducive* to collective action (p. 1876). The authors go on to assert both cognitive and structural forms must be present and interacting for an individual to “capitalize” on his or her embedded network (p. 1885).

As cognitive embeddedness can be more difficult to identify, economic sociology literature developed components that signify a network’s nature. In his 1997 piece, “Social Structure and Competition in Interfirm Networks: The Paradox of Embeddedness,” Brian Uzzi describes three important

components of embeddedness: trust, information transfer, and joint problem solving. He states these “regulate the expectations and behaviors of exchange partners” (p. 42). Trust relies on “heuristic” understanding of relationships: individuals assume the best of another in an exchange (p. 43), which challenges the Neoclassical assumption that individuals always operate in ways that satisfy their own best interest. Embedded networks also possess information exchanges requiring more specific, localized knowledge than the price signifiers used in general market exchanges (p. 45). Finally, embedded networks allow for joint problem solving through improvisation and voiced exchange, which “replace the simplistic exit-or-stay response of the market” to further information building and innovation (p. 47). By uniting an understanding of structural embeddedness with its cognitive components, as Uphoff and Wijayaratna (2000) propose, it is possible to investigate how individuals may leverage the benefits of a network of close-ties to create opportunity.

A key element of cognitive embeddedness that may be harnessed for economic benefit is the development of social capital. Although this term has a fluid definition, it is often used to describe the outcomes of cognitive embeddedness such as reciprocity, group affiliation, or values (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993). Closely tied communities, like those united by kinship, easily form social capital from their network of socioeconomic interactions (Illhan-Nas et al. 2011), and because it requires the participation of multiple

individuals, social capital is considered to be jointly owned (Burt 1992). Both D.J. Connell (1999) and Uphoff and Wijayaratna (2000) argue that social capital contributes positively to the coordination needed for collective action and cooperative entrepreneurial practices. Therefore, it plays an important role in the relationship between embedded social networks and economic production.

When a network consists of a densely tied network structure, it may need a facilitator to reach additional resources outside the boundaries of the clustered social relationships. Ronald Burt (1992) calls this facilitator a “structural hole,” or the individual or organization using weak social ties to “bridge” the distance between one embedded network and another. He hypothesizes that the number of new, or non-redundant, contacts an individual possesses has greater importance than the number of strong ties he or she has and that larger, more diverse networks are preferable to small, homogenous networks. This is because a non-redundant contact can act as the structural hole connecting individuals to new sources of social and physical capital and new opportunities.

Applying the idea of the structural hole to the ethnic enclave literature suggests the need for further development of literature that understands how entrepreneurs rely on the resources of ethnic networks. Because individuals in ethnic or marginalized communities can feel the “closure” of their networks more acutely than those associated with the mainstream

economy, their linkages to individuals of power or higher social status can play a key role in supporting the success of their businesses. Aldrich and Waldinger (1990) demonstrate that when individuals turn away from their ethnic network, however, it dilutes the power of the network's close ties and access to social capital. This then weakens the enclave economy. Others, including Portes & Sensenbrenner (1993), Sanders & Nee (1996), and Ashby et al. (2009), support this finding. It is clear from the current literature that there is a conflict between neoclassical economic assumptions and the importance of social constructs (Uzzi 1997) and between the value of ethnic networks and the challenges they create for the entrepreneur. In order to fully understand the development of economic choices and opportunities presented to individuals existing in ethnic networks, greater research must be done to demonstrate how these themes work together in socioeconomic space.

Collective Action

In 1965, Mancur Olson established the theoretical foundations for a discussion on collective action that continues today. In his book, *The Logic of Collective Action*, Olson works to dispel the Neoclassical assumption that common-pool resources cannot be allocated by participants without producing sub-optimal results. He writes, "what is missing from the policy analyst's tool kit—and from the set of accepted, well-developed theories of

human organization—is an adequately specified theory of collective action whereby a group of principals can organize themselves voluntarily to retain the residuals of their own efforts” (p. 25). With the help of an organizational form, a group of individuals can work to “advance the common interests” of its membership (p. 7). Here, individual members subordinate their present desires to collective expectations in anticipation of eventual self-satisfaction. This idea supports the rational actor theory of Neoclassical economics, and has contributed to many works on collective action since Olson’s seminal 1965 piece including: Ostrom (1990), Portes & Sensenbrenner (1993), Marshall (1998), and Meinzen-Dick et al. (2004).

Olson’s economic understanding of individuals working jointly to achieve a common goal may also be complicated by other economic motivations. He writes:

Just as those who belong to an organization or a group can be presumed to have a common interest, so they obviously also have purely individual interests, different from those of the others in the organization or group. All of the members of a labor union, for example, have a common interest in higher wages, but at the same time each worker has a unique interest in his personal income, which depends not only on the rate of wages but also on the length of time that he works (p. 8).

Uzzi (1997) supports this claim while investigating the ties that unite individuals in a common effort when he found that individuals act both cooperatively and competitively in the relationships they maintain internally in their network. In their piece, Davies et al. (2004), apply Olson’s theory to farming communities engaged in local production and enumerate two

possible types of collective action: cooperative, which maintains a grassroots style, farmer-to-farmer interaction, and coordination, which requires an agency to organize any collective action pursuits.

Therefore, to classify the type of collective action an organization or group is engaged in, it is necessary to investigate the individual motivations of participants in comparison with the common goal or purpose. Olson (1965) asserts that the rational group engaged in collective action is different that a rational group of individuals, so a complete study must work to understand this difference. When considering the distribution of common-pool resources, it is in the best interest of an individual to receive the benefits of group membership without surrendering payment—a problem called the “free rider problem”—but the group seeks to distribute the resources in an equitable fashion. The key difference that allows for the appropriate distribution of resources is the “coercion or some other special device to make individuals act in their common interest” (Olson 1965, p. 2). To understand this phenomenon further, then, we must investigate the mechanism or “special device” which prompts cooperative economic behavior.

