**Work, Life, and Labour at the Farmers Market**

**By:** Harrison Dressler

**Location:** Fredericton, New Brunswick (45.9577602076224, -66.63963021815668)

**Description:** The Fredericton Boyce Farmers Market is a cultural institution, bringing forth and productively creating vibrant displays of art, cuisine, and taste. It also allows for the smooth functioning of exploitation and wealth centralization under neoliberal capitalism.

Fredericton’s Boyce Farmers Market (FBFM) is a cultural hub, a socially charged nerve center, a network of always moving bodies and constantly engaging sights, smells, and sounds.

Within the past decade, the FBFM has cemented itself as a local institution, acting as a veritable boon to the small city’s cultural and monetary economy. Every Saturday morning, students, professors, young professionals, and families gather near the market’s entrance, chatting amongst themselves and withdrawing bills soon to be spent upon tasty food products, knitted clothing a screen-printed T-shirts, vibrant accessories, and a whole assortment of baubles knick-knacks. Potential customers are beckoned forth with calls to authentic cooking, the sourcing of local ingredients, and the sheer abundance of consumer choice.

The market environment is clearly attractive for both the small-scale producer and the small-town consumer, but why?

For me, the answer seems rather simple: labour alienation, or more specifically, a notable lack thereof.

Production, trade, and distribution under capitalism is by its very nature busy, competitive, and cutthroat. The role of the artisan and artist – a social class once valued as necessary for the production and maintenance of a healthful and vibrant culture – has, within the prior two centuries, been gradually eroded and depreciated throughout North America and much of Europe. Mass-production and corporate advertising has made the day-to-day life of the small-scale business owner physically, mentally, and emotionally taxing – only the wealthiest and most well connected survive. As a result, fewer and fewer persons in Canada are able to lay claim to their own labour, the products that their labour produces, and the human relations that these processes require to function.

Consumption under monopoly capitalism is by its very nature atomized, anonymous, and inhuman. Customers of the urban conglomerate are at once impressed by the vast availability of products while made to feel miniscule relative to its sheer size and pledge to formality, custom, and strictly economic employee-customer relationships. Customers rarely care about the lives, experiences, and wishes of the employee, nor employees the customer.

The farmers market, I argue, reduces these burdens, at least in part. Producers and vendors become business partners, friends, and fellows. Their individual successes are publicly celebrated rather than privately denigrated and feared. Ingredients are traded and tips and tricks shared. Soon enough, customers become easily recognizable persons – their lives well known, their quirks visible, their desires allowed to become manifest. Rather than rename nameless faces, vendors and customers develop symbiotic and mutually strengthening personal relationships.

However, the farmers market is not subversive. It’s cultural and political function is not one of radical or even reformist organizing or activism. Rather, by marginally mitigating the most burdensome effects of cultural alienation and wealth centralization, the market – really a neoliberal, state owned, and enclosed capitalist economy – strengthens Canadian capitalism by dampening only the most egregious and visible features of labour exploitation. The existence of farmers markets generally, and the FBFM in particular, essentially act as a band aid for a broken bone, a small dose of acetaminophen for a gaping wound. The FBFM supplies, in the short term, a negligible reversal of the tendency for capital and food production to centralize, and in the long term, an acute industrialising of local taste. If cultural capitalism is a gunshot, the market might be best described as the lubricant glossing the inner mechanics of the weapon’s trigger – it allows for its smooth functioning.