

# **GOING LOCAL: WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR FOOD PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION?**

An analysis of the ethical issues in local food systems based on principles and interest groups

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## **ABSTRACT**

Food transition is a hot topic, different actors are working towards a food system that is healthier, sustainable and fair. Local food production and consumption is gaining more and more support as a solution for current problems in our food system. The purpose of this study is to determine the ethical issues that are at stake when talking about local food systems and how they can contribute to a food system that is healthy, sustainable and fair. These ethical issues are based on research of different principles (well-being, autonomy and justice) for different interest groups (consumers, producers, animals and nature). I will argue that local food transition comes with a wide variety of ethical issues of which more analysis is needed in order to determine whether and how we should transition to local food systems.

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# INTRODUCTION

## **Developments in food trends**

After the second world war, food politics focused on one mission: “no more hunger” (“nooit meer honger”). To achieve this goal, Sicco Mansholt, then minister of agriculture in the Netherlands, initiated a reform of European agriculture in such a way that there would be enough food for everyone. The agricultural production was increased, and reserve prices were set for the most important products (wheat and milk), all part of the modernisation of the agrarian sector. This new food system with a focus on quantity has, however its negative consequences. In the 70s and 80s, farmers were producing enormous surpluses, leading to decreasing prices and poverty for a lot of farmers. Later on, at the end of the twentieth century, policies focused more on the safety of food<sup>1</sup>. In 2014 the WRR stated that food policies have shifted from a focus on food security via food safety, towards policies that focus more on food quality, for example public health, animal welfare, the environment and landscape management<sup>2</sup>.

## **Food transition**

With regard to this focus on food quality I see a developing trend towards the need for changes in the food system. There are a few problems that are often mentioned when people talk about this need for change. Issues arise around the welfare of animals, too many animals in too small cages. Issues for the environment, leading to a food system that will not be viable in the future because of the unsustainable use of resources and the rising GHG-emissions. Issues for people’s health; obesity is becoming one of the biggest problems for our health, mainly caused by unhealthy diets. These issues find their way in society in various ways; consumers, producers and policies are ever more looking for change.

First, consumers are concerned about these adverse side effects of the food system, giving rise to the so-called consumer concerns. These concerns include aspects like wanting to know where your food comes from, eating meat from animals that have lived a good life, eating healthy and consuming with a minimum impact on the environment and global warming. Second, producers are also ever more conscious of these questions. A lot of companies try to

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<sup>1</sup> WRR, ‘Naar Een Voedselbeleid’.

<sup>2</sup> WRR.

produce with a minimum impact on the environment, they try to provide healthier food, and they produce with more respect for animal welfare. They do no longer only report on their revenues but also report on these issues in reports on their corporate social responsibility. At last we also see these issues within the field of politics. The recent farmer's protests have asked for more coherent policies in which their voices are to be heard. The Ministry for Public Health is working on a front-of-pack label that makes it easier for consumers to make a healthy choice: Nutri-Score. The Dutch coalition presented their new vision of organic and circular farming. We see different stakeholders focusing on change in the food system, they often talk about achieving a food system that is healthy, sustainable and fair<sup>3;4;5;6</sup>. Some people even speak about (the necessity for) fundamental change of the food system: food transition.

### **Local food as solution?**

As part of this discussion on food transition a possible solution that is highly debated is a shift towards more local food systems. Consumers are already buying almost 15% of their food locally. Local food should reduce the carbon dioxide emissions of transport, it should provide fair prices for producers, and it should improve the connectedness with our food. If we look at the bigger picture of our food system, going back to the mission of Mansholt (“no more hunger”), some argue that a more local food system is more robust because we would be less dependent on import and export. A local and robust food system prepares us for significant changes in nature and society.

The COVID-19 crisis has shown that we are indeed dependent on import and export and that these supply chains are vulnerable in times of crisis. With the restaurants and cafes shutting down, initiatives arose to support local farmers by buying their products. The discussion has gotten even more attention; should we indeed transition towards more local food systems? Would our food system be more robust if we focus on production for the Netherlands? Should we start growing our own vegetables? Most recently a Dutch news item reported: “Is local the new normal?” asking again whether the shift towards local food is here to stay.

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<sup>3</sup> Seidell and Halberstadt, ‘Hoe Ziet Ons Eten Er in de Toekomst Uit? Daarover Woedt Nu Een Strijd’.

<sup>4</sup> Schuttelaar & Partners, ‘Smart Food Alliance’.

<sup>5</sup> Stichting TcV, ‘Transitiecoalitie Voedsel’.

<sup>6</sup> Milieudefensie, ‘Voedsel’.

## **Scope of this thesis**

In this thesis, I focus on this change towards local food systems and investigate what moral issues arise when debating local food production and consumption. I will answer the question: which moral aspects should be taken into account when deciding on a shift towards local food production and consumption in the transition towards a food system that is healthy, sustainable and fair? I hope to show that in the discussion about local food there are multiple ethical issues at stake that are all in need for more ethical analysis and deliberation. It is with respect to this variety of issues that I will not argue for certain policies, changes in consumer behaviour or production methods. I rather wish to show that arguing for or against more local food system is easier said than done. With this I hope to broaden and deepen the discussion on local food.

To do this, I will first show that the question of a shift towards more local food systems includes different interest groups and different moral concepts. In my thesis, I want to include all these different interest groups and perspectives. To do this, I use the ethical matrix as designed by Mepham; this tool can help me in identifying various issues; for different stakeholders, I apply different principles. Based on this analysis, I will argue that local food systems might help us in achieving a food system that is fair, sustainable and healthy. However, local food systems will not necessarily bring about this change, and we should not exclude the possibilities of change in an international food system. To side on one of those positions would need much further ethical deliberation.

In chapter one, I first state what I mean when talking about ‘the’ or ‘our’ food system and what it means to shift towards more local production and consumption. In chapter two, I elaborate on my method of analysis: the ethical matrix. I elaborate on the method of principlism, the interest groups and the principles that I will use. In chapter 3 till 6 I investigate what local food systems imply for the different interest groups based on the principles of well-being, autonomy and justice. Doing so will provide a wide variety of ethical issues with regard to local food. Although these issues need much more ethical analysis and deliberation in order to make decisions, they will shine a first light on what is at stake.

# 1 | CONTEXT: A LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM IN THE NETHERLANDS

In this chapter I will shortly elaborate on the range of my thesis. I first state what I mean with achieving a food system that is healthy, fair and sustainable by defining these concepts. I then explain what I mean with a local food system. At last I show some of the practical implications of a local food system.

## **A food system that is healthy, sustainable and fair**

My research question focuses on the transition towards a food system that is healthy, sustainable and fair. These terms (healthy, sustainable and fair) gain more and more support in society and food policies. However, to be able to answer my research question, a brief notion of what is meant with these terms is necessary. Although all three concepts are highly debated within the field of ethics, here I will focus on the practicalities that society often implies when speaking about these terms. First, a *healthy* food system is healthy for people and planet; food should have a positive impact on people's health and on the planet, or at least not affect them in negative ways. Second, for the term *sustainable* I will use the broad definition as given in the Stanford Encyclopaedia for Philosophy: "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs<sup>7</sup>." While interpretations of this definitions vary, for this thesis I focus on the issue whether we produce and consume food in ways that will also guarantee future food production and consumption. Third, a *fair* food system is often concerned with the prices of food. When people talk about a fair food system, they imply two factors: a) internalizing the external costs of food and b) every actor in the supply chain gains a fair share of the actual sales price. It is not my goal to defend these concepts or why we need change in order to reach a healthy, sustainable, and fair food system. Rather, these are trends in society that I use to see whether local food can contribute to this goal.

## **Local food system within the Netherlands**

As a solution for all these problems people often want to hold on to local food systems. This thesis will focus on the issues regarding a local food system in the Netherlands. Although the

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<sup>7</sup> Brennan and Lo, 'Environmental Ethics'.

focus will be on production and consumption in the Netherlands, the food system is, of course, highly international. Whenever I talk about ‘the’ or ‘our’ food system, I mean the food system within the Netherlands, including Dutch consumption and production and in relation to Dutch import and export. I will explicitly link our food system in the international context whenever Dutch policies impact the international food system or when foreign policies affect the food system in the Netherlands.

In discussing the morality of local food systems, I will always discuss those within a context in which the values of food security and safety are guaranteed. These values are too important to risk in the process of achieving a food system that is healthy, sustainable and fair. Within a safe and secure food system there are still a lot of possibilities for ways in which we produce and consume food.

I claim that focusing more on local production and consumption means reducing our import and export. If we would stop import and export completely, Dutch agriculture could still feed 17 million people, while guaranteeing the values of food security and food safety. Such a system would however have its practical consequences on our production possibilities and consumption patterns. First, because products that we cannot produce in the Netherlands, or products for which we need parts that we cannot produce, would be taken off the menu. Second, because resources in the Netherlands are scarce, we would have to change production methods and distribute them differently. We would have to change the design of agriculture and we have to choose products that minimise the use of agricultural area. The new menu would still consist out of animal and vegetable products. Big changes would be a reduce in the consumption of grain-based products like bread, a stop on pork and an increase in the consumption of potatoes, chicken meat and eggs<sup>8</sup>.

Taking these scenarios into account I will see what this means for consumers, producers, animals and nature. In the next chapter I elaborate on the methodology for this thesis.

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<sup>8</sup> Terluin et al., ‘Voedselvoorziening in Nederland Onder Buitengewone Crisisomstandigheden’, 12.