Numerous studies pursue this subject through case studies of organizational economic action. When assessing the productivity of farmer organizations in Sri Lanka, Uphoff & Wijayarathna (2000) find that “if there are well-established and effective rules, roles, procedures, precedents and

networks that evoke cooperative effort,” these mechanisms promote effective coordination (p. 1877). Granovetter (2000) writes that his studies revealed that “social welfare pressures” on a firm or individual invokes non-satisficing behavior. And, Jos Bijman introduces a 2016 textbook with the assertion that “new [producer organizations] are working in the direct interests of their members” (p. 3). Social scientists continue the themes of these studies with a focus on identifying how motivations and behavior changes when collective action is applied for economic gain in entrepreneurship.

Collective Entrepreneurship

In early attempts to differentiate collective entrepreneurship from individual entrepreneurship, authors work to overcome the myth of the “lone entrepreneur” present in Western ideology and culture. In 1979, Wilken proposes that through cooperative behavior, collective entrepreneurship contributes to innovation and expansion. A decade later, Robert Reich writes in his piece for the Harvard Business Review that examples of collective entrepreneurship exist where “individual skills are integrated into a group” and the “collective capacity to innovate becomes something greater than the sum of its parts.” Here, Reich dispels the idea of the individual surmounting market challenges for economic gain. The focus on individual choice in Neoclassical economics continues to be a problem for collective action

supporters, however. In their primers on collective action, both Connell (1999) and Burrell & Cook (2010) declare the need for establishing a greater body of literature on collective entrepreneurship.

Using relational demography in his book, *The Entrepreneurial Group: Social Identities, Relations, and Collective Action* (2010), Martin Reuf presents several social mechanisms which can be used to better understand the formation of collective entrepreneurial groups. The mechanisms promoting group cohesion and common goals are: ecological constraint, strong tie constraints, homophily, and identity fulfillment. The first relates to the way physical locations affect group collaboration. Strong tie constraints and homophily pertain to the presence of social networks, usually of individuals with similar, or homophilous, characteristics affecting the formation of entrepreneurial groups. The final mechanism offers that a shared group identity can attract the entrepreneur to join a team and lead him or her to prefer collective action instead of individual economic gain. These mechanisms can act as the force Olson (1965) describes as coercing individuals to pursue group goals (Westgren 2014).

Several preliminary studies have investigated collective entrepreneurship in the field, but these fail to integrate a holistic understanding of motivations and mechanisms promoting collective action in entrepreneurial pursuits. Connell (1999) points to Ivar Jonsson's 1997 study of the role of institutions and organizations, or collectives, in performing the

entrepreneurial function as an early example. Additionally, Hellin, Lundy, & Meijer (2009) express the importance of formal organizations in promoting market access for poor farmers. Although adding to the literature on collective action, neither of these addresses the network mechanisms promoting the formation of collective entrepreneurial groups. Uphoff & Wijayarathna (2000) exhibit the tendency in existing literature to focus on the “social capital” available to individuals. Examining social capital involves addressing network ties and sometimes group identity, but it fails to integrate geographical implications of group formation or an in-depth understanding of group characteristics, like homophily. Therefore, the collective entrepreneurship literature needs further development to present a comprehensive understanding of why collectives of entrepreneurs form. A case study of the network resources used, geographical constraints, group motivations and characteristics used in forming collective entrepreneurial organizations would fill this gap.

Cooperatives

In the early literature on cooperatives, the understanding of the cooperative organizational form appears very closely aligned with the idea of collective entrepreneurship. Ivan Emlianoff, an early thinker on the subject, highlights the independence of cooperative participants in his work in 1942. Later, Richard Phillips writes in 1953:

The cooperative has no more economic life or purpose apart from that of the participating economic units than one of the individual plants of a large multi-plant firm. Instead the participating firms agree to function *coordinately* with respect to their joint activity. This agreement runs multi-laterally among the participating firms, rather than between each of them (p. 75).

He emphasizes the autonomy of the individual firms in the midst of their “joint coordinated activity” similar to Jensen and Meckling’s 1976 idea of the firm as a “nexus of contracts.” Figure 2 depicts Phillips’ illustration of the cooperative form. The graphic could represent a collective of individual firms, were it not for the center of the organization where each firm touches another. Here, firms no longer retain autonomy and contribute to the group in proportion to their individual size, as represented by the dotted lines.

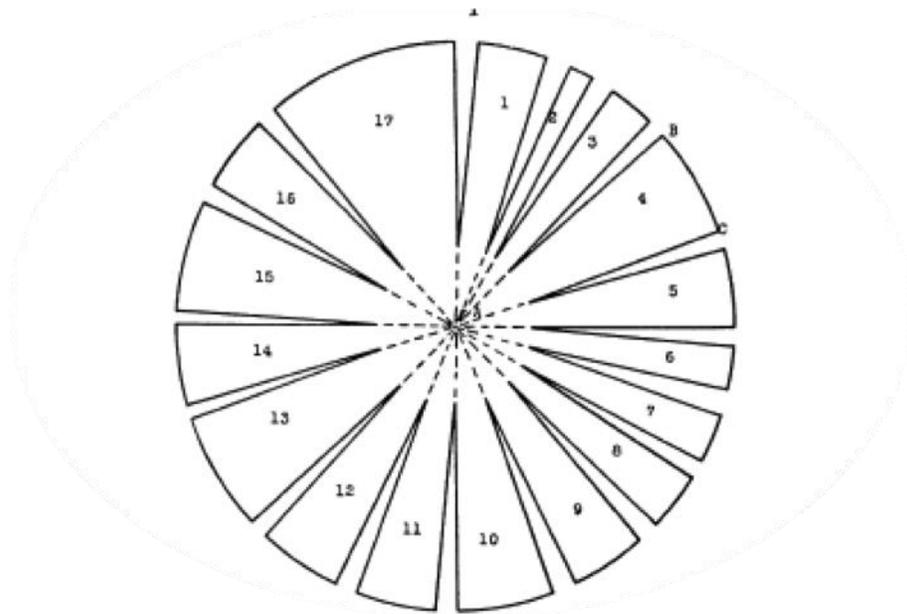


Figure 1 (p. 76)

Interestingly, the capacity for each firm to maintain its independence, which is clear in Phillip's Figure 2, similarly threatens the organization's ability to operate cooperatively. Olson suggests this in his 1965 piece. Uzzi (1997) also supports this claim, while investigating the ties that unite individuals in a common effort, when he found individuals act both cooperatively and competitively in the relationships they maintain internally in their networks. Therefore, we must seek to understand the internal socioeconomic behavior of the individuals acting as cooperative members.

