PART ONE

FOOD PROMOTION
A recent road trip in the Okanagan valley of British Columbia included a stop at a busy log-barn-styled food stand near the town of Armstrong. In addition to the displays of vintage farm equipment, bountiful shelves of local fruit and vegetables, free food samples, and gospel music playing in the background—there was an eye-catching “Log Barn 1912” logo on a host of food products that included Mennonite pies, Mennonite sausage, jams, jellies, pickles, Gouda cheese, fresh baking, and more. Sales staff assured customers that Log Barn 1912 food was natural, contained no additives, and was locally produced in the Armstrong area.

The “Mennonite Pies” box (see figure 1.1) communicates a clear message of what these food products are all about: the packaging features a wood-fired oven surrounded by log walls and the roof of a barn and, in the background, a collage of images, including a black and white family photo (perhaps from the 1940s), a woman with wheat fields in the background, a child praying, and a laughing woman and child rubbing noses. The text boldly declares “Log Barn 1912 Mennonite Pies” and “Handmade Flaky Butter Crust Pie.” The “Mennonite Ham Sausage” packaging (see figure 1.2) offers a similarly rustic feel, portraying a small child in western dress walking toward a forest and a logo image of a log barn with goats walking along the roof.

The Log Barn 1912 food labels effectively evoke notions of product quality established through associations with the rural West, nature, and
Mennonite culture—their traditions, family values, and religious virtues. The company website (www.logbarn.ca) further explains that the brand “strives to provide a healthy and nostalgic experience inspired by the culinary traditions of Mennonite pioneers.” Encouraging online viewers to “come and enjoy the peaceful setting of our Log Barn 1912 Armstrong location,” even if only to “daydream the afternoon away in an environment that is sensory and refreshing,” it presents the following mission statement:

In our infancy as a business we dared to believe that, outside of our mere survival, we could contribute to positively impacting the world. While not always being successful, and having countless reasons to fold, we have held on to our vision strongly enough to drive us through adversity. In doing so, we have grown our tiny family roadside fruit stand in to an emergent business that supports and promotes the Okanagan region of British Columbia.

![Figure 1.1 Log Barn 1912 “Mennonite Pies” package, a celebration of family values](image-url)
It is the place in connection with the product that captures our attention here. Food explicitly linked to a place of origin, of course, is typically represented as “good” simply because the food’s ingredients are presumed to be local and natural and its production more socially embedded, making the product seem more nourishing and trustworthy. In the case of the Log Barn 1912 brand, the food products are marked as qualitatively different from—and superior to—those of competitors because, as the website specifies, they are a product of the “peaceful setting of our Log Barn 1912 Armstrong location” and of the traditions of the Mennonite pioneers who settled in that location. The Mennonite sausages, for example, are all natural, free of fillers and added fats or flavours—presumably not because of Canadians’ current concerns about health or processed foods but because that was the tradition of Mennonite pioneers. Log Barn foods, in this sense, are deliberately packaged in a way that emplaces them within a territory associated with close-knit community, relations of trust, moral and spiritual virtue, authenticity, and uncompromised nature, thereby positioning them as distinct from (and superior to) other packaged products.

This chapter considers food labels, food products and processes, and food marketing, with a specific focus on the role of “place” in promoting,
representing, and affirming distinctive quality foods. To this end, we examine how food and place intertwine, analyzing in particular how constructions of “place” promote claims about food quality.

PLACE STUDIES AND THE REPRESENTATION OF FOOD

In *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*, Edward Casey (1997, ix) observes: “This much is true for place: we are immersed in it. To be at all—to exist in any way—is to be somewhere and to be somewhere is to be in some kind of place. Place is as requisite as the air we breathe, the ground on which we stand, the bodies we have. We live in places, relate to others in them, die in them. Nothing we do is unplaced. How could it be otherwise?” Casey’s proposal—that place is an experiential fact of human existence—is pivotal to understanding the representation of food when its “place of origin” matters. The meaning of the word *place* (from the Greek *plateia*, meaning “wide way” or “street”) is both simple and complex. Affirming that “Banff is a nice place” is straightforward with reference to its location in the Canadian Rockies and the experiences of its breathtaking scenery. To “know your place” suggests there is a social order to be acknowledged and followed—and suggests that “place” can be dense with meaning (including the application of social and cultural mores).