## **2 | METHODOLOGY: THE ETHICAL MATRIX**

The question of whether we need to focus more on local food production and consumption is one that covers a wide variety of issues. In society multiple issues play a role in the debate about whether or not we should transition towards more local food production and consumption. In order to identify these ethical issues regarding a shift towards local food consumption and production, I will use the ethical matrix as designed by Mepham<sup>9</sup>. However, this ethical matrix is not neutral and has some presuppositions and limits that need further elaboration. In this chapter I elaborate on the ethical matrix because it provides academic justification and it helps in interpreting the differences in practice in the next chapters.

In paragraph 2.1 I argue why I have chosen a method of principlism in order to identify the different ethical issues regarding local food production and consumption. In paragraph 2.2 I elaborate on the specific interest groups, which interest groups I have chosen and why I have chosen them. In paragraph 2.3 I go into the different principles and I argue in which way I use the principles in my thesis and how I will apply these principles to the different interest groups.

### **2.1 PRINCIPLISM**

With the wide variety of issues in mind I want to use a theory that helps in analysing the ethical dimensions of a shift towards local food production and consumption. In order to determine which theory would be of best use I use a set of parameters to investigate the flaws and advantages of three main categories within the field of ethical theory: casuistry, mid-level principlism and high theory. For each parameter I argue how casuistry, principlism and high theory score. At the end of this paragraph I argue that principlism – all things considered – is the best approach to answer my research question.

#### **The parameters**

In this thesis I want to get a grip on the diversity of ethical issues that are at stake in the transition towards local food systems. Here for, I need an ethical theory that identifies the different issues. To determine which ethical theory would be best, I lined up a set of five parameters that are relevant in the evaluation of the three main categories of theories. The first

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<sup>9</sup> Mepham et al., 'Ethical Matrix Manual'.

parameter to help me in deciding which theory is of best use is inclusiveness of *diversity* of the problem. This parameter is relevant in order to identify the different moral aspects as good as possible, with leaving none (or at least as little as possible) ethical issues under the table. The second parameter is awareness for the *context*. The issue of local food production and consumption is very specific to its context. The theory should be able to relate to the context and with the context in mind be able to identify the ethical issues. The third parameter regards whether the theory has an eye for the *underlying questions*. I do not only want to identify different moral aspects on a superficial level, I also want to identify the deeper, more fundamental moral issues that would need analysis in the case of local food systems. The fourth parameter regards the ability of the theory to *guide action*. An ethical theory should not only be able to identify the moral issues at stake, it should also be able to tell us what to do. The fifth parameter considers the ability of the theory to *reach consensus*. After identifying the different moral aspects, it would be desirable for us to reach consensus on what would be the right thing to do. The fourth and the fifth parameter seem in some way related to each other but obtain an important difference. Guiding action means that, following the theory, it enables you to determine what you should do. This might enable you to do A while it enables another person to do B. In this example the theory does guide action, but it does not reach consensus since you both choose different actions.

### 1. *Diversity*

The issue of local food production and consumption is a multifactorial question; different interest groups and different themes play a role in the case of local food consumption and production. Casuistry can be of help in identifying the different issues in the transition towards local food system. A bottom-up approach like casuistry offers a wide outlook on the variety of issues. By analysing different cases we can identify different stakeholders and subjects that will help us in determining which ethical issues play a role in local food systems. However, we might overlook some ethical issues because we do not have a certain structure that makes sure we think of all different aspects. If one is biased in her analyses of cases, she might (unconsciously) ignore some relevant moral aspects. Principlism can, through its more top-down approach, give structure to a wide variety of issues. Incorporating different principles like well-being, autonomy and justice helps in generating different perspectives on the case, leading to different ethical issues. However, principlism could also influence our way of thinking too much, because we might overlook issues that do not relate to these principles.

Toulmin argues that a morality based on general rules and principles is tyrannical and disproportioned since it leaves little room for individual differences<sup>10</sup>. I argue however that because of the different principles it will lead to a diverse range of issues. A top-down approach like high theory, for example utilitarianism or deontology, might be problematic for the diversity of issues in a specific case. Because of its top-down perspective some interests or ideas might fall outside of the scope of analysis because they are considered morally irrelevant. Concluding, casuistry can provide a diverse overview of the ethical issues, but it lacks structure and could miss out on issues when we are biased. High theory might, because of its top-down perspective, consider some issues morally irrelevant and leave them outside the analysis. Principlism offers more perspectives than high theory, but it is not as open minded as casuistry.

## 2. Context

With regard to food consumption and production it is extremely important to take into account the context. Food is a completely different case than any other consumption or production system, it is an essential product for life, and it has so much impact on how we live, on our health and on the health of others (humans, animals and nature)<sup>11</sup>. It is important that we choose a theory that incorporates this context. A casuistic approach is very capable of taking the different contexts into account since it works on a case to case basis; ethical deliberation starts with the context. According to Toulmin an ethical approach that starts with principles is too generalised and it "is not balanced by a feeling for the complex problems of discrimination that arise when such principles are applied to particular real-life cases<sup>12</sup>." According to Arras, with using casuistry, principles emerge from reflection upon our responses to particular cases; ethical principles cannot be determined in isolation from particular factual contexts<sup>13</sup>. With the use of principlism ethical deliberation starts with principles instead of with a specific case. However, to understand what these principles mean in practice, we need to understand the full context of a specific case. Applying different principles asks for an understanding of the different contexts. Use of principlism will incorporate the context of local food. The use of high theory is a top-down approach that starts from a specific perspective, this means that they take into account only the context that is relevant for that same perspective. Would we decide to use a high theory like utilitarianism, we would only look at the context that influences well-

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<sup>10</sup> Toulmin, 'The Tyranny of Principles', 38.

<sup>11</sup> Korthals, *Before Dinner*, 152–53.

<sup>12</sup> Toulmin, 'The Tyranny of Principles', 31.

<sup>13</sup> Arras, 'Getting Down to Cases', 33.

being. Context that does not influence well-being might however still be at least as important to consider. When focusing on the Dutch food system we might only take context into account that influences well-being, while we should also look at context that affects certain duties, relations or questions about justice. Concluding, a theory like casuistry would best capture the context, because the context is the starting point for ethical deliberation. The use of principlism will, although it is not the starting point, also take context into account. High theory focuses merely on the context that is relevant within the scope of the theory.

### *3. Fundamental questions*

The third factor in the decision on which ethical theory to use, is the ability of the theory to touch upon deeper ethical issues. To make a good ethical analysis, which helps in deciding what to do, we want to understand the deeper issues that need discussion. Giving attention to the underlying problems can be very difficult for a theory like casuistry. Because of its case driven method, it hardly answers questions like what kind of society do we want, or in this case, what kind of food system do we want<sup>14</sup>? Adding principles to the method of analysis can help us in thinking about the more fundamental questions that are at stake. Considering a principle like justice might lead us to come up with more underlying problems and moral dilemmas that are relevant for the case. High theories start in fundamental moral beliefs and assumptions. When choosing a theory like utilitarianism, you already have to argue why well-being (or another preferable outcome) is the one thing we need to focus on. It already asks the question what do we think is most important? What do we hold to be of great value in our food system? These are questions that we need to answer before choosing the use of high theory. This discussion creates room for thinking about the more fundamental questions that take place in our food system. In order to raise the more fundamental questions high theory would be the best choice, principlism could be of help and the use of casuistry might be problematic.

### *4. Guide action*

An ethical theory should be able to tell us what to do, it should guide our actions and answer the question “what should we do?” A casuistic method starts with cases to find moral judgments. Moral analysis starts with a case and inventories particular facts of the case on which we base our judgments. In these methods we triangulate between the present case and

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<sup>14</sup> Arras, 48.

related paradigm cases<sup>15</sup>. It does not start with a certain theory that guides our action. With the use of casuistry, we should be able to take learnings out of cases and base our actions on these learnings. However, there is no strict guidance on how we should approach these cases and which learnings or principles we should use to guide our actions. The use of casuistry is thus highly unlikely to be able to guide our actions. Principlism can, as long as principles are not conflicting, be pretty obvious in telling you what to do. When the principles of well-being, autonomy and justice all tell you to no longer eat meat, principlism guides you to no longer eat meat. However, when the principle of well-being would state that eating meat is allowed because consumers would gain more happiness from eating meat than animals would suffer and the principle of justice states that it is not just to eat meat because eating meat does not do justice to the intrinsic value of animals, it becomes really hard for principlism to guide our actions, because to which principle should we obey? The problem is that, as in this example, principles often conflict and when they do it becomes incredibly hard to guide our actions. Accordingly, Clouser and Gert<sup>16</sup> see principlism not as a guide to action but merely as a checklist of values without deep moral substance. They state that we need some form of high theory to guide our actions. Clouser and Gert argue that “everyone must agree on the procedure to be used in deciding moral questions”<sup>17</sup>, without such a procedure (as is lacking with principlism), we cannot make the right decisions because there is no unity of morality. A higher theory like utilitarianism or deontology would be helpful in telling us what we need to do, principlism might guide our actions when principles do not conflict and with the use of casuistry the ability for guiding action is highly dependent on the case.

##### 5. *Reach consensus*

To decide whether we should shift towards local food consumption and production we ideally use an ethical theory that gets us to agree upon the course of action. Toulmin argues that in order to reach consensus we should take a casuistic approach, starting from paradigmatic cases that we do understand, “we must simply work our way, one step at a time, to the more complex and perplexing cases in which extremely delicate balance may have to be struck”<sup>18</sup>. However, according to Arras it is highly unlikely that we will reach consensus when using casuistry. Many of our moral practices and policies are morally diverse and they often obtain conflicting

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<sup>15</sup> Arras, ‘Theory and Bioethics’.

<sup>16</sup> Clouser and Gert, ‘A Critique of Principlism’.

<sup>17</sup> Clouser and Gert, 236.