Many authors advocate that the benefits accrued to individuals from the cooperative's collective action motivates its continued creation. Majee and Hoyt (2011) suggest the conversion of a network of social ties into a singular unit is the key to accessing its social capital, and Westgren (2014) writes that the "membrane around the collective action" plays an important role in establishing economic opportunity (p. 2). Richard Phillips explains that the cooperative allows individuals to pool resources and work jointly, to produce a "decreasing long average cost curve over a considerable range for a part of the total economic function, or contemplated function, of the several firms" (p. 81). Cook (1995) argues that cooperatives form to avoid market failures or monopolistic competition. In the case of the agriculture industry, this may allow farmers to work together to establish fairer prices or seek government support for the substantiality of contracts (Staatz 1987, p. 89). Additionally, the cooperative form provides members with residuals, or a

return on their patronage to the cooperative. Therefore, it could be economically efficient for individuals to work together, especially in an industry that can gain a competitive edge by aggregating production, like agriculture.

Although the Institutions and Organizations literature provides a wealth of information on the cooperative form in relation to contracts and transaction cost economics, there is still work to be done concerning the relationship between the cooperative organizational form and its ability to capitalize on the resources of social networks. Authors like Boone and Özcan (2014), Cook and Chaddad (2004), Cook and Iliopoulos (2016), Porter and Scully (1987), give us a better understanding of the types of cooperatives that exist, the particular challenges associated with this organizational form, and the changes that have occurred over time to their internal structures, but the broader literature on cooperatives still lacks an understanding of the environmental and cultural factors encouraging the adoption of the cooperative form and motivating its continued development. Therefore, future research must be done to evaluate the effectiveness of this organizational form as a way to elicit economic gain.

Chapter 4: Structural Racialization and Hmong Growers in Twin Cities Urban Agriculture

As a result of both my archival research and my interviews, I found that access to land is a challenge for Hmong growers in the Twin Cities. When compiling information concerning the settlement of Hmong refugees in the United States, I learned that the process of refugee resettlement used by the U.S. government encouraged the development of ethnic clustering in certain areas, typically in urban spaces (Vang 2010). This geographic distribution then provides access to institutional resources and the support of others facing similar circumstances, and it may give rise to an ethnic enclave-type economy (Wang 2010). The Hmong community settled in this way in neighborhoods throughout the Twin Cities, such as Frogtown, East Saint Paul and North Minneapolis, and this had a direct impact on the land they might access for farming. During an interview with Dylan Kesti, a Twin Cities food activist working with the Land Stewardship Project, the interviewee shared that although the City of Minneapolis has conceded that urban agricultural usage is “development” work, he sees the City as considering other projects to be of higher or better use for urban land. He said, “if you’re small-scale ag, you don’t matter,” and explained that because local governments value land in terms of potential gains from a tax-base, land is priced outside of the range of affordability for most beginning farmers and zoned mostly for commercial

development. Therefore, although Hmong individuals participate in community gardening in these neighborhoods, those who grow produce for their livelihoods must seek farmland outside of the urban spaces.

In order to better understand the way the institutional setting affects rural land availability and usage, I spoke with individuals at the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA). Because I knew that the price of farmland has risen with the consolidation of farming enterprises, I assumed Hmong farmers wishing to purchase land would need large amounts of capital and/or some sort of credit to secure a loan. Traditionally, the USDA rural development loan program and its local subsidiaries would provide access to loans for farmers, but I learned from speaking with Bob Patton at MDA that Hmong farmers have struggled to qualify for grants given by the USDA's Rural Development program because, although their farms and projects fit within the scope of the grants' stipulations, their urban home zip codes often disqualify them from aid. Instead, they need to turn elsewhere for the expertise and aid of community financial institutions. Becky Balk at MDA informed me that traditional banks base the size of their package offerings on the credit history of the loan applicant and that many immigrant farmers come from places that do not establish an acceptable credit history. Therefore, immigrant farmers, like the Hmong growers, often cannot rely on

traditional lending institutions for financial support, and instead, they use self-financing methods in order to purchase land.

Recognizing the financial challenges facing Hmong farmers, Balk and her colleagues formed a group of contacts that could openly discuss issues facing immigrant farmers in 2010 and work towards meeting their needs. After building considerable community trust, the group grew organically and identified several areas of focus, including access to land, access to credit, and strategies for growth as challenges to be tackled. Balk relayed that the main result of the group's work has been to create network connections to community resources. At the time of our interview, the group was meeting infrequently to support its members on a more individual basis.

Another institution organizing local support for beginning and immigrant farmer access to land and resources is Agstar Financial Services. With its "Emerging Agribusiness Lending" program, the bank has implemented a unique lending process by supplying character-based loans and relying on the partnership of community actors to provide comprehensive plan support. I spoke with an Agstar employee that asserted, "We're very flexible, but we have a responsibility. We don't want to do a disservice, because it is not free money—it's debt. And, you want to make sure that they have the ability to pay it back." Agstar provides microloans with interest below market rate and ensures clients have proper credit and legal counseling to allow the smooth

implementation of business projects and success for their clientele. This level of support is unique to Agstar, however. My interviewee explained that these loans are expensive to operate and have low returns, so they are not services that traditional lending institutions provide. The Agstar board members, mostly traditional farmers, see small-scale, value-added, and organic production as an investment opportunity, however, and support the program. It is currently spread across counties throughout Minnesota and Wisconsin, and lacks the human capital necessary to operate at full capacity. Instead, Agstar relies heavily on its community partners for services necessary to the program and has recently signed an MOU with approximately 30 local organizations pledging to work together to support farming entrepreneurs.