More generally, “place” is a social construct that informs how humans see, know, understand, and experience the world. As Tim Cresswell (1996) notes, places are vested with meaning and power. People fight over places; people are excluded from places; people experience places at a profound level. People also “package” and commodify places to promote food consumption, be it through regional tourism, culinary tourism, or packaged foods. Robert Sack, in *Progress: Geographical Essays* (2002, vii–viii), proposes that humans are “place-makers” in that they transform geographic and natural realms into built, social, and cultural environments through imagining alternative realities to what already exists, and because they believe that places can be constructed through human initiative. Understanding humans as profoundly place bound does not imply boundaries or limits in the geometric sense of perimeter—but in the ontological sense of a circumstance that is intrinsic to existence. Furthermore, being place bound invites meaning making, as well as refinement of identity and self-definition, for individuals and communities who are framed and conditioned by location and a sense of place.
Like everything else that relates to human activity, food and food processes are always emplaced. Food is prepared, processed, and eaten in places. Theoretical perspectives on place-making explain that it involves active engagement by humans with the places they inhabit. That is, place-making is an active, willed process, not a passive one (Fettes and Judson 2011, 124). A place exists as a place because of the efforts humans expend to engage it—and it is hard to imagine a clearer example of place-making than the active and willed process of food production and consumption.

Place studies scholarship is typically based on the understanding that place entails three primary characteristics: location—where a site, object, or activity is located (for example, the actual site of the Log Barn food stand near Armstrong); locale—where activities occur, the “where” of social life and environmental change (the traditional Mennonite setting in which Log Barn foods are produced and sold, for example); and sense of place—the emotional and experiential attachments to a place (such as the place-based experiences encouraged by the Log Barn website—“listen to morning birds sing and watch the sunrise” while indulging in French toast with special butter caramel syrup).¹

Notably, it is the sense of place that features most prominently in the communication of the Log Barn 1912 brand. Using food labels and online marketing, the Log Barn 1912 brand constructs and communicates a distinct sense of place by associating its products with a specific location and local Mennonite culture, with traditional Mennonite production methods and ingredients, and with a nostalgic return to nature and an emplaced (Mennonite, western) past. The resulting sense of place suffuses the Log Barn brand, to the point where clear distinctions between the food and its place of origin dissolve; rather, they are interwoven and co-constitutive. Moreover, the resulting sense of place fosters within consumers a profound sense of “place attachment,” which is key to communicating the appeal of emplaced food.

We understand place attachment here, as part of the larger context of “sense of place.” The notion of place attachment not only provides insight into how people understand their experiential engagement with meaningful places, but also embraces what people do in those places. It encompasses a dynamic of setting, individual and group behaviour, and value-based evaluation. It involves connection to place that is forged through a trajectory of direct and imaged experiences that range from leisure to home life to
work places. Importantly, place attachment relies heavily on symbols and images to express what a particular place represents and why it is meaningful. “These connections [to place] are created regardless of whether a person has lived someplace their entire life, visited briefly, or has never spent time there” (Amsden, Stedman, and Kruger 2011, 34). The fact that the connection may be entirely imagined by the consumer is what makes the Log Barn packaging effective beyond the boundaries of the local community in British Columbia. The Armstrong-based food and food processes connect consumers (regardless of their own locations)—through images of family values, childhood innocence, and home baking—to the quality food claims of the Log Barn business. Visiting the fruit stand near Armstrong arguably affirms the values expressed in the Log Barn logo and images because traditional Mennonite culinary preparation is promoted in a friendly and effective manner; however, the Log Barn packaging alone engenders place attachment by promoting family, resiliency, and entrepreneurial and religious values, so that consumers can easily imagine they are experiencing the “peaceful setting of our Log Barn 1912 Armstrong location” without actually being there. Perhaps this is too much to expect of premade sausage or “flaky butter crust pie,” but, as Edward Casey (1987, 186–87) observes, place is formative in linking objects (such as food products) to intangible feelings, experiences, and value-based perceptions. “It is the stabilizing persistence of place as a container of experiences that contributes so powerfully to its intrinsic memorability,” he argues. “We might even say that memory is naturally place-oriented or at least place-supported.” In this way, the sense of place and place attachment invoked by Log Barn food packaging and marketing are arguably essential to making the brand—and the food—appear both stable and memorable.

