

The good life on the farm

A study of the aspirations and possibilities of small-scale farmers in Västmanland, Sweden

Joanna Magdalena Pettersdotter Svärd



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Abstract

Rural and agrarian societies are increasingly transformed through processes of agricultural expansion, industrialization, and market capitalism, imposing an economic squeeze on the small-scale farming sector. In Sweden, this results in a continuous decline in the number of farms and an aging farmer population, posing challenges for the sector's future. Simultaneously, there is an increasing public interest for local and sustainable food, driven by concerns for climate change, self-sufficiency, and civil preparedness in the face of crisis, as well as common imaginaries of the good life on the countryside.

Focusing on aspirations as drivers of rural development processes, this study is inspired by research within critical agrarian studies and rural geography, contributing to research on the geographies of wellbeing. The aim of this thesis is to explore the rural aspirations of small-scale farmers in Västmanland, Sweden, using imaginaries of 'the good life' as a lens, and how these aspirations are connected to rural development processes. It does so by using conceptualizations of 'the good life' (Fischer 2014) and rural aspirations (Bennike, Rasmussen, and Nielsen 2020), as well as semi-structured interviews and participative observation with four farming families.

Findings suggest that their aspirations for the good life are shaped by what they deem meaningful and are rooted in their relationship to the land and the rural community. Past experiences and political, economic, and cultural structures shape their perceptions of conditions of possibility for the future, influencing their decisions about farming activities and the future of their farms. These aspirations incorporate both anticipatory and transformative visions of the future in the face of modern, capitalistic rural development, but in seeking alternative pathways to build a sustainable farm economy and to farm according to their values of ecological and social sustainability, the farmers in this study largely follow a transformative direction. As they engage in strengthening the small-scale farming sector and their rural communities, the farmers in this study navigate between their individual aspirations and aspirations rooted in rural collectives and embody the social capacity and potential provided by rural people themselves.

Keywords: rural aspirations, the good life, rural geography, critical agrarian studies, rural transformation, small-scale farming, Swedish agriculture, agricultural policy

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List of abbreviations and acronyms

CAP = Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union

CFS = Committee on World Food Security

EU = European Union

FSS = Förbundet Sveriges Småbrukare

GDP = Gross Domestic Product

LRF = Lantbrukarnas Riksförbund (Farmer's Union)

NSD = Norsk Senter for Forskningsdata (Norwegian Centre for Research Data)

WTO = World Trade Organization

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1. Introduction

There are many theories of what constitutes human wellbeing, happiness, or quality of life, and perhaps most of us have our own idea of what ‘the good life’ entails. These concepts have been studied in a wide academic range, from psychology and medicine to sociology, economy, and development studies. Often, happiness and wellbeing have been connected to wealth, healthcare and education levels, and consumption increase that has been parallel to processes of urbanization. However, researchers are increasingly recognizing the connection between wellbeing and immaterial values, such as living according to one’s values and committing to a larger purpose (Fischer 2014). Here, aspirations stand in front, as they occur through people’s hopes, dreams, interactions, and practices.

This thesis focuses on the aspirations of small-scale farmers in Västmanland, Sweden and how they relate to rural development processes. Sweden has a long tradition of family farms and self-owned farmers. Beginning in the last century, market forces and political interventions steer towards an increased focus on volume production, imports, and exports of food, favouring large farms and imposing an economic ‘squeeze’ on small-scale farming (Gordon et al. 2017; Ploeg 2018; Waldenström 2018). The dominating trend shows a decrease in the overall number of farms and farmers, while an increase in specialisation and concentration to fewer and larger farms (Statistics Sweden 2020; Waldenström 2018). Moreover, Sweden faces a steadily aging farmer population, while the number of farms decreases every day (Mer mat - fler jobb 2022).

Simultaneously, there is an increasing interest among Swedes for the rural life, local food production and markets, driven by common imaginaries of the good life as well as environmental concerns, which has stimulated a small increase in the number of small-scale farms over the last years (Statistics Sweden 2020; Waldenström 2018). At the time of writing, concerns about self-sufficiency and civil preparedness, in the face of the covid-19 pandemic followed by rushing commodity prices due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and a continuing environmental crisis, further feed into the ideas of local and sustainable food systems.

1.1. Motivation, rationale, and scope of the thesis

The idea for this research topic came after I spent time with small-scale farmers in both Colombia and Norway, spurring my curiosity of how the small-scale farming life is like where I come from, in the region of Västmanland in Sweden. In Sweden, as in many other countries, the industrialization of agriculture has fundamentally changed the way land is cultivated and the relationship between humans and livestock. Existing literature on Swedish agriculture often focus on economic, ecological, or technical aspects of agricultural innovations and rural landscape changes. However, the literature on this development from a social science perspective is more limited. How has the enormous transformation in Swedish agriculture affected the possibility for traditional farming practices and the small-scale structured family farms to survive? What changes have small-scale farming systems gone through and how are these farmers operating today? I wish to contribute to this literature by focusing on the aspirations of small-scale farmers as a local fragment of the processes that drive agrarian and rural change in Sweden today.

Research on aspirations has mainly contextualized poverty, migration, and education within development studies, but its rural dimension has remained under-represented in development practice and policy. Simultaneously, rural development studies have generally been “more focussed on externally identified needs than on demands and aspirations of the rural population” (Mausch et al. 2021, 861). Thus, the local aspirations of rural people have been overshadowed by what external actors consider important development paths. Even if local aspirations are taken into consideration, their heterogeneity is often overlooked (Mausch et al. 2021).

Around the world, rural societies are transformed through processes of industrialization, extractive activities, and land grabbing, which “shape profoundly unequal exchanges of resources and labour and wreak havoc on rural economies, ecologies and social relations” (Bennike, Rasmussen, and Nielsen 2020, 40-41). Amid these often violent and predatory processes, however, social transformation also comes from the aspirations of the people and communities who live and operate in rural areas. Here, “local people seek to make meaningful connections and disconnections to the capitalisation of space, resources and social relations” (Bennike, Rasmussen, and Nielsen 2020, 41). While reports from rural areas often focus on visible conflicts and radical events of rural resistance, focusing on aspirations instead highlights the slow transformations that occurs over time because of the “continuous and everyday strategic

and tactical manoeuvring” of local people and communities (Bennike, Rasmussen, and Nielsen 2020, 41).

Following previous research on rural aspirations (Bennike, Rasmussen, and Nielsen 2020; Mausch, Harris, and Revilla Diez 2021; Mausch et al. 2018; Cécora 1994; Tieken and San Antonio 2016), I want to understand the “potential of ‘aspirations’ as an entry point for analysing the dynamics of” rural transformations (Bennike, Rasmussen, and Nielsen 2020, 44). By going beyond the individual to see the structures and collective dimensions that shape human imagination and agency, aspirations can be a helpful tool for analysis. Focusing on aspirations as drivers of rural development processes, this study is inspired by research within critical agrarian studies and rural geography, contributing to research on the geographies of wellbeing.

The aim of this thesis is to explore the rural aspirations of small-scale farmers in Västmanland, Sweden, using imaginaries of ‘the good life’ as a lens, and how these aspirations are connected to rural development processes. The research is steered by exploring the main research question:

What aspirations do small-scale farmers have in their pursuit of the good life and how do those aspirations relate to the rural development processes in Västmanland, Sweden?

Furthermore, this exploration is guided by three sub-questions inspired by the conceptualization of rural aspirations by Bennike, Rasmussen, and Nielsen (2020):

- *How are structural conditions influencing the perceived conditions of possibility for the future for small-scale farming in Sweden?*
- *In what ways are the aspirations of small-scale farmers in Västmanland expressions of anticipatory and transformative visions of the future?*
- *How do small-scale farmers in Västmanland navigate between individual and collective dimensions of aspirations?*

To give some further background to this study, a brief outline of the historical background of Swedish small-scale agriculture, definitions of small-scale farming, and main agricultural debates are given in this introductory chapter.

1.2. Swedish small-scale agriculture through recent history

At the beginning of the 20th century, the “small-scale structure was typical of the agrarian scene, both settlement-wise and socially” (Flygare 2011, 74), with a majority of the Swedish agricultural holdings being small (under 20 hectares), multifunctional, and family farms (Flygare 2011; Djurfeldt and Gooch 2002). The Swedish industrialization took place in rural areas, with so-called ‘small one-company towns’ based on local resources industries, such as mining, steel, and the car industry. Therefore, small-scale agriculture became important for newly industrialized rural communities (Djurfeldt and Gooch 2002; Berg and Forsberg 2003). Most smallholdings were part of a legacy of traditions of inheritance, which, from being crofts, successively became purchased freeholds as a result of 19th century economic development (Morell 2011). In the face of emigration waves, mainly to North America, the chance of acquiring small farms was a way to keep people in the country.

Following the economic and developmental boom after WW2, industrial manufactory drove a migration from the countryside to the cities. In combination with agricultural rationalization policies aimed to increase farm sizes, manpower was redistributed to other sectors (Morell 2011; Flygare 2011). The policy of 1974 officially manifested a shift “from promoting smallholdings to engineering their elimination” (Flygare 2011, 82). The new politics promoted larger units, often termed as part-time farms, which specialized on certain crops and milk production. Meanwhile, industrial employment was at its peak and the agricultural sector was intensively becoming more productive and mechanized, increasingly consolidated to larger farm units:

There were many reasons for giving up smallholding [...] The younger generation, instead of taking over from their parents, wound up the smallholdings, possibly retaining the dwelling house as a year-round or weekend home, or else they just left the smallholding derelict as a deceased estate (Flygare 2011, 84-85).

Towards the end of the century, Swedish agriculture became further deregulated. In the 1990s, Sweden entered the European Union and their Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), as well as the World Trade Organization (WTO). By the year 2000, the number of farm units in Sweden had decreased by 75% since the beginning of the 20th century, most of which disappeared in the latter half (Flygare 2011). Recent statistics show that the decline continues, except for the largest farm units, and the decline is largest for

smallholdings (Swedish Board of Agriculture 2017). The biggest loss of farm units was in the Northern and inner parts of Sweden, less suited for the large-scale, industrial agriculture favoured by agro-politics. Often, a decrease in farm units means that smallholdings became incorporated into larger farm properties. However, the picture becomes more complex due to common practices of leasing out whole or parts of one's farm, as well as other forms for organization such as sharecropping (Flygare 2011). Today, 2% of the workforce population are active within the farming sector, but the number is steadily decreasing. Moreover, 74% of the farmers in Sweden today are older than 50 years old, posing a big challenge for the future of agriculture in the country (Statistics Sweden 2020; Mer mat - fler jobb 2022).

Nowadays, there are few farmers who gain their full livelihood from their farms. Instead, one-third of the income often comes from other sources (Flygare 2011), often off-farm jobs. It is common to combine agriculture with other branches, such as forestry or construction, or farmers can introduce tourism, energy production, or on-farm processing on their farms (Statistics Sweden 2020; Swedish Board of Agriculture 2018; Ploeg 2018). Thereby, the "image of the farmer and the smallholder [has been] increasingly supplanted by that of the rural entrepreneur" (Flygare 2011, 86-87). Today, the remaining number of smallholdings should be understood as mainly functioning as part-time farms.

1.3. Definitions of small-scale farming

There are several ways to define small-scale agriculture in the absence of a universal definition. Often, smallholdings, peasant farms, and family farms are used interchangeably (Ploeg 2018). In the international context, a report from the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) states that,

Smallholder agriculture is practised by families (including one or more households) using only or mostly family labour and deriving from that work a large but variable share of their income, in kind or in cash. [...] A smallholding is "small" because resources are scarce, especially land, and using it to generate a level of income that helps fulfil basic needs and achieve a sustainable livelihood consequently require a high level of total factor productivity (HLPE 2013, 10).

According to this definition, basing the definition solely on farm size in terms of hectares or acres can be misleading. The report emphasizes the role of off-farm activities as well as the role of the smallholder family to sustain the farm economy, and state that “smallholder’s families are part of social networks within which mutual assistance and reciprocity translate into collective investments (mainly through work exchanges) and into solidarity systems” (HLPE 2013, 11). The definition of smallholder agriculture is here contrasted with on the one hand landless workers, and on the other “larger commercial holdings with hired labour” (HLPE 2013, 11).

In Swedish agro-politics over the last century, smallholdings became increasingly questioned and viewed as “the main obstacle for the future” and should therefore be “replaced with complete and viable farms” (Flygare 2011, 82). Politicians aimed for larger units termed as ‘family farms’, or ‘part-time farms’ that were structured as a sideline occupation. The term ‘smallholding’ was later reintroduced into agricultural policy, then defined with reference to the expected working time input rather than the previous definition based on farm areal size. According to the Official Statistics of Sweden, ‘smallholdings’ are today defined as farms operated with less than 400 standard working hours (Statistics Sweden 2020). Consequently, smallholdings today can be considerably larger in farm size compared to the early 1900s. Because of the change in definition, a large share of Swedish farms can be considered smallholdings today despite the major restructuring of agriculture over the course of the 20th century. Thus, it is “an oversimplification to say that the smallholding vanished completely and also to claim that it lives on” (Flygare 2011, 89).

In an article by Djurfeldt and Gooch (2002), the typology used to classify different farm types in Sweden is more complex, separating between family farms, big farms, part-time farms, and social security farms (Table 1.1).

Type of farm	Subsistence level and income
Family farms	Primarily subsisting from the farm
Big farms	Depend on hired labour
Part-time farms (pluriactivity)	Subsist from a combination of farm and non-farm income, but more than half of the worktime is spent off-farm.
Social security farms	Most on-farm worktime, but have transferences (pension, sick-leave, unemployment etc.) as a major source of income.

Table 1.1 Classification of farms used by Djurfeldt and Gooch (2002).

According to this classification, small-scale farms could fall under all definitions except “big farms”. The difference lies in the share of working hours spent on-farm and the main source of income.

Often, however, the term small-scale farming is used based on characteristics such as local food production, food craftsmanship, and high quality (Livsmedelsakademin 2018). In this thesis, I base the selection of farmers on this definition and use small-scale farming as an umbrella term encompassing both family farms, part-time farms, social security farms, and smallholdings.

1.4. Agro-political debates in Sweden and internationally

The development of smallholder agriculture in Sweden is connected to global industrialization and modernization development driven by nations, international governance and trade organizations, transnational corporations, as well as social movements of resistance. In Sweden as well as globally, capital accumulation has been the driving force of agricultural change, through colonial expansion, Green Revolution technologies, and the development of global mega-corporations (McMichael 2009). The modern agroindustry is characterized by monoculture production, mechanized technology, and large-scale use of fossil fuels and agrochemicals. The environmental implications of this form of agriculture are severe, including “land and soil erosion, depletion of soil fertility, loss of biodiversity, depletion of natural irrigation systems and water contamination, extensive greenhouse gas emissions, and increased vulnerability of agroecosystems to natural hazards as well as new pests and diseases” (Svärd 2021, 174; see also López 2018; Gordon et al. 2017; Garnett 2014). In many parts of the world, it is connected to the displacement of rural populations and farmers, spurring on a global movement of resistance among small-scale farmers and rural populations, largely centred around the international peasant organization La Vía Campesina and agroecology movements (Nyéléni 2015).

The increased globalization of the food industry, free trade networks, consolidation into a few dominating actors, and following market prices, has made agriculture into a provider of cheap input into the industry. In Sweden, this development has resulted in low market competitiveness and increasing costs for Swedish farmers and food production (Waldenström 2018), making Swedish farmers dependent on financial

support through EU subsidies (Djurfeldt and Gooch 2002). Moreover, because of globalization and free trade, the need for food has become externalized from the land producing it, having environmental, social, and political consequences both among primary-exporting and primary-importing countries. Several Swedish scholars are concerned about the loss of farmland connected to peri-urban development and the phasing out of grazing animals in favour of industrial meat production (Granvik et al. 2015; Slätmo 2017). Furthermore, “food production in general seems to be very little reflected upon in local planning, both in current and in a future perspective” (Granvik et al. 2015, 201).

As smallholdings increasingly disappeared, and farmland and food production became centred on fewer and larger farms, the agricultural landscape, too, changed. As animals were taken indoors or disappeared from farms altogether, previously grazed areas, if not left overgrown, tended to be converted into pure forestlands or large-scale crop fields, both of which are dominant in Västmanland’s topography. Throughout the 20th century, as meat consumption increased and agroindustry became dominant, the way animals are kept on Scandinavian farms changed, as well as our relation to them. In traditional family farming, the relationship with animals was often close and it was not uncommon to view them as part of the family (Syse 2020). Gradually, grazing livestock (as well as the use of shielings and summer farms) has been increasingly replaced by for example pigs and poultry, that could be managed indoors, allowing for increased production and profit. As described by Bjørkdahl and Syse (2019) the increased geographic, social, and cultural distancing to the processing of animals to meat, has resulted in a continued increase in meat consumption despite the well-known impact on animal welfare and the environment. In general, the understanding of our relationship to animals as *individuals* has been transferred to museums and visiting farms, while the large majority of livestock lives a life invisible to the public eye, often within four walls.

Moreover, the decreasing grazing activity have, since the mid-1900s, spurred concerns about the preservation of the Swedish “traditional” agrarian landscape (Flygare 2011), often pictured in literary and artistic masterpieces such as by the author Astrid Lindgren. The links between the preservation of open landscapes and the work of smallholders, or part-time farms, were often highlighted, as “[i]t was those families who made a sterling contribution by keeping the countryside open, alive and inviting, without any special expenditure on nature conservation” (Flygare 2011, 86). More recently, a

similar connection between small-scale farming and biodiversity has emerged, especially in terms of grazing animals and the creation of ecological niches:

It is of course hard to prove that a high level of biodiversity was dependent on smallholdings, but, given the fact of Swedish farming being so small-scale in character, it is obvious that the abandonment of arable land and smallholdings accelerated the losses of biodiversity. Smallholdings had more grazing animals per units of acreage than bigger farm units. Grazing on many slopes, as well as forest grazing and feed harvesting in natural meadowlands, have a crucial bearing on the abundance of flora and fauna (Flygare 2011, 86).

Recently, the meaning of natural pasturelands is visible in the recent agricultural policy. Built on the CAP framework, the Swedish national food strategy aims to increase the domestic food production, along with increased incentives for ecological sustainability and farmland preservation, as well as socio-economic support aimed at improving farmers' position in the food chain (Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation 2017). The previous Minister for Rural Affairs, Sven-Erik Bucht, states that Sweden has “the necessary expertise and innovative capacity, [...] environmentally aware, [...] a high level of animal welfare and [...] the lowest use of antibiotics in the EU” as well as “excellent access to high-quality natural resources” (Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation 2017, 3). However, the importance of organic, sustainable, and safe (referring to for example the low use of antibiotics) food is stressed mainly as factors that benefit Sweden in global market competitiveness, and any ecological and social benefits in rural areas are secondary to economic ones. Although the increased domestic production is mainly promoted in terms of increasing economic profit for the agricultural sector in general, it also has potential to improve the low national self-sufficiency rate pointed out by critics such as Erika Bjerström (2020) and Östling (2021).

Smallholder and founder of the Swedish contribution to La Vía Campesina, NOrdBruk, Torgny Östling argues that the low national self-sufficiency rate and crisis preparation level can be traced back to Swedish agricultural politics of the late 20th century and the entrances into the EU and WTO (Östling 2021). Entering these agreements meant several political adjustments in terms of deregulation to secure the free trade of agricultural products as well as the free flow of capital in investments, for example in land properties and natural resources.

The Swedish smallholder movement has historically been well-established, with political rights and a strong organizational tradition, historically focusing on ownership rights, while today centring on small-scale, craftsmanship, quality, social cooperation, and ecological and environmental quality. Today, there is “a class of family farmers, well entrenched economically, as well as politically, through their cooperative movement, through the Farmer’s Union (*Lantförbrukarnas Riksförbund*) and what used to be their own Farmer’s Party (*Bondeförbundet*, now *Centerpartiet*)” (Djurfeldt and Gooch 2002, 76). Although there are several smallholder’s organizations in Sweden, often opposing the CAP framework and current agricultural politics, the Farmer’s Union (hereafter LRF) has total domination in terms of representing the interests of farmers in the national political negotiations, a monopoly given as early as in the 1930s (Rydén 2007). This is a contrast to for example Norway, where smallholders have their own organization which is involved in the policy negotiations (Rydén 2007; Östling 2021). Moreover, the former locally organized cooperatives have become successively centralized, removing power and control from the farmers themselves (Östling 2021).

Despite the negative development for Swedish farmers, especially the small-scale farming sector, dominating interests are favouring continued agricultural expansion, specialization, and capitalization according to the agro-industrial model. In general, there has been little understanding in the Swedish society for the protesting farmers. This has its explanation in agricultural power being centralized to the EU level, the LRF having no real competition in terms of representing farmers’ interests, and agricultural debates being largely viewed as limited to the peripheral countryside.

However, issues connected to food and agriculture are becoming more common in the public debate. In the face of the climate and environmental crisis, the covid-19 pandemic, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine and military mobilization around the world, there is a stronger public and political engagement in rebuilding the national food storage and strengthening the domestic food production to improve crisis preparedness. The practical effects for farmland preservation, and political incentives and support for local agriculture, remains to be seen. Already, there are signs of more youths applying to agricultural education and a renewed public as well as academic interest for small-scale farming and rural living (Abalo Aguilar 2022; Olofsson 2021). Globally as well as nationally, the last decades have seen a rise in social movements that are challenging the current agro-industrial food system, such as slow food, food sovereignty

and agroecology, short sale circuits and community-based agriculture, permaculture, urban gardening, self-sufficiency, and to some extent organic agriculture (Nelson and Edwards 2021). In Scandinavia, the concept of REKO market rings have gained popularity over the last years, with over 800 000 members and 220 local markets in 2021 (Hushållningssällskapet n.d). REKO stands for “Rejäl Konsumtion” (meaning fair consumption) and is a form of self-organized market, where the products are pre-booked and paid online directly to the farmers, and then handed out at a certain time and place. Such new forms of local markets provide new opportunities for small-scale farmers as well as customers that seek alternative food systems.

1.5. The outline of the thesis

After this brief introduction of the motivations behind this study and relevant background of the Swedish small-scale farming sector and debates in agricultural studies, the thesis moves on to theoretical and methodological contextualization, before starting to explore the research questions.

Chapter 2 outlines existing literature on rural aspirations and the good life that is used to theoretically contextualize this study. It explores current debates about rural aspirations rooted in critical agrarian studies and presents the conceptualization of rural aspirations made by Bennike, Rasmussen, and Nielsen (2020), upon which the research questions and the structure of the following analysis is built.

Chapter 3 explains the methodological choices made in this study, briefly introduces the four participating farmer families, and discuss my positionality as a researcher and ethical considerations taken.

