

## **Economic Impact of a Social Enterprise**

Includes:  
**Final Report**

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Completed for: Seasoned Spoon Café  
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Trent University Department: International Development Studies  
Course Code: IDST 4220Y  
Course Name: Assessment of Development Projects  
Term: Fall-Winter 2014-2015  
Date of Project Submission: April 2015

Project ID: 4340

# Assessing the Socio-economic impacts of the Seasoned Spoon

## **ABSTRACT**

Social enterprises that call for a return to an environmentally conscious food system and a turn away from a mainstream industrial food complex that dominates today are becoming increasingly popular. As their scope and influence continue to expand the need to determine their impact within communities has become necessary. The Seasoned Spoon is a food cooperative that falls very much within the description of a social enterprise. This research project looked to assess the socio-economic impact of the Seasoned Spoon on the Trent and Peterborough community.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

We would like to acknowledge all the wonderful participants that took their time in helping with our analysis of the Seasoned Spoon. Special thanks go to Professor Paul Shaffer of the International Development Studies programme, who has greatly assisted in enhancing our academic knowledge and providing us with the motivation and tools to fulfil this project. Many thanks to Todd Barr, Executive Director of the Trent Community Research Centre for allowing us this great opportunity to conduct research within the Trent and Peterborough community and for the many words of encouragement. To Aimee Blyth, from the Seasoned Spoon, thank you for helping us in networking with producers and members of the cooperative. Finally, thanks go to you, the reader for taking your time in reading our project.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Seasoned Spoon is a social enterprise that focuses on delivering local, organic food to community members and on providing educational workshops about how local food systems operate. This report assesses the main socio-economic impacts that the Seasoned Spoon has upon producers, employees and consumers. Mechanism based approaches, process tracing, and grounded theory were used to analyse the data gathered through semi-structured interviews with producers and employees, and through a survey for consumers. The café is part of the larger counter-hegemonic movement against the mainstream industrial food complex. By connecting producers and consumers following the field to table philosophy, the café is able to satisfy its mandate of providing local organic food and educating community members as well. Research findings demonstrate that for producers, social effects outweigh economic effects. A sense of community and shared ethical affinity were highlighted. Economically, income generation was limited but resource sharing between producers and the Spoon was highlighted as one of the main benefits. For employees, the economic impact is substantial in relative terms. Even though wages are low, they constitute a large percentage of the total overall income generated by employees. Socially, employees also highlighted the sense of community belonging that comes from being part of the café and the knowledge learnt about local food systems and organic food preparation. For consumers, concerns were raised about the ratio between food cost and quantity. Socially, not all educational workshops were in line with the overall educational mandate and there was a strong correlation between International Development Studies (IDST) and Environmental Resource

Studies/Science (ERST) academic programs at Trent University and the likelihood that students in these programs would consume at the Spoon. This report proposes a series of recommendations. First, a small reduction in the price of food has the potential to significantly increase the number of consumers. Furthermore, more focus on workshops that allow consumers to acquire knowledge and skills on organic local food system would be beneficial while maximizing workshop resources. Another important recommendation put forth was to increase advertisement and outreach of the Spoon's brand and message to attract consumers outside of the Environmental Science and International Development background. In addition, the implementation of a constant dishwashing shift in accordance with a structured shift rotation is recommended, allowing all paid staff and volunteers to get experience in all areas while maximizing efficiency.

## INTRODUCTION

*"When I came to the open house one of the main factors in choosing Trent was the spoon cause I am not a big fan of campus food since I like organic local food and I feel like Chartwells does not provide quality food"*

When we started this project, we had little knowledge about how important the Seasoned Spoon is for the local community. The above quote was expressed by one of our informants, who made us realize the importance of the Seasoned Spoon. If a person bases his/her decision of what university to attend, solely on the existence of the Spoon, then it shows how substantial the impact is for the local and even the provincial sphere. The Seasoned Spoon is an organic food

cooperative based at Trent University. It provides locally based, vegetarian, organic oriented food to members of the Trent community. In addition to serving food, the Seasoned Spoon provides educational initiatives through volunteer opportunities, workshops and conferences. Its mandate is centred on the support of local, small-scale farmers and the revitalization of an alternative local based food system.