<sup>18</sup> Toulmin, ‘The Tyranny of Principles’, 37.

values. Casuistry will express these different values and conclude in ethical conflicts<sup>19</sup>. Although it might be possible to reach consensus with enough ethical deliberation, there is a chance that our discussion ends in conflict or compromising. Beauchamp & Childress have the ambition to create a shared moral understanding with the use of principlism<sup>20</sup>. Although we all agree on the principles they use, we are not always able to reach consensus when the principles conflict. We all believe that well-being and autonomy for consumers is important, however we might differ on which one we find more important when they conflict. Take for instance the ban on products that are deemed unsafe, we argue that it is more important that the well-being of consumers is guaranteed than respecting their autonomy by letting them decide for themselves. However, in other cases we might say that autonomy is just as important as well-being, for instance when we talk about the impact of food on the environment. May we harm consumer's autonomy in order to diminish the negative impact of food production on autonomy? Because of such difficult conflicts, opponents of the use of principlism call the principles 'tyrannical', because they obstruct compromise and they generate a gridlock of conflicting principles, making moral debate hostile and intemperate<sup>21</sup>. We could therefore argue that in order to reach consensus we need a normative standard that can articulate the nature of rules and that it helps us in weighing different principles against one another. A high theory like utilitarianism or deontology does have the possibility to generate consensus with the use of one such theory. However, there are two problems with the use of these theories to reach consensus. The first is that we can still disagree upon what would be the best course of action within such a theory. We might agree that the most important thing is to generate the most well-being for consumers, we might still disagree on what would actually generate the most well-being for consumers. So, even within a theory we would not reach consensus when we measure differently. The second, most important problem, is that we need to agree on which high theory to use. We have not yet, and might never, arrive at a point where we have some systematic coherence between the different high theories which we all agree upon. Concluding, all theories have difficulties in reaching consensus and they might need some extra consideration in order to reach consensus. We also see that there is no consensus on which theory would best be able to reach consensus. Some say that deliberation will lead to consensus, others say that we need a systematic coherence between different principles and values in order to reach consensus. I argue that looking at the different theories the use of high theory is best

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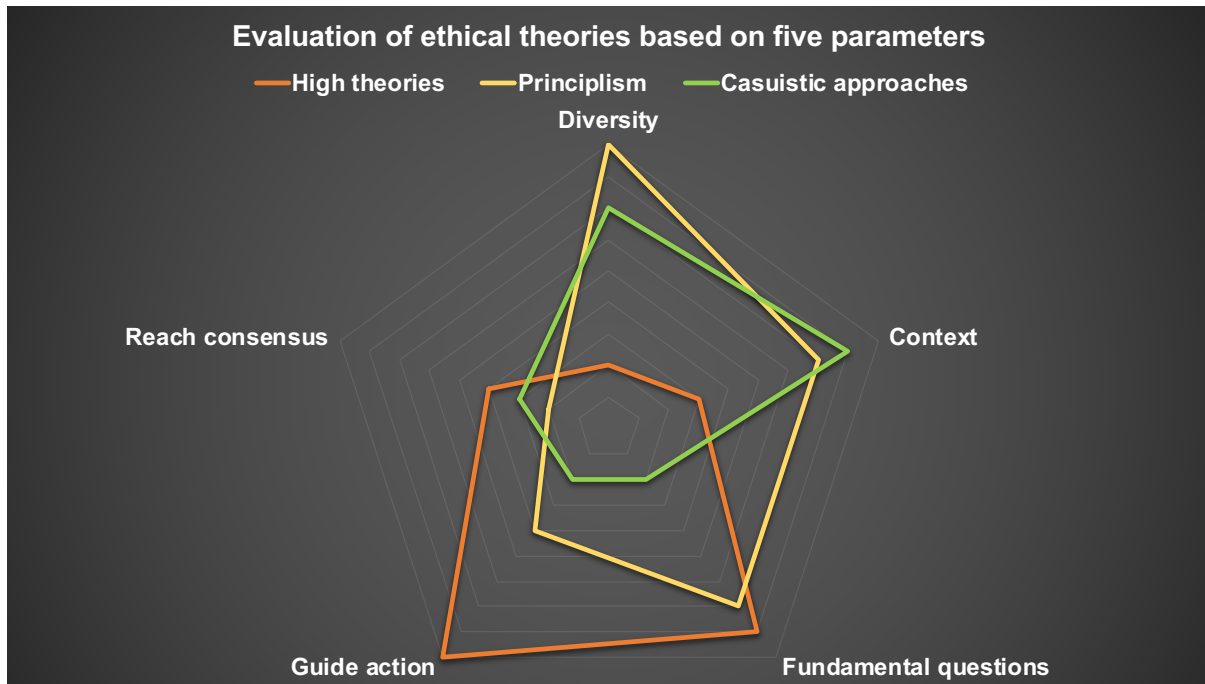
<sup>19</sup> Arras, 'Getting Down to Cases', 42.

<sup>20</sup> Beauchamp and Childress, *Principles of Biomedical Ethics*, 6.

<sup>21</sup> Beauchamp, 'The Role of Principles in Practical Ethics', 80.

to reach consensus, because you agree upon a normative standard. Casuistry could be able to reach consensus in some cases. For principlism it is very difficult to reach consensus because the theory measures with different normative standards.

Based on the analysis made above, this graph visualizes how the ethical theories score on different parameters. Based on this analysis I will now turn to the question which theory could best be able to answer my research question.



### Which theory to use?

As we have seen no theory – casuistry, principlism or high theory – is able to fully include all these parameters. Each theory has its own strengths and weaknesses based on these parameters. Which theory is then my best option? To answer that question, I return to my research goal; finding the moral aspects that should be taken into account when deciding on a shift towards local food production and consumption. With this goal in mind, it is most important to focus on the parameters *diversity*, *context* and *fundamental questions*. These parameters are most useful to find a wide variety of ethical issues that are at stake. Focusing on these parameters, principlism is most useful; principlism can best sketch a broad range of issues that are at stake before turning to the question of what we need to do. In the next paragraphs I elaborate on this choice.

Principlism is the best theory to use because it is best to include the diversity of the case in its analysis and it relates the context of the case while raising the more fundamental questions. Casuistry would also have been a good theory to include the problem and even better in relating to the context of the case. Furthermore, casuistry prides itself on its concreteness and on its ability to give useful advice<sup>22</sup>. I however find the critique that it might ignore the more fundamental questions of too much importance to choose this method. To answer my research question, it is necessary that the theory I use touches upon these more fundamental question that we need to discuss when deciding on a shift to local food systems. High theory would be best to understand these fundamental questions, but its difficulties with relating to context and diversity of the case make high theory unqualified to answer my research question.

While principlism has its advantages for my research question, it also has some flaws that I need to discuss before using the theory. Principlism is a theory that has great difficulties with guiding action and reaching consensus because the principles often conflict with each other and it is not always possible to solve those conflicts. It would have been very convenient to also reach consensus and guide action on whether or not we should shift towards local food systems. However, it is not my goal with this thesis to provide guidance in dilemmas around local food production or consumption. What I want to do, is to show which moral aspects need to be taken into account. I argue that principlism can best sketch a broad range of issues that are at stake before turning to the question of what we need to do.

A final critique that I want to address is that there is a lot of dispute on how we should interpret the principles of Beauchamp & Childress<sup>23</sup>. The principles as I will use them, well-being, autonomy and justice are all concepts within the field of ethics that have multiple contextualisations and none are undebated. In order to deal with this problem, I elaborate on these in paragraph 2.3. I will state which interpretations of the principles I use and why I have chosen these definitions in order to be able to answer my research question.

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<sup>22</sup> Arras, 'Getting Down to Cases', 38.

<sup>23</sup> Daniels, 'Wide Reflective Equilibrium in Practice', 98.



## **2.2 THE INTEREST GROUPS**

In order to identify the different moral aspects within the context of local food production and consumption, I apply principles to different interest groups. The different interest groups contribute to including the diversity of the issue and context. In this thesis, I focus on four interest groups that will provide different perspectives on a shift towards local food production and consumption: consumers, producers, animals and nature. I focus on these interest groups because they are the most important stakeholders in the food system.

These interest groups are not a pre-defined group and do not form a full range of all stakeholders. Every interest group could have been divided in smaller interest groups. Producers can be divided, such as in seed breeders, fruit & vegetable growers, farmers or people in the processing industry. In this thesis I mainly focus on primary production: farmers. Consumers could have been divided into the different channels via which they consume, e.g. retail or out-of-home consumers. Animals could have been divided in those who are of direct use for food production, the meat they produce and the animals that are of indirect use for food production, those who produce for example milk or eggs. Nature could have been divided in the resources it gives us or the environment we impact, for example the climate. I have chosen for a broader scope of interest groups in order to identify different criteria that offer enough possibilities to provide an inventory of ethical issues that are at stake. Within this broader approach I will specify issues for specific stakeholders within interest groups wherever necessary.

## **2.3 THE PRINCIPLES**

For each interest group I investigate what ethical issues are at stake by applying the principles of well-being, autonomy and justice. In the manual for the use of the ethical matrix, the principles are defined as follows. Well-being is considered to be the best way of representing utilitarian concerns ('maximising the good'). Autonomy represents deontological concerns (treating others as 'ends in themselves'). Justice represents respect for justice, an interpretation advocated by the philosopher Rawls<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> Mepham et al., 'Ethical Matrix Manual', 9.

These principles are derived from the principles by Beauchamp & Childress. They describe a set of four principles (respect for autonomy, nonmaleficence, beneficence and justice) as “an analytical framework of general norms derived from the common morality that form a suitable starting point for biomedical ethics”<sup>25</sup>. These principles are derived from the *common morality*, the collection of universal moral norms that all persons committed to morality share<sup>26</sup>.