The analysis takes place in chapters 4-6 and is structured according to the three sub-questions guiding this research, inspired by Bennike, Rasmussen, and Nielsen’s (2020) conceptualization of rural aspirations. Chapter 4 focuses on the structural context of the small-scale farmers in this study, exploring the conditions of possibility that these farmers experience for pursuing their aspirations of the good life. Chapter 5 focuses on how the aspirations of the farmers in this study are expressions of the expected rural development according to current dominating trends (anticipation), or how they deviate from the expected development through alternative visions of the future (transformation). Chapter 6 explores how the farmers in this study are negotiating between their role as

individual farmers and their role as part of rural collectives in their aspirations and their pursuit towards the good life.

Finally, chapter 7 concludes by summarizing the main arguments and findings in this study and reconnecting the three themes explored in the analysis chapters with the main research question. Some additional remarks are made on potential research that could add new insights to the field.

2. Theories on rural aspirations and the good life

This chapter dives into the theoretical discussion on rural dimensions of aspirations and how aspirations are part of human wellbeing and imaginaries of the good life. First, it investigates different conceptualizations of the good life and human wellbeing that are steering our aspirations, including material and immaterial aspects. Going beyond the perspectives of the individual, it then turns to the rural dimension of aspirations connected to political, institutional, and cultural context. The discussion is structured according to Bennike, Rasmussen, and Nielsen's (2020) conceptualization of rural aspirations that focuses on past and present structural conditions (conjuncture), anticipatory and transformative visions of the future (futura), as well as individual and collective aspects of aspirations (subjectivity/collectivity). Lastly, a short section comments on the role of human agency in aspirational formation and pursuit.

2.1. Conceptualizing the good life

Aspirations are impacted by notions of happiness, quality of life, lifestyle and satisfaction as ultimate life goals and ultimately form the basis for wellbeing (Mausch, Harris, and Revilla Diez 2021, 805).

A basic definition explains aspirations as “an orientation towards a desired future” (Huijsmans, Ansell, and Froerer 2021, 3), shaped by individual preferences, social norms, as well as political and institutional contexts. Desired futures are connected to imaginaries of the good life and happiness, something human beings have been reflecting over and pursuing since the dawn of time. There are numerous ways of describing what constitutes ‘the good life’, as well as a broad range of different academic concepts used in the attempt to describe it, such as ‘life satisfaction’, ‘quality of life’, or simply ‘wellbeing’ (Næss 2001; Fischer 2014; Cécora 1994). Scholars across different disciplines have long struggled with defining these, often synonymously used, concepts.

This thesis will primarily use Edward Fischer's definition of ‘the good life’ (2014), where human wellbeing comprises both material aspects such as income, security, and health, and immaterial aspects that include “aspiration and opportunity, dignity and fairness, and commitments to larger purposes” (Fischer 2014, 2). In this conceptualization, immaterial aspects are emphasized, as they revolve around the idea of a fulfilled life and having power over one's destiny.

The idea of happiness as an ultimate goal for humanity can be traced back to ancient Greece and Aristotle's concept of 'eudaimonia' (meaning happiness) as the final, highest good. All other values and pursuits are simply ways to get there. Philosophers within 19th century utilitarianism stated happiness as the highest social good, with the main political goal being to achieve the highest rate of happiness for most people possible. This idea refers to happiness that is sustainable over time, thereby based on long-term consequences rather than short-term gains. Others instead meant that happiness made people passive and lazy, undermining societal workings. Philosophers and scholars throughout history and across cultures have considered happiness "as a by-product of cultivating activities that individuals consider as important and meaningful" (Delle Fave et al. 2011, 187).

Some wellbeing scholars have made a distinction between 'satisfaction' (general evaluation of life) and 'happiness' (sentiments-oriented, short-term experience) (Fischer 2014; Cécora 1994; Næss 2001). Within the field of positive psychology, happiness is primarily explored through subjective wellbeing (hedonia) or psychological wellbeing (eudaimonia). The former refers to "the study of positive emotions and life satisfaction" while the latter concentrates on "a definition of happiness that comprises meaning, self-actualization and personal growth – at the individual level [...] – and commitment to socially shared goals and values – at the social level" (Delle Fave et al. 2011, 186).

Recently, the division between the hedonic and eudaimonic dimensions has been debated (Delle Fave et al. 2011) and this thesis will treat wellbeing as a broader umbrella term that incorporates both happiness and life satisfaction, as well as hedonic and eudaimonic dimensions. As this study focuses on the long-term and future-oriented aspirations, however, the emphasis will necessarily be on the eudaimonic dimension of wellbeing.

2.1.1. Material and immaterial dimensions

Both material and immaterial aspects are included in Fischer's (2014) conceptualization of the good life. Within the capitalist modernity and development discourse, economic growth is seen as the basis for higher living standards and (material) wellbeing. In the discourses such as ecomodernism, the good life is seen as one where "more people will achieve the material comforts enjoyed by affluent consumers in the developing world

today – but with less environmental impact” (Garnett 2014, 11). Individual aspirations are often thought of and expressed as specific wants and choices typically connected to material aspects such as material goods and welfare services, specific jobs or living arrangements, accessibility to healthcare, education, and markets. However, researchers generally agree that there is only a minor correlation between wellbeing and objectively measured life conditions.

The material abundance of things, by Bonneuil and Fressoz (2016) named as ‘the consumer society’, does not necessarily make people happy. As material abundance rose among the richer populations of the world during the 1900s, “indicators of well-being deteriorated: both the ‘happiness index’ and more material measurements such as life expectancy stagnated, and healthy life expectancy actually began to decline” (Bonneuil and Fressoz 2016, 150). This shows that the continued increase in world GDP, i.e., economic growth, becomes “a wretched indication of real well-being” (Bonneuil and Fressoz 2016, 150). The Human Development Index is an attempt to steer the discussion towards other material factors, such as life expectancy, education, and health. However, these are based on quantitative data that says little about whether individuals are happy or satisfied with life.

Additionally, coming into higher standards of living does not automatically increase people’s satisfaction level, as their goals and aspirations simply change into something new (Cécora 1994). Therefore, to achieve a long-lasting sense of life satisfaction, one needs “a positive development outpacing aspirations”, in terms of either frequency or intensity of positive experiences (Cécora 1994, 21). In this sense, aspirations are not based on material aspects, but on “past ‘peak experiences’, i.e. best and worst experiences; the best experiences raising expectations/aspirations and diminishing pleasure derived from lesser positive experiences” (Cécora 1994, 22). Past experiences are thus fundamental in the forming of aspirations.

The philosophical tradition, however, states that focusing on material aspects of wellbeing may never truly result in happiness, as wellbeing is fundamentally connected to living a life that gives us meaning. Living a good life is not about simply feeling happy but having a sense of purpose and meaning in life that may also incorporate struggle. Defining what is meaningful for people, then, is based on cultural as well as subjective values.

We may all want to live the good life, but we also differ widely on just what that entails, on what the good life might look like and the best means to get there. Conceptions of the good life are laden with deeply held moral valuations, the various meanings behind a ‘meaningful life’. Such conceptions are culturally specific and even idiosyncratic, but they share a common concern with *values* (what is *really* important in life) and an orientation toward the future that is not necessarily, or at least not easily, quantifiable (Fischer 2014, 12).

Fischer (2014) argues that living the good life means being in a state of ongoing aspiration of something better (or of becoming a better person) and a pursuit of living a life according to one’s values. He states that,

striving for the good life involves the arduous work of becoming, of trying to live a life that one deems worthy, becoming the sort of person one desires. As such, the good life is not made up of simple happiness. It requires trade-offs, and often forgoing hedonistic pleasure (Fischer 2014, 2).

Focusing on what is considered as meaningful and important can be connected to different domains of life or to psychological aspects. According to Delle Fave et al. (2011), both life domains and psychological aspects are needed to define happiness. These values are at the core of our aspirations, thus informing our life choices. Besides psychological perspectives and experiences on the individual level, there is therefore a need to look at broader socio-cultural, economic, political, and institutional contexts.

2.2. Conceptualising rural aspirations

In this study, the concept of aspirations is understood as firmly embedded in human wellbeing, as they articulate visions of what living a good life entail, and the ways to get there. Aspirations, although personal, are fundamentally rooted in history and place, thus incorporating past experiences not only by the individual but also by the collective. Fundamentally, “aspirations to the good life are part of some sort of system of ideas [...] which locates them in a larger map of local ideas and beliefs” (Appadurai 2004, 67-68). Scholars within the development field are beginning to value not only the subjective expression of aspiration, but also its inherently social and cultural roots.

Building on Amartya Sen's studies on values and capabilities within social development and welfare, Appadurai (2004) thinks of aspirations as 'cultural capacity', i.e. the 'capacity to aspire'. According to him, aspirations are "ethical and metaphysical ideas which derive from larger cultural norms", and they are "never simply individual", but "always formed in interaction and in the thick of social life" (Appadurai 2004, 67). Moreover, aspirations are shaped and conditioned by the political, economic, and spatial structures within which they exist over time. In their editorial introduction to a special issue on the crossroads between rural aspirations and capitalist transformation, Bennike, Rasmussen, and Nielsen (2020, 40) argue that "aspirations are conditioned by constellations of power, which shape what can be done and what can be imagined". Contributions in the special issue emphasize the different structures of possibility and the interrelation between aspirations and rural development in the face of capitalist modernity connected to for example agricultural expansion, migration, and non-agrarian pathways such as tourism (Aguilar-Støen 2020; Jakobsen and Nielsen 2020; Bennike 2020; Lyall, Colloredo-Mansfeld, and Quick 2020; Rasmussen 2020).

Building on Bennike, Rasmussen, and Nielsen's (2020) conceptualization of aspirations that emphasizes its rootedness in time-space, this study draws on its core propositions of conjuncture, futurity, and subjectivity/collectivity. It suggests that aspirations: (1) "are profoundly shaped by the conditions of possibility and historical experience (conjuncture)"; (2) "entail anticipatory and transformative visions of the future (futurity)"; and (3) "involve negotiations and reconfigurations of the relationship between subject and collective (subjectivity/collectivity)" (Bennike, Rasmussen, and Nielsen 2020, 46). As such, rural aspirations among Swedish farmers can be seen as the product of surrounding structural restrictions which limit imaginations of the possible, they can be either affirmative or transformative in relation to the current dominant agricultural development, and they occur simultaneously among individual farmers and their local communities or social spheres.

2.2.1. Conjuncture

A conjunctural approach suggests that the structural restrictions in a society shape both the actions of people living in that society, as well as their imagination of what is possible. To understand rural aspirations and the capacity to pursue them, one must dig into the past and present of the local context of place, both in terms of cultural and political history

and in terms of social and institutional structures. Thus, the conjunctural approach “fundamentally historicises aspirations, examining how they are shaped by political and moral economies and unpacking the conditions of possibility under which aspirations materialise into social action” (Bennike, Rasmussen, and Nielsen 2020, 47). Any situation is formed by historical and spatial configurations that “make certain pathways easier or more difficult” (Li 2014, 150, cited in Bennike, Rasmussen, and Nielsen 2020, 46-47). Fischer (2014) terms these structural conditions as ‘opportunity structures’, including for example formal and informal social norms, legal regulations, institutional policy and practices, and market relations. He states that “[i]ndividual agency acts on choices, but those choices are structured through political-economic processes that transcend the individual” (Fischer 2014, 6). Aspirations, then, are shaped by both temporal and spatial factors: past experiences, structural conditions, and social norms.

The conjunctural approach emphasises how capitalist processes occur in everyday rural life through the intersection of “capital’s aspirations ‘from above’” and “popular aspirations ‘from below’” (Bennike, Rasmussen, and Nielsen 2020, 47). Mausch, Harris, and Revilla Diez (2021) argue for the need for considering local, ‘bottom-up’ aspirations among rural people and working towards aligning these with the ‘top-down’ aspirations envisioned in development projects and policy to create more inclusive and thus more efficient development projects. Development interventions like these can be seen as part of a ‘politics of aspirations’, in which success or failure can be traced to their alignment with local aspirations (Müller-Mahn, Mkutu, and Kioko 2021). For example, development policy often uses imaginations of desired futures from international organisations, often informed by neoclassical economic theories such as ‘growth corridors’ and ‘community-based conservation’, rather than local aspirations from the affected geographical area and communities (Mausch, Harris, and Revilla Diez 2021).

The contributions from the two special issues on rural aspirations by Bennike, Rasmussen, and Nielsen (2020) and Mausch, Harris, and Revilla Diez (2021) confirm the need for an increased focus on local aspirations in both academic research and development policy, and increased work towards aligning bottom-up and top-down aspirations to achieve more effective and inclusive paths for rural development. Although these scholars focus mainly on non-Western contexts, their insights are relevant for rural development also in countries such as Sweden. Swedish small-scale farmers also pursue

aspirations that are relevant for rural development and agricultural policy in the European context, but that are often over-looked. Even though their opportunities of engaging in political processes through for example Farmers' Unions may be stronger than in many parts of the world, small-scale farmers have struggled in the face of the increasingly industrial and market-oriented agro-politics.

For people in search of a better future and wellbeing, aspirations are often focusing on material wealth, particularly in an individualised approach informed by capitalistic ideas of development. In the agricultural context, “[t]hese ‘better futures’ are often decidedly post-agrarian”, pushing “rural people toward salaried off-farm sectors” (Bennike, Rasmussen, and Nielsen 2020, 45). Simultaneously, the economic squeeze on agrarian societies and businesses makes aspirations connected to their continuation often impossible to realize, due to obstacles in acquiring farms and farmland, neglect of state support for agricultural infrastructure, or global market impacts on the local production profitability (Grubbström and Eriksson 2018; Ploeg 2018).

Thus, the developmentalist tendency of putting too much emphasis on the individual results in a decontextualization of aspirations and an individualisation of responsibility (Appadurai 2004). The mere presence of aspirations does not mean that poor or otherwise marginalised rural populations themselves *are able* to pursue development. There is a risk to focus on ‘aspiration failure’ as a way of directing policy efforts towards an individualised approach on aspirations, instead of the structural factors that shape them (Bennike, Rasmussen, and Nielsen 2020).

In the context of Sweden, the risk of ‘aspiration failure’ in rural development may be viewed as considerably lower than in many other parts of the world, due to Sweden’s strong welfare state democracy and unionized workforce. However, rural development processes connected to agricultural expansion, deforestation, mining industry, and energy infrastructure invoke infected disputes among rural populations, scientists, and social movements, not least in Sápmi territories (Ojala and Nordin 2015; Hollertz 2021; Westberg 2021; Östling 2021). In this thesis the conjunctural approach refers to the history of small-scale agriculture in Sweden, the different political and socio-economic structures surrounding rural and agricultural development in the region of Västmanland, as well as the personal experiences and the family structures of the farmers themselves.

2.2.2. Futurity

Based on the conjunctural analysis of the structural context in which aspirations form, this approach shifts the focal point from the past and present to the future. According to Bennike, Rasmussen, and Nielsen (2020), aspirational agency can roughly be divided into two categories: anticipation and transformation. These explain two different ways of how people perceive of the feasibility to change their surrounding environment, but these directions are not necessarily excluding one another.

First, anticipation refers to aspiring for ‘the expected’. Often, this is played out in the context of “various modernist schemes” (Bennike, Rasmussen, and Nielsen 2020, 47) that seem inevitable and therefore require an anticipatory approach for rural populations. Such developments may include large infrastructural investments such as dams, roads, or airports, or urban expansion. In agricultural research, Mausch et al. (2018) refer to two contrasting paradigms of research focusing on expected futures for rural communities. One paradigm sees agriculture as the key to development, as it is one of the foremost economic activities for rural households worldwide. Research within this paradigm concentrates on improving farming technologies for yield and profitability. The other paradigm instead focuses on the tendencies among rural populations to leave agriculture for non-farm sectors and research focuses on diversification options, urbanization, and GDP growth. Indeed, rural households are increasingly diversifying into non-agricultural employments and entrepreneurial activities, both due to dwindling access of rural resources and the economic squeeze small-scale agriculture which forces small-scale farmers into non-agrarian activities (Bennike, Rasmussen, and Nielsen 2020; Ploeg 2018). Rural spaces have become multifunctional, “wherein food production is one among other environmental, social and economic functions” (Landini et al. 2014, 128). However, both paradigms rely on questionable assumptions: just because rural households engage in farming or diversify towards other sectors does not mean that all farmers see a future in farming or that all other options are sufficiently attractive.

The anticipatory approach relates to a general agreement on the expected development, where bottom-up and top-down aspirations align. However, in many contexts unequal power relations and capitalist development agendas are undermining the (often poor) local populations’ capacity to aspire (Appadurai 2004). Thus, even rural development projects and processes that result in agrarian change, loss of land and livelihoods, and local conflicts may appear as driven from the bottom-up (Cross 2015).

However, anticipatory aspirations are not only occurring within modernist development sites, but also in more remote rural areas, as well as in contexts where local populations have greater agency. Fundamentally, anticipatory aspirations express dreams and motivations that spring out from the expected development of the local place.

Second, transformative aspirations instead express a want for something different than the expected. Often, they are connected to different critiques of capitalist development, offering ideas of alternative futures as well as possibilities to actively engage in that reformulation. Actors within this discourse often argue that the current global food system driven by agroindustrial interests results in ‘agroextractivism’ (McKay 2017) or an ‘accumulation by dispossession’ (Harvey 2004), through development projects resulting in disastrous consequences for rural populations, farmers, and the non-human world. Transformation connected to food systems are practiced within a range of different alternative food networks, incorporating ideas from agroecology, permaculture, slow food, organic agriculture, community-based agriculture, and urban gardening, among others (Nelson and Edwards 2021).

Transformative aspirations tend to emphasize ecological aspects as well as new forms of social organization and knowledge sharing with bottom-up perspectives. For example, degrowth scholars envision a society “where concepts as sharing, conviviality, care, commons, justice could stand at its foundation, and replace the call for economic growth, which is, obviously, biophysically unsustainable” (Gomiero 2018, 1824). In 2015, rural food producers, farmers’ organizations, and indigenous communities from all over the world united to promote agroecological practices and food sovereignty as alternative pathways to modern agroindustry (Nyéléni 2015). Through grassroot initiatives such as seed networks, local markets, and horizontal knowledge sharing, agroecology becomes a tool for resisting agro-industry and defending their territories, cultures, and lifestyles (Nyéléni 2015; Toledo 2019).

Often linking activism with academia, alternative and local movements are examples of attempts to “rearrange social structures of domination” (Bennike, Rasmussen, and Nielsen 2020, 48). Beyond the often over-emphasised radical ‘event’ of social resistance, aspirations are rather focusing on the slow transformation motivated by a wish for change. By focusing on rural aspirations, academics can uncover the “transformative practices folded into the everyday, as people manoeuvre between anticipation, speculation and the (im)possibility of alternate futures” (Bennike,

Rasmussen, and Nielsen 2020, 48). Rural households are navigating highly complex systems of livelihood, income streams, and socio-political networks that goes beyond farming. Rural realities shape and are in turn shaped by the aspirations of the people living them, whether they are steered by anticipatory or transformative directions.

In this thesis, the aspirations of small-scale farmers will be analysed with reference to the anticipatory and transformative dimensions. Rural aspirations in Sweden are deeply rooted in the anticipation of rural developments connected to processes of industrialization and urbanization, while simultaneously incorporating imaginaries of a living and thriving countryside. In turn, these anticipations are accepted and/or resisted through the aspirations of these farmers and their everyday practices in pursuit of the good life.

2.2.3. Subjectivity/collectivity

Rural aspirations are, beyond the structural context and future-oriented direction, also rooted in the collective aspirations of larger rural collectives and communities. They can be viewed “as a psychological structure within a sociocultural context” (Tieken and San Antonio 2016, 132). For other scholars, they are “understood as social in nature in that they are embedded and shaped by the materiality, practices, discourses and beliefs of a culture” (Dilley et al. 2021, 1094). As people reflect on the meaning of self and community, aspirations are central in changing social structures, challenging hierarchies, and forming new collectivities. Here,

aspirations are produced in the contentious spaces between individual and collective ambition, and ideas about progress and modernity – between a nostalgia for past forms of social coherence and identity, and a drive toward enhanced well-being that must reconcile individual and collective desires and hopes. The articulation of aspirations can thus shape emergent collectivities and break down old forms of social coherence (Bennike, Rasmussen, and Nielsen 2020, 49).

Infrastructure and institutions play a central role in laying the foundations for these changes, while at the same time limiting changes through formal and informal rules and norms. Essentially, “[d]iffering institutional contexts not only provide different opportunities and constraints, they also form prevailing values and attitudes, and determine criteria for the sense of well-being of individuals and groups of individuals” (Cécora 1994, 15). Focusing on subjectivity, one might learn how individuals position

and view themselves in relation to the community and the larger structures of power, as well as how those larger structures of power are affecting the possibilities for those individuals.

Although the subjectivity/collectivity aspect emphasizes to disregard tendencies of focusing on individualized aspirations, one also needs to beware of the danger to homogenize communities and disregard internal social structures (Bennike, Rasmussen, and Nielsen 2020). Social differences such as gender, race, class, ethnicity, and caste must be taken into consideration as parts of the different imaginaries of the possible that exist within a community (Kothari et al. 2019; A Growing Culture 2021). Thus, there is a need to “reconcile seemingly contradictory imaginaries of community, individual identity and progress in capitalist modernity” including those of the modern versus the traditional (Bennike, Rasmussen, and Nielsen 2020, 49).

In turn, aspirations can become institutionalised as dominant actors or organisational structures influence the aspirations within a community. This has been seen in large rural infrastructure projects pursued in the name of development, for example where rural populations (often poor) are lacking a sense of agency and aspirational capacity (Appadurai 2004). In the Swedish context, similar effects were seen in how the institutional power alliance between LRF and the government influenced most of Swedish farmers and agricultural actors to become positive towards the EU entrance (Östling 2021).

Farmer’s unions, political parties, state institutions, academia, local market networks, grassroots movements, social media, neighbour communities as well as farmer families are all different social structures that surround the life of a small-scale farmer in Sweden today. Thereby, aspirations of individual farmers are firmly anchored in the aspirations of their families, their local communities, and other farmers, as well as in the history of these social groups and the local places they live in. This thesis aims to explore the roles of these social relationships in connection to the farmers’ aspirations and perceptions of the good life.

2.3. Pursuing aspirations: human agency

Considering Bennike, Rasmussen, and Nielsen’s (2020) conceptualization of rural aspirations, there is one more piece to add to the puzzle for getting closer to understanding the pursuit of the good life: namely the pursuit itself. How are we able to follow our

aspirations, to act towards our desired futures? The answer lies in our sense of agency (Tieken and San Antonio 2016; Fischer 2014). Human agency is “the internal capacity and psycho-social power of individuals to make decisions” (Fischer 2014, 153). The ability to pursue one’s aspirations is directly connected to wellbeing, involving both the freedom to choose one’s own life path and the capacity to commit to what one deems as meaningful.