THE GEOGRAPHIC IMAGINATION, NOSTALGIA, AND FOOD LABELS

Robert Feagan (2007, 23) notes that “food and place are intertwined in robust ways in the geographic imagination.” But how, exactly, are food, place, and imagination linked? Mark Fettes and Gillian Judson (2011, 124) argue that imagination plays an essential role in place-making because it involves a conceptual “reaching out” toward new possibilities. They suggest, for example, that environmental activists confirm that seeing a familiar and loved place change through development, pollution, and overexploitation
underscores the fragility of not only that particular place but, through imagination, other places. “A vision of what their own community might become, in their own lifetime or that of their children, fuels the passion of many place-based cultural activists,” they note, going on to argue that “three features of place-making—emotional attachment, active cognition, and a sense of possibility—are all hallmarks of imagination” (124–25).

All three of these place-making/imagination features are evident when food is connected with place. Place of food origin and food labels promoting place can evoke an “emotional attachment” because eating is a first-order experiential activity with vested consequences (survival and well-being). Eating also involves conscious awareness of what is being eaten—at least, among the people who choose to reflect critically upon their food choices. As Fettes and Judson (2011, 124–25) observe about the visions of place-based activists, “place does not simply supply a blank canvas for the projection of such visions,” and the same is true when it comes to food. And finally, most food consumers who pay attention to place-related images, symbols, and logos are attempting to understand the place of food and its embedded context through imagination (a “sense of possibility”). The Log Barn food labels are effective because they appeal to the imagination of the consumer by referencing culinary practices that affirm traditional values and validate an imagined, more “nature-based” place of food production—one that stands in stark contrast to the industrial food complex revealed by such popular documentaries as Food, Inc. (2008), King Corn (2007), Fast Food Nation (2006), and the like.

Of course, all food packaging invites consumers to situate themselves in relation to the package images and claims: the explosion of front-of-package and organic claims tap into a particular kind of consumer imagination. Similarly, packaged “exotic” (or unfamiliar) foods speak to the culinary and touristic imaginations of those consumers seeking more cosmopolitan or global tastes (Elliott 2008). There is also a robust literature on the eroticization of food, which examines how media representations “often stylistically code food with an erotic aura” (Lindenfeld 2011, 13). In contrast to the communication of the organic, the exotic, and the erotic—all of which imagine food in and of different places, be they natural, foreign, or embodied—the Log Barn 1912 labelling speaks of a past place. The geographic imagination of the Log Barn brand is not the conceptual “reaching out” toward new possibilities suggested by Fettes and Judson (2011, 124) but a reaching
backward into an earlier era. Specifically, the sense of place invoked by Log Barn food labels is rooted in an imagined past populated by idealized agrarian Mennonite pioneers who settled in an idealized bountiful and peaceful Canadian West. While this imagined past is not complete fiction, it is carefully manufactured with reference to the real, pieced together using a strategic selection of images and symbols that encourage consumers to envision a rural idyll that will, marketers hope, attract their attention and sell pies.