In addition to land access, Hmong farmers face other structural challenges in performing basic business functions due to their immigrant status. Although the majority of Hmong individuals in the Twin Cities speak English, a language barrier continues to intimidate many in the immigrant community and impede their ability to access resources and education services for their business. Dr. Vang, a daughter of Hmong growers, told me in our interview that her parents refrain from reaching out to the extension services at land-grant universities that are designed to provide new knowledge to farmers, because of language or cultural reasons. She explained that setting up

electricity and water access on farmland or ensuring compliance with legal stipulations to alter the topography of land pose a challenge to older Hmong growers that struggle with English and have limited experience with using technology. During an interview with Pakou Hang, the Executive Director of HAFA, Hang shared that farmers sometimes exploit the Hmong growers' lack of power to establish fair contracts for land. For example, a white landowner in Southern Minnesota required Hmong growers renting from her to give two fifths of the goods they produced to her for free in addition to the cost of renting the land. Another farmer demanded full access to the land and any of the goods Hmong growers were able to produce on it at any time. In another case, landowners charged three times as much to Hmong growers to rent the same land rented by Whites for a lower price.

Language issues also limit Hmong growers' capacity to engage in the political discourse of alternative agricultural spaces. Farmers markets may be run by a government institution, organization with interests in the local food system, or the farmers, themselves, as a cooperative. The Central Minnesota Vegetable Growers Association and the St. Paul Growers Association run the Minneapolis and Saint Paul Farmers Markets, respectively. These Associations hold meetings periodically to manage the rental agreements of the stalls, discuss programming for the markets, and other general market business. When these meetings are conducted in English without the help of

interpreters, they limit the agency of the Hmong growers in exercising their right to make decisions about their market spaces. During a presentation at TEDx in Minneapolis, Hang, who is the daughter of Hmong farmers, described an experience she had at a meeting when the St. Paul Association was discussing whether to amend the number of stalls to make room for more growers: “I remember praying, like, ‘God, please. Someone who speaks English well stand up and say something! Defend the Hmong people!” Being one of the only dual language speakers in the room, Hang stood up to speak on behalf of the Hmong growers in the room (Hang).

During our interview, Hang shared her concern for problems caused by visible signs of difference like the language used by, or ethnic characteristics exhibited by, Hmong farmers in the farmers markets. Hang highlighted the racial divisions at the farmers markets when she said:

You’ve got the hipster farmers and they’ve got their plaid shirts, and they look well rested and they’ve got their carrots. And you’ve got the Hmong farmers and they look like they just woke up. Their skin is tanned- tons of frown lines! They just look so haggard. And the world looks at people like that and for some reason we think those people don’t have as much value as someone who’s perky and up to date and talking to you about the same carrot, right? So in some ways, I think the Hmong farmers think: ‘I am not gonna win if I, even if I, come off as someone who has 15 years’ experience, because I will have 15 years experience, but they will still buy from that hipster farmer. My stuff is actually better. I’m not certified organic, but ... I’m using intercropping and polycropping and they’re still going to buy from this organic farmer because they trust that organic farmer more.’

This story demonstrates the way whiteness has been infused with “correctness” and been given power and validity in economic situations, like

the farmers market, where, in lieu of extensive marketing campaigns and retail packaging schemes, customers rely on visible attributes and feelings of trust to make their purchases. The nature of direct sales at farmers markets allows Hmong growers to avoid communication issues that may occur when negotiating with a middleman or retailer, but a discomfort with the mainstream language definitely hampers Hmong growers' ability to develop relationships with clientele. The capacity to inspire trust in producer-client relationships is severely limited for those Hmong growers that do not speak English. An inability to speak or write English can be recognized in two ways in American culture: as signifying a lack of intelligence and/or an immigrant that has refused to adopt American values and ways of life. Hang asserted in our interview that the label of "foreigner" that is given to many Hmong growers through language practices then carries a "negative ethos" associated with malicious intent.

After investigating the environmental challenges facing Hmong growers in the Twin Cities using archival, observatory, and interviewing methods of data collection, I conclude that the ability of Hmong growers to engage in small-scale agricultural production is greatly affected by structural racialization. Due to their geographic location, as a result of government settling processes and the resources available to ethnic entrepreneurs, Hmong growers generally live in areas that make access to farmland difficult.

Additionally, traditional financial service providers overlook the needs of immigrant farmers and make access to credit and capital difficult for Hmong farmers. When Hmong growers are able to secure land, they encounter legal, economic and social difficulties exacerbated by their ethnic identity. This can be seen in the Farmers Market where social norms “otherize” Hmong growers and breed ugly stereotypes of their business acumen in ways that affect their ability to engage with and challenge the whitened discourse of alternative agricultural spaces.

Although local organizations have begun to recognize the need to take action in supporting immigrant farmers in the Twin Cities, like the Hmong growers, the existing challenges may necessitate change at an institutional level. Because of its authoritative role and ability to organize diverse voices, the MDA could act as a key player in changing the institutional environment for immigrant farmers. But, as its support group has not been formally internalized by the MDA, currently the group can only be seen as a preliminary step in eliminating the issues of structural racialization in agriculture. Similarly, Agstar’s MOU and programming has a limited scope of influence due to its lack of human capital and program investment. These examples demonstrate the need and desire for comprehensive change to occur in agriculture, but the general lack in capacity for truly effective development. In order to better evaluate the strength of, and need for, groups

engaged in assistance projects targeting immigrant and minority farmers, we must better understand how social networks are used in the Hmong grower community as alternative providers of resources and opportunities.