In this paragraph I elaborate a bit more on the principles that I use and the interpretation of the principle in its normative context. Furthermore, I show how these principles will be applicable to consumers, producers, animals and nature.

### **2.3.1 Principle of well-being**

I have chosen to combine the principles of nonmaleficence and beneficence from Beauchamp & Childress into the principle of well-being, as is done in the Ethical Matrix by Mepham. The principles of nonmaleficence and beneficence both focus on the utilitarian concerns; maximising the good or minimising the bad, I have therefore combined them in the principle of well-being.

Well-being is a very general concept that can be specified in multiple ways, and so the concept of well-being is used in different ways. The general definition of well-being is about how well the life of a person is going for that person<sup>27</sup>. Well-being answers the question: “what would be the best for someone, or would be most in this person’s interests, or would make this person’s life go, for him, as well as possible?”<sup>28</sup>. In his book Parfit suggests making a distinction between three types of philosophical well-being theories. “On *Hedonistic Theories*, what would be best for someone is what would make his life happiest. On *Desire-Fulfilment Theories*, what would be best for someone is what, throughout this life, would best fulfil his desires. On *Objective List Theories*, certain things are good or bad for us, whether or not we want to have the good thing or to avoid the bad things.”<sup>29</sup>

In this thesis I use a different account of well-being: the resourcist approach, with this approach I focus on what people need in order to generate well-being. This approach is neutral between

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<sup>25</sup> Beauchamp and Childress, *Principles of Biomedical Ethics*, 13.

<sup>26</sup> Beauchamp and Childress, 3.

<sup>27</sup> Crisp, ‘Well-Being’.

<sup>28</sup> Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 493.

<sup>29</sup> Parfit, 493.

competing ideas of the good life and doesn't suffer from the disadvantages of the earlier mentioned theories, namely that they are different for each individual within a group. The use of a resourcist approach makes it easier to determine what aspects of local food systems need to be taken into account in order to achieve well-being for the interest groups, without stating what well-being is on an individual level.

Although the neutrality of the approach is a big advantage, the approach also has some disadvantages. The first objection is an ontological one, namely that resources are not what well-being is. Well-being is an end in itself, while the resources are merely means to achieve that end. I agree with this, however in my thesis it is more valuable to discuss what the interest groups need for well-being and analysing what influence local food systems will have on those resources, instead of discussing what exactly well-being entails for them. The second objection is one about human diversity, some individuals within the interest groups will need more or different resources to achieve well-being than others. Taking this objection into account, I focus on the minimum that is necessary for well-being for the interest groups and too see how impact local food systems contribute to these resources. The risk is that local food systems might seem to have a positive impact on these minimum resources but will have a negative impact on specific individuals within the interest groups that need more than the minimum. Wherever this will seem to be a problem I will differentiate within the interest group to take these differences into account.

Applying this account of well-being will show what the interest groups need to obtain well-being. For consumers this will mean that they need enough safe and healthy food. Producers will probably need enough income and good working circumstances. Animals need enough food and living space. Well-being for nature means it has the opportunity to live and to flourish.

### **2.3.2 Principle of autonomy**

A general definition defines being autonomous as having “the capacity to be one's own person, to live one's life according to reasons and motives that are taken as one's own and not the product of manipulative or distorting external forces”<sup>30</sup>. There are however different definitions of autonomy that claim to be more specific. Most definitions focus on internal conditions (e.g. ‘being authentic’). First interpretation is autonomy as self-invention, this

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<sup>30</sup> Christman, ‘Autonomy in Moral and Political Philosophy’.

means that only desires that you chose to have, count as autonomous. A second interpretation, from Frankfurt<sup>31</sup>, is autonomy as internal harmony, meaning that first-order desires are in tune with your second-order desires. Another definition is autonomy as self-mastery, this means that being autonomous is being able to change your first-order desires<sup>32</sup>.

In this thesis I focus on the external conditions that are needed in order for interest groups to be autonomous. Joseph Raz says that the “conditions of autonomy are complex and consist out of three distinct components: appropriate mental abilities, an adequate range of options, and independence”<sup>33</sup>. I will use this definition of autonomy because I want to focus on the issues in local food systems that affect our autonomy. Just as I want to find the issues that affect our well-being, it is most useful to find different issues that affect our mental abilities, our range of options and our independence. I will take all these different components into account and see how a transition towards a local food system impacts these aspects and how such a shift might thus impact the external conditions that are necessary for autonomy.

For consumers this means they have the mental abilities to make adequate choices, they have enough options to make choices and they are independent in their choices. Producers need the mental abilities to make choices in their production, they need enough options to produce and independence in choosing what and how they want to produce.

There is big discussion on the role of autonomy for animals and nature, where it is still the question whether autonomy is applicable for them at all. The discussion about autonomy is often linked to the discussion about agency. In order for a being to be autonomous, it “must be able to choose his actions rather than be led by blind instinct”<sup>34</sup>. The question whether animals or nature have agency, in any kind, remains unanswered, leading to discussion about their autonomy. I however argue for two reasons why I nevertheless apply a principle of autonomy on these interest groups. The first reason is that there is enough common ground to start the discussion on autonomy. For example, when we argue that animals should not be kept in captivity but should live in freedom. While freedom is not the same as autonomy there is a strong link to make between the two concepts. Autonomy is being able to make your own

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<sup>31</sup> Frankfurt, ‘Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person’.

<sup>32</sup> Dworkin, *The Theory and Practice of Autonomy*.

<sup>33</sup> Raz, *The Morality of Freedom*, 372.

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.iep.utm.edu/anim-eth/#SSH2bii>

choices while freedom is being able to do as you choose without external limitations. However, if we argue that animals should be able to do as they choose than they must also in some way choose for themselves which implies some kind of autonomy. The second reason is that in this thesis I want to investigate the different ethical issues that are stake in the transition towards local food system. The implications of local food for autonomy of animals and nature is definitely one of these issues. Applying autonomy will lead to other insights than only applying the principle of well-being would. Thomas<sup>35</sup> argues that “most animals that possess the basic level of selfhood are autonomous in their actions as they are able to choose between the alternative paths provided in their environment.” Applying autonomy to animals will lead to questions about their freedom and in what way they can live a life that is true to their own instincts. Applying autonomy to nature "stands for the capacity for self-generation, for self-realisation, or for being a law unto themselves, if even in some minimal way<sup>36</sup>".

### **2.3.3 Principle of justice**

Justice in a broader sense regards how every individual or group is treated and to what extent a situation is just or fair for that individual or group<sup>37</sup>. In our food system there is a certain distribution of products, resources, harms and benefits. With the principle of justice, I focus on what the consequences of a local food system will be for this distribution and whether this might be just or unjust. In this thesis I thus focus on distributive justice because in the food system there is a certain distribution of goods and raw materials. According to Mepham such a distributive account of justice regards a fair distribution of benefits, risks & costs<sup>38</sup>.

Using a distributive account of justice calls in the question to whom we have responsibilities regarding justice. It is clear that consumers and producers in the Netherlands play a role in this distribution. How do we distribute healthy food amongst consumers? How do we distribute resources amongst producers? Or what do we pay producers for their products? These distributive issues lead to the need for an analysis of what would be just for producers and consumers.

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<sup>35</sup> Thomas, *Animal Ethics and the Autonomous Animal Self*.

<sup>36</sup> Heyd, 'The Case for Environmental Morality', 23.

<sup>37</sup> Miller, 'Justice'.

<sup>38</sup> Mepham, 'Ethical Analysis of Food Biotechnologies: An Evaluative Framework', 105.

For other stakeholders it is less obvious, and often debated, whether and how we should take them into account. This concerns people in a different place, people in a different time (future generations) or different entities (animals and nature). Although moral claims for these interest groups are not clear and highly disputable, they should come up in my analysis of ethical issues regarding the food system. For all of these entities are affected by food production and consumption. How we produce and consume affects what people in other countries produce and consume. The way we use resources and impact nature now affects how future generations can use resources. Finally, our use of, and impact on animals and nature in the food system means that we should take those entities into account as well.

When it comes to people in a different place this concerns consumers and producers, I will therefore in the chapters on these interest groups focus on the consequences that a local food system has for the distribution for people in the rest of the world: Do we as the Netherlands also have a responsibility in providing food for the rest of the world? I take future generations into account because they are part of the sustainability aspect of my research question. In deciding whether we should transition to local food systems for a more sustainable food system it means that we do not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their own needs<sup>39</sup>. This means that we need to investigate how our current actions impact the resources and needs for food production and consumption for future generations and whether such a distribution is just. How we should take different entities into account is not undebated. This relates to the question whether we have responsibilities *to* animals and nature or *with regard to* them. However, when we talk about a fair distribution of benefits, risks and costs it is clear that there are also benefits, risks and costs for animals and nature. Animals and nature form a fundamental part of our food system, we cannot leave them aside when we talk about a just distribution.

### **Final remarks on the principles**

These principles are not unambiguous, they have different conceptualisation and we can apply them in various ways for all the different interest groups. In this paragraph I have chosen certain conceptualisations and uses of the principles in the hope to be able to answer my research question. However, as has become clear, these principles and its application to the different interest group could benefit from a deeper analysis in the context of local food system.

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<sup>39</sup> Brennan and Lo, 'Environmental Ethics'.

## 3 | LOCAL CONSUMPTION

In this chapter I will see how the principles of well-being, autonomy and justice apply to consumers. I show which different normative implications arise for consumers if we transition towards a more local food system. At the end of the chapter I conclude by stating which normative implications local food has for consumers. All who consume food are consumers. In this chapter I focus on the Dutch consumers and the impact that local food systems will have on them. Of course, our Dutch food system also has a lot of consequences for people outside the Netherlands, I focus on this in the paragraph about justice for consumers.

