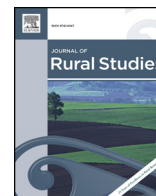




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How to survive: Artificial quality food schemes and new forms of rule for farmers in direct marketing strategies



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1. Introduction

Current agri-food policy and programs highlight the need for a shift in the approach to move towards more sustainable agriculture – socially and environmentally. In this respect, new policies are often based on market-led models that add value to certain distinctive products or practices. In this context, “quality food schemes” (QFSs herein after) emerge – those in which particular products or characteristics from small scale food production are ascribed a certain superiority that allows the producers to obtain premium prices. These schemes take the form of territorial management or economic planning strategies that link quality to the production from certain districts or regions (Marsden and Smith, 2005). These mechanisms have also helped to re-localize the food industry and to create a new paradigm of rural development granting greater autonomy to rural farmers and entrepreneurs (Marsden and Smith, 2005; Murdoch et al., 2009). Generally such QFSs are characterized by direct marketing venues, such as farmers' markets, farm-to-table initiatives, or food basket schemes, by direct connections with the restaurant sector, or by a re-connection between consumers and producers via, for instance, on-site farm visits.

However, the implementation of such quality schemes is a multi-level process that does not necessarily offer win-win solutions to all sides involved (Allen et al., 2003; Allen, 2004). For example, alternative marketing (i.e. direct, local) requires a strong education of consumers about food choices – who are advised to change purchasing habits and buy seasonal and often more expensive products (Hinrichs, 2000; Guthman, 2003; Hinrichs and Allen, 2008). Programs are usually designed around convincing consumers through awareness-raising campaigns and through new venues that can facilitate behavioral shift – i.e. offering new experiences around food provisioning. On other hand, the exclusivity of certain direct marketing channels, which are often only accessible to a certain spectrum of convinced consumers, makes it difficult for farmers to rely on and remain exclusively in such alternative markets (Jarosz, 2008; Gray, 2013).

Additionally, food justice scholars have pointed to the social

inequalities, exclusionary discourses, and the relations of power more broadly at work in these initiatives (Goodman, 2003; Slocum, 2007; Guthman, 2008; Alkon and Agyeman, 2011). They call for moving beyond an overly benign analysis of economic relations and processes embedded in direct marketing and other “alternative” food market venues (Sayer, 2001; Wilson, 2013), and show the need for different activism engagements rather than consumption in niche spaces (Alkon and Guthman, 2017). In those views, the social embeddedness assumed in the agricultural direct markets should be not idealized because marketness and instrumentalism are part of local food systems as well (Hinrichs, 2000; D. Goodman, 2003). Trust and civic engagement between producers and consumers can also abruptly dissolve. In this direction, others have suggested that urban and rural politics might play a role in the reproduction of inequalities (DuPuis and Goodman, 2005), while calling for the re-politicization of the local and the alternative, for a better understanding of the urban–rural politics and social relations uniting producers and consumers, and for an in-depth examination of alternative food networks as a politics of place (DuPuis and Goodman, 2005; Hinrichs, 2000).

In response, the objective of this paper is to examine how farmers navigate these externally-created QFSs, and how these strategies influence farmers' lived experiences and their perceptions of questions of rule and power in the agricultural cycle of production and consumption. We do so by analyzing experiences of farmers integrated into QFSs within a peri-urban agricultural area of Barcelona. Ultimately, we aim to understand the extent to which this particular form of governing food and farming are contributing to a more equitable and sustainable food systems. Our study contributes to broader debates on urban rural politics and on the politics of alternatives in the context of a transition towards agricultural sustainability.

The paper proceeds as follows. In section 2 we present some theoretical insights about agri-food policy and QFSs, and direct marketing. In section 3 we explain our methods. In section 4 we describe the case study area, and the programs promoted by the regional institutional government to support QFSs. In section 5 we present farmers' lived

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experiences when embedded in such schemes. In section 6 we reflect on the urban-rural politics of our case study, and discuss implications for a broader debate on governance and politics of the alternative food networks.

2. Agri-food policy, the quality turn and the politics of the direct marketing for a socio-economic agricultural transition

2.1. The rationales behind the creation of quality food and their implications

Over the last fifty years, the industrialization and globalization of agriculture has led to important environmental and social impacts, including rural exodus, disconnection with nature, soil contamination, and climate change (Lawrence et al., 2004; Magdoff et al., 2000; McMichael, 2017). More recently, the need to maintain a productivist-oriented form of agriculture while compensating for associated market failures has fostered a correspondingly more post-productivist agriculture focused on meeting both social and environmental objectives (Buller and Morris, 2004; Renting et al., 2003). The post-productivist agriculture turn attempts to shift both production processes and consumption choices (Renting et al., 2003) by developing tools such as labels and voluntary certifications, value-added marketing, cataloguing, and consumer awareness campaigns (see analysis of this strategies in, for example, Goodman, 2004; Guthman, 2007). Such tools “re-qualify” foods in relation to either their production processes or their region (with *distinctiveness*), in order to create new market benefits for the producers (and other agri-food chain actors) and address social and environmental externalities. Market benefits contribute to both a relatively more secure access to an increasingly competitive market and higher revenues for farmers through value added processes (Buller and Morris, 2004).

The quality food rhetoric built as a response to the plethora of environmental and social claims, including increasing public demands for higher food quality, has been accompanied by a more intense communication of quality in production through local and regional brand building (Renting et al., 2003; Goodman et al., 2014; Moragues-Faus and Sonnino, 2012). In this context, “quality food schemes” emerged as local/regional solutions to the decline of rural economies. They encompass both the production of specialty foods together with “institutional innovations, direct marketing, short food supply chains, local food systems, and the renewed legitimization of artisanal food practices and regional cuisine” (Goodman, 2003: 2). Thus, QFSs involve areas or regions in which such a strategy is deployed: where particular products or particular characteristics from food production are ascribed certain superiority that allows the producers to obtain premium prices or access exclusive markets. Quality food is also a strategy adopted by public institutions in order to sustain small scale and sustainable farming (i.e. the normalization of organic food).