**FINDING OUR PLACE: ORIGINS, INGREDIENTS, AND THE VALUES OF FOOD PRODUCERS**

Several years ago, Brian Ilbery headed up a study that compared food marketing and labelling schemes in Europe and North America. It included over five hundred local food and drink products registered in the European Union under Protected Designation of Origin or Protected Geographical Indication programs. The study examined the ways in which intrinsic qualities of place and management practices linked to food products and processes seek to demonstrate food quality; that is, how food is positioned as both distinct from and superior to other products. Three essential ingredients for constructing food quality were identified: product, process, and place (Ilbery et al. 2005, 118). For example, the French Comté label, which marks one of the cheeses in France that has AOC (Appellation d’origine contrôlée) certification, represents some 3,200 milk producers, 190 cheese dairies, and 20 cheese-refining centres producing over 46,000 tonnes of cheese collectively. The AOC label promotes a local economy (dairy farmers using unpasteurized milk products, as well as cheese production and refining centres), a specific upland environment (chalk-based grass meadows), and traditional products and practices (linking a particular breed of cattle, Montbelliard, to defined grass-based feeding practices, resulting in unique dairy products). As Ilbery and his colleagues affirm, “It is clear that the ‘Comté’ label demonstrates elements of all three Ps [product, process, and place]. The product has reinforced the territorial identity of the region, both through the enrolment of local actors into a collective project and through recognition of the region and its qualities through the product and its marketing” (125).

Ilbery et al.’s North American case studies include Foodland Ontario, established in 1977; the New Brunswick Product Promotion Plan, founded
in 1981; and Buy British Columbia, started in 1993. These case studies dealt with strategically focused food chains that explicitly or implicitly fostered the marketing of “superiority” and “difference” in labelling schemes; connect producer and consumer through the promotion of artisanal products (versus mass-produced products) and regional products (versus the geographic anonymity typically associated with global-oriented food chains) (Ilbery and Kneafsey 1998; see also Kneafsey 2010; Berndt and Boeckler 2009). Ilbery and his colleagues examined products, processes, and place via two broad but interrelated rationales: a territorial-development rationale and a critical rationale.

The territorial-development rationale deliberately promotes a territory or region by emphasizing the distinctive place-origins of food products, such as cheese, wine, fruits, and vegetables that affirm “traditional” livelihoods, enhance territorial identity, and foster community cohesion. The primary linkage in this rationale is between products and places. Some programs focus on niche markets with an emphasis on product quality, local distinctiveness, and embeddedness in a local setting; such programs may use marketing labels like those associated with Comté (cited above) and, of course, the Log Barn brand. An essential characteristic of this rationale is an explicit or assumed place-context—for example, the Franche-Comté region of eastern France or the Armstrong area in the Okanagan valley of British Columbia. Both of these examples illustrate the idea that successfully representing the place-origin of foods depends on the capacity to appeal to the imagination of the consumer.

The second rationale in Ilbery et al.’s study—the critical rationale—uses food labels to connect food products with environmental, social, and distributional processes that stand in contrast to globally based food production, which is increasingly perceived as negative by consumers (2005, 120). The main connection here is between products and processes: logos and slogans connect food products to alternative or traditional production methods or distribution processes, which, in turn, suggest that the product is healthy, safe, and environmentally friendly. While connection to place is not central to this rationale, it remains an undercurrent, given that “quality” processes (notably traditional production methods) are often implicitly emplaced within a rural idyll and framed, via place-based images on food labels, as countryside benefits.
Both the territorial-development rationale and the critical rationale involve the deliberate linking of products to place. These three Canadian case studies were classified as representing the territorial-development rationale involving government-led initiatives that continue to the present. For example, to get Foodland Ontario off the ground, the Canadian Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs invited industry stakeholders from twelve grower and retail organizations to cosponsor product identification and boost sales of Ontario products within the province. Similarly, the Government of British Columbia partnered with industry to create a Minister’s Council on the Food Industry (involving food, fisheries, and beverage industries) for its Buy British Columbia venture. It should be noted that of the three Canadian organizations examined by Ilbery and colleagues, only Foodland Ontario is still operating. In New Brunswick, a New Brunswick Agriculture Strategy evolved to promote “local agriculture,” and in British Columbia, Buy Local emerged, a program that is part of the provincial government’s Agrifoods Strategy. This Canadian push to support local food by linking food and place stands in contrast to American local-food promotion programs that have typically emerged at the local or regional level in nongovernment and nonindustry settings and are often concerned with food production and environmental matters. The Log Barn brand, in pointedly foregrounding BC food products, fits the territorial-development rationale category. However, its emphasis on quality, local identity, and traditional means of production and Mennonite culinary traditions is equally rooted in the critical rationale because of the implicit and explicit promotion of self-sufficiency, resiliency, entrepreneurialism, and the family.

