

## **Human-Livestock Relationships and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) in the UK**

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a system of food production and distribution aiming to involve local communities in the growing and rearing of their food. Whilst traditionally conceptualised as a mainly horticultural movement, recent developments have seen a number of CSA projects rearing and keeping livestock alongside their vegetable cultivation with consumers embracing the model as a means of access to a greater variety of produce. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with representatives from CSA farms across the UK and the Republic of Ireland this article explores the rationales, roles, and relationships that shape interactions between humans and non-human animals within this niche and alternative agricultural model. Livestock are implicated within CSA projects for diverse reasons, with animals strongly linked to the food based values and identities of each individual community group. Through the development of closer relationships between humans and animals, CSAs become additionally reframed as enterprises producing not just food, but also sources of animal encounters, with members joining the schemes for the encounter value of non-human life, rather than solely in a quest for alternative food (systems). Relationships between humans and animals result in new and different practices, performances, and imaginations of agriculture and agricultural space. Animals' involvement in CSA comes to be as much about producing an 'alternative place' as it is about producing 'alternative food'.

**Keywords:** Community Supported Agriculture; Animals; Livestock; Human-Animal Relations; Encounter; Place

### **1. Introduction**

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a system of agricultural production and distribution that aims to share the 'risks and rewards' of farming more equitably. Whilst CSA remains less widespread in the UK than other forms of alternative food networks such as farmers markets or box schemes (Volz et al. 2016), a strong core of CSA farms are operating and evolving across the UK, contributing to the myriad different ways people are sourcing their food and engaging in alternative economies.

Whilst traditionally associated with horticultural production, recent developments have seen a number of CSA projects rearing and keeping livestock alongside their vegetable cultivation, as well as the emergence of CSA schemes formed solely for farming livestock. This area has

been largely ignored within existing literature, and little effort has been made to study how livestock fit into practices and performances of CSA. This is in marked contrast to other forms of agriculture, where rural studies scholars have paid considerable attention to human-animal relations and the role and treatment of livestock (Holloway 2002; Yarwood and Evans 2000). Studies of CSA in comparison appear to have been immune to the 'animal turn' within social sciences (Wilkie 2015), a move which has seen an increased scholarly interest in 'animals as *subjects* rather than *objects*, in animals as *parts* of human society rather than just *symbols* of it, and in human *interactions and relationships with* animals rather than simply human *representations of animals*' (Knight 2005, p. 1, emphasis in original). This paper moves to begin to remedy these gaps, aiming to understand and contextualise the rationales, roles, and relationships that shape interactions between humans and livestock within CSA farms. CSAs can produce different human-animal relations in comparison to other modes of agriculture due to the opportunity for closer levels of contact between consumers and livestock.

The paper situates itself at the intersections between scholarship within animal geography, rural geography, and food geography, and mobilises ideas and concepts from within these bodies of work. My approach here is influenced by human geography's broad and ongoing interest in post-structuralism. Particularly here, it is post-structuralist geography's focus on heterogeneous relations (mixtures of the natural and social and the human and the non-human) (Murdoch 2006) that leads me to ask specific questions about community supported agriculture and try and produce an engagement with the 'complex entanglements of social practice and the fleshy materialities of the socio-spatial world' (Murdoch 2006, p. 17). My aim here is to begin to more critically unpack the heterogeneity of spaces of community

supported agriculture and engage with their more-than-human constitutive elements. As such, I treat CSAs as hybrid spaces, 'mixtures of machines, animals, states, organisations, ecologies, politics' – all manner of elements (Hinchliffe 2007, p. 51), in an effort to move towards a more nuanced understanding of how various human and non-human entities become entangled in shared spaces of CSA. This in turn directs my attention to what Wilkie (2015, p. 324) calls the 'human-animal nexus', and an interest in 'our symbolic and material relations with other animals'. Embracing heterogeneity also involves recognising and considering the importance of imagined, affective, and experiential elements, as Anderson and Harrison (2010, p. 16) note, 'it becomes necessary to think about the specificity and performative efficacy of different relations and different relational configurations'. Thus, as well as paying attention to the relations between different humans and non-humans, I also explore how 'performances bring these spaces into being' (Gregson and Rose 2000, p. 441).

I begin by introducing and contextualising Community Supported Agriculture, discussing recent trends within this niche mode of agricultural production, before moving to explain the methodologies which informed this study. Finally, I mobilise empirical data in efforts to 'bring animals back in' (Wolch and Emel 1995) to discussions of CSA, tracing some of the human-animal relationships that emerge within livestock based CSAs, and how these (re)shape and affect people, practices, and places.

## **2. Community Supported Agriculture**

In the UK, Community Supported Agriculture has been defined as 'any food, fuel or fibre producing initiative where the community shares the responsibilities and rewards of production in a spirit of mutual trust and openness. Whether through ownership, investment, sharing the costs of production, or provision of labour' (Community Supported Agriculture Network UK 2015). CSA thus covers a wide range of different partnerships between consumers and producers, and is often framed within the wider category of 'alternative food networks', a broad term covering 'emerging networks of producers, consumers, and other actors that embody alternatives to the more standardised industrial mode of food supply' (Renting et al. 2003, p. 394).

One of the central tenets of Community Supported Agriculture is the idea of more equitably sharing the burden of risk associated with food production amongst all those who have access to the benefits of food production, instead of being borne solely by producers (Cone and Myhre 2000; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007). In practice, this is enacted through consumers committing financially to the farm in advance of the growing season, 'buying a share'. CSA is slightly different from pure 'subscription farming', where the producer owes the consumer for what they have paid in advance (Tippins et al. 2002). Instead, those who join a CSA commit to share the 'risk and reward of farming', and will simply receive a share of whatever is produced, whether munificent or meagre – though consumers will often have had input and influence over what is grown.