The purpose of this project was to assess the socio-economic impacts of the Seasoned Spoon. This entailed formulating a conceptual model in which the Spoon was placed at the centre of a complex network of subgroups consisting of producers, consumers and employees. The methodology and research questions section includes the main theories and data collection methods used to inform our research. The examination of the impacts was informed by literature on social enterprises, food cooperatives and their counter-hegemonic movement against mainstream industrialized food systems. Furthermore, the overall sense was that social impacts had a bigger impact upon producers and consumers, while economic impacts outweighed social effects for employees.

## **METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

### **Research Questions**

With the aid of the methodological approaches discussed above, this section will look at the research questions provided, the format in which they were constructed and provide a contextualization as to their importance and why they were chosen. Our major research questions were as follows:

- What is the socio economic impact of the Seasoned Spoon on Producers/Suppliers?

- What is the socio-economic impact of the Seasoned Spoon on Employees?
- What is the socio-economic impact of the Seasoned Spoon on Consumers?

### ***Semi-Structured Interviews***

Semi Structured interviews were held with the subgroup of producers and with employees. The interviews helped in providing an analysis that would go beyond fixed-response surveys and facilitate an understanding of the multiple networks and complexities of the social relationships involving the subgroups and the Seasoned Spoon.

### ***Producer/Supplier Interview Questions***

In looking to understand the economic impacts of the Seasoned Spoon, we began by asking producers about the types of produce they supplied to the Spoon and the frequency of their exchanges. This was done in order to assess the relative importance of the producer to the Seasoned Spoon and to aid in analysing the multiplicity of products that the Spoon receives. Following this, in order to determine impact, we asked what percentage of the producers' total produce of one crop or of all crops went to the Seasoned Spoon. This question looked to directly assess the economic impact of the Seasoned Spoon and provide quantitative data in regards to income generation. The final question attempted to ascertain other effects of producer's engagement with the Spoon. This was done in order to gather qualitative responses and provide an understanding as to the social impact of the Seasoned Spoon.

### ***Employee Interview Questions***

Measuring the economic impact of the Seasoned Spoon on employees entailed gathering information on the Seasoned Spoon's contribution to an

employee's total income. In terms of social impact, questions centred on any effects apart from income. Furthermore we emphasized the acquisition of both transferable and intangible skills and work experience that could be useful in future employment endeavours.

### *Consumer Surveys*

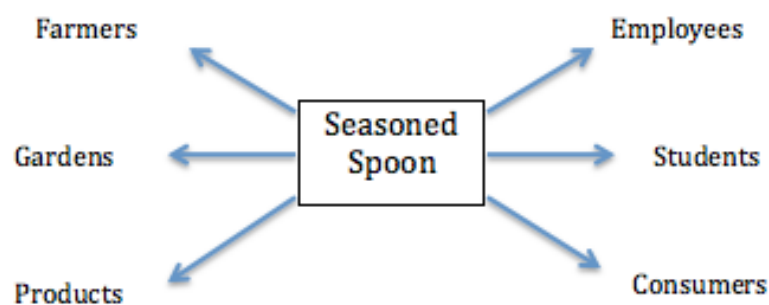
Surveys were distributed both electronically and manually and looked to assess perceptions of the Seasoned Spoon and its impact on consumers. In looking to measure economic impact, the survey looked to address the ratio between the cost, quality and quantity of food. Questions on quality focused on the tastiness and nutritional value of the food served. Social impact questions emphasized consumer response and understanding the role of the educational workshops provided by the Spoon in driving behavioural change amongst consumers. The Surveys are included in Appendix.