In “Translating Terroir: The Global Challenge of French AOC Labeling” (2003), Elizabeth Barham examines labels of origin for agro-food products that link local and global through an emphasis on place. She argues that “the discourse around labels of origin brings in issues of ‘the incorporation of nature (both symbolic and biophysical), social movements, consumers and food scares, regulatory politics, contest over corporate involvement and issues of standards and meaning.’ But labels of origins tie all of these questions to specific places” (137). Barham’s study suggests that labels of place origin have the capacity to engage complex and diverse human issues because they appeal to the basic human conditions of place-making and place attachment. Ilbery et al.’s rich research deepens the substance of
Barham’s observation because it underscores the primacy of the connections among food product, food process, and place, connections that pay substantial dividends for food producers and food promotion.

Again, Ilbery et al.’s study of food marketing and labelling schemes in Europe and North America identify the three essential factors of product, process, and place that support claims about superior food quality based on difference and distinctiveness. We build on this to suggest that place-making, when combined with values attributed to food based on its place of origin, significantly strengthen marketing claims about food distinctiveness. It matters that the Comté label affirms the French pastoral landscape in a remote agricultural region on the Swiss border. Such labels underscore the notion that place influences the taste and character of food—but more importantly, they express values that link the consumer to the producer, in their different places, through labels. For Comté cheese, the AOC certification label assures the consumer about quality control (100% small farms with small herds; cooperative cheese production that includes handmade cheese-making to ensure the right consistency), aging, and distribution. The purchase and consumption of food are consequences of decision making, and, arguably, the values linked to small, cooperative, and personal cheese-making from the Comté region play a central role in the successful marketing of this food product. Likewise, the Log Barn 1912 labels demonstrate the essential role that place of origin and Mennonite tradition play in suggesting quality, limited processing, and nonindustrialized food products.

**CONCLUSION**

While the link between food and place is often commercially motivated—as evidenced by programs such as Buy Local, Buy British Columbia, and France’s AOC—the success of such food marketing strategies is propelled forward by our imaginings of particular places (past and present) and particular values. It is worth underscoring that these are indeed often imaginings: the reality for many Canadians is one in which food is consumed in places far removed, in terms of both geography and ethos, from food places of origin—scarfed down in cars or in front of computers at work or the television at home. It is also consumed with attitudes rather distant from values about qualities of process distinctiveness, fast food and packaged food being decidedly nondistinct and homogeneous, and in contexts where
“food topophilia” is entirely absent: it is unlikely, for example, that most Canadians will feel a strong place connection to Saltine crackers or All-Bran cereal. But as consumers seek to decide among the roughly forty-four thousand products found in an average supermarket, the construction and communication of “place” becomes one distinguishing labelling strategy among many. We suggest that communicating a food product’s place of origin is indeed a potent marketing strategy for certain food producers who wish to promote the distinctiveness of their (usually high-priced) products to appeal to discriminating consumers. We also suggest that all “origins” are not created equal—fine French cheese and Mennonite sausage, in fact, cannot be found in Safeway, and the consumer who seeks out such food products is probably well aware of their places of origin. A place-focused marketing strategy is effective because it highlights and invites identification with the social embeddedness of production and takes advantage of the powerful links among food, place, and the values attributed to food producers who are rooted in places of food origin.

NOTES

1 On the three characteristics of place, see Agnew 2011; Cresswell 2004; Entriken 1991; Malpas 1999; Sack 1997.
3 Topophilia refers to an affective bond between people and place (Tuan 1974, 1977). As we have shown, it functions as an effective marketing tool for the Log Barn 1912 brand.
4 For supermarket statistics, see “Supermarket Facts,” on the Food Marketing Institute website, where numbers are updated regularly: http://www.fmi.org/research-resources/supermarket-facts.

REFERENCES