CSAs have been broadly be classified into two basic types: farmer-led, and consumer-led. Farmer-led CSA (or subscription CSA) is the 'top-down' approach to CSA, where an existing

agriculturalist is the key instigator of the system and makes most of the management decisions. Members financially subscribe, but often have little other involvement. This is the most common form of CSA practiced in the USA, where almost 75% of projects are farmer-driven (Adam 2006). However, there is a grey area in differentiating these forms of CSA from simple box schemes<sup>i</sup> (Adam 2006; Soil Association 2009). Consumer-led CSA (or shareholder CSA), on the other hand, is a more 'bottom up' approach, initiated by a community of people interested in issues surrounding local food or sustainability. This core group organises the subscriptions and works together to provide the CSA with produce. Community members tend to participate in the agricultural activities much more closely, actively engaged and involved in the labour of food production. Such practices can blur the lines and distinctions between who is a 'producer' and who is a 'consumer', as these types of CSA frequently involve the community members who 'support' the farm engaging in agricultural activities themselves. This consumer-driven CSA is the type most common in the UK (Adam 2006; Soil Association 2009).

The first CSA in the UK was set up in 1994, and since then the model has mainly been driven and supported by the Soil Association through a series of feasibility studies and development projects (Volz et al. 2016). Research from 2011 found that CSA projects in England alone 'work over 3,200 acres of land, count at least 5,000 trading members, feed at least 12,500 people, and have a combined annual turnover of over £7,000,000' (Saltmarsh et al. 2011, p. 4). However, CSA remains less widespread in the UK than other forms of alternative food networks, with farmers markets and box schemes proving more popular and well known (Volz et al. 2016). At the time of Saltmarsh et al.'s (2011) research, the number of CSAs had been

growing rapidly, with over 50 new projects having been set up in the previous three years. More recent work by Volz et al. (2016) describes 80 CSA initiatives active in the UK. However, McFadden (2008) notes that accounting for CSA is difficult, as many farms operate 'privately and quietly', going unnoticed in statistics. Furthermore, the wide range of different types of CSA, and the problems of defining what is, and what is not, a CSA, as well as the quickly changing and evolutionary nature of CSA schemes make obtaining accurate information about the uptake of CSA difficult. Pilley (2001) also blames the grassroots nature of CSA initiatives for creating problems with estimating numbers, suggesting 'it is likely that many more exist than we account for' (Pilley 2001, p. 9). Similarly, McEwan (2015, p. 1) quotes an interview with the UK's CSA Network (a co-operative organisation aiming to promote and grow the CSA model): 'no one really knows how many CSA schemes currently operate because they spring up and then disappear without ever announcing themselves'.

Despite the wide body of literature on CSA that has explored the system from both the perspectives of its workings (Cone and Myhre 2000; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007) and the associated benefits and attractions to participation (Cooley and Lass 1998; Cox et al. 2008), the place of livestock in such systems is generally left neglected. Horticultural forms of CSA have dominated research despite the existence of CSA projects farming and keeping livestock simultaneously to vegetable cultivation, and the emergence of CSA projects formed solely for livestock farming. However, according to Volz et al. (2016), 38% of CSAs in Europe now offer eggs, 29% meat, 28% honey, and 26% dairy products – as a comparison, 94% offer vegetables, 58% offer fruit, and 25% offer bread. Unfortunately, within these overarching headline statistics Volz et al. do not differentiate between CSAs who buy in supplementary

foodstuffs and CSAs who actually produce animal products as part of their operations. However, in their more detailed reporting of a 'CSA census' in the UK (which surveyed roughly a quarter of CSAs in the UK), Volz et al. report that 'five out of twenty-two farms produced meat, two produced dairy, four produced eggs and two produced honey' (Volz et al. 2016, p. 113). Additionally, they report a growth in the UK of CSA initiatives by 'existing farmers, often meat producers, who have land available and are looking at CSA as a way to involve the community and diversify their products' (Volz et al. 2016, p. 114). A more recent report by the UK CSA Network also notes a strategic need for the sector and movement to engage with livestock production:

*Strategically, it is important that the CSA movement becomes more diverse in terms of what we offer. If we only focus on horticulture, we limit the number of farmers who can participate in areas where livestock systems dominate, for example in Wales. Existing CSAs may simply want to expand beyond growing just fruit and vegetables to meet their members' additional dietary needs.*

(Community Supported Agriculture Network UK 2017, p. 40)

### **3. Methods**

The research question being addressed here is 'what human-animal relationships emerge within livestock based Community Supported Agriculture farms?'. My specific focus on human-animal relationships aligns with a growing (interdisciplinary) body of work that takes as its central concern 'the complex nexus of spatial relations between people and animals'

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(Philo and Wolch 1998, p. 110). This consideration of the place of the non-human within social networks requires recognition of 'humans' relationships with other species in relation to specific cultural and historical contexts' (Mullin 1999, p. 219) but also engagement with the 'actual material embodied relationships between humans and animals' (Fox 2006, p. 526).

As a result, the research draws on qualitative data, specifically, semi-structured interviews with representatives (members, co-ordinators, volunteer managers, administrators, chairpersons, etc.) from CSA farms across the UK and the Republic of Ireland. Whilst these representatives tended to be stakeholders actively involved with the running of the CSA, as mentioned earlier, CSA, particularly in how it tends to be practiced in the UK, blurs the lines and distinctions between who is a 'producer' and who is a 'consumer'. Many of those interviewed were consumers who had simply taken on the mantle of 'producer' through engaging in agricultural activities themselves. Indeed, as Humphrey (2017, p. 5) found in his work, producers and consumers within CSA are 'frequently one and the same'. Similarly, Stephen, coordinator and member of a CSA in England, in defining CSA argues that:

*It's just consumers being the agriculturalists, so there's no, there's not actually an interplay between two different parties, it's just one party becoming the other.*

Understanding CSA requires a more nuanced approach than a rigid dichotomy between producer and consumer, as in practice, these are rarely distinct or oppositional categories. Rather, there is a large and mixed spectrum of involvement in the CSA, ranging from those



actively engaged in husbandry and cultivation, those involved in various shades of administration and organisation, those who regularly attend volunteer days, and those who simply collect their shares of food. However, it is worth noting, that due to their gatekeeping nature, it tended to be actors who were more intimately and actively involved with the CSA who I spoke to, and thus there is certainly the potential for a level of 'pro-CSA' bias to creep in to their representations and understandings of the relationships between people, animals, and place, produced through the CSA experience that I discuss here. There are opportunities for future work on CSA and livestock to take a more holistic approach to membership, similar to Cooley and Lass' (1998) approach.