The Alternative Food Networks literature (AFNs), which describes oppositional, more socially sustainable, or simply more ethical, spaces of food production and distribution (Goodman et al., 2014) has generally overlooked the fact that the qualifications or characteristics upon which difference, or alterity, is assigned are sometimes abstract or subjective (Sonnino and Marsden, 2006; Johnston, 2017). By focusing on highlighting and building difference, AFNs have generally excluded or erased the wide continuum between the two extremes in the agri-food spectrum. In QFSs, quality is what produces difference from the “other”. Somehow different from other qualifiers (local, organic, community-based, cooperative), “quality” is abstract and becomes an elastic term. Yet, it comes as quite handy to study production sites where the differentiation alternative VS mainstream is not clear-cut. As a framework, it has been often used to analyze orchestrated strategies for supporting sustainable farming and rural development. On the ground, with a more depoliticized discourse and more marketed-based approach than the one around AFNs, QFSs has been used as a strategy by public

institutions working with a broad spectrum of food producers (that might not be called alternative nor agri-food players). Here, critical consumers are encouraged to create and engage with quality-centered food, such as protected designation of origins schemes, in order to re-connect with the food they eat and those who produce it (Johnston et al., 2011; Cox et al., 2008; Hinrichs and Allen, 2008; Calvário and Kallis, 2016). However, its use entails the risk of creating a binary thinking - where some sort of food is qualified, and the rest is identified as poor quality or “bad” food – a difference that is not sustained by a proper analysis of how quality is built, under which criteria quality products and practices are identified and rated and for whom.

In such regions, products are embedded in a local ecology and sold using the trademark of this newly rebranded locale (or other conditions of production) (Murdoch et al., 2009; Guthman, 2007; Johnston and Szabo, 2011). Consumers within quality schemes value such trademarks or what these suggest as new esthetics, pleasures, tastes and others, and act influenced by them, rather than by purely economic rationale. In the literature on AFNs and sustainable food production, the concept of embeddedness is often used to explain how complex the interplay between the economic and the social rationales is, posing problems for the construction and stabilization of purely economic or fully commoditized relationships (Murdoch et al., 2009; Hinrichs, 2000). This embeddedness has changed the map of the food sector, in which more marginal regions are able to reinvent themselves – and compete in the new embedded markets (Murdoch et al., 2009). Quality thus becomes a path to autonomy and a way of survival.

However, attributing too much value to the local production processes – or to other “quality” characteristics – gives rise to niche markets (Murdoch et al., 2009) and possible forms of exclusivity. For instance, these sustainable forms of agriculture might remain relatively marginal vis à vis a globalized food sector. “Qualified” characteristics might also become mainstreamed by a large agricultural corporate sector which appropriates and rebrands them (Johnston et al., 2009). For this reason, it seems desirable for the values and premises on which embeddedness is constructed to be based on carefully considered social and/or environmental criteria and consumers should be well informed about these criteria. Several critics also denounce the problems associated with the strategy of localization as a form of food activism, which comes with a very diffused, uncritical and innocent idea of what “local” is and means (DuPuis and Goodman, 2005; Hinrichs, 2003; Harvey, 1996). Others have pointed out that the meaning of what constitutes “sustainable” food systems deserves consideration when linking rural producers with urban consumers (Selfa and Qazi, 2005; Moragues-Faus, 2016).

In a context of neoliberal governance (Wacquant, 2012; Pudup, 2008; Marsden and Franklin, 2013), the quality food rhetoric can be seen as the perpetuation of a form of governance that avoids direct intervention and legislation and devolves responsibility – but not power – downwards (to regional governments first, and to farmers and consumers in a latter step) (Higgins et al., 2008; Lawrence, 2004). This governance pushes for certifications and new rules, rather than good practices (Guthman, 2007). In turn, the creation of “quality food” as a strategy for driving socio-ecological changes is paradoxical, because it fetishizes the commodification of food, which is considered to have harmed small farming and rural livelihoods (Agyeman and McEntee, 2014). In this line, critical scholars have warned that farmers markets remain fundamentally rooted in commodity relations (Hinrichs, 2000) and in forms of exclusion and exclusivity (Alkon and McCullen, 2011). With the notions of embeddedness, networks and trust, a “softer treatment of capitalism” or eco-capitalism, might be legitimized (Sayer, 2001:700 in Goodman, 2003), without questioning fundamental hidden problems attached to market-based economic relations, such as marketness and instrumentalism (Hinrichs, 2000; Block, 1990).

2.2. The politics embedded in quality food

While direct agricultural markets, predicated upon face-to-face ties between producers and consumers, are often central components of more alternative, localized and qualified food systems (Hinrichs, 2000) scholars have rightfully cautioned against obscuring the social inequalities, exclusionary discourses, and relations of power more broadly at work in these activities (Goodman, 2003; Slocum, 2007; Guthman, 2008). They have also argued against inadvertently producing an overly benign view of economic relations and processes embedded in direct marketing and other “alternative” food market venues (Sayer, 2001; Wilson, 2013; Bowen and De Master, 2011), and for re-politicizing urban-rural food relations (DuPuis and Goodman, 2005). The social embeddedness assumed in direct food markets should not be idealized, because marketness and instrumentalism are also part of local food systems (Hinrichs, 2003, 2000). Furthermore, trust and civic engagement between producers and consumers are relations that can abruptly dissolve and leave producers vulnerable. Issues of power and privilege are also present in many direct distribution schemes, especially those of the more privileged and educated upper or middle class consumers over farmers and less advantaged consumers (Hinrichs, 2003; Alkon and McCullen, 2011).

Remarkably, most of the current food activism in the global North occurs at the consumption level and most of the food movements act at the urban level, as for example, the food councils, which are predominantly urban-centric (DuPuis and Goodman, 2005; Di Masso et al., 2014; Cretella, 2015). Following this direction, others have suggested that urban and rural politics might play a role in shaping alternative food systems and in (re)creating inequitable relationships between producers and consumers. The subjugation of the rural world by cities has been often framed as a planning issue related to land competition (the expansion of cities at the expense of farmland). Yet, to date, the politics between urban elites and urban hinterland food producers who participate in food localization projects have been largely ignored (DuPuis and Goodman, 2005:365) while these politics have been framed as an environmental injustice in different ambits (Kelly-Reif and Wing, 2016; Pellow, 2016). For instance, there has been little attention to the urban political interest around farmers' markets and how they might be, far from farmers' aspirations, an imposition to meet urban taste, after the so-called ‘greening’ of western society boosted the demand by (urban) citizens for environmental security and higher food quality (Brand, 2010).