Human agency can also be described as “the capacity of persons and other social actors to process social experience (i.e. they acquire “knowledgeability”) and to act accordingly so as to cope with their life-circumstances vis-à-vis their own motivations and goals (“capability”)” (Landini et al. 2014, 129). This means that rural people, in this case small-scale farmers, are active subjects who can shape their own goals and strategies to achieve them based on their knowledge, experience, and rationales. Strategies for how to act on aspirations are connected to particular social structures that function either as constraints or as resources (such as interdependencies between actors). To avoid determinist assumptions, one should consider how personal rationales, beliefs, as well as different “shared frames of meaning” in social settings are in constant transformation due to experiences arising in the meeting with rural realities (Landini et al. 2014, 135). Additionally, most individuals have multiple identities and social belongings that adds another layer to the dynamics of rural aspirations.

Structural constraints condition and limit not only aspirations, but also the possibility to pursue them. Fischer (2014) views change, i.e. pursuing aspirations, as a result of the intersection of human agency, resources, and opportunity structures. Essentially,

an actor may be able to choose options, but the effective realization of those choices will largely depend upon the institutional context within which the actors live and work. The opportunity structure comprises these institutions that govern people’s behavior and that influence the success or failure of the choices that they make (Alsop, Bertelsen and Holland 2006, 13, quoted in Fischer 2014, 153).

Human wellbeing, then, is directly linked to agency as “it is through agency that actors are able to employ objective material resources and opportunity structures to achieve the life that they desire” (Fischer 2014, 149).

2.4. Summary

This thesis attempts to put rural aspirations and their pursuit into the context of Swedish small-scale farming. Rural aspirations, as part of an increasingly integrated and urbanized world where imaginaries of the good life are often connected to material wellbeing, need to be understood beyond agriculture. In research focused on human wellbeing, there has been an over-emphasis on objectively measurable factors relating to socio-economic conditions and materialism and a lack of qualitative research on the subjective perception of happiness and satisfaction (Næss 2001). Simultaneously, research on aspirations has seen a general over-emphasis on the individual and psychological factors that neglects the role of structural factors and contexts (Bennike, Rasmussen, and Nielsen 2020; Mausch, Harris, and Revilla Diez 2021).

As aspirations are shaped by the local context and social structures of place, derived from its past, there are “only some versions of the future and certain pathways to these that are imaginable” (Bennike, Rasmussen, and Nielsen 2020, 51). Thereby, the attention is shifted from the individual to the structural forces that shape and condition those imaginaries, through conjunctural analysis. Whether anticipatory or transformative, aspirations of the future are rooted in the history of place, the structural context, and the interconnection between the individual and the collective. Aspirations, as well as the capacity to pursue them through human agency, are directly connected to our sense of wellbeing and happiness.

In this thesis, agriculture remains in the centre of attention as it explores the rural aspirations of small-scale farmers in Sweden and their connection to current rural transformations in the country. The aim of this thesis is to provide some insights into how small-scale farmers in Sweden perceive of the good life, by looking at the aspects of conjuncture, futurity, and subjectivity/collectivity of rural aspirations, as well as the capacity of these farmers to pursue their aspirations by help of human agency.

3. Methodological design and methods

As a researcher within the social sciences, I am steered by the post-modern epistemologies that emphasize the socio-cultural aspect of knowledge. That is, a recognition that our understanding of the world differs according to our social, cultural, and historic context, that ‘truth’ is relative and based on our interpretations (O’Leary 2017). This preference for multiple truths and complexity is central to the common perception of how knowledge is legitimized within qualitative methodologies. A qualitative methodology aims to “gain an intimate understanding of people, places, cultures and situations through rich engagement and even immersion in the reality being studied” (O’Leary 2017, 142).

Exploring aspirations means digging into subjective, sometimes highly personal perceptions, opinions, and experiences that may be difficult to explain or grasp in quantitative research. To properly investigate this topic, therefore, I have chosen a qualitative methodology based on participative observation and in-depth interviews, allowing me to gather primary data through meeting the farmers in person, talking, and taking part in their everyday life. In total, four farming families participated in this study, presented below. This chapter outlines the different research methods used, as well as the ethical aspects and considerations of conducting this research.

3.1. Temporal and spatial considerations of the fieldwork

The choice of research topic and methods, in combination with the covid-19 pandemic of the time of research, set certain limits to the fieldwork. Choosing Västmanland as geographical context was both motivated by my curiosity about the conditions for small-scale farming where I come from, as well as practicality, as I had a place to live and access to a car. Moreover, personal connection to the geographical area may assist in building trust among the participants. Interviews could theoretically be done any time of year, but as I wanted to do participant observation, the fieldwork was conducted during the summer months, the high season for farmers in Northern Europe.

In my original plan, I set aside two months in total for visiting 3-4 farms and spending between two days and two weeks at each farm. However, I ended up spending about a month in total on one main farm, to build trust as well as to experience

everyday farm life over time and to get a deeper understanding of their aspirations. Moreover, considerations regarding the covid-19 pandemic made it more practical and safer to concentrate the participation to one farm. This longer stay with participatory observation was complemented with day trips and interviews on three other farms.

3.1.1. Stig and Solveig

Stig and Solveig run the main farm of this study, where I spent several weeks of the summer participating in their everyday life. Stig and Solveig are a retired couple aged 70+ who both grew up on farms in other parts of Sweden and ended up in Västmanland because of their careers in the industry before becoming small-scale farmers. The farm is located along Lake Mälaren in the Southern part of Västmanland. It became theirs in 1993 and they kept their full-time jobs until retirement. They keep sheep, chickens, ducks, rabbits, and bees, and grow a wide variety of vegetables, herbs, fruits, and berries, as well as cereals and grass for fodder. The farm consists of around 40 hectares in total, of which 15 is agricultural land. The farm has a mixed landscape of grazing fields, crop fields, and forest.

3.1.2. Marie and Bosse

Marie and Bosse are another elderly couple with a farm similar to Stig and Solveig's, also in Southern Västmanland. Marie grew up on the farm and they took over after her parents in the mid-1980s. They have always been part-time farmers and they also own a local agricultural business off-farm. Marie and Bosse grow different types of vegetables, berries, produce cereals and grass for fodder, and keep sheep, chickens, and some cattle. In total, they have 100 hectares of grazing land, cultivated farmland, and forest. What is special about their farm is that a motorway divides their land, resulting in accessibility issues and noise pollution. During the time of writing the motorway is expanded, thereby impacting further on Marie and Bosse's land. The farm has been expanded over time through the purchase of neighbouring smallholdings.

3.1.3. Thomas and Kattis

Thomas and Kattis form a middle-aged couple, the youngest in this study, who bought their farm four years prior to the fieldwork. They relocated from a city in a neighbouring region into the Northern part of Västmanland that is part of Bergslagen's more undulating

landscape. The farm consists of 100 hectares of forest and 40 hectares of agricultural land, as well as their own little lake. In the 19th century, it used to be the main farm of the village, but several buildings have been bought out from the property since then. Today, neither Thomas nor Kattis can work full-time at the farm, but Thomas works full-time in an agricultural company and Kattis is self-employed. They focus on animal husbandry, with sheep, horses, rabbits, some cattle, and their cats and dogs, including kitten breeding. They produce their own grass and cereals for animal fodder but focus less on crop production compared to the other farms in this study. Thomas and Kattis have introduced farm tourism through their summer café.

3.1.4. Stefan

Stefan and his family run the last farm of this study. It is also located in Southern Västmanland, with large grazing areas, cultivated fields and forestland. Stefan grew up on another farm in the region. What separates this farm from the former three, is its organizational structure. Stefan and his family are the owners, but there are several other families and entrepreneurs involved in the farm as well, contributing to the produce, animal care, and vibrant life of the farm. At the time of the fieldwork, there were 16 people working with horses, pigs, sheep, chickens, cows, fodder and vegetable crops, and honey production on the farm. They also host a veterinarian, woodwork handicraft and carpentry and they host several open farm days and events during the year, inviting visitors to the farm.

3.1.5. The farms in this study according to small-scale farming definitions

If we consider the Swedish agro-political development that redefined smallholdings into part-time farms (Flygare 2011), all four farms in this study are small-scale farms. According to Djurfeldt and Gooch's (2002) classification (Table 1.1), Thomas and Kattis's farm is considered a part-time farm as they get their main income off-farm. Stig and Solveig's farm and Marie and Bosse's farm get a large part of their income from pension (retirement), making them social security farms. Stefan's farm, however, is a bit hard to classify as he is working full-time on-farm, while the farm in its totality is run by several individual businesses. As they are not hired by Stefan, the farm could be considered an extended form of dependent family farm, as they are dependent on the work force, but each entrepreneur has its own business. According to the umbrella definition

of small-scale farming used in this thesis that emphasizes characteristics such as local food production and food craftsmanship, all farms in this study are small-scale farms.

3.2. Sampling

As the research is focusing on the perspectives of a specific population (small-scale farmers), I used targeted/purposive sampling strategies, such as hand-picking and ‘snowballing’ (O’Leary 2017; Seale 2018). My aim was to reach potential participants through different farmer organizations, for example LRF and REKO market groups. The former proved difficult as I wanted specifically small-scale farmers, but the latter was a better pathway and where I found Stig and Solveig as well as Marie and Bosse. Hand-picking allowed me to choose whom I contacted and allowed me to “enhance learning by exploring the limits or boundaries of a situation or phenomenon” (O’Leary 2017, 210). For instance, some of the producers on REKO markets are not farmers, but brewers or bakers. I was aware that not all small-scale farmers participate in REKO markets, and therefore, I also researched broadly online using keywords such as “smallholding”, “farm”, and “small-scale farm” (in Swedish) over map applications or in combination with “Västmanland” to get the locations of potential farms within the region.

At the outset, I aimed to reach a breadth of different small-scale farms in Västmanland, both geographically and production-wise (for example conventional, organic, and agroecological farms, animal or crop farming, farms based on self-sufficiency or commercial, part-time, or full-time farms), as well as the farmers’ age group, to get different perspectives. However, the focus on small-scale farmers proved a big limitation, as many of those visible online (through REKO markets, on-farm shops, or own webpages) were either large-scale farmers or located just outside the Västmanland border, especially further East and South. Moreover, I struggled to find farms in the Northern and Central parts of Västmanland, as there were no REKO markets locally in these areas to rely on, and I tried going through personal contacts and reaching out on social media for help. Moreover, many of the farmers I contacted did not answer at all or answered negatively. Eventually I managed to find Thomas and Kattis’ farm through social media research, as the only one in this study located in the Northern part of Västmanland. They also represent a younger, less experienced farmer couple than the others.

Snowball sampling refers to building the sample based on the further recommendations of small-scale farmers I initially contact (O’Leary 2017). Snowballing helped me in pursuing contact with some of the farmers I had already contacted beforehand. Beginning my fieldwork at Stig and Solveig’s farm and accompanying them to the local REKO market, they could introduce me in person to Marie and Bosse. Thus, it was easier to contact them again for booking the interview. Similarly, through these first contacts, I got recommended to contact Stefan.

The dangers of using hand-picking and snowballing strategies are the risks of subconscious bias and wrongful assumptions (O’Leary 2017), and I did my best to contact any farmer that matched my criteria, no matter the first impression of a website or the age or manner of a farmer. Admittedly, pursuing contact with farmers who neither seemed very enthusiastic of my study nor seemed to understand their place in it, and who proved hard to make concrete plans with, was challenging. Several of the farmers recommended to me I decided not to contact due to lack of time and capacity, as well as to avoid adding more imbalance regarding location and age group. Of course, this may be based on wrongful assumptions that they would be too similar in their experiences or aspirations to those already participating in the study.

As my research goes in-depth on subjective aspirations and perceptions, and includes such a small sample, representativeness of small-scale farmers in the country or region is not possible to assess. Small-scale farmers live and work in different local, regional, and ecological settings, shaping both their type of production, their social and political relations, and in turn their aspirations and conditions of possibility. A more accurate goal is therefore high ‘relativeness’ of the sample to the aim of the research (O’Leary 2017). As such, this study contributes to knowledge about existing rural aspirations in Västmanland, without generalizing these to all small-scale farmers in the region or nationally.

3.3. In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews were used to dig deeper into the subjective perspectives and was a way for the farmers to give their own account. They were conducted in an informal manner, as semi-structured, sometimes conversation-like, but I used the same interview guide as basis (see Appendix 1). They took place at the farms themselves. These strategies

were used to make the interviewees feel more comfortable, as well as help building trust and making the communication flow more freely (O’Leary 2017).

In all instances except with Stefan, I interviewed the farmer couples together, as they preferred that, given that this research concerns their lives as lived together at the farms. For example, Stig and Solveig even spoke to me on the phone together when I first made contact, making clear how their lives are completely interwoven. Therefore, doing separate interviews seemed uncomfortable and inappropriate. During participant observation, I did talk to them one-on-one as well, but only in conversations and with spontaneous questions, not in formal interviews. The formality (and perhaps the recording) seemed to make them uncomfortable, while they seemed more at ease while we worked or had coffee breaks or dinner together. Interviewing one-on-one might provide more accurate data from the individual farmer, as aspirations are subjective, and a couple might have slightly different aspirations even if their overall goals and dreams for the farm are similar. Moreover, interviewing more than one person simultaneously influences the data and there is a danger that some interviewees might feel unheard or marginalized (O’Leary 2017). However, it was clearly more comfortable for the couples to be interviewed together.

During the interviews, I combined handwritten notetaking with audio recording in order to best preserve raw data for the afterward analysis. To some extent, I also used post-interview notes of my own thoughts and impressions of the interview as part of my fieldwork diary, including for example non-verbal cues, the atmosphere, and feedback to myself.

3.4. Participant observation

The goal of participant observation is to go beyond the spoken insights of an interview or survey and to experience the life of the researched in their own natural setting. The participant observer gathers data while being “out there in the field” (O’Leary 2017, 251), and “seeks out opportunities to spend time with and carry out activities with members of communities in which he or she is working” (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 4). In ethnography, especially common for cultural anthropologists, it is common to conduct long-term fieldwork and sometimes live among the researched (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011), but my own fieldwork took place on selected farms spread out within a larger region, rather than one local community, and the timescale was days and weeks rather

than months or years. Doing participatory observation allowed me to explore the actual practices and interactions at the farms that go beyond words or first, superficial impressions.

The observation process was unstructured, whereby I valued any input and looked for patterns underway as I participated in farming activities, made conversations, and just spent time at the farm. This fits into what DeWalt and DeWalt (2011) refer to as ‘active participation’. The first week of my stay at Stig and Solveig’s farm, I drove out from Västerås¹ and back every day. This, as well as my one-day task-specific participation at Marie and Bosse’s farm, fits into what DeWalt and DeWalt’s (2011) refer to as ‘moderate participation’. However, for both academic, practical, and ethical purposes, I moved into a cabin just off the premises for the remainder of the time. It allowed me to spend more time at the farm, as I often stayed chatting with Stig and Solveig until late evening, with the possibility of some own space and alone time for gathering my thoughts.

The primary recording method of my observations was notetaking, as I always kept (and used, extensively) a notebook in my pocket as well as kept a diary throughout the fieldwork. Notes are the first steps in data analysing, and therefore, the unstructured manner of my observation demanded me to continually reflect on the process and make modifications if necessary (O’Leary 2017). For example, when I noticed how I mainly joined Solveig rather than Stig in their different tasks (if it was due to their preferences or assumptions, my personal interest in tasks, something else, or a combination, is hard to know), I tried to balance it out by initiating more time with Stig. Moreover, my notes helped me preparing for the deeper interviews (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011). I also took photographs and recorded short videos of farming practices and the surroundings, always with consent from the farmers and without picturing the farmers or the farms that could endanger their anonymity.

The dangers with participatory observation are the potentially extensive temporal and emotional commitments, that may challenge the ability to maintain the researcher role (O’Leary 2017). I tried to avoid stepping too far into pure observation (becoming a ‘bystander’ or ‘spectator’), by distancing myself from and not interacting with the researched, as well as pure participation (or “going native”), by becoming too immersed into, and part of, the researched culture (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011). I offered full disclosure of the research to the participants and any other people I met at the farms,

¹ The regional capital of Västmanland.

ensuring that they knew what I was doing there, how I intended to use the data, and could give informed consent. As I was aware that the participants might not behave completely natural with me there, offering to help with the farm work was also a way of alleviating some of the tension. I sensed a risk of getting too emotionally immersed into the ways of the farm or the family I studied, especially regarding Stig and Solveig's farm, as I stayed there for several weeks and undoubtedly formed an emotional attachment. However, I have tried to be aware of these attachments in the analysing process.

3.5. Analysis and writing process

After the fieldwork, the interviews were transcribed using the F4 Transkript software and the field notes and diary entries were written into digital copies. In these processes, any names, third persons, or locations mentioned were anonymised. I used the software NVivo to code the data according to a thematic analysis. Initially, the data was categorized into themes such as economy, social relations, aspirations towards the good life, and perceived obstacles to those aspirations. However, these themes often overlapped. To find structure in the data that centred on the research topic of rural aspirations, therefore, I went back to the theory and re-structured the data according to the framework of Bennike, Rasmussen, and Nielsen (2020), that re-centred the focus on aspirations while allowing space for analysing the different perspectives in the data in relation to the theory. Thus, the analysis was highly integrated in the writing process, dynamically explored through continuously going back to the theory as well as the raw data to not miss anything of importance. For this purpose, I also kept the direct quotes used in Swedish for as long as possible.

3.6. Research ethics

Before conducting the fieldwork, my research was registered with the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) and adapted to their standards for ethical requirements. This includes certain moral obligations towards the participants (O'Leary 2017).

First, ensuring the participants have given informed consent based on transparency about the research plan, purpose, and process. This means that the participants understand the scope of what they are requested to participate in, including "time commitment, type of activity, topics that will be covered, and all physical and emotional risks potentially involved" (O'Leary 2017, 70). They have the right to know

how the data about them is processed for what purpose and how it is stored. Moreover, it is to ensure that they are participating voluntarily and aware of the right to withdraw at any time. Covering this aspect, all farmers signed a consent form based on the guidelines of the NSD (see Appendix 2) and thus agreed to participate in the study with informed consent. Before each interview we went through the consent form together and they got the opportunity to ask questions before signing. They also got to keep a copy of the form.

Second, ensuring that no harm, physical or psychological, comes to the participants. Due to the covid-19 pandemic, I was prepared for video interviews or day trips only if the farmers would not be willing to meet me in person or accommodate me at their farms. Luckily, this was never mentioned by any of them as a problem. Visiting the farms gave invaluable information of the geographical, social, and cultural context of the farms, as well as their farming activities, challenges, routines, practices, and social and more-than-human relationships. It also provided deeper opportunities for connecting with the farmers, building trust, keeping the communication open and relaxed, as well as the ability to analyse non-verbal communication. To minimize risk connected to the pandemic, though, some measures were taken to ensure participant security, especially for people in the risk groups, such as both the elderly couples. For example, as I wanted to live on the farm to get a deeper understanding of the everyday life, I could live in Stig and Solveig's daughter's cabin rather than in the main house. Moreover, living there instead of driving back and forth every day reduced climate impact as well as risk of spreading the virus. When visiting the other three farms just over the day, we stayed outdoors all the time. I also included margins for potential quarantine time before and after the fieldwork due to travels between Sweden and Norway. Except these risks, physical harm in my study was likely to be avoided (except for potential farming accidents, not directly linked to my research), but psychological harm might be hard to notice. Since the topic of my research is mostly glancing into the future, it might avoid extensive harm surrounding past traumas. However, I tried to be attentive and sensitive around topics that might be difficult or sore, such as health and family issues that came up, and tried to be aware of any hints of when to thread carefully.

Third, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity. As I have been in personal contact with the participants this study, full anonymity is not possible. Using sampling strategies such as snowballing, and online sources such as the REKO market, make some of these connections hard to hide. Moreover, the region is quite small with diverse natural

characteristics, and the farmers are known in their local areas and farmer communities. To maintain confidentiality, I have been careful around how much detail I give about each farmer, their farms, and communities in this thesis. The names used are pseudonyms made up by me, and their real names and the names of their farms have only been stored in handwriting. Digital raw data (recordings, transcriptions, photos, and videos), as well as writing documents has been kept on the encrypted server of University of Oslo throughout the process. Any photos and videos do not show the farmers or the farm in a way that make them recognizable.

Some of the farmers have immigrants working or helping out at their farms. As these relationships are part of the social web at the farms and in the rural community, they are mentioned in the analysis. However, due to sensitivity and issues of ensuring informed consent due to language barriers, they have not been interviewed and I have taken extra measures to keep their anonymity throughout the research, for example removing details about their situations and relationships to the farmers.

3.6.1. Positionality and limitations

As pointed out by O'Leary (2017, 55), “researchers are responsible for shaping the character of knowledge”, and therefore, “must actively manage power, politics and ethics”. This applies to the consideration and wellbeing of the participating farmers as well as the trustworthiness of the research findings and conclusions. One way to make the research trustworthy and to give it credibility is to be true to the limitations of the study, as well as to my own inherent biases (O’Leary 2017; DeWalt and DeWalt 2011). This helps making the research open, transparent, and accountable. When researching people, awareness that all human beings are subjective, with their own worldviews and socio-cultural backgrounds, is fundamental. This includes awareness of how my own subjectivity, i.e my set of beliefs, assumptions, and worldview, influences how I choose to define, build, conduct, and interpret the research itself (O’Leary 2017). It also influences the relationship between me as the researcher, and the research participants. As such, it is not possible for qualitative research to be objective.

However, by recognizing multiple perspectives on ‘truth’ as well as being attentive about different worldviews, knowledges, assumptions, and biases that I carry and may encounter in the field, I attempt to keep some degree of neutrality. Issues of gender, class, and race, and recognizing the power of language is central in this

perspective (O’Leary 2017; DeWalt and DeWalt 2011). Moreover, drawing from feminist geographers (Moss 2002; Staeheli and Lawson 1995), it is important for me as a researcher to be aware of and actively practice acknowledging different truth claims, and how (multiple) positionings shape how different forms of knowledge are legitimized, challenged, and reproduced. For instance, it is easy to listen to the ‘dominant voice’, while missing others. Typically, this refers to the participants in my research that can relate to me and that I can relate to, those who have a similar background, cultural understanding, and ‘speaking my language’. By consciously working on hearing other, often traditionally marginalized, voices as well, the research actively engages in emphasizing diversity in representation, which ultimately seeks to combat inherited societal (as well as academic) assumptions and prejudices (O’Leary 2017).