During 2015 I aimed to conduct interviews with representatives from the majority of livestock-based CSA projects operating in the UK. This proved more challenging than might first be imagined. As mentioned earlier, 'no-one really knows' how many CSA schemes there are (McEwan 2015), and at the time of the research a definitive list of CSA projects operating in the UK did not exist. The Soil Association had been maintaining a database of UK based CSAs, but this endeavour ceased in March 2012, remaining online and accessible until early 2015, before being removed completely. Thus, though slightly dated and incomplete, lists of CSAs curated by The Soil Association, The Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens, and The Community Supported Agriculture Network UK served as my starting point<sup>ii</sup>. I then used social media websites (Facebook and Twitter), in-depth search engine requests, and an element of 'snowball sampling' to develop a more concise database of livestock based CSAs. My sampling approach involved working with projects that self-defined as CSAs, respecting participants' views and understanding of their practices.

I conducted 27 interviews with representatives from livestock-based CSA projects. These CSAs ranged from more typical and traditional approaches to livestock farming, to apicultural CSAs, and game-meat CSAs, as well as CSAs keeping livestock for therapeutic or labour purposes. These interviews sought to discover the context of the farms, the roles ascribed to livestock, and how participants viewed their relationships and encounters with livestock. During interviews with representatives from livestock-based CSA farms, it became apparent that there was also a need to speak to those CSAs that remained purely horticultural too, discussing their reasons for a lack of livestock. I thus undertook an additional 13 interviews with representatives from CSA projects without livestock. Further, I also interviewed organisations involved with promoting and developing CSA as a model of alternative agriculture to canvas an understanding of trends within the sector at large.

Interviews became a way of allowing me to access participants' knowledges and experiences, without needing to take up large amounts of their time. Indeed, several of the CSA projects I interviewed had specific policies not to allow researchers to visit the farm, as they could not afford the time input. I chose to use a mixture of face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, and online synchronous interviews (using Skype). Telephone and online interviews allow a researcher to access a more geographically dispersed range of participants, without compromising a project's feasibility. Technologically mediated interviews in this way can also be more convenient for participants and easier to re-arrange, reducing drop-out and withdrawal rates within research.

I audio recorded<sup>iii</sup> all interviews, following participants' consent to do so, and these were later transcribed. All participants were assigned pseudonyms. During analysis, I imported these transcripts into NVivo for coding. I relied on a mix of emic and etic codes in a form of 'open coding'. Coding served to capture the essence of the data, a means to understand connections and relationships not immediately apparent and ask new questions (Cope 2010). By exploring the interrelations between different codes, recognising how they overlapped and connected, I began to tease out emergent themes, trends, and issues, in a process of 'code mapping' which then served as the main themes and quotations for the proceeding discussion. Following Milligan (2001, p. 109), 'the process of analysis has not been viewed as developing a definitive account, rather it has been viewed as one means of trying to understand the interrelations of multiple version of reality, and in doing so, it serves to stress the interconnectivities between actants'. My analysis thus served as a way of revealing some of the multiple versions of human-animal relationships that can emerge within CSA farms, as I now discuss.

#### **4. Community Supported Agriculture and Animals**

Agriculture provides huge potential for exploring human-animal relationships (Riley 2011), and Community Supported Agriculture is no exception. At the time of my research I mapped 80 active CSA projects<sup>iv</sup>, 36 of which (representing a significant proportion of the UK CSA sector) were keeping animals to varying extents for a range of purposes. Animals are important actants that co-produce these food networks, and actively influence how people experience and engage with their food and the farms themselves.

Within the subsequent three subsections I move to explore some of the human-animal relationships that emerge within livestock based CSA farms. I begin by exploring the nexus of relationships between animals, food, and CSA, noting how animals become imbricated in allowing the performance of certain food based identities. Whilst food is clearly important within the context of livestock-based CSAs I am also keen to discuss the different and more-than-food forms of human-animal relationships that emerge. Particularly, I examine how engagements with livestock emerge from, and produce, a desire for encounters and relationships with animals. These encounters can have a direct impact upon how CSA is practiced. Finally, I explore how livestock allow CSA projects to perform specific geographical imaginations of being a farm, of local culture, and of successful alterity.

#### **4.1. CSA, Animals, and Food**

This section explores the nexus of relationships between animals, food, and CSA, noting how animals reshape certain practices and identities, and exploring how the closer relationships that CSA members develop with animals subsequently affects their relationships with food. Within this section I draw on, and contribute to, ideas within animal geography scholarship, as well as the more specific findings related to CSA, arguing that livestock are an important way for CSA groups to define their own food systems and identities.