Chapter 5: Building Social Capital in the Hmong

Growers' Social Networks

With the understanding that structural racialization alters the landscape of opportunities for Hmong agriculturalists in the Twin Cities, I sought to examine the resources and methods these growers use to overcome their challenges without the help of institutional support. I learned from my interviews that the cultural norms of Hmong growers' networks in the Twin Cities region promote resource sharing. Dr. Vang suggested that networks of strong ties are the result of a collectivist culture: "everybody kind of pools together to own resources so they can own homes, own businesses, and so forth." She explained that the resources pooled could be financial, physical, social and/or other types of capital, and that extended families, organized into clans, play an important role in allowing this resource pooling to occur. The clans maintain a patriarchal structure to social interactions, so uncles, brothers, and sons make the decisions about how resources are distributed and used within a family. When women marry into a clan, their work, at home or professionally, is then shared amongst the family. Dr Vang said, "Anything you do has to go back into the clan."

As a cultural institution in the Hmong community, clans dictate the rules of social behavior, but they are typically too large to operate as

organizational forms in business. Dr. Vang told me that in the Twin Cities, a region with a large Hmong population, a clan might have 300 to 500 families. Businesses, then, generate wealth for smaller family units and rely on these for labor. In Hmong growers' families, women and children are also expected to contribute to the welfare of the family. Reflecting on her childhood spent helping her parents on the farm Dr. Vang laughed and said, "That's why [Hmong families] have a lot of kids!"

I learned from both my archival and interview-based research that Hmong growers rely on the second generation to bridge the gap between cultures. Children who speak English well are expected to help translate in spaces associated with the mainstream culture, like farmers markets or banks, while others may provide legal advice or new business ideas. However, the cultural norm of maintaining respect for elders in the Hmong community can make this process difficult. As a daughter, Dr. Vang worried: "Parents, themselves, will destroy their own businesses, because of not knowing how to get the information and... wanting to be the superior person—the elder that doesn't take in the information from the kids." She saw this conflict when witnessing her parents grapple with the process of labeling their produce. As they do not speak English well or write the language, they struggled to find information on the organic certification process. Without the help of their daughter, they would not be able to access

the resources of the mainstream community that are so essential to this process.

In addition to important familial ties, Hmong networks operate cooperatively with the help of social norms that act as rules for behavior. Dr. Vang explained, “This idea of independence or individualism is actually frowned upon. If you break off and do your own thing then people actually look down on you. Everything you do should be for the system—for a system.” This quote reveals a social mechanism for maintaining group loyalty: the threat of exclusion. Anyone that pursues individual goals is thought of as a “renegade” and is “outcasted” (Interview, Vang). Because the collectivist culture provides important resources for the businessman or woman, expulsion is a serious threat to economic security.

In conflict with the idea of cooperation, however, is the presence of competition in Hmong growers’ social networks. Dr. Vang shared that the desire to meet customer demands for organic produce in local farmers markets led her parents to mimic the business ideas of their network contacts to increase profit. While resources may be sourced in a cooperative way, individual family businesses are culturally prompted to neglect the potential benefits of their relationships and work as singular units. She explained:

The parents would teach the kids—in life, you’re in competition with each other, so you should live your life as though you’re in competition with

everyone else. That's a way of motivating us, but they take it literally, like we're *literally* in competition with everyone!

Competition drives Hmong growers to pass skills and knowledge along their network connections. From the theory work on social networks, we may understand this process to be the production of social capital. Interestingly, the Hmong growers rely on a mixture of competition and cooperation in their social networks to generate capital that will enhance their entrepreneurial opportunities and endeavors.

In reflecting on my interviews, observations, and archival work, I deduce that the social networks formed and used by Hmong growers are an entrepreneurial response to a lack of institutional support in agricultural markets and the presence of a structurally racialized environment. Returning to the theory on social networks, I understand that the strong tie relationships and cooperative norms, which allow for internal network cohesion, mean the Hmong community's network can be considered an "embedded" network. An embedded network fosters cooperation, competition, and the generation of social capital that is then used in a business setting. However, when coupled with the challenge of the acculturation process, an embedded network can also decrease the incentive for individuals of the Hmong community to forge relationships with those of the mainstream community. Without the help of a structural hole, like the second-generation, they would not be able to form weak ties to access the

resources of the mainstream community, and the network becomes closed off. Hmong growers must learn from one another information about the market and entrepreneurial process. As a result, they lack key pieces to forming and running a successful small-scale farm. Therefore, although the network's social capital is important and used as a defense mechanism against competition from outside the enclave community, it is not enough to ensure success of the Hmong growers' businesses. Faced with the challenges of a structurally racialized industry environment, Hmong growers need an institutionalized support system. From this observation, I decided to turn my attention to the installation and development of the Hmong American Farmers Association as an organization working to overcome the barriers to operating in agriculture as a Hmong individual.

Chapter 6: The Organization

After learning of the significant structural barriers Hmong growers face with limited institutional or organizational support, I wanted to investigate the potential solutions that a formalized collective organization might provide to a group of Hmong growers, specifically. I hypothesized that this organization might act as a structural hole in linking the Hmong growers' network with the resources of the mainstream community. During an interview with the Executive Director of HAFA, Pakou Hang, I learned that Hang, the daughter of Hmong farmers, began the organization as a result of a Bush Fellowship she received in 2011. The Fellowship was awarded to Hang in order for her to investigate the local foods system of the Twin Cities. An important aspect of her research was speaking with Hmong growers to better understand the issues facing Hmong farmers. She told me that after weeks of hearing the same stories, she went to a community meeting of farmers and heard a woman say, "We have to stop waiting for people to come and save us, because we can save ourselves." During a presentation at a TEDx event, Hang calls this her "Eureka moment" when community desire for change spurred her to create the Hmong American Farmers Association, or HAFA.