The aim has been to be mindful of these factors in my interaction with the farmers and other people met during the fieldwork and in my analysis, including actively seeking out the perspectives of for example female farmers or non-ethnically Swedish farmers. As all the interviews (except with Stefan, whom I interviewed alone) were conducted with heterosexual couples, and my participant observation was mostly spent with women (Solveig and Marie), the female farmer voice is actively present in this study. However, as they were interviewed together, I have not managed to include a substantial gender analysis, which represents a limitation to this study.

Moreover, O’Leary (2017, 59) reminds us that “analysis of words needs to come from the perspective and reality of the researched, not the researcher”. Building trust lies in the ability for the researcher and the participants to relate to each other, and is heavily influenced by characteristics such as gender, age, ethnicity, and socio-economic status (O’Leary 2017). To build trust, it is “absolutely crucial to minimize any real or perceived power differential” between the participants and myself, to avoid making them “feel alienated, intimidated, and/or uninterested” to participate in the research (O’Leary 2017, 61). As a young, ethnically Swedish, middle-class woman of high education, it is possible to imagine certain tensions in the prejudices and power relations when meeting with farmers. As the age of farmers in Sweden are rising, and two of the couples I met are 70+, I was concerned for potential prejudice about me being ‘green’, naïve, and not understanding their reality. Being from the region capital, I was concerned about assumptions of me being elitist, unused to the hard work of farming, or romanticising rural life. As a student of development and environment as well as a vegetarian, I feared

assumptions of me being too ideological or against dairy and meat production. From the beginning, I was transparent about the study and open about my position and previous experience and used it to lower the barriers and emphasise my interest and eagerness to learn from them.

Since this research was conducted in my own home country and mother tongue, the difficulties of translation were limited to the writing process, as the complexity and meanings within the Swedish language risk becoming lost or changed in the translation to English. However, issues of communication and interpretation can occur despite being in the mother tongue. Thus, I attempted to be as clear as I could in my communication with the farmers and I asked whenever I did not understand something during the fieldwork.

Being transparent about my research design and setting may provide tools for conducting similar research elsewhere to further build this knowledge field and provide auditability and accountability to my research (O'Leary 2017). Thus, although the findings in this study cannot be generalized, providing detail on how it has been conducted and the lessons learned ensures transferability.

4. Being small-scale farmers in an industrial society

Following Bennike, Rasmussen, and Nielsen's (2020) conceptualization of rural aspirations, the aspirations of the farmers in this study are shaped by the spatial and temporal context they live in. So-called 'opportunity structures', that condition aspirations are found in current agro-political frameworks, market access, social norms and structures, and legal frameworks (Fischer 2014). This chapter explores how the farmers in this study experience these structures and how they influence the conditions of possibility to pursue their aspirations of the good life. It aims to answer the question: *How are structural conditions influencing the perceived conditions of possibility for the future for small-scale farming in Sweden?*

First, the main aspirations of the farmers in this study are presented. Then, the chapter explores their experiences of the structural conditions of small-scale farming in Sweden, divided into three overarching themes: (1) perspectives on the overarching agro-political framework, (2) income opportunities and economic structures, and (3) experiences of larger socio-cultural and spatial conditions in rural Sweden.

4.1. The farmers' aspirations of the good life

The farmers in this study unite in viewing themselves living a good life as small-scale farmers. They all emphasize different things that impact their sense of wellbeing, such as the possibility of eating good, self-produced food and spending their days doing what they enjoy, being close to the soil and their animals, working together with nature, and cultivating their relationships to their families and their rural communities. Things that negatively influence their sense of wellbeing are connected to stress of managing a never-ending pile of tasks, health issues, loss of rural community, and insecurity about the farm's future or fear of not building a sustainable economy. These findings are consistent with findings in an international study of wellbeing by Delle Fave et al. (2011) that emphasize health, a sense of harmony/balance in life, and social relationships as important for human wellbeing. Moreover, increased wellbeing by being in nature and connecting with the non-human world is emphasized by deep ecology scholars (Næss 2001).

Pursuing the good life entails being part of a larger purpose or doing what each person considers meaningful (Fischer 2014). Dedicating their lives to producing food for themselves and others, cultivating the land, and taking care of animals, gives our

farmers meaning, inner peace, and harmony. Thus, wellbeing, for our farmers, is rooted in their connection to the land. Although running a small-scale farm allows for little flexibility regarding taking time off, travelling or visiting friends and family in other places, the farmers in this study are happy about their chosen lifestyle, since

the love for running this is so much higher (Thomas)

Moreover, the sense of wellbeing for the farmers in this study is connected to their individual aspirations of their own farms but are also rooted in collective aspirations of farmers and rural peoples.

Their individual aspirations differ according to preferences and are conditioned by factors such as age and health, as well as their different family situations. Stefan aspires to transfer the farm to his children and continue living his retirement years on the farm. Similarly, even though they are old, Stig and Solveig aspire to keep on farming as they do today for as long as possible, focusing on producing high quality food for themselves and others. Marie and Bosse are instead aspiring to phase out, as their age are limiting their physical ability and motivation. While Thomas and Kattis have just started their journey as farmers and are aspiring for making a living off the farm, the other three families are soon facing generational shifts.

For Stig and Solveig, Marie and Bosse, and Stefan, aspirations are increasingly moved from their individual futures towards the future of their farms in a longer perspective and for the general rural and agricultural development. They aspire to see their farms continued as small-scale farms, in the hands of someone who cares for the land in a similar way they do, where small-scale and organic practices are continued instead of the land falling to conventional and industrial farming. Preferably, they want the farm to continue within the family, firmly connecting this aspiration to the aspirations of their children.

A strong aspiration among the farmers in this study is to contribute to the growth of local, small-scale, and organic farming practices. They want to contribute to increased ecological sustainability and to prosperous rural areas and rural community, both in terms of social and economic values. In a wider sense, they aspire for contributing to rural areas and resources being increasingly recognized and valued by politicians as well as the population in general. This aspiration is pursued through creating meeting

places and building local community around food production. All these aspirations are explored deeper in the next three analysis chapters.

4.2. Small-scale perspectives on current agro-political frameworks

The farmers in this study have aspirations connected to an agricultural policy that would focus more on ecological and small-scale food production, local food systems, and increasing the national self-sufficiency rate. As both the current agro-political framework found in the CAP and the national food strategy are focusing on increased domestic production and several financial incentives and support connected to organic and local food production (A National Food Strategy for Sweden - more jobs and sustainable growth throughout the country. Short version of the Government bill 2016/17:104 2017; The European Commission ; Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation 2017), there are potentially improved conditions for small-scale farming in Sweden. Currently, however, the farmers in this study are united in feeling they are being down prioritized as small-scale farmers in the current agro-political framework, both regarding incentives for farming activities, available financial support, and market access. Beyond the direct impact on economic opportunities, they also criticize that market-based economic profit is valued higher than ecological and cultural values in the current agro-political framework.

The farmers in this study feel that agriculture and rural areas are not prioritized in national political debates, which is a natural consequence of the centralization of agro-politics to EU level and the reliance on the global agro-industrial food system. Their frustration was illustrated by referring to the problems the Swedish government had to find a new Minister of Rural Affairs².

It's absolutely insane. And that... it, it strongly suggests that he's, he hasn't quite realized how important agriculture is, or the countryside, above all, is. For Sweden. (Thomas)³

² In Sweden, the agricultural sector falls under the Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation, as matters concerning rural affairs and regional development. Since entering the EU in 1995, agricultural politics are governed mainly from the EU level.

³ «He» referring to Sweden's Prime Minister at the time of the fieldwork, Stefan Löfven.

As farmers within the EU, they are heavily dependent on financial support systems to maintain market competitiveness in the face of cheap food produced elsewhere at the expense of ecosystems and rural populations. The natural conditions that made agricultural development possible are beginning to disappear, as intensive monoculture production dependent on fossil fuels and agrochemicals are undermining the natural biochemical cycles in the soil, water and land availability, and biodiversity, that agriculture is founded upon (Svärd 2021). In Västmanland, Stefan argues that the continued promotion and cultivation of large-scale cereal production is one of those devastating processes, spurred on by economic incentives grounded in mid-1900s capitalism and development discourses:

Well, there was only one way. And that was growing cereals. You weren't supposed to have any animals, because that's what was so, too, bad and ugly [...] And what was the goal? Well, it was getting the same money as an industrial worker. And get time off. And that's what... what my grandfather and my father, well, everything they dreamed of have, came true. [...] But now it's just... what a disaster! Ecological disaster! Unsustainable disaster! [...] That is, that construction I grew up with and that I learned from agricultural schools (Stefan)

The modern agricultural development was a way for farmers to get out of poverty, to get time off, to increase their status in society, and to pursue their visions of a better life. However, today, agriculture has become somewhat of a high-tech occupation, largely steered by corporate food regime interests (McMichael 2009). The good life that the earlier generations sought through agricultural reconstruction might have come to them and their children, but with the cost of disconnection from the animals and the soil that provide our food, traditional knowledge lost and centralized into scientific institutions, and depopulated rural areas.

The farmers in this study express worry about how the global market and large-scale imports affect Sweden's domestic food production. They have noticed how more and more imported foodstuffs have appeared in the supermarket shelves and are frustrated over how previously domestic cooperatives are bought up by foreign companies and incorporated into the global food market, while Sweden's self-sufficiency rate remains low and small-scale production and local food systems are squeezed out.

I think we could, we should be more self-sufficient in, not only... (Solveig) Yes, what we *can* grow and produce. (Stig, his emphasis) ...*can* grow. Not just carrots

and wheat flour [... Then] it's only possible to bake carrot cake. (Solveig, her emphasis)

The solution, according to the farmers in this study, lies in a transformed agricultural policy that promotes small-scale farming, increased domestic production, and strengthened local food systems.

It's very important that we take care of the small-scale because *that* is the only thing that will, I think, be the right policy in the future. Look at the pandemic now, typical example of, what's happening? Well, these small farms that have been more or less deserted now, all of a sudden, almost all of them have been bought up. Because people want to get out and, and start to become more interested in farming and so on. And then you also have to pursue a policy that brings us closer to the soil⁴. (Thomas, his emphasis)

Building on CAP, the current Swedish national food strategy has several elements related to the small-scale agricultural sector, such as the role of local and regional landraces and crop varieties, the importance of grazing animals, and the need for developing needs-based research and advice systems (Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation 2017). The strategy is built on the premise that more food should be produced domestically, in general good news for the national agricultural sector and those promoting a stronger self-sufficiency rate. However, the main goal is to increase productivity and economic profitability. Thus, the strategy's elements and priorities are bound to bias the most profitable and resourceful agricultural businesses. If not directed specifically towards the small-scale sector, for example by strengthening local markets and aiming at reduced local food prices, the risk is that measures are favouring mostly large-scale producing farmers.

The new CAP framework for 2023-2027, however, specifically includes directions for redistributing financial support from larger to smaller companies (LRF 2021), potentially improving financial support for small-scale farmers and other agricultural businesses. The farmers in this study are not against financial subsidies since

⁴ "närmare till jorden" in Swedish could refer to either "closer to Earth" or "closer to the soil", and it is hard to know which one Thomas refers to here, the more symbolic one or the more hands-on. I chose "soil", since it seems safer to interpret it that way, due to the reference to farming, rather than to risk over-interpreting it symbolically.

they are an important source of income. However, they are sceptic of the capitalistic motivation behind them, since

it's not because the farmer should get more money, it's to make the food cheaper.
(Thomas)

Although they have strong opinions on these matters, none of the farmers in this study are currently politically active. LRF, as the only farmer's organization allowed in political negotiations, are the primary way for farmers to gain political influence as a group. According to Marie and Bosse, the existence of LRF is a good thing as it represents farmers' interests in their feedback on legislative proposals put forth in the parliament. However, they are sceptic about the actual possibility for farmer's organizations to create change.

that the draft laws go out to LRF centrally, then, and we get to express ourselves, that's good (Bosse) But then, what does it lead to? (Marie) No, you don't know that, because then it's the parliament that decides, anyway. (Bosse)

Additionally, as LRF gathers all kinds of farmers nation-wide, farmers with more alternative views, such as Stefan, and small-scale farmers in general, have lesser opportunities for political influence than conventional, industrial farmers. The latter group of farmers are often more aligned to the current political framework and generally have more resources in terms of time at hand, for example due to hired labour and monoculture farming, to engage politically. The farmers in this study have chosen to instead focus their energy on their own production and local communities.

4.3. Economic structures: building a sustainable farm economy

The four farming families in this study have found different ways to organize their economy to be able to live on their farms. Having been able to acquire farms and starting farming activities, they have already come a long way on their path towards their good life. Income opportunities are crucial in conditioning their means to pursue their aspirations, whether that is to live off their farms such as Thomas and Kattis, to provide services and community for the rural area such as Stefan, or to maintain a certain level of self-sufficiency like the older couples. This section looks at the economic factors of the life of a small-scale farmer in Västmanland, with an emphasis on income opportunities.

4.3.1. Debts, financial support schemes, and bureaucracy

The farmers in this study have different economic situations, predominantly because they are in different stages of their (farming) lives and because they have sought different pathways towards a sustainable economy. Thereby, they also have different financial possibilities depending on how steady their income is and how indebted they are, which influence their aspirations and thoughts of their farms' futures. The two elderly couples, who have paid off their loans and receive state pension as their primary income, see no real obstacles to their aspirations due to finance, for example when it comes to investing in their farm. However, their aspirations have largely moved towards their farm's future and larger social and agricultural changes, which is more dependent on the aspirations of others and structural changes, than their own financial situation.

Stefan and Thomas and Kattis are dependent on customers as well as financial support schemes and off-farm jobs to sustain their farms' economy. They use their income to invest in their farms, to build a sustainable financial foundation, and trying to leave it in as good a shape as possible for their children. However, as they are dependent on getting a sufficient income from their activities, the possibility to pursue their aspirations connected to their own lives as farmers are limited or demand a longer timeframe.

All farmers in this study own their farms and due to the financial capacity needed, often through taking up large loans, becoming debt-free is an aspiration among them, although they are in different stages in their lives. Both Stig and Solveig and Marie and Bosse, have owned their farms long enough to having paid off their debts already, which is referred to with pride.

So, what we've done here, we're grateful that we're debt-free! [...] I think that there's a, a bit of pride in having managed to do it, to become debt-free. (Bosse)

Because of them being debt-free, continuing living on their farms is cheaper than moving somewhere new, not least since they perceive the chances of getting new loans at their ages are low. Being retired, they get most of their income as state pension. Thus, they are not limited by working hours elsewhere and can focus as much time they want on farming without worrying too much about income.

For Stefan, the aspiration is to pass the farm over to his children without debts. Therefore, they are investing as much as possible from their income back into the farm.

my wife and I, well, we have no incomes at all, but everything goes into the farm and is invested there, right? [...] For the future and for our descendants. Because we want our children not to be burdened with too much... loans. (Stefan)

Of the farmers in this study, only Stefan works full-time on his farm. That is only possible because of the specific structure of the farm that divides farm activities among several entrepreneurs, and because his wife works full-time off-farm.

For Thomas and Kattis, still having large debts limit their possibilities to pursue their aspirations of being full-time farmers, as the income opportunities for their newly started farm are not enough. To sustain themselves for now, Thomas works full-time at an agricultural business off-farm. Being self-employed allows Kattis to structure a balance between that job and the farm according to their needs.

but it's a puzzle, it's absolutely a puzzle. It's like... you have to lay... it's a patchwork, like, to make it work. And we make it work! But it's not any plus-plus-plus (Kattis)

As for most farmers in Sweden, Thomas and Kattis and Stefan are dependent on CAP subsidies to sustain their income. The older couples also use these subsidies as it helps covering some of their costs, for example costs connected to the certification process for organic production. However, both the older couples state that these subsidies have not been their most important source of income.

we're probably a bit bad at keeping track of and using, maybe there's support that we could have used, then, but that we haven't bothered with. [...] Yes, and only because, well, we've managed anyway. (Stig)

Although the farmers in this study do not specifically aspire to become independent of these subsidies, they would prefer less bureaucratic demands. All farmers in this study are operating multifunctional farms, meaning that their administrative workload and costs become heavier compared to large-scale and monoculture farming. For the farmers in this study, institutional bureaucracy and controlling schemes demand unnecessarily difficult

and time-consuming administration, including demands from several Swedish authorities.

it has to be reported what you grow, how you grow it, and then, all of that was [already] reported when you applied for the support. And that they can't coordinate that, it's well... astonishing. I think. (Stig)

While none of them would change their farming lives because of bureaucratic demands, it affects their sense of wellbeing negatively in terms of managing their farm as they like. As emphasized by Stig and Solveig, control fees also add to production costs. As their products are already disadvantaged on the market, the extra costs involved in a diversified production influences their possibility to get an income from their produce.

4.3.2. Multifunctional farms

The farmers in this study all have multifunctional farms, with activities ranging from traditional food production and processing to forestry, farm tourism, craftsmanship, and energy production. Multifunctionality spread their sources of income as well as risk. For example, forestry represents an important income source for the farmers during the winter season. Large forestland was explicitly a requirement in Thomas and Kattis's search for a farm that they could eventually live off economically. They as well as Stefan's family have also introduced tourism activities at their farms. At Stefan's farm, it is mainly in the form of short events, such as open farm days and harvest parties. For Thomas and Kattis, their summer café has become one of their main activities, as a full-time job during the summer season. Due to the popularity, they need to decide on how to develop it.

We want to kind of, maybe we want to make some rooms on the side and have some bed and breakfast (Kattis)

For Stefan's family, the very multifunctional character of their farm is one of its main attractions for farm tourists when they arrange open farm days and events. The self-branding as "the happy farmer", organically produced food, as well as the on-farm processing, craftsmanship, and the plans of an on-farm abattoir, are all activities that attract both customers and tourists. Both Stefan and Thomas and Kattis use social media to promote themselves by sharing pictures and histories from the everyday life at the farms.

Farm shops, cafés, and visiting farms are part of a growing agrotourism sector. Thomas and Kattis are receiving financial support from their municipality in marketing their summer café since it helps attracting tourists to the region. The national food strategy seeks to promote local food as an integral part of the tourism industry (Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation 2017). This is a way to build demand for domestically produced food both within the country and among foreign tourists to increase export. Thus, the political aim of increasing domestically produced food is perhaps less about increasing the self-sufficiency rate, but rather to strengthen the competitiveness of Swedish food on the global market.

4.3.3. Market access based on short sale circuits and provenance

In the face of climate change, ecological collapse, the covid-19 pandemic, and recent worries of war, the demand for small-scale, local, and organically produced food, is increasing among customers as well as public procurement (Waldenström 2018). The farmers in this study have noticed this increased interest in their products and in local markets, contributing to their positive view on the future for small-scale and organic farming in terms of demand. The farmers in this study produce high quality, local, organic, and to some extent self-processed, food based on ecological values connected to their wish of taking care of the land, using local resources, and pursuing the handicraft of farming. However, there are some differences in the motivation for provenance food production among the farmers in this study. Stig and Solveig and Marie and Bosse produce food largely based on their own preferences, as they primarily produce food for themselves, while Thomas and Kattis are more eager to choose production that generates income. For instance, they are planning to introduce beef production, as it provides a better income than mutton. Stefan, on the other hand, produces food based on ecological values as well as customer demand and based on what the entrepreneurs at his farm aspire to produce.

Much of the food produced by the farmers in this study adds value to their farms due to ‘provenance’, which is value based on moral preferences referring to geography, quality, authenticity, and exclusivity, often used in the labelling of products or producers (Fischer 2014). For example, buying locally produced food invokes a sense of closer relations between producers and consumers, as well as a security regarding social and environmental production conditions. Through traditional knowledge and

high-quality craftsmanship, the products attract customers based on other criteria than simply food prices. Stig and Solveig's on-farm processing is one such example, providing "home-made" products while making use of their crops as well as the wild local resources at hand. Producing organically, as well as keeping native breeds, such as Gotland sheep or Hedemora hens, are also examples of provenance pursued by the farmers in this study. Marie and Bosse have noticed an increased interest in traditional ways of cultivating land and how traditional, native crops are becoming more popular.

all these old cereal varieties are coming back, which have more flavour. [...] And people are prepared to pay more. (Marie)

To be able to market their products, the farmers in this study face extra costs. As the prices on their products are already high compared to conventional and imported foodstuffs, their ability to increase prices further is limited if they want to keep attracting customers. For example, the income generated by meat products often barely extends beyond covering the extra costs connected to slaughter, processing, and purchased fodder. Thus, producing food that fall under provenance produce generates extra income to these farmers, but the main reason for them to pursue these farming practices are due to ecological values and personal preferences.

To get their products on the market, all farmers in this study today focus on short-sale circuits. It allows them to sell a wider variety of their products at higher prices compared to selling to the large cooperatives and the supermarket industry. For example, products that do not meet the strict demands of the industrial market, self-picked wild edibles, organic or local produce, on-farm processed foodstuffs and handicrafts products. Short sale circuits also help them cultivate direct relationships both with customers and other farmers, which are important both for building knowledge of where and how food is produced, loyalty towards local farmers, as well as building a sense of community among farmers and customers.

All families except Marie and Bosse have on-farm shops, representing the main selling channels for Stefan's family and Thomas and Kattis. Both the older couples mainly use local markets such as the farmer's market and REKO. The emergence of new local markets, such as REKO, was important for both older couples to be able to stop selling to the supermarket industry.

All lamb meat now, then, it's sold on... directly to consumers. (Marie) It wasn't like that 10 years ago. (Bosse) No, then we sold to Scan⁵ or something like that. (Marie) The last 10 years, it's pure revolution (Bosse)

Living in Västmanland, the farmers in this study have the advantage of having relatively short distances to several cities, with access to several local markets to reach customers. During my time with Stig and Solveig, I got to join a couple of REKO handouts, that provided important insight into the organization and preparation of using pre-booked local markets, as well as the importance of physical markets for cultivating direct relationships. The direct relationships to the customers form a mutual bond of trust and obligation. For example, it is a norm that customers bring back used jars and egg cartons to be re-used for ecological as well as economic reasons, while the producers are expected to hold a certain quality of their production. Marie and Bosse emphasize the need for, and joy in, putting effort into producing high quality food, which makes customers want to come back.

Well, if you've been liked, if you say so, then... (Bosse) Yes, they've tried the product, so they know it's good. (Marie) Yes. And then they continue. (Bosse)

During high season, there are many orders to be delivered and queues can become quite long, leaving less time for networking. During market days, most working hours are spent preparing the orders and following administration. However, there is always a consideration if the number and size of orders make it worth going, considering the use of gas and time. Despite these factors, both couples emphasize the benefits of predictability, and convenience in selling their products on certain times and with orders being pre-booked, while also easing some of the stress of getting their products sold.