Given that CSAs are spaces of food production, it is perhaps unsurprising that a desire for animal food products plays a large role within the 'human-animal nexus' (Wilkie, 2015) that

emerges at CSAs. However, it was rarely a desire for a generic foodstuff, driven purely by calorific or nutritional needs that led the CSAs to establish themselves or introduce livestock, as Anthony explains:

*CSA is hugely about something else, something other than its products, its economic products, it's its social value! It's like an iceberg, what you see are the economic products, the things we grow and do, the stuff in a box, but actually, what keeps that all there, there's this iceberg of submerged value, it's tacit!* [Anthony, board member of the CSA Network UK]

Thus instead, interests and relationships with livestock emerged from desires for specific qualities of food and practices of agriculture. It highlights the value of exploring heterogeneity within discussions of community supported agriculture and local food, different foods produce different affectual engagements. Participants, such as Esther, Michelle, and Neil (see below), spoke about qualities such as 'organic', 'local', 'biodynamic', 'high-welfare', 'high quality', 'sustainable', 'traditional', 'natural', or 'ethically produced', with the values held important to the community group then becoming embedded and embodied within both the living animal and the final food product itself. The animals' presence, and agency (and management/suppression/encouragement thereof), become crucial in co-constituting these moral food communities. For example, the values that Esther, Michelle, and Neil talk about below regarding their group's desires for specific qualities of animal produce emerge from a combination of shared morals surrounding ideas of how livestock should be treated and farmed. As well as from a yearning for a level of involvement and participation within the food

production system, and a rejection and opposition to the mainstream methods of livestock farming:

*Well, the attraction for people, why would you pay more and put so much effort in to your meat? The people who want that humane, local meat!* [Esther, coordinator and member of a pig CSA in England]

*There were some families, who really wanted to be able to give their families good quality meat [...] people who are passionate about local food, about ethically produced food.* [Michelle, coordinator and member of a livestock CSA in England]

*The ideologies are, the values are very clear, it's all about, it's all in the objectives really, it's to get local sustainable food which is affordable and people know where it comes from is all, mainly, pretty well organically grown, it's healthy, and so on, and affordable and all that sort of thing, very simple values, and it's part of, you know, trying to restore more local, the local economy. It's all to do with sustainability really.* [Neil, founder and member of a lamb CSA in England]

As a result, the livestock involved with CSA become intimately associated with a morality of human behaviour and lifestyle. Sovereignty of livestock production and the ability to take an active role in the rearing of livestock was highly valued across many CSAs. As Holloway et al.

(2007) note, creating an identity that a product is specifically 'yours' carries additional significance. For some groups, such as Esther's pig CSA in England, it was the only way to produce food in a way that matched their values:

*I mean as soon as you get a lot of people or somebody else in charge or a farmer or someone else deciding on the welfare of the animal, then you've lost control which defeats the whole object to me personally and I think the people in my group, defeats the object of doing it, you might be back to, you might as well buy from the farm shop.*

Whilst the themes of localness, sustainability, and ethicality that emerge in the earlier quotes, as well as the ideas of ownership that Esther talks about above, are clearly important, it is also worth recognising that the relations which co-constitute these particular value-laden foods, and the animals involved in their production, serve to construct an identity for CSA members as connoisseurs of quality and ethical consumers. Rather than just a desire to purchase an organic, locally produced, leg of lamb, per se, it is equally a desire to access and perform the identity of someone who buys, and is involved in the farming of, organic and local produce, as Stephen, coordinator and member of a CSA in England, suggests:

*When it comes to livestock, people are being, they see themselves more as farmers [...] I think it's about performing, even when it would be perfectly possible to pay an extra 50 or 60 quid to get the vet in, and the impact that would have on people's pork price wouldn't be too bad, I think, it would be, a*

*sense of, maybe this is me, a sense of perhaps failure in the performance of keeping pigs.*

Many CSAs coalesce around the lack of husbandry, agricultural, and food based practices that align with the groups' desired standards, as Logan, farmer at a meat and dairy CSA in England, explains: *'when we did this local food survey there was a desire for organic goats' milk, raw goats milk [...] organic chicken was really desired as well and then as you probably know, you can't, it's just easy to, it disappears like hotcakes'*. Here, the community element of the farming project becomes more about a community of interest, rather than a purely geographic community. However, it is also a slightly different community of interest in comparison to the regular understanding that CSAs are formed by large amounts of vegetarian consumers (Lang 2010). For example, in Lang's (2010) work with one farm in America, he found that 31.4% of the CSA members were vegetarians, compared to what was at the time a national average of circa 3.2% of the population. Having livestock involved redefines who comes to participate in these groups and the collective makeup of what a CSA is, increasing the overall heterogeneity of CSA membership, and challenging previous norms about what these spaces are. As Michelle, coordinator and member of a livestock CSA in England, mentions: *'I was expecting it to be just kind of [the City's] greenies, but actually I guess the real greenies don't eat meat!'*. Indeed, several interviewees reported that introducing livestock to a CSA served as a catalyst that transformed notions of vegetarianism:

*He was vegetarian for 25 years, until he joined the farm, and he's not anymore, he eats meat, because he can see the sense of it, he can see where it fits in to*



*the scheme of things, and there's another lady, she's started eating meat after being vegetarian, because again she can see it, she knows the animals are being looked after.* [Hannah, founder and farmer of a mixed horticulture/livestock CSA in England]

This isn't about converting vegetarians to meat-eating, but creating additional food procurement pathways that allow individuals to enact their personal values and ethics in a modality that goes beyond the binary of carnivore/vegetarian. Alongside this idea of visibility equalling edibility, for some, embracing the visceral and sanguine nature of livestock rearing became an important part of the human-animal nexus in itself. The hemic encounter becoming a crucial part of the experience that CSA groups were marketing as part of subscribing and joining a livestock CSA, as Lisa, farmer at a livestock CSA in England, explains:

*Everybody is invited to come along to the abattoir, I have approached the abattoir to see if we can have a group go in [...] the last time we went there, there were a few guys who had looked after the pig and we waited for some blood.*

A trip to an abattoir is perhaps a more exceptional event, however, there was certainly a sense amongst CSAs that for their members, the issue of animal death was very much at the forefront of their engagement with meat-eating and their relationships with animals, as Lewis, a member of a mixed horticultural/livestock CSA in England describes:

*It makes you honest, it makes you face up to what you're really doing when you eat meat, and that's a healthy thing.*

For others though, the relationships that they developed with their livestock became problematic when it became time to send the animals to slaughter and actually encounter an animals' death:

*We lost one member because at the end, they said they were too upset with the process and they have gone back to shop buying meat, coz it's easier. It was too emotionally traumatising for them. [Esther, co-ordinator and member of a pig CSA in England]*

*Some people have found it very difficult to say goodbye to them, and then very difficult when the meat comes back as well [Ruth, founder and member of a mixed horticulture/livestock CSA in England]*

As Esther and Ruth describe, choosing to keep animals as a CSA can be a fractious matter. However, as Michelle, coordinator and member of a livestock CSA in England explains, this isn't as much of an issue as one might first expect, because *'the type of people that get involved with these things, you know they've thought about where their meat is coming from, that's why they are involved in this kind of scheme, and so you don't get that kind of squeamishness'*. There is possibly a self-selecting process going on here, in that by signing up to a CSA that rears livestock for meat, people are aware of, prepared for, and accepting of

some of the difficult ethical and emotional relationships that they might develop with the farm animals.

Relatedly, Ron, the animal co-ordinator of a mixed horticulture/livestock CSA in England, told me that his group was specifically pleased to be able to offer unusual animal products such as blood (for black-puddings) and heads (for brawns<sup>v</sup> and other speciality cuts and dishes) to their members. Ron cited the access to these less common animal products as being a key reason for having livestock in their CSA system. Generally, food products tend to be anonymised post-production, leading to a culture of denial around where animal products come from. Morgan and Cole (2011) describe this as a 'selective visibility of life'; a process which divorces the act of eating meat from the act of killing animals (Kellert 1996). Yet for several CSA members like Ron, being able to engage with blood and internal organs was an important part of the human-animal relations that constituted the group, a way of acknowledging, connecting, and living the realities of a food system which relies on death.

For other CSA members however, this was framed in a sense of efficiency. Eating the whole animal became framed as a way of 'doing justice' to animals that become food, in a way that conventional supermarket purchasing would not allow them to do, as Jon, founder and member of a mixed horticulture/livestock CSA in Wales describes:

*One of the things we said from the outset was that we wanted to use all the animal, so, you know, when we take it to the butcher we even get the testicles back from the young rams, so yeah, it was never our intention to just discard*

*any of it, we wanted to use as much as possible [...] when I cook it, I want to get it right, just the thought of not doing justice to this, you know this thing that you've looked after for an age, would just be gutting.*

For Jon's group, their choice to involve livestock arises as a mechanism that allows the group members to practice and perform meat consumption in a way that aligns with their wider environmental values and preferences. The livestock on the farms do not exist solely as isolated units of stock, but also as 'a bundle of social relations' (Watts 1999). Livestock allow groups to draw on and enact certain food cultures and discourses, particularly around alterity, heritage, or environmentalism, concerning the food they produce and practices they mobilise. Rhoda, for example, founder and member of a mixed horticulture/livestock CSA in Wales, discusses how local food traditions and cultures caused an engagement in sheep farming alongside their existing horticultural CSA: '*we're also aware that around us we're surrounded by sheep, so it's foolish to just cut yourself off from that, I mean that's part of our heritage and our food culture if you like around here*'. Similarly, Ruth, founder and member of a CSA that was based on land loaned from a local heritage project described her group's reasons for having bees being that '*honey has always been a really important food you know throughout our local history, and you know when the monks were around here, honey would have been really important to the local people*'.

As this section has shown, for the CSAs I was exploring, livestock were an important way for group members to define their own food and agricultural systems, broadening the ability for CSA members to practice and perform specific identities and politics in ways that vegetables

alone could not, such as advocates of animal welfare or connoisseurs of heritage breeds. CSA, as a model of farming and food production/procurement, is not limited to only fruit and vegetables, but is being applied to a wide range of human-food relationships and practices in the UK, produced through complex entanglements of social practice and fleshy materialities (Murdoch 2006). Livestock were crucial for many of the CSAs to be able to practice their own specific ways of 'doing food', and engage in values important to their memberships.

However, relationships with animals are neither simple nor static. Many CSAs experienced their relationships with their livestock changing, as Jon, founder and member of a mixed horticulture/livestock CSA in Wales explains:

*I think we got them initially because we all eat meat, but now, I think, if you asked us why do we have the animals, I think it's a totally different set of reasons, like they're really, really good fun, they're brilliant to have, it's just, everyone loves looking after them.*

Jon's groups' ongoing attunement to their sheep led to a change in their relationship(s) with the individual animals. This transformation moved the sheep beyond being conceptualised purely as food, and resulted in Jon's group becoming more focussed on the encounter value of their livestock. I move to explore this in more detail now.

#### **4.2. The Encounter Value of Livestock at CSAs**

This section draws on, and contributes to, ideas within animal geography around human-animal encounters (Emel and Urbanik, 2010) to discuss how closer, and more embodied, relationships and encounters with livestock can provide a level of 'encounter value' (Haraway, 2008) that can reshape practices within CSA. I argue here that human-animal relationships within CSA go beyond a singular positioning of 'animals as food'. Additionally here, I argue for the need for scholarship on alternative food networks to more critically unpack the heterogeneity of spaces of CSA to engage with their more-than-human constitutive elements, rather than subsuming non-human elements, such as animals, into broader conceptual categories, such as 'nature'.