While consumers play a predominant role in shaping food-related movements, farmers tend to remain in a secondary and silenced position. In this context, Lawrence seems particularly on point when stating that, while “rural people are expected to save the planet, their ability to do so is proscribed by their liminality” (Lawrence, 2004:14). For example, farmers have seen their role in land management diminished to a current subordinate position (Sempere, 2005). Rural citizens are often unable to become engaged, reflexive participants in new arrangements because of social disadvantages, such as social isolation, exclusion and deprivation (Lawrence, 2004; Zografos and Martínez-Alier, 2009). This point on marginality is also present in the literature on alternative food networks, which tends to focus on consumers participating in these networks (i.e. their aspirations, motivations or status) rather than on producers and the constraints they face (Moragues-Faus, 2016; Busa and Garder, 2015; Di Masso and Zografos, 2015). In addition, in the agro-food literature, categorizations of food systems as alternative and local are shaped importantly by consumers' perceptions of food quality (Selfa and Qazi, 2005), centered usually on the production phase of the food circuits (Goodman and DuPuis, 2002).

The protagonism of the consumer, and of the more privileged consumer in particular, has at least two implications at the social level: i. the control of agri-food decisions by a number of convinced consumers and ii. the resulting elitization of quality foods (Guthman, 2014; Alkon, 2008). First, market-based initiatives aimed at creating niche markets

for “distinctive” products provide consumers with the power to make “regulatory decisions about ecological and public health risk, working conditions and remuneration, and even what sort of producers of what commodities should be favored in the world market” (Guthman, 2007: 472). Thus, how niche producers become financially compensated depends on willing and convinced consumers paying a price premium for the ascribed commodity. Second, because the value added to sustainable food comes from consumers' pockets, this system excludes many people from accessing “quality” products and thus has implications in terms of social justice (Guthman, 2007; Allen et al., 2003; Alkon, 2008; Alkon and McCullen, 2011). That is why many direct agricultural markets focus on exclusive food items and exclusive urban customers (Selfa and Qazi, 2005; DeLind, 1993), and why farmers themselves are excluded from them (Jarosz, 2008).

In sum, a rich scholarship has developed on the underlying logics and implications of QFSs for questions of integration, equity and elitization. However, to date few studies have examined the way in which these instruments intersect *in practice* with farmers' aspirations and lived experiences. In this paper, we attempt to address this limitation by looking at the meanings and implications of these programs for farmers in a peri-urban agricultural area of Barcelona, where quality schemes are being promoted in order to sustain small farming. We offer here a broader understanding of the extent to which this particular form of governing food systems is contributing to a more socio-economically and genuinely sustainable food system.

3. Methods

This paper is built upon a qualitative study based primarily on direct observation and in-depth semi-structured interviews and informal interviews with farmers, consumers, and technicians from public institutions involved in the creation of QFSs in the metropolitan area of Barcelona. In 2016, we conducted 25 in-depth interviews with different actors involved in food production (fresh products such as vegetables and fruits) (n = 13), consumption (n = 3), and planning (n = 7), as well as independent organizations and trade unions (n = 2) in Barcelona province. We also reviewed the content, rules, and guidelines of existing schemes based on publicly available program documents and websites.

We first interviewed consumers, technicians, and members of local organizations (a trade union and a social movement promoting local food), and focused our questions broadly on their perception of the role of different institutions in creating and sustaining alternative food networks. Consumers were members or organizers of consumers groups in Barcelona. Technicians belong to different institutional levels (municipal, metropolitan and regional) and are working on different parts and aspects of the food production and distribution cycle. Some of them were managing programs supporting small farmers directly. Others were managing economic aspects in their respective areas. After a first round of interviews with them, in which many of their responses were centered on quality food and value-added strategies, we interviewed farmers to better understand their integration and experiences in these new food milieus. Our focus was on one of the agricultural regions next to Barcelona – the Baix Llobregat and Garraf districts – where the quality food strategy has been broadly deployed in the last decade. Among other crop types in the region, we have focused our study on vegetable farmers. These farmers might have a relatively small amount of fruit trees too, but they still consider themselves vegetable farmers. Vegetables are the most common crop type in these districts.

To select interviewees, we contacted farmers listed in the databases of the programs El Camp a Casa (today Producte Fresc), Parc a Taula, Xarxa Productes de la Terra, and Benvinguts a Pagès (which is part of Som Gastronomia). In particular, we contacted producers who, in the catalogues, were attached to one or few labels. Labels used in the catalogues identify direct marketing, organic or integrated production, fresh product (which is used to differentiate products from BLAP), or

unique products (typical products from specific regions), among others. This decision was meant to ensure the relatively strong implication of the farmers in the QFSs. From an initial list of 42 farmers who were contacted, 13 replied. We did not notice any pattern associated with their willingness to participate. Interviewees' ages range from the early 30s to the early 60s (average of 50 years old). Most of the farmers have been farming since their early adulthood. Ten of them come from families who farmed in the same area. Our respondents are selling their crops through different channels (to the wholesale market for Barcelona, or a municipal market's stall) and have been introduced to these markets/programs in the past 4–7 years. Only two young interviewees started their business selling through “alternative” markets.

Interviews were scheduled, generally at their farms or in nearby places. The farmers can be considered to be embedded in QFSs in different degrees (influenced primarily by their size): Larger plots generally means more need to diversify channels. Although not all of the farmers can be considered to be selling in direct marketing venues (at least not a large portion of their harvests), all of them were at some point interested in doing so. Some of them succeeded and some others did not or have not yet. Farmers were both organic (6) and non-organic (7). From the latter, three of them are practicing “integrated agriculture,” that is a non-organic agriculture that aims to have low environmental impact. Technicians from the Department of Agriculture of the Government of Catalonia support farmers in the management of pests and weeds. Interviewees cultivate farms between 1 ha and 40 ha. Interview questions directed at farmers focused mostly on the farmers' production and distributions systems, their aspirations, their challenges, their trajectories, their perception about the role of public institutions and about QFSs programs in particular. Informants' names are anonymized through the document, and they are referred to with the initial letters of their names or projects.