### 3.1 WELL-BEING FOR CONSUMERS

As stated in paragraph 2.3 I will focus on what resources consumers need in order to achieve well-being. Enough food contributes to the well-being of consumers, but also healthy and safe food contributes to their well-being. It is for well-being of consumers thus important that every person is food secure. This is stated by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), food security is “a situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”<sup>40</sup>. Physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food are thus necessary. The consequences of not having access to enough food are terrible, hunger is an obvious pain, thus diminishing their well-being. But also, a short time of not eating influences their happiness. If we are hungry the gut releases hormones to whet our appetite and to prompt us to search for food. After we have eaten the gut sends leptin and serotonin, giving us actual pleasure in eating<sup>41</sup>.

#### **The question of health**

Having enough food is thus important for our well-being. But what about the quality of the food? Is it necessary that we do not only have enough food but that the food is also healthy? It can be debated what the contribution of the healthiness of someone’s lifestyle is on someone’s well-being: one person might have enormous pleasure in being healthy whilst others might gain more pleasure out of just eating what they love, whether that is healthy or not. I would

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<sup>40</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World*.

<sup>41</sup> Steel, *Sitopia*, 62.

however like to stress that being sick has an obvious negative impact on a person's life, it is highly unlikely that someone might gain pleasure out of being sick. Being healthy can thus positively influence our well-being in two ways. First, because when you are healthy you are obviously not sick and second because being healthy also reduces the chance for you of becoming sick. If we look at how healthy food is, there are three categories to discuss. The first is food that forms an immediate risk on our health (e.g. poisoning). The second are food (patterns) that in the long term do not provide enough nutrition (e.g. not enough food, or not enough vitamins/carbs/fibres etc.). The third category is obesity, too much food can also be very dangerous. Because the first two categories are in the Netherlands not highly problematic, I will focus on the third category.

Obesity is becoming one of the biggest problems when regarding our health, and thus our well-being. In the Netherlands (in 2017) almost half (48.7%) of the population over 20 years old is overweight, of whom 13.7% is obese<sup>42</sup>. Shaw and Shaw<sup>43</sup> argue that obesity has become one of the most significant health concerns in modern times in the developed world. Because of growing welfare and urbanisation, consumption patterns have shifted towards more animal products, more processed foods and more convenience food<sup>44</sup>. These food styles do not contribute to a healthier lifestyle, they are often even the direct cause of problems like obesity. In our current food system, there are not many incentives for producers to produce healthy food as long as consumers keep consuming unhealthy food. Unfortunately, they also keep consuming unhealthy food as long as producers are advertising unhealthy food and as long as they are not conscious of what they are eating and what is healthy.

### **Impact of local food on the well-being of consumers**

If we want to see if local food systems can have positive impact on our well-being we should see if a) local food systems can provide us with enough food and b) if local food systems can provide us with healthy food.

Regarding the question of enough food, research has shown that in different scenario a self-sufficient food system can provide the Dutch with enough food<sup>45</sup>. It is however questionable

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<sup>42</sup> Ministerie van VWS, 'Nationaal Preventieakkoord. Naar Een Gezonder Nederland.'

<sup>43</sup> *Corporate Social Responsibility, Social Justice and The Global Food Supply Chain*, H1.4.

<sup>44</sup> WRR, 'Naar Een Voedselbeleid'.

<sup>45</sup> Terluin et al., 'Voedselvoorziening in Nederland Onder Buitengewone Crisismomstandigheden', 9.



whether this would really change anything? We already have enough food. This is argued against by stating that while the current food system produces enough it is very vulnerable because of its dependency on import and export. Changes in countries, business partners and nature make for a necessity for a more robust food system<sup>46</sup>, a food system in which we are less dependent on external factors. Import and export are vulnerable for changes and external factors, this is why local food system would be more robust. However, it is questionable why local food systems would thus provide more food security. First because local food systems are as well dependent on external factors. For example, the weather conditions in the Netherlands, which are not always optimal or even good enough for robust food supply. Or because of political changes or problems within the Netherlands. The second question is whether we could not improve the robustness of the import and export in the Netherlands to achieve a more robust food system.

The question with regard to our health is very dependent on what we will eat if we eat only food from local resources. In the Netherlands this means we will switch towards more vegetables and less animal products. We would in the Netherlands not be able to produce enough fruit, but these shortages can easily be fixed with a higher intake of vegetables which we can produce enough in the Netherlands<sup>47</sup>. Would this however fix the problem of unhealthy food? Probably not, we would still be able to consume fast food, we can still eat too much and we can still eat too much fat, sugar, salt, etc. And why would it not also be possible to improve the health of our food in an international food system? We have the same problem and it does not seem that switching to local food production and consumption would automatically lead to healthier food. Unless local food consumption and production will increase our consumption of fresh and raw food, but then again, why can't we make that switch in an international system?

### **3.2 AUTONOMY FOR CONSUMERS**

As stated in paragraph 3.2, autonomy for consumers means they have the mental abilities to make adequate choices, they have enough options to make choices and they are independent in their choices.

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<sup>46</sup> Korthals, 'Voedselproductie Moet Eerder Robuust Dan Efficiënt Zijn'.

<sup>47</sup> Terluin et al., 'Voedselvoorziening in Nederland Onder Buitengewone Crisisomstandigheden', 12.

In order for their choices to be true, consumers must be able to make informed choices. In his book *Before Dinner*, Korthals<sup>48</sup> argues that consumers have more and more been kept distant from food production. For a long time, consumers have accepted this, just like we have accepted that we don't know where and how our cars are made. Because of this gap we have lost a lot of information on how our food is made and where it comes from and so the feeling with our products slowly disappears. In the UK they did a study on the knowledge of children with regard to the origin of food. "One in ten thought tomatoes grew underground ... one in three believed cheese grew on plants, and ... one in five children had never visited a farm"<sup>49</sup>. Although there have not been similar studies in the Netherlands, it does show how consumers are becoming more and more distant with the production process of our food.

With losing this knowledge consumers also lose the mental abilities to make adequate choices. However, we often accept the fact that we do not always know how things are produced, as long as we know the end product. Just like automobiles we do not have to know how they are made as long as we know they are safe to drive in. If we would have to concern ourselves with all these processes, we would have an entire day job on knowing all different production processes. However, food differs from other consumption products "because it involves living material, because we consume it each day, because it is directly on, in and under our skin"<sup>50</sup>. Only knowing about the end product is not enough, because it is the production process that determines the end product, because the production process concerns living things or because the production process influences our well-being.

Furthermore, consumers need to know about the production processes because individual consumers differ in their opinion on what is safe or desirable. Food safety is for example often not as straightforward as scientific research might show. A simple illustration of issues concerning food safety shows when we look at the differences between food safety in the United States and food safety in the European Union. In the United States everyone rides her bike while wearing a helmet, in the Netherlands we often do not think the risks of riding your bike are big enough for you to be wearing a helmet. In the food sector we see the same with raw milk cheeses, these are deemed unsafe in the U.S. while in Europe we eat them with great

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<sup>48</sup> Korthals, *Before Dinner*, 152-53.

<sup>49</sup> Shaw & Shaw

<sup>50</sup> Korthals, *Before Dinner*, 151-152.

pleasure<sup>51</sup>. More recently attention for food safety was directed at the issue of chlorine chicken. In the United States chickens are washed with chlorine after slaughter in order to clean them. In the European Union chlorine chicken is forbidden because we do not believe it is a hundred percent safe<sup>52</sup>.

These examples make clear how diverse risk perception can be. These differences are often culturally, and thus food safety is for everyone different. These differences about risk definitions can occur between countries, as seen with the U.S. and European countries, as well as between different groups of people. Small children, pregnant women or old people are willing to accept different risks than others. And women often believe food risks are less intolerable in comparison with men<sup>53</sup>. It is thus very important that consumers must be able to make these analyses for themselves. Note that of course there should be guidelines for the processes that are proven unsafe for consumption. It is my goal here to point out that this is however not the case for everyone and that we all desire different safety or other requirements of our food. Furthermore, the safety of the food also relates to the well-being of consumers, as we had seen that safe food is required for the well-being of consumers. Having autonomy over your food choices can then also influence well-being positively.

The food that is available must therefore be in accordance with consumer's preferences, as long as the food also contributes to the well-being of consumers, meaning that there should be enough healthy options. Because the supply side cannot decide for consumers what their preferences are the most important factor is that there is open communication on what food contains, where it comes from and who were involved. This transparency on the food supply chain is of utmost importance to guarantee that consumers the ability to make informed choices. Consuming food more locally can make it easier for consumers to know about the process, origin and content of your food. Buying your vegetables or milk at the farm gives the consumer the opportunity to ask questions about how the food is produced. In this way the gap between consumers and producers can be reduced and this gives consumers more autonomy so they can make well-informed choices in accordance with their preferences.

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<sup>51</sup> Korthals, *Goed Eten. Filosofie van Voeding En Landbouw*.

<sup>52</sup> Dawson, 'Chlorine-Washed Chicken Q&A: Food Safety Expert Explains Why US Poultry Is Banned in the EU.'

<sup>53</sup> Korthals, *Goed Eten. Filosofie van Voeding En Landbouw*.