Indeed, much of the literature on CSA discusses how the model enables consumers to feel a sense of connection with the land (Adam 2006; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007). 'The land' in this sense is fairly homogeneous, and lacking a discussion of what elements it is that CSA members are seeking to engage and connect with. A variety of diverse and heterogeneous elements and relations come together to co-produce places and practices of CSA. Similarly, there is frequent discussion of how CSA creates the opportunity for consumers to develop closer relationships with food-growers (Cooley and Lass 1998; Cox et al. 2008). However, it is not simply just agriculturalists that CSA members are entering relationships with; livestock CSAs allow the development of closer relationships between humans and animals. CSAs become reframed as enterprises producing not just food, but also sources of animal encounters. Indeed, Lisa, a farmer at a CSA in England, found that members were joining the CSA for the encounter value of non-human life, rather than joining the CSA in a

quest for alternative foods: *'we've got like [...] people who just go and check the sheep but don't want to eat them'*.

For many of the CSAs, livestock were valued for their ability to attract members to the CSA. Not just as sources of specific food products, but also for their value as an attraction, providing a marketing benefit and capitalising the potential for animal encounters, attracting new members and, in certain cases, visiting groups seeking to use the farm for therapeutic purposes (Gorman 2017b, c). As Stephanie, a member of a horticultural CSA in England enviously describes, *'I do think animals help, I think they help bring people to the site, they're an attraction, not everybody wants to come and admire your vegetables!'*. Adding livestock to the community farming projects allows CSAs to profit from their member's interest in, and desire for, contact with animals.

The desire for animal encounters was a common theme. For Lisa, a farmer at a livestock CSA in England, initially the livestock intended to be part of the CSA were those already present on the family farm. However, the community involvement at Lisa's CSA later began to actively influence the specific animals that were implicated in the farming system, certain qualities and types of sheep becoming valued above others: *'people wanted some black sheep and some prettier sheep, so we brought in a Jacob ram, so we have got a few black sheep now'*. Human-animal relations within CSA are heterogeneous; there are different ways of valuing animals, and tensions can arise between those who value the aesthetic exterior of animal bodies and those who value their interior 'meaty' qualities (Holloway 2005). Despite Lisa rearing her sheep for meat, she had to change her farming practices to produce additional

qualities beyond the purely food-products of the animal to be able to continue to receive the support of the local community, and their engagement in her CSA scheme. This is similar to Serpell's (2005, p. 178) idea of 'anthropomorphic selection', 'selection in favour of physical or behavioural traits that facilitate the attribution of human mental states to animals'. While Serpell's original use of the phrase was to discuss selection from an evolutionary and breeding perspective, it certainly applies to how a desire for specific imaginations of human-animal relations and encounters influence and shape CSAs performances and practices of agriculture, such as rearing black sheep for aesthetics. It provides a good example of how CSAs emerge from these 'complex entanglements of social practice and the fleshy materialities of the socio-spatial world' (Murdoch 2006, p. 17) – neither produced purely by 'social' or 'natural' forces, but a 'mingling of various entities in complex assemblages' (Murdoch 2006, p. 196).

Beth, the farm manager of a mixed horticulture/livestock CSA in England, also described how her farm changed their stocking to embrace the idea of the farm as a place of encounters: *'the sheep are to produce lambs for the visiting public and visiting Primary Schools to see and also for meat. The goats and donkeys are just for viewing'*. For Beth's CSA, individual species were assigned individual roles within the farm's enterprise, with these roles changing throughout the animal's lifespan. Certain breeds were favoured over others for their smaller statures or more sociable natures – characteristics which make them more intimately encounterable and companionable.

Human-animal encounters have implications in changing the CSA and the farmer's role. Rather than focussing solely on animal management and food production, they must also



focus on fulfilling people's expectations and preconceptions of animals (Cloke and Perkins 2005) to ensure that a 'successful' encounter is created. This change exists as a source of tension for some producers. Returning to Beth, although they have species on the farm deliberately to create encounters, she later laments that, '*we want the farm to be a working farm, not a petting farm*'. Animals can quickly become a detractor from creating a 'real' farming experience when they become reduced solely to spectacle. CSA farmers become implicated in the duty of fulfilling anticipations, imaginations, and expectancies and must balance care for animals with human curiosity (Gruffudd 2000), while creating and producing the animal encounters which people come to the farm for. There is clearly the potential for conflict between harmonising both, and CSA producers, such as Joni, often struggle to manage these conflicting practices:

*The big focus has been like allowing people to learn about bees, to the detriment of you know, possibly to the detriment of their welfare, and also to the detriment of honey production, because the more you open up the hive, and you know being handled, you're handling them slowly so that people can learn and you're doing things that actually if I were just doing it myself I would probably be quite quick but I want to show people. [Joni, beekeeper and founder of an apiculture CSA in England]*

Though equally, with the rise of social media, animals' agency, aesthetics, and charisma become key resources which CSA farms can capitalise on to capture interest, support, and

create a sense of connection between the farm and group members. Annmarie describes this below:

*It made, I think, them feel that little bit more connected with what they were eating, and I remember when they, when the snows were really bad, they, that we got sent some fantastic pictures of the sheep in the snow and them bringing them down to shelter and things and we did an email around with those and things, so there is just that sense of being a bit more, I don't know how to put it into words really, but you know, you just feel more connected to the processes of life, so that you're aware of where your food is coming from.*

[Annmarie, founder and member of a sheep CSA in England, describing how members of her CSA had 'virtual animal encounters']

This results in the emergence of human-animal relationships that are unmediated by an actual physical encounter and instead constituted by knowledge. A co-mingling of the physical with the virtual that allows CSA members like Annmarie to feel a connection to non-humans, devoid of a tangible embodied encounter. Holloway et al. (2007, p. 88) describe this as 'closeness at a distance', manifested through technologies that virtually establish sensual connections and vicarious experiences between viewers and a representation of place.