In order to conduct data analysis, we fully transcribed our interviews and coded them in NVivo. After an initial data coding using grounded theory techniques (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2000), we identified key recurrent concepts (such as profession shift, imposed rules, fear of roads, mixed commercialization), and then developed a more refined coding book for the in-depth analysis of farmers' perceptions and experiences with the quality food programs. Upon the completion of this qualitative coding work, we wrote analytical memos around our main key research questions, which were used as the base for developing the results section. For the purpose of this paper, most of our data analysis is based on our interviews with farmers, although we also integrate some of our interview data with municipal technicians and policy documents to present the broader policy context of local quality food strategies.

4. Case study description: the strategy of developing QFSs in the Baix Llobregat and Garraf

The Baix Llobregat and Garraf are two adjacent districts within the Barcelona province, located southeast of Barcelona city. Together, they extend over 670 km². Their proximity to the city of Barcelona, on the one hand, and the importance of their respective agricultural sectors, on the other hand, situate Baix Llobregat and Garraf at the intersection of urban and rural settings. Technicians working in these areas refer to the farming occurring there as “peri-urban” or “metropolitan agriculture”. They can be considered hybrid areas where urban dynamics meet rural landscapes and economies. This area has been extensively studied as a place of expanding urban sprawl in planning studies or quantitative-based studies in applied geography (Paül and Tonts, 2005; Paül and McKenzie, 2013; Pirro and Anguelovski, 2017; Serra et al., 2017).

The Baix Llobregat has a fertile area where the Llobregat River discharges to the sea. Vegetables and fruit production are dominant land uses. Artichoke is the most important vegetable crop. Garraf, a more mountainous area, is also a historical agricultural district, rich in vegetables and orchards (cherry trees) and vineyards. Together with the

Maresme, bordering with the city in the northwest, the Garraf and Baix Llobregat are the main agricultural areas surrounding Barcelona. In 1998, in order to protect farm land from an expanding urbanization, a combination of public, private, and nonprofit organizations created the Parc Agrari del Baix Llobregat (BLAP), as the outcome of a long dialogue between different public administrations and farmers. The agreement secured 3000 ha of farmland in Barcelona's fringes. The park includes more than 620 farms, and is considered, from a planning perspective, as a paradigmatic case of farmland conservation near a metropolis (Paül and McKenzie, 2013; Paül, 2015). However, the relationships between farmers (represented by the major trade union, Unió de Pagesos) with the public administration, and especially the different public institutions that are part of the BLAP, have not been always easy (Sempere, 2005; Paül and McKenzie, 2013; Pirro and Anguelovski, 2017) and the continuity of family farming in the area has not been secured (which invites to question the agrarian significance of the BLAP beyond reversible land protection).

These two districts' agricultural sectors have experienced a strong transition since the 60s, with overlapping changing socio-economic and environmental dynamics (many of those dynamics are explained from the farmers' perspective on Sempere, 2005). Farming has been severely impacted by the increase of exports in Spain and by the consolidation of the larger Barcelona wholesale market and distribution center, Mercabarna, in the 80s. Mercabarna is a private-public enterprise, owned partially by the Barcelona municipality (51%). Originally a logistics center for farmers and sellers at the Barcelona municipal markets, Mercabarna is now a large international distribution center where national farmers, international export companies, retailers, and distributors buy and sell products under a bidding system. In recent years, the power of retailers has increased and, in turn, affected farmers' income to large extent. Paradoxically (but not by accident), Mercabarna is also located in Baix Llobregat. This proximity has greatly imprinted the local farming sector, with particular dynamics (i.e. the relative ease to sell there) and with farmers' perceptions of the spatial and economic competition created by contradictory policies. The proximity to this market is perceived by farmers as an economic opportunity but also as a contributing factor in the decrease of cooperative practices (Sempere, 2005).

In the Baix Llobregat and Garraf, different institutional programs supporting “quality” local agriculture overlap. They are promoted by the Barcelona Regional Government (Xarxa Productes de la Terra, Parc A Taula, Del Camp a Casa), the Catalan Government (Gastroteca), or both (Benvinguts a Pagès). This strategy has been deployed in the study area for at least 15 years (See Table 1 below for a summary of the objectives and strategies deployed by the five programs in the study area to support QFSs through direct marketing venues). The objectives of the programs are all similar: locale valorization and value creation, improved commercialization, direct connection between consumers and producers, or the reconnection of urban consumers with their hinterland. In the particular districts of study, these programs have translated into a number of actions: the organization of at least 8 farmers markets in different municipalities in both districts; the creation of a brand/label “Producte Fresc” to identify products from the park sold without intermediaries; the publication of two printed catalogues and two online catalogues presenting the participating food producers, distributors and restaurants; two web applications for finding local farmers; the organization of meetings to connect farmers with possible customers (restaurants and/or distributors); the planning of courses to improve the capacities needed to sell in quality schemes; and the organization of programs to visit the farms and a bike tour in the BLAP.

Farmers are not involved in the early stages of program implementation, and they are usually only contacted by the administration staff members to ask whether they would like to “be part” of a specific program. The programs are linked not only to food production, but also to gastronomy and catering: Many programs also promote

Table 1
Quality food schemes in Baix Llobregat and Garraf.

Program (starting year)	Leading public body	Main objectives	Mechanisms to support QFSs
El camp a Casa/Producte Fresc (2002)	Barcelona Provincial council, with the support of Catalonia Government and municipalities within the BLAP	Support to the farmers at the agrarian park situated in Barcelona fringes (BLAP) by facilitating the commercialization of their products via value added strategies and direct marketing venues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Labeling ● Value added marketing ● Gastro-tourism ● On-farm visits and bike tours ● Organization of farmers markets ● Link to catering and gastronomy fairs
Gastroteca (2007)	Catalonia Government	Regional economic development through the valorization of Catalan products and the promotion of direct marketing strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Labeling ● Catalogue and app with food producers' contacts ● Supporting the marketing of regional products ● Gastro-tourism
Parc a Taula (2010)	Barcelona Provincial council	Economic development at the natural parks in Barcelona province, linked to tourism development and gastronomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Catalogue and app with food producers' contacts ● Supporting the marketing of regional products ● Promotion of quality foods in social media ● Gastro-tourism
Xarxa Productes de la terra (2010)	Barcelona Provincial council	Economic development of the rural areas in the Barcelona province. Support to small producers for commercializing their products through product valorization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Labeling ● Catalogue with food producers' contacts ● Organization and support of farmers markets and food fairs ● Gastro-tourism ● Training and advisory meetings ● Promotion of quality foods in social media
Benvinguts a Pagès (part of Som Gastronomia) (2016)	Barcelona Provincial council and Catalonia Government	Development of Catalan gastronomy sector and gastro-tourism, products valorization, linked with tourism development and the invocation of Catalan cultural heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● On-site visits to farms ● Gastro-tourism ● Organization of food fairs and gastro-events ● Economic promotion of Catalan products and cuisine ● Promotion of quality foods in social media