However, another aspect of autonomy for consumers is that they have an adequate range of options and independency in their choices. Shifting towards more local food systems will drastically reduce the set of options that consumers can choose of. Namely that their set of choices is being limited to those products that are produced locally. Consumers are no longer able to choose products from outside Netherlands or Europe. Shouldn't consumers, to be truly autonomous, be able for themselves to choose whether they want food only from local farmers or if they want mangos from the other side of the world? Yes, it is difficult to know for consumers where the mango comes from and what its journey has been, and it is easier to understand where the apple from the farmer a few towns away comes from. But does the fact that it is easier to understand the short supply chains make it impossible to design transparent long supply chains? I argue that it is also possible for consumers to know the origin of products from far away, new technologies make this even more possible. That gives us also ability to make informed choices about food from far away and it enables us to make choices between what we prefer: local or international products?

### **3.3 JUSTICE FOR CONSUMERS**

In order for the food system to be fair for consumers, food should be equally accessible to everyone, everyone should be able to enjoy food security. Now of course this might sound a bit idealistic if there is not enough food for everyone, but the current food system does have the capacity to produce enough food for everyone, there is however a problem of misdistribution. While some are starving others are eating so much their health is in danger. It is a widely held belief that with regard to principles like justice and fairness, misdistribution of food is undesirable<sup>54</sup>. This issue of justice seems more an international problem than a problem for the Dutch society. But the Netherlands does have a role in supplying for the rest of the world. The Netherlands are, next to the United States, the second greatest exporter of agriculture. Mostly exported are meat products, produced for export value over 6,5 billion euros, furthermore milk & dairy, vegetables and drinks are also much exported. This means that other countries are dependant on our food production<sup>55</sup>.

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<sup>54</sup> Kaplan, *The Philosophy of Food*.

<sup>55</sup> CBS, 'Nederland Tweede Landbouwexporteur Ter Wereld'.

We in the Netherlands might be able to produce enough for a local food system, this might not be the case in other places. Kinnunen et al.<sup>56</sup> have shown that if people would consume within a radius of 100 kilometres, not even a third of the world population would have enough of the most used crops to take in enough calories. Half of the world is dependent on food from over a thousand kilometres for their calories. So, is it just if we focus on local food production? Don't we have a responsibility to share our viable land and resources with consumers in the rest of the world? Not every region is suitable for growing all kinds of crops. By choosing local here on our fertile soil, we leave others in less fertile areas on their own.

Now it could be argued that this would be justified if we cannot supply for Dutch consumers while also producing for consumers in the rest of the world, however we see that this is possible as we are doing now: Dutch consumers have enough food to consume, while we are also producing for the rest of the world. It is more just to provide more people with healthy and safe food than it would be to only provide a small group with more security.

### **3.4 CONCLUSION FOR CONSUMERS**

Looking from a consumer's perspective there are different moral aspects that we should take into account when deciding on a shift towards local food consumption and production. First, we see that while local food system can make us more independent of international changes is not necessary that we shift towards local food system in order to achieve a more robust food system and that it is not a guarantee that a shift towards local food systems will cause a more robust and healthy food system. For the autonomy of consumers local food systems might make it easier for consumers to be well-informed about the choices they make, but on the other side it would mean that the choices they have will be limited, leading to a decrease of their autonomy. For the principle of justice, it might be unjust to focus only on the consumption for Dutch citizens while the Netherlands as a production country has the capacity to focus on a secure food system for and Dutch citizens and other citizens on less fertile soil. While local food consumption and production might on some aspects turn out positively on the well-being and autonomy for consumers, it also has a lot of moral downsides. Without more ethical deliberation we cannot state whether local food systems are morally desirable for consumers.

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<sup>56</sup> Kinnunen et al., 'Local Food Crop Production Can Fulfil Demand for Less than One-Third of the Population'.

## 4 | LOCAL PRODUCTION

In this chapter I will see how the principles of well-being, autonomy and justice apply to producers. I show which different normative implications arise for producers if we transition towards a more local food system. At the end of the chapter I conclude by stating which normative implications local food has for producers and if these contribute to a better food system. In this chapter I focus on producers in the primary production of our food system, mostly farmers. Although there are also a lot of people working in the processing industry and the rest of the supply chain, I have chosen to focus on farmers because they are most essential for the production of our food.

### 4.1 WELL-BEING FOR PRODUCERS

Well-being again relates to how well a person's life is going for that person and specifically the resources that are needed for producers to obtain well-being. In this chapter I will see if local food system can have a positive effect on the well-being of producers.

Unfortunately, there are still a lot of bad working conditions for farmers. Although slavery is forbidden for a long time, workers in food production are often not treated as dignified as we would think is the standard. Not only farmers in the global South are often suppressed to slaves and humiliated because big companies are mostly concerned with their revenues. Also, closer to home, in for example Italy, there is still talk of slavery on the tomato (and other fruits) plantations. Although this is not in the Netherlands, we do consume those products here and might have a certain responsibility for these harms. In the Netherlands this issue was raised in parliament because these are the tomatoes that we buy in supermarkets. The immigrants in Italy often work for 12 hours a day, 7 days a week, for payments of 22 – 30 euros a day<sup>57</sup>. Also, in the Netherlands there is exploitation of employees, most of the time seasonal workers from foreign countries. In 2017 the court ruled that there was speak of modern slavery; the workers worked for 6 days a week, 12-13 hours a day for 5 euros per hour, above that housing and sanitary was poorly arranged<sup>58</sup>.

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<sup>57</sup> Ministerie van BuZa, 'Beantwoording Vragen van de Leden Alkaya (SP) En Van Den Hul (PvdA) over Het Bericht Dat Arbeidsmigranten Slavenarbeid Verrichten Op Italiaanse Tomatenplantages.'

<sup>58</sup> 'OM Eist Hoger Beroep Celstraf Tegen Aardbeienteler Uit Steenwijkerland Voor Uitbuiting Personeel'.

If we would focus more on local food production and consumption, we have a better grip on the circumstances under which farmers are working. It might therefore be argued that the food we consume that is produced locally is made under better working conditions than food produced internationally. I argue that whilst this might be true, this does not lead to better working conditions overall. First, because also in the Netherlands the working conditions are not always at best, certainly for labour immigrants: many hours of unpaid overtime, dangerous working conditions and sleeping on a mattress in the canteen. Reports of poor housing and exploitation of migrant workers crop up regularly<sup>59</sup>. Second, when we focus more on local production this means that we stop (part of) the import of other products. This also means that the people who are producing in other countries might lose their jobs, which might be argued to be even worse than working under bad circumstances. Finally, I argue that if farmers have to produce only for local markets, they might lose a lot of opportunities to export their products and thus a lot of Dutch producers might lose their jobs, also not contributing to their well-being.

I argue that shifting towards more local production and consumption will thus not obviously improve the well-being of producers, and that it is also not set in stone that we cannot improve the well-being of producers far away. We can set stronger controls on the circumstances under which our food is produced, and we could have stricter rules on what is allowed to import into the Netherlands, maybe making European or even international guidelines on this. It is not immediately clear how local food production can be beneficial and it is not excluded that we might be able to improve the well-being of producers in an international food system.

## **4.2 AUTONOMY FOR PRODUCERS**

Autonomy means that one has the appropriate mental abilities, an adequate range of options, and independence to be able to make her own choices. Autonomy for producers means that they can structure their production processes according to their own reasons, values and desires. Producers always function within a market in which they are dependent on what consumers want. Within those limits it should however be possible to determine their own production processes.

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<sup>59</sup> 'Slapen in Lekkende Tenten: Zo Worden Arbeidsmigranten Behandeld'.

In the Netherlands a lot of farmers might not experience they have autonomy because in the supply chain there are other companies that have an enormous impact on our economy, agriculture and diet, these are the so called ABCD companies. These companies have influence on approximately 80% of the food market<sup>60</sup>. They dominate global trade in raw material for the food industry. These companies don't owe a lot of land, but they are the biggest traders in food commodities. They have this power because of two reasons. First because of their place in the supply chain. Imagine the food chain as an hourglass, on top are all the farmers producing our food, on the bottom are the consumers. In the middle, the smallest point of the hourglass, are the ABCD companies. They are with only four, but they determine what farmers produce by buying their products and they determine what consumers buy by selling those products. The second reason for their power is simply their size; together they make about 250 billion dollars each year. Because of their enormous impact in the food system a lot of farmers don't have the freedom to make their own choices in what and how to produce. They have contracts with these ABCD companies and have to produce for them in order to keep existing. There is an unequal level playing field for the small farmer, leading to less independence and thus less autonomy.

The question is then whether local food systems would increase the autonomy of producers. Local production and consumption would mean they could be able to sell more directly to consumers, without interference of these big companies. Does this give them more autonomy? It might because no other companies are deciding what they should produce or how they should produce it. However, a lot of farmers are producing for export, if we would focus more on local food production and consumption, they would not be able to export their products any longer and maybe thus they would have to stop producing if they can't find a way to sell their products. Just as consumers have now less choices in what to consume, producers have less choices in what and how to produce. Whilst they could previously produce anything that was asked for in the world, they can now only make successful business out of the production that the Dutch want to consume. Product that only sell internationally are no longer an option.

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<sup>60</sup> Klundert and Mulder, 'Onzichtbare Voedselreuzen'.



### 4.3 JUSTICE FOR PRODUCERS

From the aspect of justice, we should look at a fair distribution of benefits, risks & costs<sup>61</sup>. For producers this means that there is a fair distribution of benefits, risks & costs with regard to the money they get for their products.