Human-animal relations and encounters (both physical and virtually mediated) become positioned as a useful way for CSAs to garner support, both politically and financially. The presence of livestock within the farm creates a means of engagement and charisma, and an

important symbolic resource: *'we would not get the public visiting or the schools and would not attract funding or donations without the animals'* [Beth, farm manager of a mixed horticulture/livestock CSA in England]. Animals have significant cultural value, people like to see them, and to know that they are present. Livestock become important agents in representing ideas of novel and virtuous practices worth supporting. The animals' value as food (discussed earlier) is positioned as a bonus here, rather than their core role; their presence becomes their purpose:

*A lot of them [members], they don't have a big expectation, they're like this is nice, we want plenty of bees in the world and somebody's managing them and they're happy to support that.* [Joni, beekeeper and founder of an apicultural CSA in England]

The invocation of animal life allowed Joni's CSA to perform in a completely different way to the usual model. 'Sharing the reward' of the CSA then becomes more about the opportunity for a flourishing of human-animal relations, and the potential for animal encounters.

As this section has highlighted, human-animal relations can be a useful charismatic marketing resource, allowing farms to attract additional members, funding, and support. However, this valuing of animals for their 'encounter value' can also cause tensions about what a farm should be, the type of animals present, and challenges balancing productivity alongside 'petting'. Building on this, I move now to discuss how the presence of livestock can begin to

reshape and influence the imaginations and materialities of place that are associated with CSA.

### **4.3. CSA, Livestock, and Producing (Imaginations of) Place**

This section explores the relationships between animals, people, and imaginations of place within the context of CSA. Drawing on ideas from rural geography around imaginations of 'the rural' (Clope, 2006) and the role of animals in creating place-identity (Yarwood and Evans, 2000), here I argue that human-animal relationships at CSA farms actively influence and represent how people experience and engage with place.

Human-animal relationships within CSAs were frequently framed as being an important part of creating the type of place that people expected when they imagined 'the farm'. For example, Aisling, founder of an apicultural CSA in the Republic of Ireland, discussed how the presence of bees changed what her group expected their performances and practices of agriculture to be: *'I feel now, when people come, they'll expect, if there's loads of bees around, they're going to expect it to be not conventional'*. Often this emerged through an element of prestige in having a 'rare' breed of animal, with animals' genetic heritage mobilised to produce ideas of localism, as Lewis and Ruth discuss below:

*The cattle are Sussex cattle, which obviously is the local breed.* [Lewis, member of a mixed horticultural/livestock CSA in England]

*So, we wanted to have a rare breed for the pigs, we wanted you know, we asked around sort of a bit, we ended up with Saddlebacks, and they were born locally and obviously, we wanted to use, wanted to keep things as local as possible.* [Ruth, founder and member of a mixed horticulture/livestock CSA in England]

Indeed, livestock were often positioned as being crucial to maintaining the everyday understanding of 'the farm', key co-constituents of place-making and experience-producing, as the quotes from Louise and Dan demonstrate:

*It does somehow, it changes the whole atmosphere of a place, you know you go somewhere and it's just polytunnels and veg, and then you go along somewhere that's got livestock, even if it's just hens, it changes the whole atmosphere of a place.* [Louise, board member of the CSA Network UK]

*It just makes the land a really different place [...] they're really intriguing, animals, aren't they, and they just, they improve the whole quality of the environment I think.* [Dan, farmer at a mixed horticulture/livestock CSA in Wales]

In these examples, relationships with livestock are important in the emergence of a particularly coded sense of place, and cast as central to the working of the situated and emplaced CSA, and the creation of both place identity and local culture. Livestock were

regularly seen as integral to the idea of an agricultural and rural landscape by many of the CSAs I interviewed, part of their geographical imagination of the countryside (Cloke 2006). Animals' presence was valued, and in itself, a 'product' of the CSA, achieved by (supporting) farming in a certain way that contributed to specific landscape distinctiveness. Annmarie, founder and member of a CSA in England, describes this in relation to her group's reasons for establishing a sheep CSA:

*I suppose also supporting, at that time it was felt that the sheep, you know, the Swaledales and things were a bit more under threat, so it was a way of maintaining that lifestyle [...] Yeah, and loving the landscape there, and of course if the sheep weren't there, then the landscape wouldn't be there.*

Annmarie's description of 'loving the landscape' is a large part of her engagement with the CSA. Her love of landscape and subsequent connection and sense of place is co-produced by the presence of sheep. The livestock of the CSA becoming intertwined with wider ideas of environmental sustainability and biodiversity. Rather than just food, they are mobilised as symbolic capital, with the 'product' that the livestock yield being a means to both practice and perform ideas of landscape conservation. However, focussing on the preservation of specific landscapes and places (and breeds) can reify ideas about the 'special' value of rural and traditional lifestyles, communities, economies, and environments (Holloway et al. 2007). Indeed, livestock were often mobilised as a means of the group involved in the CSA expressing power. One community for example initiated a sheep CSA to restore a local meadow to productive use, thus preventing a housing development. Here, the livestock become

mobilised as political agents. Not there for food, nor for aesthetics, nor for encounter value, but purely to facilitate local politicking.

Alongside enacting these more imaginative ideas of rurality, livestock were also used to modify the very physicality of place. For Hannah, founder and farmer of a mixed horticulture/livestock CSA in England, her relationships with her CSA's livestock are based around more 'ecological' ideas: '*we just needed to restore the soil, that's why we got chickens and geese*'. In many interviews with CSA representatives, livestock were frequently discussed as being present for the 'ecosystem services' they provided, or 'tools' for land management – reiterating the point that livestock are frequently involved within CSAs for many more-than-food reasons. There are links to ideas of permaculture and biodynamic farming here. Animals' roles often became about modifying the physical environment of the CSA, with livestock becoming replacements for certain technologies, as Jay talks about below. Though again, this is as much about the facilitation of specific agricultural values (such as low-intensity or anti-industrial). Human-animal relations modify both physical and cultural landscapes. Animals' roles in this way become multifaceted and fluid, positioned and viewed differently by different groups, simultaneously sausages and string-trimmers:

*In a way we can see them more as a tool for the trees with a nice benefit that we get some eggs and some meat, and that we can sell some of that, rather than that being a primary focus of earning money, it's about reducing other costs basically by not having to import lots of manure and stuff like that coz we can use them, use the chickens to fertilise the trees and not having to run the*

*strimmer all the time, or to mow the grass, all that kind of stuff, so that kind of land management is what they're about really.* [Jay, farmer at a mixed horticultural/livestock CSA]

As this section has shown, animals' involvement in CSA is as much about producing an 'alternative place' as it is about producing 'alternative food'. For many CSAs, having livestock within their holdings is not just about being able to produce and consume value-embedded 'good' foods. Instead, the livestock are part of being able to perform a specific geographical imagination of 'a farm', of local culture, and of successful alterity. Human-animal relations at CSAs are complex, locally specific, interdependent, fluid, and shifting.