The organization began with a small group of community advisors and little resources, but the economic and educational opportunities its

services provided Hmong growers helped it to grow rapidly. Hang told me she started the organization with the funds she received from the Bush Fellowship, approximately \$24,000, and at the time of its founding, HAFA had one full-time organizer with Hang taking only a part-time position. Over the next five years, Hang and the increasing number of HAFA staff worked to grow their budget with the help of social investors, government grants and some support from traditional agricultural financial channels. At the time of our interview, in Summer 2016, the group projected a budget of \$1.3 million and maintained a staff of ten full-time individuals, four interns, and seven or eight consultants providing specialized services.

In order to promote equity and a group ethos amongst HAFA's membership, Hang and her colleagues chose the cooperative organizational form as a governing structure. Hang said in our interview:

We wanted to be membership based because we really believed that many of the challenges that Hmong farmers were facing were systematic in nature. They weren't just: 'You're a bad farmer. We need to teach you.' There was a way that education was being delivered to farmers that's not being delivered to other people who don't speak English. So because the challenges were systematic, we needed to find a solution that was equal. And so, we thought that the membership model would be equal to that, because within the membership model we would have a recognition of our shared values but also our shared future and there would be a sense of solidarity. You weren't the only one, so there would be a sense of shared power—of building power. And there would also, that within the membership, that there was a belief that we were all "in this together."

HAFA established strict criteria for membership: farmers must have at least three years of continuous farming experience on more than three acres, an established farmers market, and more than a million dollars in liability

insurance. Over time, the organization has experimented with changes in the membership structure, but it has found that individuals who consistently benefit from HAFA's work exhibit these characteristics.

HAFA's membership strategy and organizational programming renews the collective nature of the culture and enhances the development of a strongly tied network within the organization. HAFA's meetings offer a time for members to share experiences and work together for entrepreneurial gain. For Hang, the seed catalogs symbolize the group's cooperative spirit:

Our farmers come to our trainings with three or four catalogs, and they're sharing the catalogs with each other and they're saying, 'Okay, if you order these from this catalog, can you put \$500 in for me too? And with my catalog over here, I'll put in \$500 worth of potatoes for you, too.' And [they're] really helping each other out. They are thinking, what is the next thing? What is the thing that people want? (Interview, Hang).

This comment demonstrates collective entrepreneurial behavior: members are searching for new ways to capture not only their own entrepreneurial rents, but also helping their neighbors to increase their returns, as well.

Ensuring the meetings are done in Hmong allows members to feel comfortable and included and enhances the role of cultural norms in group activities. From these observations, I conclude that the formalized boundary of the Hmong American Farmers Association allows its membership to access the social capital built from the immigrant's strong, social network.

The HAFA Farm

In addition to providing access to markets, financial resources and educational opportunities, HAFA's ability to provide long-term access to land plays an important role in group programming. From my archival research, I learned that the organization purchased an 155 acre farm in Dakota County, Minnesota with the help of an anonymous social donor (Goetzman). I knew that farmland typically is more readily available in tracts much larger than the 5-10 acre plots desired by the Hmong growers, and therefore, difficult to locate for the average Hmong farmer. An employee at HAFA informed me that the group purchased the land with the intent of distributing parcels amongst its membership for small-scale production. Today, the farm is split between 18-22 families on five to ten acre plots, and Hang shared that the 125 acres of tillable land produces approximately \$1 million in sales annually in farmers markets and other "alternative markets." Overall, the group has approximately 128 members and works with multiple generations to promote innovative practices and the development of value-added products (Interview, Hang). During an interview, an employee at HAFA told me that many farmers were attracted initially by the opportunity to establish long-term land use contracts, which would provide security and economic flexibility for their businesses, but then continued their membership to receive the benefits of the group's other programs and services.

Providing Access to New Markets and Knowledge

As part of its many services, HAFA aggregates the growers' produce so that the small-scale farmers may collectively service the larger contracts of area clients. The client list includes local grocery chains, public school districts, restaurants, and community service providers. Additionally, the group runs a Community Supported Agriculture program (CSA), and all together, HAFA calls its production process a "food hub." Because the produce supports local farmers and the consumption of healthy foods, Hang described it in our interview as a "win-win" for both HAFA and the community at large. She sees these programmatic elements as opportunities for Hmong farmers to reach new markets.

The educational programming HAFA provides also enhances the entrepreneurial capacity of the Hmong growers. Hang explained that the "robust business development program" consists of savings account trainings, loan matching, classes in new agricultural techniques, business planning assistance, and other research projects. When speaking of the organization's classes during our interview, Hang said: "When we do our training... we always max out. We always have tons more people than we think will come, and they always stay longer than we think because people are hungry for knowledge." To do these trainings, HAFA often partners with other community organizations or institutions. These groups are similarly

interested in promoting entrepreneurial opportunities for new farmers, such as AgStar Financial Services. In 2014, AgStar provided HAFA with a \$70,000 grant for continued programming (Meersman). The Latino Economic Development Center (LEDC) is another community actor that works throughout the Twin Cities and partners with HAFA on some occasions. Hang shared with me that HAFA and the LEDC have co-written a grant to fund Spanish translation for trainings that could benefit Latino immigrant farmers in the area. This seems to relate to Hang's goal of contributing to the establishment of "community wealth."

Providing Access to the Mainstream Community

The instantiation of the organization, HAFA, helped to ease some of the racial tensions between Hmong farmers and their White counterparts. When describing the early days of setting up HAFA's farm, Hang said that local farmers thought the Hmong farmers had received a "handout" and as a result, the farm suffered a lot of vandalism. After putting up a deer fence, some farmers thought the Hmong growers were going to begin shooting deer and expressed concern for their horses' safety. When reflecting on these tensions, Hang said in our interview: "I think there are people in the community, white people, other people, who really have a real affinity to try to reach out their hands—try to help other families—but they don't know how to and HAFA can be that conduit." It can be inferred from this statement

that one of HAFA's essential functions is to act as a structural hole between the membership and the broader community.