In the current food system, producers can get less than the costs of production for their products. Businesses aim at making revenue and distributing dividend to shareholders. In this goal the quality of the food is set aside<sup>62</sup>. In the industrial approach to agriculture the production is fully focused on the quantity and the prices of food. This means farmers often do not have the freedom to ask for certain prices for their products or to focus their attention on the quality of the food. Because of the competition in the food market they have to produce and sell for the lowest price possible to guarantee their sales. In the UK the price share of bananas is as follows: 4% is for the banana plantation workers, 20% for the growers, 23% for the transport to the European Unions, 12% of the price is spend on EU tariffs, another 12% is for companies in the UK that ripe and distribute the bananas and the final biggest part of the price, 29%, is for the supermarkets<sup>63</sup>. Moreover, supermarkets often determine the prices of the products, instead of the costs determining the price of the products. The supermarket can make less revenue on certain products while making more revenue on other products, based on what the consumer is willing to pay for certain products. This leads to the fact that some products are sold really cheap in the supermarket, and part of the loss of revenue will be charged on the farmers<sup>64</sup>.

Farmers are for their prices fully depended on how the market determines the prices. Even though there are all kinds ways invented to strengthen the position of farmers in the market, these are often not in proportion with the power relations in the global food market. Of course, this is also true for other products besides food, however we seem to think that for food this is more problematic because it is essential for human beings that the food producers keep producing. In other sectors companies stop existing when they cannot make enough revenue with their products. However, we have set up the food system in such a way that there should always be enough food for everyone, which can still lead to over supply of food, leading to lower food prices than a true market would have created. This leads to the fact that some

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<sup>61</sup> Mephram, 'Ethical Analysis of Food Biotechnologies: An Evaluative Framework', 105.

<sup>62</sup> Korthals, *Goed Eten. Filosofie van Voeding En Landbouw*, 280.

<sup>63</sup> Shaw and Shaw, *Corporate Social Responsibility, Social Justice and The Global Food Supply Chain*, chap. 5.3.

<sup>64</sup> Shaw and Shaw, *Corporate Social Responsibility, Social Justice and The Global Food Supply Chain*.

farmers keep farming without making the revenues that they want to make. There are farmers that are doing quite well, but they are still not in charge of what they are producing and for which prices, from the perspective of autonomy this is still problematic.

It is often argued that farmers would get fairer price without the intervention of other companies, if they could sell directly to consumers. That is true, because the consumer still pays the same for products as she does in the supermarket, but now hundred percent of that money goes to the farmer. The farmer gets at least more money for their products, which is necessary in order for the farmer to obtain well-being and be autonomous in her decisions. It is still questionable whether local food systems would increase the number of consumers that will buy their products at the farm. There is a reason why consumers buy their products at supermarkets; it is extremely convenient. And will it not still be convenient to buy all your products at one place instead of going to all kinds of different farms? If we still go to supermarkets will farmers get fairer prices? And I argue that it should also be possible for farmers to get fairer prices without local production.

#### **4.4 CONCLUSION FOR PRODUCERS**

In this chapter I have argued that local food systems seem to have some advantages for producers, for example better regulation of working circumstances, stronger position in the supply chain because of shorter supply chains, and fairer prices because of direct sales to consumers. However, I have also shown that the ethical issues that arise do not immediately indicate that we should transition towards local food systems. Working circumstances in the Netherlands can be meagre as well, producers lose abilities to produce for export and prices might still be determined by supermarkets instead of by producers themselves. These are all ethical issues that would need further deliberation to decide whether or not it would be for consumers favourable to shift towards local food production.

## 5 | LOCAL ANIMALS

In this chapter I focus on the animals that we use for food production; this can be direct (the animals that we eat) or indirect (the animals that we use for the production of eggs and dairy). Although we, humans, are animals as well, in this chapter I refer to nonhuman animals that we use for food production. In this chapter I do not want to touch upon the discussion about whether or not we are morally allowed to consume animals at all. Undoubtedly there is also a need for guidance on these personal-choice decisions<sup>65</sup>. However, in this chapter I want to find out how local food could influence animals in the food system. If we transition towards local consumption and production this leads to a reduction of meat in our food system in order to produce enough food for all Dutch citizens. This reduction of the use of animals in food production will be taken into account in application of the principles.

### 5.1 WELL-BEING FOR ANIMALS

Talking about the well-being of animals we use the term animal welfare. Following the resourcist approach to well-being I here focus on what animals need in order to obtain well-being, this concerns that they are treated well and have enough space to live.

Part of food production is aimed at maximising profit, this results in a focus on low input-high output and low costs. Therefore, intensive farming systems have been developed to meet these criteria. These intensive production systems often focus on keeping more animals on smaller pieces of land in order to maximise production output<sup>66</sup>. In a free market, consumers should be able to decide which products are allowed and which are not, by methods of not buying the products they see as undesirable. They are not all determining in which products are available, but they should be able to not buy the products they do not desire. However, there are (at least) three reasons why this system does not include the welfare of animals. First, it requires that producers are aware of the added value that animal welfare has for consumers. Producers can make revenues on animal welfare because the animals grow better, or the meat has a higher quality, without the consumer being aware of the increase in animal welfare. However, they could also make money with animal welfare if the consumer is aware of the animal welfare or

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<sup>65</sup> Fraser, 'Animal Ethics and Food Production in the Twenty-First Century', 205.

<sup>66</sup> Madzingira, 'Animal Welfare Considerations in Food-Producing Animals'.

the harm that was done to animals. However, because consumers are often unaware of these practices, they cannot decide which are desirable and which are not. A few slices of ham do not show the harm that was done to the animals. Second, consumers might have other interests (e.g. economic) for buying products that do not correspond with how they value animal welfare of the products they buy. And third, the negative effects that food production has on animal welfare is not incorporated in the price of meat; this is not something that we can easily put a price tag on.

There are two trends with regard to local food production and consumption that might impact the welfare of animals and the problems mentioned above. First is that consumers who buy more locally might be more aware of the production process. The assumption is that they would not accept the poor standards of well-being that are currently often the case in animal production processes. This would mean that producers will not be able to make money with poor animal welfare standards and that these production processes will disappear. It is however the question if people would really be more aware of the circumstances under which animals are used for production. The circumstances under which animals are used for production in the Netherlands right now are not always as we would all agree upon. But consumers do not always know about these circumstances, so why would this change when we would only consume meat from the Netherlands? It might again be argued that it is also possible to raise more awareness about the conditions under which animals are used for food production in an international system. Can education, campaigns or other forms of providing information towards consumer not be more successful to raise awareness for this?

The second impact that a local food system might have on the welfare of animals is that if we would switch towards a local food system, the use of animals in our food production would drastically decline, as showed in the report of Wageningen University<sup>67</sup>. This means that the supply of animal products will decline, and prices will due to market forces increase. Meat prices might become so expensive that consumption will totally stop, or at least drastically decline. Less animals will be kept for food production increasing the welfare of animals. However, it might also be argued that because of the lack of space animals will be kept on even smaller pieces of land, leading to less animal welfare.

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<sup>67</sup> Terluin et al., 'Voedselvoorziening in Nederland Onder Buitengewone Crisisomstandigheden', 10.

## **5.2 AUTONOMY FOR ANIMALS**

As I have argued in paragraph 2.3 on the principle of autonomy, applying autonomy to animals will lead to questions about their freedom and in what way they can live a life that is true to their own instincts. An animal has autonomy if she can choose between different paths provided in her environment. The question whether local food systems will have a positive impact on autonomy for animals depends fully on the new role that animals will have in a local food system. In the Netherlands local food systems will make for less room for animal production because usable land in the Netherlands is scarce and production with animals often takes up a lot of land<sup>68</sup>.

If we would transition towards local food production and consumption this would mean one of two things, either we minimize animal food production or we intensify animal production with more animals on smaller pieces of land, for example vertical farming. The first strategy would mean that less animals suffer from a loss of their autonomy, less animals are kept captive for food production, less animals that cannot freely choose their own way of living. The second strategy would have a negative impact on the autonomy for animals because they would have less possibilities to determine how they should live.

In order to say something about how local food systems impact the autonomy of animals we would thus need to know what animal production would look like in a local food system, this can have different implementations and therefore we cannot yet say what its impact on autonomy of animals will be. It is unclear whether local food systems would have a positive impact and it is unclear whether this positive impact cannot be achieved an international system.

## **5.3 JUSTICE FOR ANIMALS**

Regarding the question of justice for animals, it is an important factor whether animals have only instrumental value or whether they also have intrinsic value. If they have an intrinsic value this would mean that we have certain responsibilities towards animals. If they have only instrumental value, we have some responsibilities with regard to animals, but all in a context

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<sup>68</sup> Leenstra and Vellinga, 'Quick scan: Dierlijke eiwitconsumptie en duurzaamheid, de feiten en cijfers in perspectief'.

where this is instrumental to the benefits of humans. In the field of ethics, we believe something, or someone has intrinsic value if they have a (certain) moral status. There are a lot of ways to appoint moral status, based on the fact for instance that animals are sentient, they can feel pain and thus they have interests of their own not to feel this pain<sup>69</sup>. But it could also be argued that nonhuman animals are not rational beings and therefore do not have interests of their own to which we have obligations<sup>70</sup>. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to argue if, and which, moral status we should give to nonhuman animals. As argued in paragraph 2.3.3, animals do also have certain benefits, risks and costs in the food system, as we have again seen in the paragraph on well-being for animals, this means that we should take those into account even when we are not quite sure yet how we should take these into account.

The question about justice for animals is a more fundamental question than an issue of distribution. It is not my goal here to investigate this issue, and neither can I make any claims on what would be a fair distribution for animals without a statement on the value of animals. This is why I want to conclude this paragraph by stating that animals need more discussion and deliberation within the context of local food systems. They are at stake in the food system, there are benefits, risks and costs that affects their lives, it is therefore that I argue we should give more moral consideration on what we owe animals in are food system before making any conclusions on whether or not a local food system could be just for animals.