REKO is great! Ordered in advance, paid in advance, you deliver. Cannot get any better! (Bosse)

Provenance products and short sale circuits are mentioned in the national food strategy, for example in relation to public procurement. It states that “It should be made easier for small and medium-sized suppliers to tender for public contracts for food and catering services” (Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation 2017, 17), meaning that all state

⁵ One of the large corporations in Swedish food industry.

authorities, including municipal institutions such as schools and elderly homes, should prioritize locally grown food. Thus, it helps build a demand for locally produced, small-scale, and organic food across the country.

The strategy also aims for consumers to be able to “make informed and conscious choices about their food”, no matter the socio-economic group (Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation 2017, 16). Focusing on labelling, the strategy does not recognize the potential that direct customer-producer relations, as is cultivated on local markets such as REKO, have in providing information about where and how their food is produced. Visiting local farm shops also provide a chance to see the production location for yourself. Here, the problem is accessibility for people without a car, for example, and the fact that locally produced food is often more expensive than supermarket foodstuffs. Small-scale, organic, and local food cannot compete with global food market prices, driven by trade subsidies and large-scale production, but rely on the demand from local customers and tourists. Thus, small-scale farmers are dependent on social norms that are connected to an increased demand for local and organic food.

Despite the aims of the national food strategy to strengthen domestic food production and availability of organic and local food, the small-scale farming sector is still missing in the framework. For example, stronger political and financial incentives are needed to help even out the disadvantage of local food in the face of global market food prices and in terms of availability.

4.4. Structural conditions connected to larger rural developments

Aspirations are not only individual for these farmers, connected to farming practices or the possibilities to make a living, but also to longer-term developments of the farm itself, the agricultural sector, and the rural community. These three topics are discussed in this section.

4.4.1. The future of the farm

For the farmers in this study, farming has become an identity, embodied in their daily routines and practices, even in what they eat. Thus, the prospect of phasing out means not only giving up working with the animals, the fields, and the soil, but also giving up a life purpose and an identity. The three farming families in this study that are closing in on a

generational shift of their farms (all except Thomas and Kattis), express aspirations of continuation of their farms within their family. The same aspirations among aging farmers in Sweden have been found in a study by Grubbström and Eriksson (2018). These aspirations are rooted in their personal connection to the land and in wanting the farm to fall into hands that will take care of it after them. The farms represent a life's work, where they have put hearts and soul into pursuing food production and what they see as the good life. However, although Swedish farms have historically been transferred within the family through inheritance or purchase, it is increasingly common for smallholder owners giving up farming to lease out their land to large, industrial agricultural units (Morell 2011). Stig and Solveig and Marie and Bosse are all worried over this prospect for their farms, while Stefan has the luxury of knowing that his children will take over the farm when he retires.

All farmers in this study are concerned about the difficulty to take over farms. Their aspirations connected to the continuation of their farms align with the new CAP framework that seek to make generational shifts easier (European Commission n.d). Across the EU there is a low interest among young people to take over farms, due to the large capital resources required and barriers between older and younger generations (Waldenström 2018). According to LRF Ungdomen, the youth organization of LRF, an estimated needed capital range between 1-5 million SEK (Rappe and Öhrlund 2022). Although there are also green waves of people wanting to start farming or moving to rural areas, such as Thomas and Kattis, the loans create barriers to pursuing their aspirations.

If you hadn't had the loans, then you could've taken loans to expand and do the production you wanted. And then all of a sudden you can live off the farm. And that's the problem, with not being allowed to inherit a farm, then, but that you must buy it. (Kattis)

Market prices for farms and agricultural land are considered by many as overly expensive (Grubbström and Eriksson 2018). Leasing gives an opportunity for young farmers to try out farming without risking too much financially, and a way for the owning families to hold on to highly valuable land for future generations (Grubbström and Eriksson 2018), which might benefit the older farmers in this study who are uncertain of their farms' futures. Policy efforts to make generational shifts easier have thus far not been sufficient to change the declining number of farmers in Sweden, but the effects of the new CAP

remain to be seen. For the older couples in this study, it may result in an easier sell or lease to someone who cares for the continuation of their farms.

Learning that his farm will continue in the hands of his children has brought feelings of relief and happiness to Stefan. He aspires to continue living at the farm in retirement and take part in what he views as the good life there, without having to manage it or worry about making a living:

I[‘ll] just walk around as a farm hand here, helping my kids and... teach... doing what needs to be done and teaching them what I can⁶. And not having to think of “well, I need to save for retirement and... now the interest rate goes up and now the interest rate goes down”, I mean (laughing), all that. Just escape that and just live this. Be here on the farm. (Stefan)

This vision has been an aspiration for Marie and Bosse as well, but as their children are not interested in taking over, it becomes increasingly unlikely for them. However, aging is unavoidable and as both couples are above 70 years old, they already experience limitations in their farming connected to a declining physical ability.

In their study on components of wellbeing, Delle Fave et al. (2011) found that health was one of the life domains that most people connected to their sense of happiness. For the farmers in this study, the sense of wellbeing is influenced both by their actual health, and by potential future health, especially for the older farmers. Their ability to continue farming is mainly conditioned by their own health and the potential loss of mental and physical abilities influence what they view as possible in the future. Due to their declining health and loss of motivation, Marie and Bosse are already preparing for phasing out their farming activities.

I've grown tired! Of working. I've not been afraid to work, but now, now it's straining⁷. There's nothing of that motivation, and it might have something to do with the fact that I was sick. That I have no motivation anymore. And that... I miss it, you know! It was fun to work, but today... it's not at all like it used to be. (Bosse)

⁶ In Swedish, the sentence “lär dem det jag kan” could be translated to either “teaching them what I can” or “teaching them what I know”. Both works here and it was hard to know which one Stefan meant. I chose the former alternative here, mostly based on my instinctive interpretation.

⁷ The Swedish expression “bära emot” has no direct translation, but it refers to the feeling of difficulty and resistance, something standing in the way. “Straining” in this sense felt like a good translation, as it can both refer to that mental feeling of losing motivation but also of a physical resistance, both of which could be referred to here.

For Marie and Bosse, as for many other outgoing farmers, simply deciding to quit may provide a sense of relief (Grubbström and Eriksson 2018). However, the worry of what will happen to the farm if they sell has perhaps made them hold on to their farm for longer than they would have wanted. As they have a motorway going through their property, which is to be expanded, Marie and Bosse are worried it will lower the property value, or simply result in their property being cut off and sold as farmland to already large landowners. However, when asked if they would have liked the farm to stay within the family, Marie answered,

In a way, but, but since it lies where it lies with... with the proximity to the highway and... I don't know if I think it's... right? The property itself and its location is nice, but it was ruined by it being divided in this way and the sound that is. We don't get anything, noise barrier or anything. (Marie)

The motorway thus represents an infrastructural rural development that affects their sense of control over their own property, negatively influencing their conditions of possibility regarding the farm's continuation within the family as well as in the face of selling. Because of the motorway expansion, they do not believe that anybody would like to live at their farm but expect the attractive farmland to be cut off from the rest of the property.

For Stig and Solveig, who still have energy to continue farming, the focus lies on living here and now, while the future of the farm is a problem for the future. Discussions about whether they should make any investments in the farm were approached from a practical viewpoint, both involving their own interests and if they would sell or lease out the land in the future. When asked about whether any of their children want to take over the farm, they did not seem to have given it much thought. Solveig stated that it does not worry her now, while Stig emphasized that,

Yes, well, you do think that you've kept on here and struggled, like, for many years, that it would be a shame if it sort of just disappears from the family somehow. (Stig)

In a seminar on generational shifts in agriculture organized by Landsbygdsnätverket (the Swedish Rural Network) and LRF, employees in the agricultural sector suggest introducing emotional assistance schemes in the process of transferring farm ownership (Rappe and Öhrlund 2022). According to them, farmers facing a potential transfer of ownership are often troubled by how that will affect their identity, frictions in the family,

or whether it may instigate new family conflicts, as a family farm is often viewed as keeping the family together. This may be true for Stefan, where the whole family is involved in the farm, or for Stig and Solveig, who's children grew up on the farm. However, Thomas and Kattis's farm is still new to their lives and Marie and Bosse's children have never been involved in their farm. For the farmers themselves, though, selling the farm or leasing out the land means more than just giving up a home and a lifestyle, it means giving up an identity and redefining one's purpose in life. No matter what happens to their farms in the future, though, pursuing small-scale farming was primarily built on their own aspirations for a good life. Thus,

I have never regretted that we took over the farm. (Bosse)

4.4.2. The links between natural pastureland and small-scale farming

The role of small-scale farms in terms of biodiversity and ecosystems is mainly connected to the practice of grazing to preserve natural pastureland. Although not all smallholdings automatically hold grazing animals, the farmers in this study do and the symbiosis between grazing, biodiversity, and landscape management is central at their farms. It is part of their aspirations for continued small-scale farming and increased rural values, as aspirations from 'below' (Bennike, Rasmussen, and Nielsen 2020).

Political incentives for preserving and increasing natural pastureland in the Swedish landscape, an activity largely connected to and important to small-scale farmers, also exist through the CAP subsidies as aspirations 'from above' (Bennike, Rasmussen, and Nielsen 2020). However, these subsidies have thus far not been large enough to increase grazing activity. In Stefan's case, increased financial demands have made it necessary to stop the grazing of neighbouring large estates' lands to instead focus time and effort on what brings income. Moreover, the food strategy fails to address the need for re-introducing abandoned farmland, indicating a focus on increasing the productivity on the farmlands already in use. Clearly, if natural pastureland is to be kept, aligning the aspirations of the farmers in this study with the political aspirations, financial incentives for farmers to keep grazing animals needs further strengthening. Smaller-scale animal husbandry also makes it easier to follow up on each individual animal, minimizing the use of antibiotics and thus making small-scale farms important contributors to high levels of animal welfare, both of which are important elements in the national food strategy (Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation 2017).

Through their multifunctional farms and grazing-centred practices, the farmers in this study provide a contrast to the general landscape in Västmanland today, where vast cereal fields dominate the landscape in the South, and forest plantations dominate in the North (Figures 4.1 and 4.2). The farmers in this study have noticed the change in the agricultural landscape brought about by the consolidation of farmland into increasingly larger farms and the loss of small-scale farming, despite grazed lands being viewed as an integrated and important part of the Swedish agricultural landscape and cultural heritage (Waldenström 2018; Flygare 2011).



Figure 4.1 Grazing sheep in a natural pastureland landscape on one of the farms in this study. Photo by author.



Figure 4.2 Cereal fields as the dominating agricultural landscape in Southern Västmanland.
Photo by author.

It's almost a sensation when you're out driving, a sensation to see some dairy cows in a pen. That's not often you see. (Solveig) No, especially around here... (Stig) [...] When I was little, there were cows everywhere, I thought. (Solveig)

As animal husbandry has decreased in Västmanland (except for horse farms), the needs of local farms change, influencing the conditions for local businesses and agricultural workforce. For instance, Marie and Bosse have noticed a decreased demand for services by their off-farm agricultural business. If local businesses such as theirs would need to shut down, incentives for re-establishing animal farms in the region are even more limited.

4.4.3. Rural depopulation eroding knowledge and social support networks

The farmers in this study aspire to contribute to a strengthened sense of rural community. They emphasize the importance of community among farmers, neighbours, and likeminded people around them, both in terms of business relationships, social networks, and their own wellbeing. In the start-up phase, especially, all farmers in this study have been dependent on other farmers for mentorship and knowledge transfers. All farmers in

this study except Kattis have grown up on or next to farms. Throughout the years, they have noticed a decline in the sense of rural community, as farms have shut down or become incorporated into larger farms, as rural services and meeting places have disappeared (Östling 2021) and as neighbours are increasingly keeping to themselves.

As the cities grow and rural areas become depopulated, people also lose their relationship to the land, the animals, and the knowledge of where food comes from. With urbanization, industrialization of agriculture, and the development of large-scale agri-food and retail chains, the farmer has become invisible and distant to most people in society.

as an example, if there becomes only one farmer in the whole of Västmanland, or we say Västerås Municipality, if there would be only one farmer there, no one would notice anything. [...] you don't hallo the farmer, well, the farmer's no longer there! But when I drive around here, then everyone hallos. Because they know who I am. And... so it almost becomes a bit strange, they sort of think that all agriculture is like what we have here. (Stefan, laughing)

There is a gap between the popular, often traditional, image of agriculture, where grazing animals roam free, and the reality, where most farms are industrial, and most animals are kept indoors. That Stefan meets people who believe that their farm is a typical example of a Swedish farm today, shows how big the distance has become between consumers and producers.

Marie and Bosse mourn the lively rural community from their childhoods, where the local community had strong cooperative and social relations, how relatives often lived close together, and how they had both rural services and local events.

in the past, you know, when I was a child, then you had barn dances along the road, there were more people. There aren't that many [now. ...] There were families, and the school bus came here, and it was... yes. (Marie) Yes, then everything came almost home. The milk truck came and the shop's... (Bosse) The shop's truck came and the butcher's truck came, and the drinks truck came and that, yeah. (Marie) [...] Just take... like when we, you went to school, there were three, four small shops, only around here! Today there is nothing (Bosse)

Although they still have a community association managing their road, the services and events that used to bring people together have disappeared and they do not know most of their neighbours.

But now it's, that you hardly meet a neighbour, because everyone, they just go about their own business and then... You don't really have any contact. [...] you're... pretty lonely. (Marie)

Stig and Solveig are also seeing more of their older friends and fellow farmers getting sick or too old to continue farming, and many have leased out their land and equipment. However, since their daughter is often at the farm, they did not express the same feeling of loneliness. It may, of course, also be differences in social preferences here.

The farmers in this study have noticed how the recent rural development and modern individualism have spurred a tendency to keep to oneself. According to Stefan, it is one of the main issues that need to be addressed to build stronger rural communities. He has noticed the tendency of new people moving into big, nice-looking houses, but not wanting to farm the land nor bothering to get to know the neighbourhood.

I have my neighbours here, big, nice farms, well... if someone goes down to the farm, then the alarm goes off. [...] So, it's about, about the fact that you have to like relationships. Or you have to like people. Because [...] we need to get the people out in the countryside. (Stefan)

On the other side, Thomas and Kattis have managed to find an area where they experience a stronger sense of community than in the city, where the relationships are both social and important for business.

we might need help, or something breaks, or you need to borrow something. But next time it's them. So, you... it... you become dependent on each other in a different way [...] if a cow escapes, then... then you don't fix it yourself, but then it's the whole street [getting involved] (Kattis, laughing)

The rural and local community is also important in terms of knowledge transfers. Support from the farmer collective was crucial for the farmers in this study in their start-up phase and throughout the farming years, for example through the sharing of tools and machinery. Since neither Stig nor Solveig have any agricultural education nor any family

in the area, they had to rely on knowledge gained from their parents and farmers in the neighbourhood.

Well, it's...has been very important actually. Especially our neighbour here across the road, have we had a lot of help and support from. [...] If you run into problems, that you've broken down, or something, you've often been able to borrow from him. (Stig)

For Thomas and Kattis, the mentorship from more experienced farmers in their village have been equally important.

So, we have them close by if that were to be the case. (Kattis) And we, like, help each other. (Thomas) [...] we've learned a lot from them. And... really! Gotten lots of good help and tips and stuff like that. (Kattis)

Following the structural developments in Swedish agriculture throughout the last century, the organization of agriculture has become increasingly centralized, important local agricultural institutions, such as local cooperatives, machine pools, and slaughterhouses, the social organization that surrounds these farmers and their farming practices have become eroded. Increased centralized and privatized services and machinery that make farmers dependent on other actors for certain services increases vulnerability and reduces farm autonomy. Not having continuous access to the required tools for everyday farming tasks may impose a feeling of not being able to cultivate the land on their own terms. It also represents one way that small-scale farmers have become marginalized in favour of entrepreneurial and large-scale farming in the modernistic trajectory of agricultural expansion and specialization.

Certain agricultural services are provided by a few specialized farmers or entrepreneurs, while small-scale farmers today often do not have the means for owning all required machines, which have gotten bigger and more advanced. On one hand, this might be a way for local farmers to support each other's businesses by paying for services, but on the other hand they might also create barriers of dependency between farmers. Historically, small-scale farmers used to own most machines themselves or use machine pools. For example, both Stig and Solveig, and Marie and Bosse hire someone else to press the grass into silage. Although it may be comfortable to lease out certain services, it also means that small-scale farmers are dependent on entrepreneurial, larger-scale farmers and that the specific farmer is available at the specific time when the task needs

to be performed. Being dependent on one farmer alone increases vulnerability, as tasks like this are often highly dependent on the weather.

Although Marie and Bosse would like to see decentralization of these services and the possibility for more farmers to own their machines again, they admit that the current economic situation for most small-scale farmers would require more cooperative and sharing arrangements.

well, of course, it would be great if you could have your own machines. (Bosse)

Yes, but not all. You must have a collaboration because [...] it's not economically justifiable. (Marie) No, it's not. As it was, 40 years ago. (Bosse)

Sharing resources, although I did not get any detailed explanations of how they organize their space and resources, is one of the basic principles at Stefan's farm, as they gather farmers, craft workers, and entrepreneurs in the same place. For the farmers in this study, rural community is crucial in terms of both social networks and sharing of knowledge and farming infrastructure. The decline of rural social support networks and community over the last century makes them aspire to rebuild these relationships. The connection between the individual aspirations of these farmers and aspirations of the rural collective are further explored in chapter 6.

4.5. Summary

This chapter has focused on the so-called 'opportunity structures' (Fischer 2014) and the temporal and spatial context that shape what the farmers in this study perceive as conditions of possibility for pursuing their aspirations (Bennike, Rasmussen, and Nielsen 2020). These consist of political and economic structures as well as social norms and our farmers' personal experiences of what room for manoeuvre they have in shaping their futures, thus their aspirations.

The farmers in this study are in different stages in their lives, influencing the directions of their aspirations as well as their conditions of possibility. Financially, Thomas and Kattis as well as Stefan are dependent on making sufficient income to pursue their aspirations of making a living off the farm and leaving the farm without debts to their children. As the older couples have financial stability through state pension and are debt-free, they are less limited by financial conditions. However, their aspirations are less connected to farm investments, but instead to health aspects and to future generational

shifts. All farmers in this study aspire to contribute to a stronger small-scale farming sector and rural communities, based on both cultural, economic, and ecological values, through their farming practices and the continuation of their farms.

The new CAP framework introduces specific directives on strengthening the small-scale sector, but the continued focus on profitability and market competitiveness of Swedish food production inherently bias large-scale, industrial farming that can keep the producing costs low. The agro-political framework seems to become increasingly aligned with some of the aspirations of the farmers in this study. However, without stronger focus on the financial, cultural, and ecological interests of the small-scale sector, the sector remains disadvantaged compared to larger, established agricultural actors.

The increased public and political interest for local, organic, and small-scale food production improves the conditions of possibility for the farmers in this study to reach customers and contribute to strengthening the sector. Short sale circuits such as local markets and farm shops provide their main selling channels, where they can use provenance to sell their products at higher prices. Moreover, short sale circuits allow for direct customer-producer relationships, that provide increased loyalty and interest among customers for local food as well as strengthened rural community.

The farmers in this study who soon face generational shifts aspire to leave their farms to someone who will continue cultivating the land based on small-scale and organic farming practices, preferably keeping it within the family. The conditions of possibility are in this instance closely linked to the aspirations of others and thus not completely within their own control. While Stefan's farm will continue within the family, also allowing him to live out his days at the farm despite retiring, the other two older couples are worried about what will happen to their farms. The political framework aims to make generational shifts easier, potentially improving the conditions of possibility for the older couples to see their life's works continue as small-scale farms after them.

For the farmers in this study, social and cultural norms influence the conditions of possibility to pursue their aspirations of increased local and organic food and for ensuring their farms' continuation. The former sees higher potential in today's society, while the latter faces larger challenges. More support is needed to rebuild financial opportunities as well as cultural norms that view small-scale farming as a viable profession.

Rural developments over the last century have eroded both local knowledge systems and local sense of community that the farmers in this study deem as important, negatively influencing the conditions of possibility for a strengthened small-scale farming sector and rural community. Due to knowledge as well as rural resources being increasingly consolidated to large institutions, corporations, and large-scale farmers, small-scale farmers become increasingly dependent on these actors.

5. Aspiring for the expected or the alternative?

Pursuing aspirations connected to their vision of the good life have steered the farmers in this study to become small-scale farmers despite the economic and political context that make small-scale farming unfavourable in comparison to large-scale, agroindustrial production. This chapter explores the aspect Bennike, Rasmussen, and Nielsen (2020) refer to as ‘futuraity’, by attempting to answer the question: *In what ways are the aspirations of small-scale farmers in Västmanland expressions of anticipatory and transformative visions of the future?*

The main aspirations of the farmers in this study are explored in this context through looking at the values underlying their aspirations towards the good life. The chapter explores the motivations behind these farmers aspirations in terms of farming activities and how they produce their food. Then, their visions of the future for rural Sweden are investigated in terms of local communities and the future of their farms.

5.1. Anticipatory and transformative aspirations

According to the framework by Bennike, Rasmussen, and Nielsen (2020) anticipation refers to what is expected, in relation to rural developments in the past and socio-cultural, political, economic structures in the present. Transformation instead seeks to change status quo and focus on alternative futures. Just as these approaches are not necessarily exclusive, the aspirations of the four farming families in this study include elements of both anticipation and transformation.

Scholars such as Waldenström (2018) believes that the agricultural development goes towards a further globalized food industry on the one hand, while simultaneously towards more alternative localized production networks and rural developments. The latter may well be a reaction to the former, as seen in many of the initiatives pursuing transformative aspirations. Based on past developments and current dominant trends, anticipatory visions of the future for small-scale farmers in Sweden are to either develop into entrepreneurial farms largely focused on economic profit and industrial production, or to stay as part-time farms that eventually are bought up and incorporated into larger farms (Flygare 2011; Ploeg 2018). The farmers in this study argue that the good life is to be found at a farm where social and ecological values stand in front. They wish for more people to move out to the countryside and start farming, not only because of it being a good life according to them, but to strengthen rural communities

in terms of investments in rural services as well as social security networks. A strengthened small-scale farming sector would also potentially increase people's self-sufficiency during crises. These aspirations follow a transformative pathway in the face of the dominant modern agroindustry driven by market capitalism, as well as the expected futures of small-scale farms in Sweden.