## 5. Conclusion

This article has developed understandings of human-animal relations and community supported agriculture. I have argued and demonstrated that CSA projects in the UK are not simply spaces of horticulture, but are regularly co-constituted by a range of vibrant human-animal relationships and practices. Livestock play an important role in how CSAs define and practice their own food and agricultural systems, and their imaginations and enactments of 'alternative' agriculture, with livestock strongly linked to the food based values and identities of individual community groups.

Additionally, through exploring human-animal relations this article has challenged the assumption that consumers involve themselves in CSA projects for purely food based reasons



(Brehm and Eisenhauer 2008). To re-use a quote discussed earlier: *'we've got like [...] people who just go and check the sheep but don't want to eat them'* [Lisa, farmer at a livestock CSA in England]. For the individuals involved in CSAs, livestock serve purposes that go beyond simply producers (or sources) of food. Livestock are implicated within CSA projects for diverse reasons, with animals' ontological positions and status moving fluidly, simultaneously constructed as friend and food.

Human-animal relations influence the identity of both the people and places of CSA. Their presence allows the mobilisation of different knowledge practices, performances, and imaginations of agriculture and agricultural space. Animals' involvement in CSA thus comes to be as much about producing an 'alternative place' as it is about producing 'alternative food'. Indeed, the animal presence causes a big change in what the CSAs produce, reframing them as spaces of encounter. This can result in changing the types of labour involved for producers managing a CSA, in comparison to other approaches to livestock farming. As well as focussing on food production, CSA groups have to juggle the additional tasks of fulfilling CSA member's expectations and preconceptions of animals to create 'successful' encounters.

Whilst this paper has addressed prior literature gaps concerning CSAs and livestock, there are further questions to be asked around the implications of livestock on the very model of CSA. Future research which considers community approaches to livestock farming may wish to consider how livestock problematize and subvert notions of CSA and the complications of attempting to 'share the risk and reward' of livestock farming. This paper has discussed the animals that do become part of CSA projects, but what animals are unwanted or unsuitable

for community modes of food production? Livestock CSAs face certain challenges that their solely horticultural counterparts do not, and livestock can be a large source of both risk and tension within community groups. There are issues concerning the level of animal husbandry skills within the CSA movement, and the problems that moving livestock husbandry from a professional role to a community role creates. There are also fundamental questions to be asked regarding whether it makes financial sense for CSA groups to keep livestock. Further, the governance that surrounds animals' lives and deaths has the potential to create challenges for community groups seeking to practice and define their own food and agricultural systems. As community approaches to food production and distribution move to increasingly turn their practices towards animal products (Volz et al. 2016), so too should academic discussions of alternative food networks increasingly direct attention to the more-than-human elements of food systems and the human-animal relations which (re)shape these networks.

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<sup>i</sup> Defining the difference between 'CSA' and 'box schemes' is complex, and currently underexplored within academic literature. In certain geographic contexts the two are conflated into one practice. However, in the UK, particularly amongst CSA groups, there is a strong desire to differentiate the two (the opinions of box scheme practitioners in terms of this question is an area for further research). The distinction, at least, amongst the CSA practitioners spoken to within this research, tends to hinge around the idea of 'properly' sharing the risk and reward of agriculture and/or having a 'proper' connection with an individual farm or farmer. For example, one of the founding members of a CSA in England explains: "*I would tend to call a CSA a place where people are actually having a kind of subscription for supporting the farm, and then getting their veg, you know, and they're paying a monthly standing order and that's supporting the farm, rather than a box scheme, where people are just buying boxes*". 'Box schemes' in comparison are often spoken of by practitioners as a threat to 'true CSA', or an attempt at capitalizing the CSA model at the expense of an actual connection between consumer and producer. A recent article in the New York Times by Moskin (2016) summarises similar views beginning to emerge with similarly competing schemes in the US: 'the presence of a middleman between the farmer and the customer is precisely what traditional C.S.A.s are designed to avoid'. There are clearly interesting and important differences between box schemes and CSAs, exploring this in more detail is beyond the scope of this piece, but certainly something which future research may wish to consider.

<sup>ii</sup> The CSA Network have more recently made extensive efforts to rectify this lack of knowledge, and their current online 'Map of CSAs' provides a much more detailed depiction of the CSA movement in the UK than was available at the start of this research.

<sup>iii</sup> The recording of my interviews was done using the default 'voice memos' application on my smartphone. While for telephone and skype interviews this simply meant precariously balancing the smartphone near enough to my laptop speakers to avoid static and feedback, during face-to-face interviews the smartphone itself became more visible to my participants, and played a role in actively mediating the interviews. The role of the visible smartphone within research is explored and discussed in more detail in Gorman (2017a).

<sup>iv</sup> At the time of writing, the CSA Network currently list 103 UK based CSA projects.

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<sup>v</sup> In Britain brawn refers to a 'meat from a pig's or calf's head that is cooked and pressed in a pot with jelly'. In North America, this dish is more commonly known as the delightfully named 'head cheese'.