restaurants, hotels or food fairs (for example Xarxa de Productes de la Terra, Gastroteca or Som Gastronomia) where distinctive products can be tasted or bought. These restaurants are located either next to the agricultural areas or in the city itself (the target being always urban consumers). The beneficiaries of the programs cover a wide range of actors: from small vegetable producers, wine makers, and food processors. Participation in the programs does not involve any mandatory activity, and consists in being presented in catalogues, receiving courses, or being advertised in special events. In the case of Benvinguts a Pagès, the program requires farmers to host a visit to their farms. Gastro-tourism or agro-tourism is a frequent strategy to encourage weekend trips to Catalan rural areas and enjoy traditional gastronomy (Paül and Araújo, 2012). The use of labels that “tell stories” (Guthman, 2007) is also common. We counted more than 12 different labels signaled in the programs' documents.

5. New rules for survival: how quality food schemes intersect with farmers' aspirations

In this section we analyze QFSs' meaning and implications through farmers' lived experiences. Due to space limitations, we only use quotes selectively to illustrate our findings. Our data reveals that farmers experience difficulties and contradictions when embedded in these schemes and in the programs aimed at supporting local small-scale producers through direct selling. We argue that, while QFSs might seem like an innovative solution in the short term in order to better connect farmers to new customers and identify new market opportunities/

venues, they do not represent a long term solution for truly sustainable agriculture because i. they bring new organizational and managerial challenges to farmers and leave important structural problems unresolved ii. they involve new imposed schemes and rules on farmers with further implications related to how farmers perceive and adopt these programs.

We do not aim to deny the positive outcomes that QFSs bring to small-scale farming that have been described elsewhere (as in Verhaegen and Van Huylenbroeck, 2001). Our interviews related that QFSs create new opportunities for securing farming livelihoods. They allow farmers to increase their income by opening new markets and avoiding abusive intermediaries (or simply designed for larger scale production), such as those often working in Mercabarna. They might serve as “tools” for surviving in the “war” or “marathon” (as often described) against corporatized large scaled agriculture. The farmers we interviewed value positively the awareness-raising campaigns aimed at educating consumers. As consumers increasingly become aware of the importance of buying low-impact products, the market for environmentally and socially sustainable food increases. QFSs have also created a system of trust that was often missing in the food sector, by supporting closer relations between producers and consumers. Furthermore, farmers repeatedly state that they enjoy a direct contact with consumers because it allows them to know their preferences and gather suggestions. They also appreciate feeling esteemed as individuals (Sage, 2003), as when clients appreciate their products. They also acknowledge that farming and the image of the farmers have positively changed in the last 10 or 15 years: the quality strategy has helped to raise the

value of agriculture (at least a certain type) in the mind of consumers. This revalorization has spurred some young people to start farming projects, who are able to sustain them partly thanks to these more embedded structures. All these factors encourage farmers to enter quality food projects. These observations do not contradict, but complement, the results summarized below.

5.1. The rise of farmers' entrepreneurship and the lack of attention to unresolved socio-economic and structural agrarian challenges

Although quality schemes might have helped to economically sustain small-scale farming projects, farmers' working conditions do not seem to have improved. Most of the farmers interviewed work 7 days a week (a few 6) with working days lasting 12–14 h. Working days have increased since the setup of farmers' markets on weekends. In direct marketing venues, weekends became important days for sales, in contrast with more traditional distribution outlets such as shops or intermediaries, or more alternative ones, such as food cooperatives. The distribution of many small-volume orders is frequent among people selling in farmers' markets and delivering baskets. In this new time-distribution arrangement, farmers signal transportation as a clear inefficiency and externality in food baskets and farm-to-table schemes. Due to such a grueling working routine, interviewees show tiredness and stress. They share stories of family breaks and of physical fatigue. While their farming occupation is based on hard dedication and commitment ("we love what we do, otherwise this makes no sense"), many recognize that they have difficulty making ends meet every month. As alternative channels are not big enough to provide reliable sources of income (due to fluctuant and small orders), many farmers are not able to fully rely on direct marketing sales and are forced to use intermediaries and traditional sale channels to piece different sources of revenues together (11 out of 12 of the interviewees sell to Mercabarna at least occasionally, most of them regularly). In their experience, these mixed commercialization channels mean double work and redundancy in terms of planning, organization, and delivery.

Furthermore, QFSs generally imply an often-imposed professional change from farmers to entrepreneurs. Farmers embedded in QFSs must dedicate relatively more time to distribution, selling, shipping, and marketing. This change is generally seen as undesirable and risky ("the farmer should be a farmer," as several interviewees noted). Dedicating oneself to these multiple responsibilities entails the risk of leaving agricultural fields more unattended. The development of new capacities might also not be within the reach of all farmers, including in regard to advertising or marketing expertise. Such new responsibilities are particularly problematic as we are referring to small farmers with few employees, who end up having to fulfill too many different roles, as they highlight in interviews. This multitasking also brings new risks to the farms. In fact, two of the interviewed farmers attribute new financial problems to a poor commercial management of their farms, but not to low yields or production problems. Due to the relatively high importance of product marketing in QFSs, being able to dedicate ample attention to marketing all the products becomes an increasingly important task:

"I think that the first thing one should do is to ensure that you can sell the product. Before planting, one should have the product sold and make the numbers, [to know] if with the price you get you can make them work. You can cultivate the best artichokes, have the best cherries in the market, but if you sell them below cost price, does that do some good? If you don't have the sale guaranteed, there is no need for planting anything, I think. I think is a bit as in other businesses, a shoe maker, I don't know if he starts making shoes just because." J.P. (2016)

The importance of marketing often seems to force other family members to engage in marketing tasks, leading to a renaissance of the former agrarian model in which the whole family worked on the farm.