## **5.4 CONCLUSION FOR ANIMALS**

For animals in the food system there is a lot of unclarity which ethical issues will be at stake when we transition towards local food systems will be. This unclarity has two main reasons. First, because it is not clear what role there is for animals in local food production and consumption; the use of animals in local food production and consumption can vary too much. Second, because it is from an ethical perspective not evident how we should take animals into account when deciding on food policies like a shift towards local production and consumption. For animals their well-being, autonomy and justice raise more fundamental ethical questions about the position of animals in the food system, rather than questions about the practicalities and implications of local food systems.

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<sup>69</sup> Gruen, 'The Moral Status of Animals'.

<sup>70</sup> Gruen.

## 6 | LOCAL NATURE

Just as with animals, there is no agreement on whether nature has intrinsic or only instrumental value, for the scope of this thesis I leave this issue aside. Whether we value nature intrinsically or instrumentally does matter, but in both ways we value nature and we want it to last. In order for nature to last, I look at the principles of well-being, autonomy and justice. All will point to different aspects of the environment, namely well-being focuses on how we pollute it, autonomy focuses on how it can still have its own way of existing and justice represents our way of treating it; do we treat it with respect so it is able to last.

### 6.1 WELL-BEING FOR NATURE

In our current food system, the well-being of nature is harmed. In the way we currently produce and consume food we pollute nature in all kinds of ways. The most recent discussion in the Netherlands has been about the emission of nitrogen. Lots of measures must be taken to reduce the nitrogen emissions, these measures are taken by the Dutch government, they are buying out farmers, so they stop producing and thus stop emitting nitrogen<sup>71</sup>. Also, in the Climate Agreement of the Netherlands there is great attention for agriculture and food production, all aimed at reducing the impact of food production on the climate, working towards a climate neutral Netherlands in 2050<sup>72</sup>. Furthermore, food production and consumption contribute to the pollution of plastic in the oceans (and on land). Since the beginning of plastics use (around 1950) there is about 9.2 billion tons produced. Of that, more than 6.9 billion tons have become waste, from that only 0.3 tons made it to the recycling bin. Between 5.3 and 14 million tons of plastic end up in the ocean each year<sup>73</sup>. Although this is of course not all due to food production and consumption, they do have an impact. These are all examples of ways in which food production and consumption harm the environment. If we would apply the principle of well-being to nature, we must admit we have to turn this impact around, what would be the consequences of local food production and consumption for these issues?

It is often argued that more local food consumption will lead to lesser carbon dioxide emissions from international transport. However, the transport of our food represents a mere 10% of the

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<sup>71</sup> Ministerie van LNV, 'Kamerbrief Voortgang Stikstofproblematiek Structurele Aanpak'.

<sup>72</sup> 'Klimaatakkoord'.

<sup>73</sup> Parker, 'We Made Plastic. We Depend on It. Now We're Drowning in It.'

emissions<sup>74</sup>. The other emissions are part of agriculture itself. By producing more efficient in the right places we might be able to reduce the emissions better. Growing tomatoes in heated greenhouses might emit more CO<sub>2</sub> than growing them in Spain and transporting them to the Netherlands. Transports by plane are creating most pollutions. Initiatives of sustainable growing in South-America of avocado's, mango's or banana's might be more environmental friendly than banana's grown here in the Netherlands. Think for example of initiatives like Apeel<sup>75</sup> that increase the shelf life of products, making it possible to transport them via ship instead of plane.

Another aspect of well-being of nature is the conservation of biodiversity. Can local food systems contribute to the biodiversity in nature? Boudry & Boersma<sup>76</sup> argue that intensification of food production can help the biodiversity. The main cause of decline in species diversity is the destruction and fragmentation of their living environment<sup>77</sup>. By producing more efficiently in places where we can do so on most fertile ground, we could give 50 percent of agricultural area back to nature, this will have a positive effect on the biodiversity<sup>78</sup>. This can be done all over the world and does not necessarily have to take place within the Netherlands.

Producing food with respect for the well-being of nature requires a fundamental change in how we treat nature in the process of food production and how we determine what production methods are allowed and which are not. There are highly nature friendly production methods outside the Netherlands that can with small emissions be transported towards the Netherlands. This shows that producing locally is not the only option in producing methods that supply in more well-being for nature. Furthermore, it is not a guarantee that when we produce only within the Netherlands nature would benefit from it. In the Netherlands we also have production methods that are highly harmful to nature and changing these production methods is not guaranteed to happen when we produce and consume food locally.

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<sup>74</sup> Ritchie, 'You Want to Reduce the Carbon Footprint of Your Food? Focus on What You Eat, Not Whether Your Food Is Local'.

<sup>75</sup> 'Milieu'.

<sup>76</sup> Boersma and Boudry, 'De Landbouw Moet Juist Verder Intensiveren'.

<sup>77</sup> Haddad et al., 'Habitat Fragmentation and Its Lasting Impact on Earth's Ecosystems'.

<sup>78</sup> Folberth et al., 'The Global Cropland-Sparing Potential of High-Yield Farming'.



## 6.2 AUTONOMY FOR NATURE

Applying autonomy to nature "stands for the capacity for self-generation, for self-realisation, or for being a law unto themselves, if even in some minimal way"<sup>79</sup>. We render nature morally considerable out of respect for its unity and capacity for self-realization. Heyd argues that in order for us to counter the problems that nature faces (global, humanly caused degradation) we need to develop ways of revaluing nature and promote the recognition of the autonomy of nature<sup>80</sup>. He argues that we have different ways of knowing nature, for example instrumental, aesthetic, historical, affective, and so on<sup>81</sup>. In order for us to revalue nature we need to get to know nature in a different way. In a practical manner we need to "find ways that allow the other beings in our environment to show themselves unencumbered by our instrumental interests"<sup>82</sup>. Local food systems can contribute to this particular kind of recognition of the autonomy of nature. In local food systems we are more aware of where our food comes from and the role that nature plays in our food consumption, and how important nature is, not only for us, but also as an end in itself. Of course, it could also happen that when we only look at nature's role in food production, we only value nature in relation to its value for food production, not as an end in itself. This would then hinder our way of knowing nature as an autonomous being.

## 6.3 JUSTICE FOR NATURE

Just as for animals, it is again the question in what way we should apply the principle of justice to this interest group, because of the debate on whether nature has intrinsic or instrumental value. It is a too difficult decision on whether nature has something like intrinsic value for the purpose of this thesis. I therefore take here a practical approach from a view of *enlightened anthropocentrism*. This is a world view that says that humans have moral obligations towards nature for the sake of other human beings<sup>83</sup>. Enlightened anthropocentrism is sufficient for the practical purpose of protecting the earth's environment, and perhaps even more effective in delivering pragmatic outcomes, instead of using a *non-anthropocentric* theory that is burdened to provide arguments for intrinsic value of nature<sup>84</sup>. Just treatment of nature should therefor

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<sup>79</sup> Heyd, 'The Case for Environmental Morality', 23.

<sup>80</sup> Heyd, 24.

<sup>81</sup> Heyd, 22.

<sup>82</sup> Heyd, 23.

<sup>83</sup> Brennan and Lo, 'Environmental Ethics'.

<sup>84</sup> Brennan and Lo.

take into account the benefits, risks & costs for nature. This means that we first should look after the well-being of nature and furthermore we should use nature in a sustainable way that makes sure future generations can also enjoy food production. Here we come to a question that is not related to whether we produce locally or not. The question is about how and what we produce instead of where we produce it.

## **6.4 CONCLUSION FOR NATURE**

For nature there is one important question when it comes to its role in local food production and consumption, that is about how we value nature. For the principle of well-being it is most important that we value nature in order for it to last. We should value nature in such a way that we produce and consume without polluting the environment too much, this could be justified by the fact that we value nature because of its value for humans. However, for the principle of autonomy we see that it is necessary to not only value nature for humans, but also value it as an end in itself. The question of justice again asks how we should value nature. In all of these questions the role for local food systems is quite small, whether or not local food systems have a positive impact on nature depend on different issues that might be tackled in local food systems, but this is not necessarily the case and they could also be tackled in international systems.

## 7 | CONCLUSION

In this chapter I will answer my research question: which moral aspects should be taken into account when deciding on a shift towards local food production and consumption in the transition towards a food system that is healthy, sustainable and fair?

In this thesis multiple issues have passed the revue. With regard to local food consumption and production there are clear moral dilemmas for consumers and producers. For the well-being of consumers, it is a question about how healthy food should be and what its value is in relation to the robustness of our food system and its ability to produce enough food for everyone? For the autonomy of consumers, we see there is a dilemma between the range of options they have in choosing food products and how well-informed these choices are. Justice for consumers raises the question about our responsibilities for not only producing enough healthy food for Dutch consumers but also the responsibility to produce for people in the rest of the world. Well-being for producers asks if we could better regulate working circumstances in local food systems and if this might harm the possibility for producing for some people? Autonomy for producers raises a question about their range of options in food production in relation to the independence they have in making those choices. Justice for producers asks what should determine the price of food products for those prices to be fair?

For animals and nature, it was more difficult to see which ethical issues are at stake in the transition towards local food production and consumption. This is mostly because there is a more fundamental question that needs answer before we can say anything about the impact of local food systems. That question is how do we value animals and nature in our food system and how should we treat them? We see that there is something to say for how local food systems might impact the well-being of animals and nature, but certainly when it comes to autonomy and justice, there are bigger issues that need more substantial analysis that this thesis has not been able to provide.

I would finally like to conclude by a small reflection on the use of the ethical matrix. While it has definitely been successful in raising different ethical considerations regarding local food systems it has its flaws in giving a more substantial weighing of those different issues. As expected, it was not able to in any way guide our actions or help us in reaching consensus on

what to do. However, it has given us multiple issues that we can further deliberate on to determine whether or not a transition to local food system is morally desirable.

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