However, Sweden's and EU's agro-political framework also include several incentives directed towards improving the conditions for the small-scale sector, for instance connected to increased domestic production, organic and local farming, agrotourism, and generational shifts. In the Swedish context, therefore, aspirations of strengthening the sector and the rural community are also part of the anticipatory development pursued by current agro-politics. Aspirations connected to increasing economic profit of their farms, for example pursued by Thomas and Kattis, have elements of both anticipation and transformation, as they need to choose activities that provide high income while also finding alternative pathways to be able to live off their farm. The mere aspiration to live off their small-scale farm is transformative in the face of expected rural developments for Swedish small-scale farms.

5.2. The motivations behind small-scale farming activities

All the farmers in this study have multifunctional farms, with both traditional farming practices and activities such as forestry, agrotourism, and energy production. They are aspiring to pursue small-scale and organic food production as an alternative to the conventional agro-industry, and they are increasingly replacing agroindustrial input with local and farm resources. For example, they are reducing agrochemicals and promoting on-farm resource cycles such as grazing that both provides fodder, keeps the landscape open, and naturally fertilizes the land. Both Stefan's family and Stig and Solveig are also aspiring towards stronger self-sufficiency and farm autonomy, Stefan through building an abattoir, and the latter couple through installing their own water systems and energy production.

Although financial economy is important for the possibility to pursue their aspirations, particularly for Thomas and Kattis who want to live off their farm, most of these farmers' aspirations are not rooted in economic rationality, but in personal, ecological, and social values. According to Fischer (2014), visions of 'the good life' are strongly connected to morality. Moral economies are systems based on assumptions

“about what is good, desirable, worthy, ethical, and just” (Fischer 2014, 17), which in turn are informed by cultural and historical context. In that sense, markets are deeply steered by moral values, which we can see in consumer choices and international politics regarding poverty, corruption, human rights, and the environment, as well as in values such as trust, loyalty, and honesty.

The farmers in this study are pursuing activities that augment the value of their products (such as provenance produce and on-farm processing), as well as non-agricultural activities that are added to the farm, and they use short sale circuits and new ways of using and optimizing local/farm resources to reduce agroindustry inputs. Like many Swedish farmers, they use these strategies to diversify income sources to meet the economic squeeze put on them by current agro-political frameworks and the globalization of food (Waldenström 2018; Ploeg 2018). However, the financial aspect is not the only motivation for the farmers in this study. For example, the older couples can rely on state pension as their main source of income and do not need to achieve financial sustainability from their farming. Thomas and Kattis, and Stefan, are more steered by financial opportunities in their aspirations.

According to Ploeg (2018), most activities connected to European small-scale farming are perceived as motivated by pursuing agricultural transformation and resistance against the modern, industrial- and growth-based agro-politics. However, in my interviews with small-scale farmers in Västmanland, besides Stefan, there was little trace of this kind of strong political resistance expressed by for example the smallfarmer organization NOrdBruk (Östling 2021). Although all farmers in this study expressed concerns over the agro-political priorities in reference to domestic and local food production, ecological devastation, animal welfare, and depopulation of rural areas, their political references stretched little beyond their own socio-economic situations and local rural areas. They often came back to moral values surrounding ecological and social aspects of their lives.

5.2.1. Local food networks

Provenance and local food production is promoted by organic and local food movements as their advantage in the face of conventional agriculture and dominant food chains that focus on cheap market prices (Fischer 2014). For many small-scale farmers around the world, local food networks are crucial for the farm economy as well as for the rural

community. Often based on agroecological principles and aspirations of food sovereignty, local food networks become a form of resistance to the modern agroindustry and global food chains (Nyéléni 2015; Anderson, Maughan, and Pimbert 2018). Thus, “a substantial subset [from the food system transformation discourse] argues for more localised food production” (Garnett 2014, 13).

For the farmers in this study, provenance and local markets provide economic benefits over selling to the dominating food industry, while also providing a stronger community around local food and alternative markets. Several farmers that I met during the REKO markets emphasize the importance of them as an arena for small-scale producers to meet, network, and pursue business relations. It also provides a self-organized market where they have ownership and control over their sales.

As provenance products are increasing in popularity, there is also a form of anticipation of continued growth in this sector, that may spill over to the dominating industry. However, the farmers in this study have made transitions away from conventional production and sale channels towards organic production, on-farm processing, and short sale circuits because it benefits themselves economically and answers to their own moral values. Thus, their aspirations connected to production and selling networks are more in line with transformative visions than anticipatory.

Replacing agroindustrial cooperatives and corporations with direct customer relations made these farmers realize how valuable that social connection is, not only for themselves and the customers, but also for the rural economy. As people invest in their local farmers, they also invest in the local rural area and alternative ways of farming. Keeping native breeds and selling wild food also provides provenance in terms of local specialties and resources, connecting the products to place.

Meeting customers directly that wanted to buy locally and ethically produced food became an eye-opener for Stefan, that since then has guided the development of his family’s farm away from industrial cereal production.

So, it seems strange how, how like a whole... what to say, industry can just, like, just ignore, skip over that! (Stefan)

Furthermore, he states,

I depend on people coming here and shopping. I'm not dependent on some politicians, in Västerås, or political decisions, or what the grain market says, or

anything, the New York stock exchange, that's nothing... I'm only dependent on my customers *here*. Around me. (Stefan, his emphasis)

In the modern market economy, it is not possible to stay unaffected by agro-political decisions and market prices. However, this quote shows how Stefan values the local customer highly above agricultural policy and the global food market. Short sale circuits are meaningful for both the farmers and the customers, as they provide an arena for forming local food networks based on ethical and ecological food production, for the benefit of the local, rural community.

The farmers in this study value the ability to control all phases of production, securing both quality products as well as animal welfare and ecological impact. Values connected to biodiversity, ecosystems, soil health, animal welfare, as well as human health are often considered easier to secure through local and small-scale farming than the global food industry (Garnett 2014). Marie and Bosse started producing meat to know the meat's origins in the aftermath of the Chernobyl nuclear accident. The farmers in this study also use extensive grazing practices and choose local butcherries based on considerations of quality, farmland preservation, and animal welfare.

Scholarly debates have arisen around whether small-scale, agroecological, and alternative food networks can challenge the corporate and agro-industrial food regime (Waldenström 2018; Oelreich and Milestad 2016). Some argue for an interdependent relationship between the dominating and the alternative, mutually influencing each other, where new and small-scale initiatives sometimes are incorporated into larger systems. Others argue that small-scale and local initiatives and movements are too many and too scattered and varied in their approach to sustain any gathering force, making a real paradigm shift hard to accomplish. However, “the variation can be an advantage and contribute to learning, and it is of course a necessary aspect to strengthen the ties between agriculture, the place and the local development” (Waldenström 2018, 225, my translation).

The local food networks in Västmanland that the farmers in this study are part of are, although gaining in popularity, still only a small part of the food market locally. Together with local and alternative food networks globally, they do not yet challenge the power consolidated in corporate giants, but at least challenge the values and norms surrounding food and food production locally as well as globally.

5.2.2. Animal welfare

For the farmers in this study, their animals and their relationship to their animals are central in their farming approaches. Having grazing animals for example, is motivated both by their interest and care for animals, and by ecological benefits connected to natural landscape management, increasing biodiversity, and optimizing their resources as small-scale farmers (Flygare 2011). For instance, Stefan sympathizes with animal rights activists who protest industrial meat production.

[...] there are alternatives! Where there's... where we... where the animals are the finest interplay... -thing that exists, right? [...] It's the finest thing we have here! [...] But if you have animals in factories, in concrete facilities, right, so they can't run out no matter how much they want to, well, it's a completely different world. And that world... you can't, no matter how you, no matter how good⁸ you are, you can't make it nice, or... well, in my world, defendable. Really. (Stefan)

By keeping native breeds, for example, who are naturally adapted to the Swedish climate, the farmers in this study show respect for the animal's natural way of life. For instance, although it perhaps also provides benefits in terms of less need for managing, Stig and Solveig's sheep have access to outdoor grazing areas all year. The way the farmers in this study care for their animals show a human-animal relationship that is similar to the smallholdings of the 19th and early 20th century as described by Syse (2020), where the animals were often viewed as more or less part of the family. For example, Thomas and Kattis name their animals and Marie and Bosse show extra care for their sheep by giving them sun protection. Moreover, animal care is central in the way they choose to slaughter them, by using small-scale, local butchereries.

Well, it's... well, for me it's completely unthinkable to use a large slaughterhouse and let the animals be stressed because... It wouldn't have mattered if it had cost half as much! Not for me. Because it, it's... if you can't, if you can't afford to do it, then you shouldn't keep animals! If you cannot provide good handling. It, then... then it's not worth it! There's... never, it'll never be worth it! So, so, proper handling is super important. (Kattis)

⁸ The Swedish word “duktig” could also refer to words such as “skilful”, “talanted”.

By building an on-farm abattoir, Stefan pursues his aspirations of ensuring proper handling, animal welfare and closed circulation of farm resources. He sees it as a farmer's duty, and moral responsibility, to take care of the animals through their whole lives and regard their death as part of the farm's cycle of life.

All ordinary farmers think it's obvious that you have your own tractor and thresher and everything, but having... every farm should make sure that they have their own abattoir, I think it's as obvious as having your own tractor. [...] it must be your responsibility, it's your obligation to, well, if you're going to have animals, right, then you're also going to slaughter them yourself. So that's the least you can ask for. (Stefan, emphasizing his words by tapping the table)

Building an abattoir is also a way to reintroduce a traditional rural service for other farmers and costumers in the region, strengthening the rural economy. Through their abattoir, Stefan's family also aspires to provide local resources and services for farmers in the area, potentially strengthening incentives for keeping grazing animals. Thus, instead of waiting for political incentives, Stefan's family choose to act themselves towards the rural development they aspire for. However, it requires both motivation and financial possibilities to invest in such activities, which none of the other farmers in this study have. Due to the strong consolidation and centralization of the slaughter industry in Sweden, building an on-farm abattoir would further enhance the transformative and alternative focus of Stefan's farm, while contributing to increased farm autonomy.

5.2.3. Values of multifunctional farms

The variety of activities that the farmers in this study pursue according to their aspirations of self-sufficiency, economic sustainability, and strengthened small-scale farming sector are both rooted in anticipatory and transformative perspectives. Although several farming activities are strategies for building a sustainable economy, most activities done by our farmers are not primarily motivated by financial aspects, but by ecological, cultural, and social values as well as personal interests. Moreover, they enjoy the variation a multifunctional farm brings. Keeping grazing animals, and producing their own food and energy, although not always financially rational⁹, help these farmers pursue aspirations

⁹ This was written before the rushing energy prices in 2022 due to the war in Ukraine and following geopolitical interventions, which results in energy production generating a higher additional income than during the time for the fieldwork.

of self-sufficiency and farm autonomy. Agrotourism provide new sources of income but may also increase public interest in local food and rural living.

Strengthening farm resources and adding non-farming activities, such as the farmers in this study do, are ways to gain more autonomy by reducing dependency on external capital and gaining control over the farm economy throughout the whole food chain, while developing skills, product quality, and local cooperation networks (Ploeg 2018). Diversifying their farms thus offer a way out of the dilemma of expanding into large-scale or entrepreneurial conventional farming or disappearing, that is, one of the expected outcomes for small-scale farms in Europe today.

The motivation for keeping certain animals is rooted in their care for animals as well as their own preferences of food, such as delicacy meat. On-farm processing is a way of conserving the vegetables and the wild food resources they have around them:

No, it doesn't sell that much. But it's a way to make use of vegetables and... [...]
Then I think it's fun to have, and it's good to eat ourselves. So, I can make some more than just for us. (Solveig)

When discussing whether it would be financially more rational to buy grains for fodder instead of farming grains themselves, they refer to ecological benefits such as alternating crops. Moreover,

I'm thinking that we have the land! That you can use it. (Stig)

The farmers in this study aspire to contribute to a transformation of society with more small-scale, local farmers strengthening both rural communities and the local, and national food production. By engaging in local markets and by bringing visitors to their farms, the farmers in this study may assist in making more people curious of rural living and farming. However, pursuing agrotourism can also be seen as based on anticipatory aspirations for the rural society, as the political framework promotes a growing tourism industry and increasing urban populations are seeking to explore rural areas for holiday fun or luxury consumption. Both agrotourism and provenance products such as local production and organic, and ethically certified foodstuffs are expected to rise in popularity and named in the national food strategy as main factors in increasing demand for Swedish food (Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation 2017). Thus, pursuing agrotourism may assist in creating cultural curiosity for rural living and farming, while

simultaneously participating in keeping the rural a place for romanticized visions of food production and ‘nature’, where the realities of the industrial food chain is kept at a distance.

The multifunctional character of the farms in this study is according to Ploeg (2018) transformative as they break with the agricultural modernization paradigm in multiple ways: through diversification instead of specialization, short circuits instead of standardized world markets, and on-farm processing instead of industry processing. He goes as far as claiming that pursuing farm diversification represents a new paradigm shift. However, small-scale farmers in Sweden can only survive economically through financial support systems or as part-time farms. For a paradigm shift to become true, then, institutional, and political interest also needs to turn away from the modernization trajectory and towards more localized, farmer-steered, and nature-centred approaches to farming.

In an attempt to influence the political framework towards more alternative visions, recent calls from within the EU argues for an inclusion of agroecological principles in the CAP, which also prioritizes small-scale farming and local food systems.

The CoR [Committee of the Regions] proposes a gradual shift from a basic payment per hectare to a basic payment linked to the number of active persons and for direct payments to be funnelled as a matter of priority to small and medium-sized agroecological farms. (European Committee of the Regions 2021).

However, agroecology has not been included specifically in the new CAP framework for 2023-2027, but new measures are to ensure redistribution from larger to smaller companies (LRF 2021), potentially improving financial support for small-scale farmers. Measures addressing small-scale and organic farming, domestic production, as well as generational shifts may be small steps in the direction towards well-needed agricultural transformation. However, the dominating goal is still growth-based, meaning that large-scale agroindustry has the upper hand. Here, Swedish organic and small-scale initiatives can challenge the dominant corporate food regime (Oelreich and Milestad 2016). Alternative movements and organizations should not be overlooked in their potential for showing viable pathways forward and creating spaces for transformative action, especially if they cultivate the potential for cooperation (Oelreich and Milestad 2016; Rydén 2007).

5.3. Visions of another rural society

All farmers in this study aspire to contribute to a rural and agricultural development inspired by the traditional Swedish rural landscape and the lively communities they grew up with. Although the current agro-political framework includes elements of similar (top-down) rural aspirations, the farmers in this study also pursue farming practices based on organic and ethical principles, which in combination make their aspirations directed towards rural and agricultural transformation. For example, Stefan praises the Swedish post-war political incentives aimed at providing properties for prospective smallholders (Morell 2011), which would help people find the good life on the countryside that many dream of today, without having to earn a fortune first.

instead of you having a great job and a high income, and what do... what do you do with that money? Well, you buy a farm, so you can live the good life (Stefan)

By gathering people with aspirations of the good life at a farm like his, Stefan is actively pursuing his aspirations to rebuild rural communities based on social and ecological values. Although he realizes that systemic change is not something he can do alone, he is frustrated over the slow progression. He has high ambitions of creating change in the way farming is done and the way rurality is valued in society. However, he seems to feel rather alone in his pursuit, as he used to be active in LRF but quit because he did not feel like he fitted in there due to his more radical views of agricultural transformation. Such a transition requires a larger social and political movement, currently missing in the general farming society.

The larger farmer collective in Sweden rather follows the dominating agricultural development steered by the current agro-political framework, corporate food industry, and discourses such as ecomodernism. Traditional farming practices and ideas of agroecology are often perceived as backwards or anti-modern by ecomodernists promoting technological innovation and market mechanisms (López 2018). However, the farmers in this study are not rejecting modernity. They sell their products on the market, which although local are part of the global market systems, they use machine technology such automatic irrigation systems and solar panels, they open their farms to tourists, and use social media for community as well as business ends. They do so while trying to minimize the environmental harm, deeply caring for their animals, aspiring to produce most of their own food and share it with others (by selling it on the local market), and

valuing their local communities and their own places in them. Thus, incorporating traditional farming practices and promoting the local and rural community are simply ways for them to pursue their aspirations of the good life.

However, the tendency among alternative movements to romanticize local and small-scale food systems may result in failure to “subject these systems to critical scrutiny as they do in the case of commercial systems” (Garnett 2014, 16).

While such analyses cast light on the inequalities associated with current systems of production and consumption, and their damaging consequences for health and human wellbeing, the corollary assumption – that small-scale, localised production systems are necessarily more sustainable – is nevertheless a value judgement. For example, smallholder adoption of agroforestry practices may or may not halt deforestation, depending on the prevailing socio-economic conditions. These conditions may include the presence or absence of land use rights, labour or forest protection legislation (Garnett 2014, 14).

Moreover, as consumers in wealthier countries tend to romanticize local food systems and communities, they seal themselves off from the reality of many farmers across the world, who are stuck in patent systems and economic debt that followed Green Revolutions technologies and corporate domination of rural agricultural exploitation (Svärd 2021). Thus, in the pursuit of actual transformation of the food system, local movements need to actively pursue solidarity actions. Hopefully,

if a local food movement is a space where the people who have been most marginalized are represented, centered, and in positions of leadership guiding the movement; if the movement tries to come up with creative alternative structures to fight injustice in the food system; if it grapples with the tension between standing in solidarity with the struggles of farmers around the world and working at this more tractable scale; if it builds solidarity with other localities trying to do the same work; if it grapples with and turns towards the complexity of historical forces of injustice and seeks to build redistribution into its model — then local food movements can become some of the most exciting and hopeful spaces for the future of the food system (A Growing Culture 2021).

As explained by Nirmal and Rochelau (2019, 473), “the challenge is to regrow localized interdependent networks, and degrow colonial, dependent global networks while re-making the patterns and terms of connectivity across scales”. The farmers in this study

mention little regarding solidarity with farmers in other parts of the world, except regarding experiences by the immigrants involved at their farms. Aspiring to taking steps towards strengthened solidarity and connections between different movements (especially internationally) was nothing our farmers mentioned, as their concerns are mostly focused on their own farms and their own political context.

5.3.1. Moral values steering decision-making about the farms' futures

The farmers in this study aspire to leave their farms in the hands of someone who will actively cultivate their lands and who have similar aspirations as themselves for the farm's future. Although they have different prospects of it staying within the family, they have in common that their children would be the first choice. Like for many Swedish farmers, their attachment to land and moral values, such as "social interaction, and concern for the environment, the rural community and the agricultural landscape", are what primarily steers who gets to buy or lease a farm in generational shifts (Grubbström and Eriksson 2018, 707). When uncertain of the possibility of their children taking over after them, the farmers in this study have feared that their farms will fall into decay or becoming part of an industrial agriculture, such as many small-scale farms have in the last century (Morell 2011). Thus, their aspirations of the future of their farms align with more transformative rural aspirations.

Emotional ties to family and land influence the decisions the farmers in this study make about the future of their farms. However, like many other retiring farmers in Sweden (Grubbström and Eriksson 2018), the older couples in this study are concerned with not pressuring their children into taking over but ensuring their freedom of choice. Thus, similar to earlier research findings, they emphasize values of individual freedom, relating to broader trends of individualization in the modern society (Grubbström and Eriksson 2018; Chiswell 2018). Although tradition in the form of family succession still plays a role in their aspirations, the farmers in this study are primarily focusing on their own futures as small-scale farmers and accept that their children's visions of the good life may not be the same as their own.

Aspiring to contribute to a living countryside steer the farmers in this study to carefully choose who is to take over the farm after them.

Those who sell land often fear that the buyer will just sell the farmhouse and incorporate the land into large-scale farming operations involving travelling

around the countryside with heavy machinery. This creation of agricultural wasteland is the opposite of how they picture a living countryside (Grubbström and Eriksson 2018, 719).

Also using the word “wasteland” about the dominating agricultural development of fewer and larger monoculture farms, Stefan had the same worry about his farm’s future before learning that his children will take over, as was portrayed in a documentary a few years back.

But then, in the movie I say that if I die, and well, it was several years ago, then this will just (dramatic pause) die out. And then the land will be added to some [other] farm. Then it becomes (dramatic pause) quiet. Like everywhere else. Could become some horse farm, maybe it's someone who... some Stockholmer who buys this and... fiddles a bit but works in Stockholm, right, and not as a farmer. So, the land around is used by some large [-scale] farmer. But now, now I don't say that. Now I can die, actually! And my children will continue to take care of this. Because now they are big enough, and now they understand. So now it's actually them who run a lot of, well, as soon as there are decisions, right, they're the ones who make them. (Stefan)

The fear of their farm falling into the hands of large landowners, as their children are not interested in taking over, might have resulted in Marie and Bosse holding on to their farm longer than they otherwise would have, as they aspire to phase out farming soon.

it's not like there's no interest, there are... there are large [-scale] farmers who haven't hesitated to ask outright, if they can buy the farm. But it's kind of like... well, then they want the land, because they've got machines and all. (Marie)

Although Marie and Bosse are firmly against their farm falling to large landowners, they have been part of this development themselves, however in a smaller scale. Marie and Bosse have earlier bought up a neighbouring small-scale farm to add to their own. As they already had a binding leasing contract on the farmland, it was difficult for any new owner to take over the farm in question. This development, although somewhat breaking with their aspirations of a living countryside and thriving small-scale farming sector, also has its roots in wanting to cultivate the farmland available to them. Thus, it represents another way of contributing to a living countryside, if the alternative was to see their neighbouring land falling into decay. Stig and Solveig also express a fear of their land

falling into decay or becoming incorporated into larger farms, in line with the dominating trend.

I hope that someone will continue here, with beekeeping and... [...] the pens, how will they look? Will they become overgrown? Is there someone tending the fields? Or should it... be leased out? (Solveig) Yes... that's how I think it'll be... (Stig)
Yes... (Solveig)

Often, farmers prefer leasing or selling to people they know, who have local attachment and an agricultural background, and who they can trust will take care of and actively use the land, such as a family member or a neighbour (Grubbström and Eriksson 2018). This also increases the potential for a good relationship between the two, even a potential 'gradual retirement' (Duesberg, Bogue, and Renwick 2017), where the older farmer has a possibility to keep being involved, while the younger farmer can get mentorship and important transfer of knowledge. All the farmers in this study emphasize the importance of knowledge transfer for the continuation of the farm but also for the rural area at large. Thus, social, and environmental values are important for the farmers in this study when considering their farm's future. Farmers with high levels of emotional attachment to place tend to retain ownership until they find a buyer or lessee that better suit their aspirations for their farms' futures and to influence the development of the local rural area (Grubbström and Eriksson 2018).