Hang's vision to create community wealth through HAFA's programming relies on the organization's ability to act as a structural hole. Hang explained the contribution she and the other founders expected HAFA to make to the Twin Cities food system in her TEDx speech:

We were... committed to this idea that Hmong farmers should be lifting up other people in the agricultural system, and so we wanted to better a system where the people who are picking the food were at the forefront. We wanted to have a better food system that really lifted up small farmers, ethnically diverse farmers, folks who were food producers, people who would be interested in working in cooperatives so they would decrease their risk, but at the same time, increase their economic opportunities. Because of the economies of scale, they could be building actual equity and power (Hang).

In order to make this happen, Hang also works with local politicians to generate better understanding of the challenges facing minority growers and policies that are more inclusive for diverse groups of agriculturalists. Additionally, she has testified in front of the Minnesota legislature and other elected bodies, is a member of many local organizations working with alternative agricultural practices, and speaks openly about the work HAFA has done to promote change at events around the Twin Cities. In fact, an employee at HAFA told me during our interview that she sees Hang as playing a key role in opening opportunities for change in the region.

After conducting research on the Hmong American Farmers Association through archival, observational, and interviewing methods, I conclude that this organization successfully works to combat the challenges associated with the structural racialization of the agriculture industry. It does this primarily through an organizational farm, network of contacts, and its educational programming. The HAFA farm increases access to small-scale plots for growers and decreases the opportunism Hmong farmers often suffer in their contracts with landowners. The organization's food hub provides growers with a new network of producers and consumers that supersedes the embedded networks of the Hmong growers and enhances its use of social capital. With the educational resources it provides, HAFA supports the entrepreneurial nature of Hmong growers' projects by allowing them to pursue new and innovative practices in farming. Finally, by including other immigrant groups, HAFA is further extending the members' networks and bridging the gap between Hmong growers and other immigrant communities to encourage shared experiences and resources. As a result of these practices, it is clear that HAFA exists as a structural hole between the Hmong growers and the mainstream community.

In seeking to further evaluate the success of the organization in meeting its goals of becoming a cooperative engaged in community change, however, I must address the efficacy and use of the cooperative governance

structure. A traditional cooperative shares the decision-making power amongst its membership and uses “we-intentionality” in actions and decision-making. The Hmong American Farmers Association, however, has yet to fully integrate its membership into the governing process and its members continue to operate in an individualistic manner. The organization hosts meetings during which it invites discussion, and even voting, from its membership and the Board includes two Hmong growers and several growers’ children, but the decision-making process is not maintained wholly by the group’s membership. A HAFA employee told me that she sees it “more like a traditional nonprofit” because of the importance of the staff in making decisions. I know from my archival research that the clan familial structure has historically relied on groups of elders for making administrative choices, and therefore, I propose these cultural norms could be why HAFA’s membership defers to its knowledgeable leaders for managerial control. However, no matter the reason, for HAFA to fully adopt the cooperative model, the organization’s membership must have greater authority over programmatic arrangements and engage in a shared ethos. This would result in a transition from its current state, a collective of individuals, to a cooperative organization, and begs the question, then, of what does the future hold for HAFA?

Chapter 6: The Future of HAFA

Changing Identities, Changing Roles

The future of the Hmong American Farmers Association will depend on the actions of its membership. Recognizing this, the organization is currently encouraging its members to exercise agency through an entrepreneurial mindset. In addition to thinking of themselves as farmers many Hmong farmers carry a refugee identity. Dr. Vang said of her parents: “They still very much view themselves as refugees.” She suggested that a “poverty mentality” and barriers to mainstream support systems urge growers to maintain small sources of income, like SSDI, instead of risking an investment in business ventures. During our interview, a HAFA employee explained how this affects the organization’s members:

A lot of our farmers have not even been able to think about becoming organic or using different practices because it’s kind of like a hustle to even do it and continue to do it. And not even having a secure environment and land access—you can’t really invest in these bigger things, even like learning.

This quote demonstrates the conflict between the survivalist and entrepreneurial mentality. At HAFA, career development and capacity building go hand-in-hand: by helping the growers to improve their businesses with innovative training, the group leads individuals to think of themselves as entrepreneurs and to reinvest in their products and their personal development at the same time.

While innovating was a luxury for growers in the past, HAFA provides opportunities for farmers to learn with its classes on budgeting, demonstrations on organic practices and research on crop profitability. A HAFA employee was proud to share that the organization has created a “baseline” of acceptable chemical use that it plans to distribute shortly after the 2016 harvest to better align members’ production with consumer demand for organic produce. HAFA also operates two high tunnel systems as demonstration projects to assist members that want to extend their growing season. During business classes, members may learn the true cost of production or how to calculate their net worth. Hang told me about a woman who was surprised to learn her net worth was close to half a million dollars: “She stood up and she put her hands in her pockets and she pulled out her pocket and she said, ‘But I have no money! I have no money! How can I be worth so much?!’ She was so proud. She was in disbelief, but she was so proud.” Hang describes the classes as a way “to give people the tools to change [their] perception and to improve it.” These provide members a time to engage in self-assessment and, Hang suggests, an opportunity to decide if they want to identify as poor, immigrant farmers or as entrepreneurs.

Incorporating multiple generations into family production and encouraging long-term planning is another way that HAFA plans for its future by developing an entrepreneurial mindset amongst its membership.

During our interview, a HAFA employee shared, “many Hmong kids... have been told, and are being told, don’t go into farming because it’s not economically going to sustain you.” HAFA is working to change this perception by recognizing existing enterprises as valuable economic options and incorporating younger generations into the production of value-added goods. Additionally, the group educates its membership on opportunities throughout the agricultural supply chain aside from cultivating produce that may be attractive to second- and third- generation college-educated individuals in members’ families. Hang tells growers, “The vision I have for your business is that one day your children are going to be telling [this] story: ‘I used to be in the field with my parents and look at it now! We’re running a multi-million hedge fund’ or something like that” (Interview, Hang). Establishing farming as a multi-generational endeavor has been important to Hang since the organization’s founding.