The new division of labor is represented in the ongoing tension between the production and the marketing sides, as many of interviewees explain. In the case of F. (female) and S. (male), a couple in their early sixties, the shift to direct marketing obliged F. to step in the business about five years ago. She is now in charge of the direct marketing of products six days a week at a stall in the basement of their house and in a farmers market on Saturday. While F. aims for greater product diversity and for offering new products every season, S. acknowledges the difficulties that this new direction brings to managing the farm.

In fact, this need for hyper-diversity in farm production and commercialization represents a major challenge for farmers, as vegetable and fruit crop planning and management becomes more complex. Consumers in quality schemes look for a wide diversity of products, obliging farmers to sell many different types of products, and many varieties of those, each season. Although challenging, most of the farmers accept the need for hyper-diversity. Some farmers relate hyper-diversity as an indicator of quality and they engage in hyper diverse farming in order to differentiate themselves from an agri-food industry often characterized by mass-produced monocrops and a low varieties' diversity. This need for hyper-diversity also pushes farmers to commercialize products from other farms. Even though this new practice allows farmers to bring in new products for their customers, it also pushes for different business models and (re)creates intermediaries in the system. We recognize tensions around this practice, as well as different opinions on its validity among farmers and policy makers.

Another challenge associated with QFSs is linked to the burden caused by bureaucratic constraints. The labels helping to differentiate farm products as quality products have created a lot of paperwork and processes of control and monitoring for farmers. Although the labelling is directed to consumers, it means extra work for producers. As a result, this additional burden reinforces the "vicious circle of bureaucratic monitoring and distrust" (Eshuis and Van Woerkum, 2003:393; cited in Lawrence, 2004) and recreates "audit cultures" that help to sustain a neoliberal governance of agri-food (Campbell et al., 2006 cited in Higgins et al., 2008). For example, the regional organic certification (CCPAE) requires an exhaustive control and traceability, which comes at a high cost for farmers. While these controls seem appropriate for large scale farmers, they create new burdens for family farms of 4 or 5 employees which struggle to find time for administrative tasks. In addition, this process does not take into consideration the difficulty faced by farmers who produce many different products and have to conduct the traceability of all the products and parcels. As a farmer suggests, these controls incentivize the "big organic" instead of the "small organic" (Guthman, 2014; Pollan, 2001). Farmers embedded in different certification schemes claim that many farmers outside the QFSs are not controlled or inspected, and call for a more equal regulation system that would control everyone, "not only those behaving well."

Although farmers perceive QFSs as an opportunity for reaching new markets and sales, they also regret their inability to help address core agrarian issues related to land, water, training, and labor. Many farmers long for more growth opportunity, greater mechanization, innovation, of improved productivity. Some farmers enjoy "watching videos about US big fields and the machinery they use" and see those cases as examples of progress and efficiency. Yet, it seems that they are constrained, directed, or resigned to a farming structure and priority that they have not chosen, that is, to remain small and becoming a seller – rather than a farmer. They enjoy visiting other farms, learning new techniques, and they call for more technical training and support. Many of them particularly value technical support related to pest and weed control. Many claim that this is the type of support they need from public institutions, and they often complain that they have to pay for this service. Even if it is subsidized by the regional government, farmers have to pay a monthly fee, which limits the number of those who can access them.

Despite being embedded in quality programs and being able to sell the products at a fair price (one that covers costs), farmers share

feelings of vulnerability and uncertainty. Most of the farmers related experiences of crop loss due to weather, animals, machinery theft, and the expropriation of land for large infrastructure construction such as roads or railways. They claim that their cost of production is always uncertain, and so is the profitability of each crop. In that sense, QFSs are not able to solve many farmers' structural problems and challenges. All interviewees shared indeed their deep pessimism towards the future of agriculture. One of the most cited examples of this negative outlook is linked to a generational shift, which is seen as unresolved. Farmers work with the idea that there is no future and that "agriculture does not yield." In the case of the oldest farmers, there is no one to take over their business, which conditions their decisions about future investments and upgrading plans.

Indeed, most of the farmers who have switched to value-added marketing share long stories of farming tradition and have increasingly found it difficult to make a sustainable and reasonable living. They evoke the past with nostalgia, remembering the times when direct marketing was common and unregulated, and entire families could make a living by cultivating a few hectares of land. While family traditions of farming offer the benefit of inherited knowledge and, in most cases, an easier access to land, this inheritance also causes pressure and unease when farmers think they are doing worse than their forefathers. This is how P.G. expresses it:

"I feel sorry that I inherited a profession ... the land and the stalls that were from my family a long time ago, and I feel guilty that I had to close down, partly because of my [knee] illness, but also because business was consistently shrinking, every day I had more difficulties to make a living, and more recently I just couldn't keep up. I feel that I wasn't able to make a living doing what I love, what I have always done, and that is what hurts me the most. But that's life ..."
P.G. (2016)

Beyond the unresolved structural challenges within QFSs, these strategies also impose rules and constraints for farmers, creating additional layers of inequities and privilege at the center of urban/rural politics. These are explained in the following sub-section.

5.2. Urban/rural politics or the inequities, privilege, and imposed rules in QFSs

The first of these new rules imposed upon farmers is the one dictated by consumers' power and taste preferences. When farmers shift their marketing strategy towards direct marketing, they have to accept consumer preferences in a more direct way than when selling to distributors. Niche markets for "distinctive" products provide consumers with the power to shape regulations related to ecological and public health risks, labor conditions, and even to influence the development of products in global markets (Guthman, 2007: 472). As a result, farmers are faced with having to please, convince, or as some say, "pamper" consumers. Farmers respond to these new requirements as they can, by attending courses, innovating, improving product and stall aesthetics, producing greater varieties, and sharing cooking tips and recipes, among other things.

In addition, the direct relations with consumers, as required by QFSs, result in exhausting practices and cause internal tensions for farmers. We heard angry critiques of consumers as ignorant, hard to convince, demanding, and capricious. Many perceive that the work of the food producer is not valued, as illustrated by the frequent statement "Consumers should try working in the field to know what it is like." Although an important part of the institutional programs promoting QFSs is dedicated to consumer awareness, a common critique to public programs is that they have not properly educated urban consumers. These critiques refer mainly to the fact that consumers do often ask for non-seasonal products, are picky with sizes and aesthetics, and demand lower prices.