These issues are taken up by LRF Ungdomen, who applauds the focus on generational shifts in current agro-political frameworks but emphasize the need for defining common goals. For example, should generational shifts refer to merely ownership of the land (no matter to who it is transferred), or should it be towards more farmers and a larger diversity in the sector? (Rappe and Öhrlund 2022). Rebecca Källström from the Swedish Rural Network's group on ownership transfers, states

I hope that we start talking more about new ways of taking over companies and farms. New business and financial models will be required. For example, co-ownership and different ways of dividing risk if all the necessary transfers of ownership are to happen. Otherwise, we risk many companies in the green industries closing down, completely unnecessarily, which would be negative from several aspects, but not least for the green transition that needs to take place in society. (Landsbygdsnätverket 2022, my translation)

To attract new farmer generations, there is demand for possibilities to enlarge and making the farm more economically viable. These factors were important for Thomas and Kattis when they searched for a farm property, as they aspire to be able to live off the farm. Turning small-scale farms more into entrepreneurial businesses provide more opportunities for rural areas to attract people as well as investments in rural services, that the farmers in this study emphasize as important for a living countryside. However, it also risks prioritizing economic profit over the social, ethical, and ecological values that the farmers in this study connect to the small-scale farming tradition.

There is a common view in the agricultural sector that issues regarding generational shifts need to be approached from many different angles, both on farm level, regarding the political framework, and building cultural and economic attractiveness of the sector. One such example is building bridges between farmers and local schools, such as the initiative Farmer Time (Farmer Time 2021). Another is found through leasehold, as sometimes, the relationships between retiring farmers and their lessees can resemble family ties and then provide ways for new entrants to farming (Grubbström and Eriksson 2018). Similarly, some of the farmers in this study have integrated immigrants at their farms, providing a social environment and daily activity, as well as building and cultivating interests in the agricultural sector, and forming bonds in the local rural area, thus creating potential entrants to the agricultural sector as well as the local community.

5.4. Summary

Rural aspirations are based on ideas of the good life based on both anticipatory as well as transformative visions of the future. The farmers in this study are critical towards the dominating agroindustry and modes of production and aspire towards alternative visions of the future, where social and ecological values tend to be prioritized over economic growth and technological innovation driven by common perceptions of modern development. However, in the Swedish context, agro-political frameworks are increasingly valuing the small-scale farming sector and local food, meaning that the bottom-up and top-down rural aspirations are increasingly aligned.

The farmers in this study pursue different farming and non-farming activities that are motivated by moral values, such as personal interest, animal welfare, ecological sustainability, and social community, rather than economy. The farmers in this study emphasize access to self-produced, delicacy food, the joy of keeping animals,

resilience of their farms, and taking care of their resources. They also show motivation to share their resources with others, that is rooted in aspirations for a strengthened local resilience and community for the rural collective.

Their farming practices are motivated by care for the ecological health of their land and care for the welfare of their animals, steering them into organic and local systems that reject agro-industrial input and practices. Stig and Solveig and Stefan's aspirations connected to self-sufficiency and farm autonomy are further steps in a transformative direction. Thomas and Kattis and Stefan's aspirations connected to agrotourism are both transformative, as they promote small-scale farms and rural living, and anticipatory, as they follow capitalist interests connected to rural resource exploitation and may only increase a romanticized image of the countryside and local food without addressing the issues of modern agro-industry.

The anticipated development of small-scale farmers to fall into the hands of already large landowners, as seen throughout the 20th century (Flygare 2011; Morell 2011), threatens the aspirations of the farmers in this study to ensure their farms' continuation, based on emotional attachment to the land as well as aspirations connected to the larger rural community and the small-scale farming sector. However, aspirations of a living countryside also entail economic possibilities for younger farmers to acquire farms and build sustainable farm economies, which are incorporated in the current agro-political framework. Thus, these aspirations also have an anticipatory dimension.

6. Navigating individual and collective aspirations

The aspirations of the farmers in this study are rooted in the aspirations of the rural collective, both connecting to rural aspirations of their own families and social networks, historical and global small-scale farmers networks, as well as anticipatory and transformative political perspectives. As they navigate their aspirations of the good life, they constantly move between positioning themselves as individual farmers and as being part of a larger group of farmers and rural inhabitants. Thus, their aspirations “involve negotiations and reconfigurations of the relationship between subject and collective (subjectivity/collectivity)” (Bennike, Rasmussen, and Nielsen 2020, 46). This chapter aims to explore this relationship by answering the question: *How do small-scale farmers in Västmanland navigate between individual and collective dimensions of aspirations?*

The chapter starts by exploring the negotiation between private and public spheres of commitment and how the farmers in this study prioritize between individual aspirations and the aspirations connected to different rural collectives. Then the focus is turned towards how the farmers in this study navigate in their roles as farmers to pursue the aspirations connected to stronger rural communities, through sharing knowledge, creating meeting places, and involving new rural groups.

6.1. Private and public spheres of commitment

When reflecting over whether they live a good life, all farmers in this study emphasize their possibility of doing what they enjoy and eating good, self-produced food, but social dimensions were only mentioned when digging deeper into what gives them meaning as farmers and rural inhabitants. Their aspirations are connected to rebuilding rural communities, both when considering their own farms' futures, people's sense of belonging in the local community, and the general agricultural development. However, living in a society with strong individualistic tendencies, their commitment is mainly focused on their own farms and families. As seen in earlier research,

results shed light on a trend which is apparently uniformly spreading in Western societies: well-being is prominently pursued and found in meaning and feelings confined to the home environment or to a close circle of friends. Community and Social issues are less valued as targets of resource investment. [...] This result contradicts Aristotle's definition of eudaimonia as the fulfillment of one's deepest nature in harmony with the collective welfare (Delle Fave et al. 2011, 204).

Social relationships are important for human wellbeing, but close relationships such as family and partners are viewed as more important than the general community, indicating a “clear demarcation line between public and private spheres of commitment” (Delle Fave et al. 2011, 201). Moreover, ‘community’ is becoming decreasingly important in modern cultures, especially in Western societies, and more often replaced by the more abstract and anonymous ‘society’ (Cécora 1994).

The farmers in this study prioritize their own sense of wellbeing and their closest family over the larger rural community. For instance, they aspire to leave their farms in the hands of someone with a care for the land, preferably their children. Stefan is relieved and happy that his children are taking over, while Marie and Bosse are sad that their farm might end up with large landowners if they sell and Stig and Solveig express hope that their farm may still be continued by family members. For them as for many small-scale farmers, family succession is often the first choice (Grubbström and Eriksson 2018). However, Thomas and Kattis and Stig and Solveig also state how their chosen lifestyle bound them geographically, making it harder to see family in distant places. Their choice of becoming small-scale farmers have thus, to some extent, meant a priority of their own aspirations over flexibility to visit family members. Beyond their farm and the immediate family, however, the farmers in this study also aspire for a revival of the traditional rural communities, valuing a sense of belonging and social support in the local community and the farmer collective.

Their aspirations of a living countryside and transformation towards more local, small-scale, and organic agriculture, relate to the aspirations of resistance found among small-scale farmers and rural populations globally (Nyéléni 2015). Although they have not engaged in farmer organizations or solidarity networks beyond their own communities, by actively pursuing change in their own spatial context, they also, even if unconsciously, show solidarity with their peers across the world.

The farmer community, whether that is found within a farm, or in local markets and networks, is an important source for support and cooperation, as well as the sharing of knowledge and resources. Organizing does not only mean the farmer’s unions anymore, but small-scale farmers such as the ones in this study are finding other ways to meet and organize, that perhaps better meet their needs. All the farmers in this study have primarily focused on their own farms, rather than being active in farmer’s organizations.

None of them have joined any of the traditional organizations for smallholders such as FSS, but the local markets provide a form of social organization among small-scale farmers. Although local markets may not be a place for political debates, these small-scale producers have a forum where they are in charge and where they can unite and together pursue aspirations that are challenging the industry-led food market.

Stefan used to be actively involved in the LRF but quit, due to the lack of support for his more radical ideas of farming upon the premises of natural cycles and ecological sustainability, animal welfare, collectivity, and direct customer relations.

So now I've run my own race for the last 20 years, that's how it is... only caring about my farm and what I do here and the contact with customers and then, everyone else, just leave them alone, they leave me alone. And it's been great. Trying to change others, well, that's... [the] worst job you can do (laughing).
(Stefan)

Stefan's decision to stop his engagement in the organization shows how important it is to have support when trying to influence large, structural changes. Although he finds meaning in pursuing his aspirations of building rural community by gathering people on his own farm, farmers with ideological aspirations such as Stefan may find support and belonging in small-scale farmer organizations such as NOrdBruk, FSS, or other initiatives connected to food transformation nationally or globally.

6.2. Building rural community

The aspirations connected to stronger rural communities have their roots in the experiences of a rural development characterized by depopulation, exploitation of rural resources, loss of local meeting places, and loss of social belonging. However, whereas the older couples experience a decay in their local rural area, Thomas and Kattis have found strong sense of belonging in their new rural community. The narrative of a decaying countryside is often put forth in public debates in Sweden. Although farms are being shut down every day (Mer mat - fler jobb 2022), an unknown part of the Swedish farmland disappearance is due to easily attainable plots of land or forest which is not built on. As these have been easy to lease or buy into larger farm units, the popular image of farm units disappearing – bringing with it depopulation and devastated abandoned farms, villages, and areas – is not always true (Flygare 2011). However, the number of farmers

is steadily decreasing, and as exemplified by our farmers, many people who move to rural areas are leasing out their land for others to farm and keeping to themselves.

Developments such as the creation of new local meeting places, through markets, events, or tourism, as well as the strengthening of social bonds that goes beyond the immediate family, seems to have much to say in terms of belonging. Involving new social groups such as immigrants at small-scale farms and in rural activities, may help form new social bonds that strengthen the local communities. With stronger feelings of local community, the chance for more young people to stay in rural areas are also becoming higher, further pushing a positive spiral.

However, focusing on local communities, as is often emphasized in alternative food networks, also risk romanticizing them. Local food systems do not automatically mean freedom of exploitation or equal representation within the community, but power relations found on national or global scale are often also found locally, including unhealthy relations and systems of oppression against people who “do not belong” in different ways (A Growing Culture 2021). Therefore, it is important to work for inclusion and find a balance between individual and collective needs and promote pluralism in bodies as well as thoughts, for example in terms of gender, ethnicity, or ability (Kothari et al. 2019). Aspiring to contribute to stronger rural communities, therefore, should be connected to aspirations of inclusive rural communities. Several of the farmers in this study actively work to involve marginalized groups such as immigrants on their farms and in their communities. However, as it is beyond the scope of this study, the effect of these relationships has not been investigated. Their engagement in these relationships nevertheless indicate inclusive tendencies in their visions of the lively rural community.

6.2.1. Strengthening systems of knowledge

For the farmers in this study, the support network with other farmers have been invaluable in terms of mentorship as well as sharing of local resources. Their relationships are based on a mutual exchange of knowledge and services as well as support of each other’s businesses. These relationships are important for transferring knowledge and sense of community in their local area both now and for future farmer generations. The farmers in this study also use social media to reach a broader farmer community online. Social media is used as a tool for sharing knowledge and inspiration, and for cultivating new

relationships with farmers beyond the local area. Solveig views the online farmer community as a provider of new ideas and inspiration. Kattis has used social media more actively to connect with rural people and farmers all over the country.

Besides knowledge transfer among farmers, there is also demand for practical knowledge concerning food production and processing in other local rural arenas. Solveig has held a few fermentation classes locally, that have been popular.

Well, it's that they've¹⁰ been nagging me to hold course[s]. They think [that I should. ...] Well. It can be fun to go out and meet some people too, sometimes. [...] But, yes, it's not like I think it's great fun. (Solveig, laughing)

Despite the popularity and the social aspect, Solveig rather keeps to her processing activities herself than teaching. She instead shares some of her knowledge through recipes included in some of her products. Thus, although Stig and Solveig are promoting social values and transferring of knowledge, especially as they wish for their farm and small-scale farming culture to continue in rural areas, they prefer keeping to themselves and engaging in local food networks on their own terms.

Local knowledge is also shaped by the specific natural and economic settings of every farm, the characteristics of the animals, and the practices and routines developed by each farmer. The farmers in this study have different ways of interacting with each other, structuring their tasks, and building community on their farm. For example, over the years, Stig and Solveig have developed their own routines and specific knowledge of the conditions of their farm, connected to weather patterns, ecological preconditions, farm infrastructure, and personal and social conditions of those involved at the farm. They perform many of the tasks and activities together, making them both part of decision-making processes. Even if it to me, during the fieldwork, sometimes seemed more efficient to divide tasks, being part of and having control over what goes on at the farm is highly valued by them both. They have spent years building up their practical experience, planning and adaptation skills, and local knowledge. In the face of a generational shift, the possibility of transferring their knowledge and experience is important not only for the farmer taking over, but also for their own aspirations of leaving the farm in capable hands.

¹⁰ “They” referring to people in the local or semi-local area.

6.2.2. Creating meeting places

The farmers in this study are constantly aiming for a balance between their aspirations for the community and for their individual aspirations to live at their farms. As they aspire to rebuild local communities, the farmers in this study engage in local markets and agrotourism to create new meeting places for rural people. However, aspirations to build stronger communities are strongly related to both collective and individual aspirations of living the good life on the countryside, making it hard to distinguish between the individual and collective dimensions of these aspirations.

All farmers in this study emphasize how meeting the customers is one of the most interesting, fun, and meaningful aspects of selling their food locally, either at markets or at their own farm. Beyond cultivating producer-consumer relationships, it provides a chance to build social bonds with people in the local community and the regional area. However, the farmers in this study also emphasize the importance of getting enough privacy for their sense of wellbeing as farmers. Although it is meaningful for them to participate in markets and social networks to share knowledge and increase the interest for local food, they also aspire to spend time at their farms and have time to enjoy their farming activities. This is especially true for the older couples and Stefan. For Thomas and Kattis, being able to live off their farm is also connected to their individual aspiration of living the good life, an aspiration that is perhaps stronger than the aspiration of creating new meeting places.

Farm shops and local markets are part of a long-standing cultural tradition in the Swedish small-scale agricultural society. Marie remembers from her childhood how her mother used to sell eggs at the town square, and as she and Bosse continues this tradition, they emphasize how direct contact with the customers feels meaningful.

Well, if you're home six days a week and work and, like, it's a little fun to get out then, with people. (Marie) [...] Then you become friendly with them and talk and joke and... (Bosse) Meet acquaintances you haven't seen for ages, since you went to school. (Marie, laughing) [...] There are all kinds of people who come and want to talk a lot. (Bosse)

The farmers in this study notice how both local markets and on-farm meeting places are important for people, both in the local area and in the cities. Thomas and Kattis feel highly welcomed in the neighbourhood and their café have received positive feedback from their neighbours.

I mean, someone takes care of [the farm], that increases the value, for everyone else too. Plus, that we've opened a café and that means that people are around here all the time. I mean, there's probably never been this much traffic here. It's really... (Kattis) Mm. Yes, exactly, and all of a sudden, neighbours who haven't spoken to each other in 10 years meet, so... It becomes a get-together in a completely different way. And it increases, the café increases the value of the whole village, as well. (Thomas)

Similarly, Stefan's farm has for many years arranged farm events with activities such as pony riding and barbecues, attracting many visitors. It is important for him that people come there to enjoy their farm, meet the animals, and see where the products come from. However, they do not want too many people there too often. During the beginning of the covid-19 pandemic, for example, they got too many visitors who wanted to get out of the city, attracted by the peaceful outdoors, the farm activities, as well as the bakery they had at the time.

And it became so horrible, cause... unpleasant and repulsive with all these people. You couldn't, like, do what you wanted, if you... if people come to the farm, you kind of want to get... well, some kind of contact, which is quality (Stefan)

Although Stefan's family enjoys having visitors at their farm, it has to be on their terms. Too many people at once and over a longer period reduce and undermine the personal, quality contact they normally have with visitors. There is a fine line that, when crossed, results in increased stress and discomfort for the farmer, and possibly also for the animals. Thomas and Kattis did not mention this in relation to their café, possibly because they are still in the starting phase, because they are more in control as they are the only ones at their farm, or because they have different social preferences. Both Stig and Solveig and Marie and Bosse, though, explained that their wish for privacy is the reason they have not introduced any tourism activities at their farms. These farmers have chosen different ways to meet and relate to their customers, since they have different interests and different social needs.

Farm tourism is not the answer for all small-scale farmers but, just as local markets and farm shops, it can add value for rural economies as well as feelings of community. Local markets like REKO provide meeting places for producers as well as customers, where the food, as well as the social and business relationships, are at the

centre of attention. Despite the development of modern agroindustry and global markets, the farmers in this study are valuing the local, self-organized, marketplaces, where people connect with each other. Creating incentives for these types of meeting places is important for both farmers and visitors, as well as the whole rural community.

6.2.3. Generational shifts and new rural groups

The agricultural landscape is seen as an interplay between the individual aspirations of farmers and the opinions of neighbours, villagers, and others in the local community (Grubbström and Eriksson 2018). For the farmers in this study, aspirations connected to the continued care of the land as well as the development of stronger rural communities and the small-scale farming sector steer how they make decisions for the future of their farms as well as how they connect with new rural groups. That some of them integrate immigrants at their farms are both rooted in humanitarian values and the aspirations of strengthening the rural community, as they invest in these groups by providing both social belonging and local knowledge.

That the farmers in this study care for the development of the rural area indicate that they to some extent, as for many outgoing farmers, are influenced by the concerns of neighbours and others in the local community (Grubbström and Eriksson 2018). All three farming families that face a generational shift soon emphasized the importance of carefully choosing who will take over their farms. Beyond the joy and importance of being able to transfer their local knowledge, a close relationship with between the former and new farmer may also generate mutual understanding and aspirations concerning the farm's future (Grubbström and Eriksson 2018). Social relations may induce a wish to please the community in making a good choice and already established business or cooperative relationships may influence the choice of buyer or lessee, especially if the former farmers plan to stay in the community (Grubbström and Eriksson 2018).

Farmers attach values and feelings to a certain place and these values could be threatened by e.g., large-scale agriculture or construction of residential properties following a sale. Such changes could also cause negative reactions among villagers. Hence, feelings for land could have an individual dimension, as they are closely linked to personal experiences, but also a more collective dimension, where the area as a whole with its landscape, character and people is linked with a feeling of belonging to the land and the farm (Grubbström and Eriksson 2018, 720).

In the potential sell or lease of their farms, the older couples in this study have not stated whether they would stay on their farms or in the community or not. Both couples, however, emphasize their fear of moving into apartments that would go against their idea of the good life on the countryside. For farmers such as Thomas and Kattis, who experience a close sense of community in their village, may care more for the concerns of other villagers in a potential future generational shift. For Marie and Bosse who experience a loss of community in their neighbourhood, the opinion of neighbours may matter less. However, their critique against large-scale agriculture and rural development that negatively affect the possibilities for small-scale farming and local food systems may be reinforced through interactions with other small-scale farmers in their neighbourhoods or in local market networks with the same opinions.

Although Stefan largely focuses on his own farm, he takes inspiration from the old post-war politics in Sweden that was based on giving every family a piece of land, as homesteads, in the countryside.

So that lots of people... instead of one farmer having a thousand hectares, I would like to... not all people, but all these people who are now a burden on society, because they are, feel bad and they have... aren't needed and they... it's just a big risk that they will do things that will cost, you know, the public account. Criminality and sick people and healthcare and whatever you want... Uh... So, that, to... to give people their homestead, well, that's a super idea, right? (Stefan)

In his aspiration to continue providing a place of connection and growth between people, animals, and the land at his farm, he emphasizes the need for people to understand and join the transition towards a more local and nature-based living. The key to stronger and livelier rural communities, he believes, is to get children to want to stay in the rural areas they grow up in.

I fled my parents. As far as it was possible (laughing). And then they became alone. And I think that... then I understood, when I got children of my own, here that, what's important. [...] And that's what the big problem is now that the children, they go... and then it becomes like giant agricultural units, and there are, like, no farmers anymore (Stefan)

Although Stefan has the fortune of knowing his children will take over the farm, most small-scale farmers do not. Another way to contribute to the future of the local community

and the agricultural development is mentoring other new groups. Several of the farmers in this study are involving immigrants at their farms, and sometimes the relationships they build become family-like¹¹. For example, one of the immigrants working at one of the farms in this study needs a higher salary, leading to the farmers in question having to make more financially rational decisions. Among other things, this has resulted in them ending leasing contracts with some of their neighbours, thus influencing the relationships in the local community. This shows how the wellbeing and aspirations of the people involved on the farm itself are sometimes valued higher than the larger local community.

Helping these immigrants acquire some income and a social network indicates strong humanitarian values among our farmers, while they are simultaneously providing new potential for rural development on the society level. For example, as these immigrants are given a sense of purpose and belonging in the rural local area, some of them have begun aspiring for starting their own agricultural businesses. Because the relationships with these immigrants are so important to individual farmers, they have an influence on economic decisions at the farms. Moreover, in the long run, they may provide pathways to strengthened rural communities through cultivating potential farmers. Thus, both individual aspirations and the aspirations of others in the rural collective are influencing the decisions of the farmers in this study.

6.3. The role of small-scale farming in rural development

As Västmanland is a region dominated by large-scale agricultural and forest production for the global market, the spatial context and, thus, the aspirations of the farmers in this study are deeply integrated into capitalist modes of production (Bennike, Rasmussen, and Nielsen 2020, 43). Dominating rural aspirations influenced by large corporate and state interests are therefore focused on further development in the same direction. As the farmers in this study have experienced, their farms hold valuable farmland interesting for actors attracted by further expansion. However, their own aspirations are mainly steered by transformative visions of the future connected to a living countryside based on small-scale farming and strong rural communities.

Small-scale farming provides value to rural areas in terms of keeping open landscapes, local food and energy production, important services such as digging and

¹¹ To maintain anonymity, I have chosen to not name the farmers in question.

snowploughing, job opportunities, local ecological knowledge, and social meeting places (Ploeg 2018; Milestad, Ahnström, and Björklund 2011). Thus, beyond local knowledge and social community, small-scale farmers also provide economic services. These factors are increasingly important for rural communities as knowledge about food production are concentrated to fewer and larger actors and the distances between production modes and consumers become longer (Waldenström 2018). Thus, the multifunctional activities pursued by small-scale farmers such as the ones in this study influence the patterns of interaction among farmers and customers, as well as between the farmers and the food industry.

The relevance of say, on-farm processing of milk into cheese, yoghurt and other products and directly marketing these products lies not so much in the elaboration of new dairy products but more in a redefinition of the interrelations between farming and agro-industry. It expands the boundaries of the farm from being solely a supplier of farm materials, into becoming a new multifunctional unit that relates in new and multiple new ways to society and nature (Ploeg 2018, 97).

As the farmers in this study pursue activities such as preserving biotope forestlands for recreational purposes and keeping grazing animals as ways of preserving biodiversity, building local customer-farmer or farmer-farmer networks, or providing local rural services and social meeting places, they add both economic, social, and ecological value to their rural areas.