Another factor in the organization’s future is its ability to maintain land access. Currently, HAFA leases the land it uses from an anonymous donor with a ten-year lease, but after the eighth year, HAFA has the option to buy the land. Although this will not happen until 2021, HAFA is beginning the process of educating members now on the cost of purchasing the land and what that would mean for the growers and their businesses (Interview, Staffer #1). Hang hopes the farmers will elect to buy the land as a cooperative. She believes this would allow the farmers to continue using it in

the same way, as small parcels, and that it would provide them with a piece of equity that would travel with them if they leave the cooperative. As the state upholds an “anti-corporate farm law,” which prevents corporations or cooperatives from owning farmland (Revisor of Statutes, State of Minnesota), HAFA would need to receive exempted status to purchase the land. Additionally, the organization would need to raise a significant amount of capital in order to purchase the land, whether from member patronage or grant fund-raising.

Although the future of the organization may be difficult to predict, I have determined that the identity of the membership will play a key role in the success of HAFA in establishing itself as a true cooperative. Currently, the majority of the membership self-identifies as immigrants or refugees, which encourages individualism in group interactions and decision-making processes. However, as HAFA develops an entrepreneurial mindset and enhances the ability for members’ networks to create social capital through its educational programming, it can foster a “we-intentionality” amongst its membership that may be conducive to a cooperative governing structure in the organization.

Additionally, the establishment of an entrepreneurial identity amongst HAFA’s membership will have a direct impact on the role Pakou Hang plays in the organization’s future. Currently, she is essential to HAFA’s programming success. Hang develops connections with local organizations to

widen the scope of the members market access, she sits on the board of local organizations engaged in developing Twin Cities food security, and she is an activist in establishing legislation supporting immigrant and small-scale farming in the region. Through her hard work, Hang has become a visible leader in both the Hmong and mainstream communities, and because of the managerial role she retains at HAFA, the organization cannot function without her. While HAFA functions as a structural hole for the Hmong growing community, Hang functions as a structural hole for HAFA. In order for this to change, the membership must actively engage in the cooperative governing process and play a greater role in establishing HAFA's presence in the Twin Cities food system. Without this action, I predict HAFA will continue to represent a collective of individual entrepreneurs, and cannot be considered a true cooperative organization.

Chapter 8: Concluding Thoughts

As a result of my research, I conclude socially disadvantaged farmers, like the Hmong growers of the Twin Cities, face significant structural challenges in engaging in agricultural production on a small-scale. A long legacy of discrimination at agricultural institutions, like the USDA, exacerbates these challenges and deters immigrant and minority farmers from seeking support in traditional ways. Instead, farmers must rely on their social contacts to provide the financial, physical, and human capital necessary to begin their farming enterprises. Strong social networks present in immigrant communities can enhance this process and build social capital in ways that are conducive to entrepreneurship.

In my study, I learned Hmong growers have historically settled in immigrant communities and have a preexisting cultural norm of cooperation that could be used to overcome the challenges facing farmers of color in U.S. agricultural production. However, another cultural practice, competition, and the survivalist mindset they maintain, impedes the Hmong growers' ability to access social capital and network resources. Instead, Hmong growers have historically operated as individuals in the Twin Cities region and struggled to build lasting wealth through their businesses.

As a way to combat these challenges, the Hmong American Farmers Association organized Hmong growers within the boundary of a formalized institution and solidified the members' social network for better use. By providing safe, secure land access, reliable markets for product retail, and education opportunities, HAFA has emboldened its members to engage with one another and build community trust and support within its social networks. The group operates as a structural hole by working to "bridge people's relationships," and also works to "change the narrative" so that the mainstream culture begins to see Hmong farmers not as immigrants or refugees, but as entrepreneurs (Interview, Hang). This shift must occur internally, as well, so that the growers begin to think of themselves as innovative business-owners.

If HAFA's membership can begin to alter its identity, this may result in the organization functioning more like a true cooperative and a successful alternative to acting individually in the marketplace. Currently, Pakou Hang, the organization's Executive Director, plays a major role in the success of HAFA's programming. Responsible for community recognition and engagement, establishing funding sources, and supervising the organization's curriculum, Hang is essential to HAFA's work. If the members begin to take on greater responsibility in group decision-making, this could grant the

organization greater stability and enhance its ability to enact community change in the Twin Cities food system.

When I began my research, I was able to answer my initial questions fairly quickly. By triangulating my archival, observation, and interviewing data, I quickly understood the barriers facing Hmong farmers in the Twin Cities region. My additional research questions concerning the role of social networks and the organization in combating these barriers, however, required further interviewing and questioning. With the help of grounded theory concerning ethnic entrepreneurship, social networks, and collective and cooperative practices in agriculture, I was able to understand the way Hmong individuals organize themselves to produce and use their social capital in an entrepreneurial sense. I feel satisfied in the result of my research project and hope to inspire continued work on this subject.

As this report is a case study of a small organization in one place, it is not generalizable to the whole of U.S. agricultural industry, but it may provoke further research. Immigrants, refugees, and other farmers of color across the nation face similar challenges and barriers due to structural racialization, and a project comparing experiences could be an important study for policy-makers and agriculturalists, alike. Additionally, it could be interesting to evaluate the success of HAFA and other cooperatives working with socially

disadvantaged populations in generating revenue and social capital as an alternative to traditional agricultural support.

While options for future research are endless, this project represents the present state of affairs for Hmong farmers and the Hmong American Farmers Association in the Twin Cities. It demonstrates the social value generated by forming a collective of entrepreneurs and the opportunities a structural hole can provide to a marginalized community in agriculture. Additionally, we can see that an entrepreneur may provide essential leadership and guidance in the organizational process. As a conclusion, this research should indicate a greater need for understanding the potential of collective entrepreneurial practices in small-scale agricultural production and direct-to-consumer markets, and its effect on local food systems.

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