Furthermore, because the value added to "quality food" comes from

consumers' budgets, QFSs strategies have not only (re)created privilege and inequity between consumers and producers but also among consumers themselves. The higher price of low-impact or organic food tends to exclude many consumers from accessing "quality" products, which has implications in terms of social and food justice (Guthman, 2007; Allen et al., 2003; Anguelovski, 2015). This also leads to a paradoxical situation in which the farmers are excluded themselves from these quality products (Jarosz, 2008) which is very much the case here. Many interviewees recognize indeed that they buy their own food for personal consumption at local supermarkets because this practice is cheaper than buying food through local and/or organic networks. Farmers have thus to accept the exclusivity of their clients, often with much resentment towards the higher cultural and economic status of their urban clients. As many explain, most of their clients are "ironically" (as it has been described) highly educated people with some environmental or health consciousness, or ill people (specifically those who can afford organic products from QFSs). Although they tend to reject this exclusivity and regret it, they assume that the market will expand over time. In contrast, some other farmers prioritize selling "exclusive" products and target very specific markets, such as high-end restaurants. They naturally accept that their clients belong to a certain cultural and economic status, and do not acknowledge that some groups are excluded from the accessing of quality foods. They describe their customers as "courteous people" buying at neighborhood farmers' markets, and incoherently accuse those buying in supermarkets or not valuing alternative markets as "uneducated."

In that sense, the relationship between producers and consumers can be interpreted as a form of urban-rural politics, in which privileged habits and tastes enhance power dynamics of ones (urban dwellers) over others (rural producers), even though those power relations are not directly acknowledged by all. This power relationship is exacerbated by the fact that the programs promoting QFSs are generally designed and implemented by technicians working in public institutions without any input from farmers. There is also a difficult overlap between different institutions and institutional levels. The strategies to support farmers are discussed at offices in the city, and farmers are only asked to be part of them after they are designed, if at all, and with little information about the QFSs features. This form of governing generates distrust and a lack of engagement with the created QFSs and the technicians who sponsor them, whose roles and capacities are often questioned. Many farmers resent being excluded from agricultural policy-making, being evaluated, and being prosecuted. As it is expressed by A.F.:

"The solution to the problem [of sustaining small-scale farming] is very difficult. Well, not so difficult: It requires that those in the public administrations, in the [Catalan] agriculture department, in the provincial council, etc. know the real difficulties. If you want to know something, or to learn something, or if you are an agrarian technician sitting in an office and you have never seen a farm ... Once, during an [organic] inspection (...) we had leeks planted and the technician said, "Your scallions are really big scallions!" and I said "Those are leeks." It's pretty unbelievable. And then you have to contribute 9% of your production for paying those people [the technicians] ..."
A.F. (2016)

Additionally, QFSs involve the imposition of new norms upon farmers, often for the benefit of urban consumers who can get a "taste" of the rural. A common activity promoted by QFSs programs is agrotourism through visits to farms or bike tours ending up in a local restaurant serving local food. The rationale for these activities is to "help farmers to connect directly with metropolitan consumers" (Paül and Araújo, 2012, pg. 1). However, most of the farmers interviewed consider these tours as an additional layer of work, and complain about sharing roads "full of bikes" and "being the gardeners of urban dwellers who come here to have fun". Feelings of hostility were often present towards the visitors/consumers as well as the institutions who promote

these activities. This strategy also seems to suggest that farming projects require extra activities to be viable. Farmers are increasingly required to engage in something else than farming to attract urban consumers, increase their income, and make their business economically viable, even though it requires some organizational restructuring. As some say, “it might be the only way to compete.”

Another common complaint about the way farming is managed by public institutions is related to a conflict with environmentalists. This conflict originates in local environmental organizations fighting for the protection of birds, wild boars, rabbits and other animals that destroy crops. Farmers are resentful of the fact that environmentalists claim to protect these animals at the detriment of their impact on farmers. They also perceive that environmentalists' priorities are backed by policy makers over producers' need of protection. In this quote, J.E. highlights the difference in the management of fauna between the airport (a fair representation of modernity) and the agrarian areas (which are adjacent):

“Regulations are not made by agrarian engineers, they are made by biologists and naturalists. Why do I have to support all the pressure from all those birds? There are no birds in the airport, but all my lettuces get eaten, strange! It is not just a coincidence. There are no trap areas in the airport, all the trap areas are in agricultural areas.” J.E.

More generally, all forms of new transport infrastructure (i.e. high speed train, highways) – often designed for urban residents and by urban decision-makers are seen as an enemy. Their impacts are twofold: They force the expropriation of land and they facilitate imports of food products. Interviewees often point at the 2012 regional government plan to build a large casino area inside the agrarian park, the Eurovegas project (Pirro and Anguelovski, 2017; Fundació Agrotèrritori 2012; Alió et al., 2017), which caused massive protests in the region. Although the casino plan was stopped, several shopping malls were built in former agrarian land at the outskirts of the park and many lots are left vacant in hope of new real estate developments (Pirro and Anguelovski, 2017). This siege has exacerbated farmers' impressions of being prosecuted. Today, many of them perceive themselves as being the smallest and the last wheel in their sectors, “those who kick the bucket”, “those who no one takes care of,” or those whose jobs have historically been perceived as degrading. In their views, they also have to employ immigrant labor “because no Spanish person wants to do this hard work”. M.G. explains how he deals with problems at the farmers' trade union.

“Some people just live for screwing us over, people enjoy it, we farmers are guilty of everything, of pollution, of nitrates. We are guilty of everything and we are wasting our time writing statements answering to those charges, trying to explain. There is a lack of knowledge, you need to be defending yourself from these issues constantly (...) This is a big problem, society does not accept farmers.” M.G. (2016)

In sum, beyond consumers, technicians, restaurants, policy-makers, and or environmentalists, farmers show an overall resentment towards the “urban” and what it represents in terms of the rules, privilege, and inequities that they are faced with in the context of new QFSs.