These insights are lifted by scholars as a 're-territorialization' of agriculture that puts emphasis on the place where it is based, which challenges the continuous decoupling from place pursued in the dominating food regime, where cheap prices are premised over the economic, social, and ecological impacts on the place of production (Waldenström 2018). Waldenström (2018) emphasizes the potential for safeguarding these relationships through place-based, or territorial, rural development policy, such as the national food strategy, even if it fails to recognize the role of agriculture. She claims that “[b]y building on the character of the place or the region, on values and different kinds of capital – socially, identity-wise, culturally and landscape-wise – the meaning of the place can be restored” (Waldenström 2018, 220, my translation).

As seen in the historical development of rural areas in Sweden, and as emphasized by the farmers in this study, viable opportunities for small-scale farming plays an important part in creating a living countryside. Increasingly, “municipalities

view agriculture as a valuable part of the local business sector and value the local production and environmental management” (Waldenström 2018, 226, my translation), for example through public procurement, different support schemes and cooperation, as well as integration projects. The latter providing potential for new workers in the agricultural sector, in the same way as the farmers in this study have done. Municipal initiatives directed towards young potential farmers also strengthen the potential for smoother generational shifts (Waldenström 2018).

Institutional initiatives like these potentially address the issues connected to rural communities experienced and emphasized by the farmers in this study regarding loss of rural welfare services, resources, and sense of rural community. However, by engaging in local markets, building inter-farmer and farmer-customer relationships, creating rural meeting places, and integrating new people at their farms, they embody the social capacity and potential provided by rural people themselves. Their engagement in the local and rural community, whether online, offline, small, or large, are steps on the pathways towards stronger rural communities.

6.4. Summary

The aspirations of the farmers in this study are rooted in the aspirations of their families, their local communities, and other farmers, as well as in the history of these social groups and the local places they live in. Past developments of depopulation, and loss of services and community in rural Sweden have shaped their aspirations connected to rebuilding rural communities and contribute to strengthening the small-scale farming sector. For this end, the farmers in this study engage in the local community and the sector by creating meeting places both on-farm and off-farm, integrating with new rural groups, sharing knowledge, and through decision-making about the future of their farms. However, the farmers in this study focus on private rather than public spheres of commitment in this pursuit.

Although their aspirations are rooted in alternative visions of the future also pursued by alternative agricultural movements globally, the farmers in this study are focused on their own communities and individual possibilities rather than actively engaging in solidarity with global movements. However, by pursuing aspirations connected to agricultural and rural transformation in their own spatial context, they also show solidarity with small-scale farmers and rural populations elsewhere.

The social relations experienced and cultivated by our farmers play an important part in the making of place, home, and rural life. Instead of traditional farming organization, the farmers in this study find new, local ways of organizing themselves where they cultivate direct relationships with customers and the rural community. They put meaning into local systems of knowledge and support in their relationships with other farmers. Supporting and sharing amongst each other is fundamental not only for the individual farmer's business, but also in shaping the social networks that build local community. Transferring knowledge across farms, communities, and generations is important for the whole rural society.

The farmers who are facing generational shifts soon all aspire to transfer their farms into the hands of someone with similar values as themselves, who cares for the land and wants to continue a similar pathway. The decisions they make regarding their farms' futures are steered by their aspirations connected to rural development and sense of rural community, as well as their own attachment to the land. As providers of both rural services, local meeting places, local knowledge, and social networking, their aspirations influence not only the farm itself but the whole local community.

7. Conclusion

The aim of this study has been to explore the rural aspirations of small-scale farmers in Västmanland, Sweden, using imaginaries of ‘the good life’ as a lens, and study how these aspirations are connected to rural development processes. We have, through interviews and participative observation, followed the aspirations of four farming families in Västmanland (Stig and Solveig, Marie and Bosse, Thomas and Kattis, and Stefan) in their pursuit of the good life. Using conceptualizations of ‘the good life’ and rural aspirations (Fischer 2014; Bennike, Rasmussen, and Nielsen 2020), the following research questions have been explored, which are summarized in this conclusive chapter.

What aspirations do small-scale farmers have in their pursuit of the good life and how do those aspirations relate to the rural development processes in Västmanland, Sweden?

- *How are structural conditions influencing the perceived conditions of possibility for the future for small-scale farming in Sweden?*
- *In what ways are the aspirations of small-scale farmers in Västmanland expressions of anticipatory and transformative visions of the future?*
- *How do small-scale farmers in Västmanland navigate between individual and collective dimensions of aspirations?*

7.1. Main aspirations of the farmers in this study

The farmers in this study all consider themselves living a good life as small-scale farmers, for example as they have access to self-produced, high-quality food and spend their days doing what they enjoy and what gives them meaning: being in nature, taking care of their land and their animals, and engaging in their rural communities. Their sense of wellbeing and their aspirations for the good life is rooted in their relationship to the land and to the rural community.

The farmers in this study aspire to live out their (retirement) years at their farms, all except Marie and Bosse who due to the limitations of old age are aspiring to phase out. For the three families that soon face generational shifts, aspirations are increasingly connected to the future of their farms, both rooted in their attachment to land and wanting to secure the continuation of their farms and rooted in aspirations of a living

countryside and a strengthened small-scale farming sector. For Thomas and Kattis, the main aspiration is to be able to live off their farm.

Moreover, the farmers in this study aspire to contribute to the growth of small-scale, local, and organic food production and farming practices, that are rooted in small-scale farming traditions as well as ecological and social sustainability in rural areas. Their aspirations are connected to rebuilding rural communities, both when considering their own farms' futures, people's sense of belonging in the local community, and the general agricultural development.

7.2. Structural conditions and perceived conditions of possibility

Political, economic, spatial, historical, and cultural structures shape the aspirations of the farmers in this study and what they perceive as conditions of possibility for their visions of the future. As they are in different stages of their lives, the farmers in this study have different visions of the future, as well as different financial opportunities and restraints. The two older couples have financial security in their state pension income, and thus their aspirations focus on living out the good life as farmers and securing the future of their farms. The other families are dependent on sufficient income to pursue their aspirations of making a living off the farm (Thomas and Kattis) and to leave the farm without debts to the children taking over (Stefan).

The agro-political and institutional frameworks found in the CAP and the national food strategy steer Swedish agriculture based on modern agro-industry and market capitalism. However, the new policy for the period 2023-2027 include specific directives to strengthen the small-scale farming sector and ecological conditions, that might improve the conditions of possibility for these small-scale farmers in the future. Thereby, the agro-political framework seems to become increasingly aligned with the aspirations of the farmers in this study. However, in a society steered by capitalistic interests and industrial scale food production, the small-scale farming sector remains disadvantaged.

The farmers in this study diversify into different income sources to strengthen their financial opportunities in the face of the economic squeeze on the sector but are mostly motivated by personal preferences and moral values. They use local markets and short sale circuits such as REKO and on-farm shops that provides direct

relationships with customers and other farmers, strengthening loyalty bonds and the community around local food.

For the farmers in this study, social and cultural norms influence the conditions of possibility to pursue their aspirations of increased local and organic food and for ensuring their farms' continuation. The increased public and political interest for local, organic, and small-scale food improves the conditions of possibility for these farmers to sell their food based on provenance marketing and can potentially strengthen the small-scale farming sector. On the other hand, financial conditions as well as social and cultural norms negatively influence the possibility for these farmers to ensure their farms' continuation in generational shift processes. More political support is needed to rebuild financial opportunities as well as cultural norms that view small-scale farming as a viable profession.

Rural developments over the last century have eroded both local knowledge systems and local sense of community that the farmers in this study deem as important, negatively influencing the conditions of possibility for a strengthened small-scale farming sector and rural community. Due to knowledge as well as rural resources being increasingly consolidated to large institutions, corporations, and large-scale farmers, small-scale farmers become increasingly dependent on these actors.

7.3. Anticipatory and transformative visions of the future

According to the farmers in this study, the good life can be found on a small-scale farm where social and ecological values stand in front. Their aspirations connected to strengthening these values are pursued by incorporating both traditional and new farming and non-farming practices at their farms, engaging in their rural communities, and the possibility for their farm's continuation. These aspirations incorporate both anticipatory and transformative visions of the future, in the face of modern, capitalistic rural development. In the Swedish context, agro-political frameworks are increasingly valuing the small-scale farming sector and local food, meaning that the bottom-up and top-town rural aspirations are increasingly aligned.

However, by specifically seeking alternative pathways to build a sustainable farm economy and to farm according to their values of ecological and social sustainability, the farmers in this study largely follow a transformative direction. Thomas and Kattis are the only farmers in this study who explicitly seek pathways steered by

income opportunities, however, it is more an effect of their economic limitations and conditions of possibility, than aspirations to follow the expected pathway. As anticipatory visions of the future for small-scale farmers in Sweden are to either develop into entrepreneurial farms largely focused on economic profit and industrial production, or to stay as part-time farms that eventually are bought up and incorporated into larger farms, aspirations of living off the farm and for ensuring the farm's continuation are transformative.

The farmers in this study build their aspirations largely on moral values, steering their choices regarding farming practices as well as the future of their farms. They engage in local food networks and short sale circuits, both to reach out with their products and to build alternative markets and community around alternative food production. Their farming practices are motivated by care for the ecological health of their land and care for the welfare of their animals, steering them into organic and local systems that reject agro-industrial input and practices. Stig and Solveig and Stefan's choices to pursue activities in the direction of self-sufficiency and farm autonomy are further informed by transformative ideas. Thomas and Kattis and Stefan's pursuit of agrotourism activities are both transformative, as they promote small-scale farms and rural living, and anticipatory, as they follow a capitalist interests connected to rural resource exploitation and may only increase a romanticized image of the countryside and local food without addressing the issues of modern agroindustry.

Due to emotional ties to the land and the farm, and the rejection of industrial, large-scale agriculture, the farmers in this study fear that their farms will fall into decay or be incorporated into already large farms, such as the anticipatory development for small-scale farms in Sweden. The farmers in this study aspire to leave their farms in the hands of someone who will ensure the farm's continuation. The declining trend of particularly small-scale farming has spurred a debate in the sector of how generational shifts should be approached, indicating a stronger focus on rebuilding the small-scale farming sector, moving in the transformative direction.

Although all farmers in this study express concerns over the agro-political priorities, their engagement stretch little beyond their own socio-economic situations and local rural areas. Focusing on local food systems are transformative in essence, but without solidarity with movements and rural populations elsewhere, the effects for actual change may be limited.

7.4. Navigations between individual and collective dimensions

The aspirations of the farmers in this study are rooted in the historical experiences and the aspirations of their families, local communities, and other farmers. Social relations and sense of community play an important part in their sense of wellbeing. Past rural developments in Sweden that resulted in depopulated rural areas and a declining small-scale farming sector, have shaped their aspirations to contribute to rebuilding the sector and rural communities. However, they engage in private rather than public spheres of commitment, but the subjective and collective dimensions of their aspirations are highly integrated, making them hard to differentiate.

The farmers in this study engage in their communities by contributing to creating meeting places both on-farm and off-farm, sharing knowledge, and involve new rural groups in their networks and farms. They put meaning into local systems of knowledge and the social support networks provided by their neighbourhoods and other farmers, both for their own benefit and for the benefit of the local rural community. While the older couples value a certain amount of privacy and keep their social engagement to local markets, Thomas and Kattis and Stefan are creating meeting places at their farms through agrotourism and events. Several of the farmers in this study also involve immigrants at their farms, strengthening relationships between the small-scale farming sector and new (marginalized) rural groups. As local food producers, landscape managers, and providers of knowledge, rural services, and social networking, the aspirations and chosen pathways of the farmers in this study affect both their own lives and farms as well as the larger rural community.

The aspirations rooted in alternative visions of the future for rural communities and small-scale farming largely align with alternative global agricultural and social movements. Although the farmers in this study do not actively engage in solidarity movements, they pursue aspirations connected to agricultural and rural transformation locally and thereby practice solidarity with small-scale farmers and rural populations elsewhere. As structural incentives are missing, by engaging in local markets, building inter-farmer and farmer-customer relationships, creating rural meeting places, and integrating new people at their farms, the farmers in this study embody the social capacity and potential provided by rural people themselves.

7.5. Concluding remarks

This study has attempted to contribute to a growing literature on rural aspirations and the meaning of aspirations for rural development processes. Recognizing and including perspectives from rural populations can provide more inclusive and sustainable development processes in the future through aligning ‘top-down’ with ‘bottom-up’ aspirations. The Swedish agro-political framework is increasingly aligning with aspirations of the farmers in this study on some levels. However, rooted in imaginations of the good life, the aspirations of these farmers and their rural collectives are leaning towards a transformative direction. There is still a long way to go before these top-down and bottom-up rural aspirations align in their visions and chosen pathways for the future for rural and agrarian Sweden. Future research could for example investigate how agro-political institutions and policy are incorporating bottom-up perspectives, explore the aspirations of other rural and agrarian actors and groups, or follow how the new CAP framework and the increasing public interest influences the future conditions for the small-scale farming sector in Sweden.

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Appendix 1

Interview guide used as a foundation for the semi-structured, in-depth interviews with the participants in this study (in Swedish).

Intervjuguide

Gårdens bakgrund/ekonomi

- I. Hur länge har du/ni/familjen haft denna gård?
- II. Vilka är huvudaktiviteterna på gården?
- III. Har du/ni möjlighet att försörja er på dessa? Om inte, vilka andra aktiviteter tar du/ni till för att göra det (t.ex. andra jobb)?
- IV. Har du/ni behövt ändra produktionen eller lägga till andra typer av aktiviteter för att kunna försörja er på gården (t.ex. turism, energiproduktion, förädling)? Vad tänker du/ni om det?

Lokala sociala förhållanden

- V. Berätta lite om relationen med närliggande gårdar/grannar och andra bönder, vilken betydelse har de relationerna?
- VI. Har du/ni något samarbete med andra gårdar i området/regionen? På vilka sätt?
- VII. Hur ser du/ni på framtiden när det kommer till det lokala eller regionala nätverket av småskaliga bönder? (Anser du/ni att relationerna mellan olika gårdar behöver ändras och, isåfall, hur då?)
- VIII. Hur skulle du/ni beskriva er relation till lokala kunder? Hur tror ni att den relationen kan se ut i framtiden?

Drömmar och ambitioner

- IX. Vilka anledningar hade du/ni för att köpa/ta över/starta gården (drömmar, ambitioner, praktikaliteter, familjeidentitet osv.)?
- X. Hur ser dina/era drömmar och ambitioner ut för gården idag?
- XI. Ser du/ni några hinder för att uppnå dessa? Isåfall, vilka?
- XII. Hur upplever du/ni möjligheterna för att uppnå dina/era drömmar och ambitioner (socialt, ekonomiskt, politiskt, tidsram, etc.)?
- XIII. Vilka politiska regelverk/lagar skadar samt underlättar för er gård? Vilka förändringar skulle du/ni vilja se i jordbrukspolitiken eller ekonomiska stödordningar (EU)?
- XIV. Vad är ett gott liv enligt dig/er? Anser du/ni att du/ni lever ett gott liv?

Appendix 2

Consent form as it was given to the participants in this study (in Swedish), based on the guidelines of the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD).

Vill du delta i forskningsprojektet ”Småskaligt jordbruk i Västmanland: drömmar, ambitioner och framtidsutsikter”?

Syftet med projektet är att undersöka vilka drömmar och ambitioner som småskaliga bönder har i Västmanland, samt hur de upplever framtidsutsikterna politiskt, ekonomiskt och socialt för sina gårdar. I detta formulär finner du information om forskningsprojektets mål och vad det innebär för dig att delta. Projektet genomförs av Joanna Svärd, mastersstudent vid Senter for utvikling og miljø (SUM), Universitetet i Oslo. Projektet är en masteruppsats som beräknas färdigställas i december 2021.

Målet med denna masteruppsats är att undersöka:

- Vilka drömmar och ambitioner har småskaliga bönder i Västmanland och hur upplever de framtidsutsikterna för att uppnå dessa?
- Hur kan dessa drömmar, ambitioner och upplevda framtidsutsikter knytas till större rurala trender i Sverige idag?

Varför får du frågan om att delta?

Detta formulär delas ut till bönder i Västmanland som anser sig bedriva småskalig jordbruksproduktion och har visat intresse för att delta i projektet. Genom att se, uppleva och lyssna till deras erfarenheter av att vara småskalig bonde, samt vad de tänker om framtidsutsikterna för fortsatt verksamhet, är målet att förstå hur de sociala, kulturella, ekonomiska och politiska förhållandena för småskaliga bönder ser ut i Västmanland idag.

Vad innebär det för dig att delta?

Om du väljer att delta i projektet innebär det att hysa studenten på din gård över en längre eller kortare period, där målet är att utföra deltagande observation och minst en djupare intervju. Deltagande observation innebär att studenten deltar i arbetet på gården som forskningsmetod. Arbetet sker efter behov och kapacitet, utan lön, och om det är möjligt önskas även att bo på gården. Exakt tidsperiod, ifall det är möjligt att bo på gården, och eventuell arbetsmängd avtalas närmare med varje projektdeltagare. Djupare intervju innebär att du får frågor som berör bl.a. dina erfarenheter som småskalig bonde, hur du upplever framtidsutsikterna för just din gård samt småskaligt jordbruk generellt (politiskt, ekonomiskt, socialt), samt hur de lokala och/eller regionala nätverken mellan småskaliga bönder ser ut.

Både under intervjuerna och observationen kommer anteckningar tas och intervjuerna kommer att spelas in med ljud och transkriberas (skrivs ut).

Information som nedtecknas under deltagande observation inkluderar: hur gårdsarbetet föregår, prioriteras och fördelas över en dag samt över tid; studentens upplevelse av gårdsarbetet; utmaningar som uppstår; hur sociala och ekonomiska relationer upprätthålls; (om relevant) hur försäljningskanaler föregår; och anteckningar från informella samtal. Nedtecknad information inkluderar inte: sensitiva personliga upplysningar rörande specifika hälsotillstånd, familjerelationer, sexuell läggning, partipolitisk eller religiös tillhörighet; upplysningar om tredjeperson som kan identifiera enskilda personer.

Om du ger samtycke till det är det även önskvärt att ta bilder av gården och gårdsverksamheten. Vid frågor om något av detta, ta gärna kontakt med Joanna Svärd, på epost (jmsvard@uio.no) eller telefon: +47 45836861.

Det är frivilligt att delta

Det är frivilligt att delta i projektet. Om du väljer att delta kan du när som helst dra tillbaka ditt samtycke utan att uppge någon grund. Alla dina personuppgifter kommer då att raderas. Det kommer inte ha några negativa konsekvenser för dig ifall du väljer att inte delta eller senare väljer att dra tillbaka ditt samtycke.

Dataskydd – hur vi lagrar och använder dina personuppgifter

Vi kommer bara att använda dina personuppgifter för det syfte som är beskrivet i detta formulär. Vi behandlar uppgifterna konfidentiellt och enligt regelverket för personuppgifter (GDPR).

- Joanna Svärd (student), samt Jostein Jakobsen (handledare) och Mariel Aguilar-Støen (handledare) kommer att ha tillgång till dina uppgifter.
- Deltagare kommer att anonymiseras så att du inte kan bli igenkänd i publikationer från projektet. Trots anonymisering finns dock möjligt att deltagare indirekt kan bli igenkända i publikationer från projektet, till exempel genom bruk av beskrivningar av åldersspann, kön eller sysselsättning på gården, samt beskrivningar av gårdens produktion och omgivande landskap.
- Om du samtycker till det kan du välja att låta uppgifter om dig, så som namn och gårdsnamn, vara möjliga att igenkänna i publikationer från projektet.
- Vi följer standardrutiner för anonymisering och för hantering av personuppgifter, så att namn och kontaktuppgifter hålls avskilt från övriga data. Personuppgifter lagras och behandlas på maskinvara som tillhör Universitetet i Oslo.
- Du kommer att få möjlighet att läsa igenom uppgifter om dig själv, inklusive citat, innan publicering.

Vad sker med dina personuppgifter när forskningsprojektet avslutas?

Projektet ska enligt planen avslutas i december 2021 och efter projektets slut kommer personuppgifter och ljudinspelningar raderas. Dessa kan behållas i upp till ett år, till

december 2022, ifall projektet av olika grunder behöver förlängas. Om du samtycker till det kommer bilder att behållas även efter att projektet är avslutat.

Dina rättigheter

Så länge du kan identifieras i datamaterialet, har du rätt till:

- insyn i vilka personuppgifter som är registrerat om dig och få utdelat en kopia av dessa,
- att be om att felaktiga personuppgifter om dig rättas,
- att be om att personuppgifter om dig raderas,
- att klaga till Datatilsynet i Norge om behandlingen av dina personuppgifter.

Vad ger oss rätt att behandla personuppgifter om dig?

Vi behandlar uppgifter om dig baserat på ditt samtycke.

På uppdrag av Universitetet i Oslo har Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS (NSD) värderat att behandlingen av personuppgifter i detta projektet är i enlighet med regelverket för personuppgifter.

Hur tar du reda på mer?

Om du har frågor om projektet eller önskar att använda dina rättigheter, ta kontakt med:

- Joanna Svärd, jmsvard@uio.no
- Jostein Jakobsen (håndledare), jostein.jakobsen@sum.uio.no
- Mariel Aguilar-Støen (håndledare), m.c.stoen@sum.uio.no
- Personvernombud ved UiO, Roger Markgraf-Bye personvernombud@uio.no

Om du har spørsmål rundt NSDs vurdering av projektet, kan du ta kontakt med:

- NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS, på epost (personverntjenester@nsd.no) eller på telefon: +47 55 58 21 17.

Med vänlig hälsning,
Joanna Svärd

Bekräftelse på samtycke till projektdeltagande

Jag har mottagit och förstått information om projektet ”Småskaligt jordbruk i Västmanland: drömmar, ambitioner och framtidsutsikter” och har fått möjlighet att ställa frågor. Informationen som delas kommer användas i en masteruppsats vid Senter for utvikling og miljø (SUM), Universitetet i Oslo.

Jag samtycker till följande:

- Att tillåta deltagande observation på gården (d.v.s. att låta studenten delta i arbetet på gården som forskningsmetod)
- Att bilder tas av gården och gårdsverksamheten
- Att delta i intervju
- Att intervjun spelas in med ljud
- Att det jag säger kan bli citerat
- Att upplysningar om mig behandlas och lagras fram till projektets slut (december 2021) eller upp till ett år efter beräknat avslut (december 2022). Efter detta raderas alla personidentifierande upplysningar, inklusive personidentifierande bilder
- Att upplysningar om mig publiceras så att jag kan igenkännas

(Signerat av projektdeltagare, datum)