6. Discussion and final remarks

“We keep doing and we don't complain” M.G. (2016)

In previous studies of agricultural development in the Baix Llobregat and Garraf districts, researchers examined the impact of urbanization and sprawl on farmland, and the role of urban planning decisions in such equation (Paül and Tonts, 2005; Sempere, 2005; Montasell and Callau i Berenguer, 2008; Paül and McKenzie, 2011; Serra et al., 2017; Callau i Berenguer and Montasell, 2017). From a

planning perspective, the creation of the BLAP agrarian park and the QFSs have promoted an “exceptional urban-rural partnership, guaranteeing farming protection and (...) a departure from the usual arrangements” (Paül and McKenzie, 2013: 101). Other authors highlight the possibility of these mechanisms for advancing food self-provisioning in the region (Callau i Berenguer and Montasell, 2017). However, we argue that these perspectives are somehow optimistic, as we highlight other structural and local dynamics at play in the loss of agricultural land and in the constraints perceived by farmers that have remained unexplored by former studies: the loss of rural livelihoods and prosperity. The agrarian policies and programs at different administrative scales (from the European Common Agricultural Policy to the regional or municipal level) is what makes (certain types of) agriculture more or less profitable and what determines farmers' ability to keep farming and how. Those programs affecting agrarian systems include quality schemes.

Although a rather large scholarship exists on the underlying rationale, logics and implications of QFSs, the way these instruments intersect in *practice* with farmers' aspirations and lived experiences remain unexplored. In this paper, we have attempted to address this gap by looking at the meanings and implications of these programs for farmers in a peri-urban agricultural area of Barcelona, where quality schemes are being promoted to sustain small-scale farming. While QFSs programs often use a discourse of urban and rural reconnection, we find that top-down, unbalanced, and inequitable urban-rural politics are often embedded in these newly created quality schemes. These politics play an important role in defining how and why these schemes are designed – and for whose benefit. Our data analysis also reveals the unresolved challenges faced by farmers embedded in QFSs. As a result, we argue that, in this case, despite the new opportunities for marketing and commercialization that these programs have brought, QFSs do not represent a long-term solution for sustainable agriculture because i) QFSs create new organizational and managerial barriers to farmers and leave important challenges unresolved ii) QFSs involve imposed schemes and rules on farmers and favor power and privilege dynamics between urban and rural sites. We acknowledge that some of the challenges identified in this paper are not unique to the implementation of QFSs. QFSs are made of different components and initiatives (direct selling, retailer marketing, labels, etc.) which have bring different advantages and problems. What we argue here is that there is an intensification of these challenges due to the addition of different duties and the overlap of quality initiatives.

While QFSs programs in theory aim to protect a sustainable form of farming by “qualifying” it and by creating new venues for direct marketing strategies, they do so without considering farmers' aspirations and capacities, nor the structural context in which these exchanges take place. The quality strategy seems imposed, and the created quality foods artificial. These schemes seem more directed at and linked to consumers' will, taste, and aesthetics than to a concern for improving farmers' socio-economic conditions. The tensions with urban dwellers (consumers, technicians, or environmentalists) reveal an overall perception that the rural – the farming – is abandoned, devalued and/or prosecuted (in line with those found in Sempere, 2005 at the same area). Such an argument supports previous research suggesting that current forms of food sustainability governance are following neoliberal city logics and producing a hierarchy of places and people (Pirro and Anguelovski, 2017; Argüelles et al., 2017; Domene and Saurí, 2007; Wacquant, 2012) and privileging certain narratives or discourses at the detriment of small farmers' needs and aspirations (Bourke and Meppem, 2000; Rutherford, 2007). Despite efforts in improving commercialization channels, many challenges faced by food producers remain unresolved. Moreover, farmers acknowledge contradictory policies and (un)regulations that reinforce the polarization of agriculture. QFSs programs result often incoherent and unclear (since communication strategies often target consumers and not producers) or insufficient to farmers that have to deal with and major agrarian problems in a context

where economies of scale are still central.

As a result, farmers show a partial distrust towards the implementation of programs promoting quality spaces and question the willingness and capacity of public institutions to solve their problems. Many of them seem resigned or uninterested in the creation of these schemes, which are often defined as “patches”. Their deployment and the overall skepticism of farmers bring important governance challenges to the shift in the agricultural paradigm. Scholars have pointed at the relation between neoliberal forms of governance as a source of governmentality for farmers (Lockie and Higgins, 2007; Murdoch and Ward, 1997). There is a risk in resignation, and of not avoiding the disciplining effects of these forms of governing at-a-distance. The politics of no-alternative linked to neoliberalism (McCarthy, 2006; Peck et al., 2009) play a role in the deployment of QFSs. The fact that neoliberalism has endorsed and fostered the (self)regulation of individuals translates into an acceptance of programs, techniques and procedures that support market rule, productivism, and global competition (Lawrence, 2004). “Hoping to survive (...) farmers obey market signals and adopt the behavior required to ensure their futures in farming” (Lawrence, 2004:4). The acceptance means either enrolling in the productivist high-tech farming systems (to which Lawrence refers to), or in the alternative or sustainable one (which we discuss). Embedded in QFSs, farmers assume the responsibility of surviving and accept the “quality” rhetoric, not without doubts but with little options to move out, and with little hope for direct intervention and legal changes in favor of small-scale farming. Our data shows that it might be problematic to accept these schemes as the only solution towards an agricultural shift, and to not claim for changing the conditions in which these niches are created.

There are thus broader political implications emerging from the positioning of certain practices and logics as an alternative to the agri-food socio-political crisis. Our results calls for a more nuanced perspective of agri-food systems, one that avoids dualisms and reflects upon the criteria on which alterity, or quality, are constructed (Maye et al., 2007; Fuller et al., 2010). There is a tendency of so-called alternative practices, a chiefly urban phenomena, to promote high-quality natural food to create and sustain niche markets and to support the direct marketing venues (Goodman, 2003; Sonnino and Marsden, 2006; Begueria Muñoz, 2016). Quality, as well as alternative, “does not give any clear sense of intentions, perspectives or desires of those involved” (Wilson, 2013:4). Up to date, both designations find most of their signifiants at the urban level. What they evoke often times in the urban imaginary is simplicity, authenticity, natural and socially sustainable foodstuffs associated with rurality or neo-rurality archetypes (DuPuis and Goodman, 2005; Goodman and DuPuis, 2002; Blecha and Leitner, 2014; Goodman, 2004; Goodman and Goodman, 2001) while invisibilizing or overlooking the changes in agricultural practices, behavior, mindsets, and identities for the farmers themselves. We argue that a better understanding of the aspirations and lived-experiences of those involved in so-called alternative spaces help to unfold the power dynamics that might undermine the reasons and objectives that originally motivated the creation of such networks.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data related to this article can be found at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2018.06.005>.

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