### **Methodology**

In our analysis of the impact of the Seasoned Spoon on the three subgroups - producers, consumers and employees - both mechanism based and process tracing approaches were used. This entailed formulating a conceptual model where the Spoon was placed as a central hub surrounded by the three sets of actors affected: producers, consumers and employees. This allowed us to understand that not only did the Spoon facilitate an individual relationship with each subgroup, but furthermore played a role in mediating and fostering increased networking and the creation and reinforcement of relations between and within the three subgroups. Fig 1.3 below provides a visual description of



this conceptual model. This section will provide an in-depth discussion of the mechanism based and process tracing approaches followed by a detailed description of the methodological tools used to attain responses from the three subgroups as to their perception of the role and impact of the Seasoned Spoon. Furthermore, textual analysis was used to examine the transcripts of each interview. This meant comparing different discourses on the perceptions of the café and it's functioning. The information that we gathered from interviews, surveys and focus groups helped us improve our conceptual model of the mechanism of the Seasoned Spoon and the use of grounded theory aided in examining the different discourses.



**Fig 1.3 illustrating the conceptual model of the different actors that the Spoon impacts**

### ***Mechanism Based Approach***

The mechanism-based approach, based upon the conceptual model shown and described above, defines mechanisms as “entities and activities that are organized such that they are productive of regular changes throughout their process of function, from start to termination” (Machamer et al, 2000.3).

According to Machamer et al, mechanisms are composed of both entities (with their properties) and activities, which are the producers of change. Hence, within

the context of determining the impact of the Seasoned Spoon, the subgroups involved- producers, consumers and employees- were seen as the entities and engaged in activities that drove change, which in our case was the continued running of the Seasoned Spoon. As entities, the sheer exchange of produce, skills, educational workshops and the flow of resources were all activities that contributed to the process of change that drove the Seasoned Spoon in mediating an alternative food system. Analyses on the causal relationships that are brought about by the Spoon playing the role of a central hub were informed by Daniel Steel's study on Social Mechanisms and Causal Inference. Here, Steel (2004) argues that social mechanisms are complexes of individuals, usually classified into specific social categories that would generate causal relationships between aggregate level variables. Hence, within the context of the Seasoned Spoon, our three major subgroups, through their interaction, and particularly through economic and social exchanges generated relationships that allowed us to examine and measure their impact, through the mediation of the Seasoned Spoon. For example, in our analysis of the economic impact on each subgroup, the role of the Spoon in changing the relative incomes of each individual subgroup could be measured and determined, thus underlining the impact the Spoon in mediating causal relations on impact. In supporting Steel's analysis of mechanisms and activities as being complex, we found that relations and exchanges between and within groups often overlapped and fluctuated between both social and economic. This overlapping illustrates that while the Seasoned Spoon is seen as a cooperative and hence placing a strong impetus on its ability and responsibility in cultivating an alternative food system, its role in mediating

economic exchanges must not be understated. It played a decisive role in affecting the income and livelihoods of many people.

### ***Process Tracing***

In supporting the mechanism based approach, process tracing allowed for a reflective analysis and acted as a tool for causal inference and thus focused on the unfolding of events and situations over time. As Collier (2010) argues, this unfolding of events allowed for a deeper understanding of the role that time has and how this altered the degree of impact that the Spoon may have had on a particular individual, within a subgroup or its impact on an entire subgroup. In our study, for example, the emphasis of the Seasoned Spoon on seasonality meant that the Spoon's impact on a producer that provided seasonal produce would be high during periods of harvest and productivity. However, during periods of low or no harvest, this impact dwindled. Process tracing, thus, provided a step-by-step mechanism to understand the impacts of variables such as seasonality or impacts of weather extremities and issues around low harvest and aided in pinpointing how such extremities and changes affected the relationship between the Spoon and a producer. Furthermore, process tracing aided in understanding that changes within one subgroup could greatly alter and change how the Spoon impacted a different subgroup. Herein, came the enmeshment and co-existence of both process tracing and mechanism based analysis as changes within one subgroup, for example a decline in consumer demand for a specific product, thus changed the complex system of mechanisms and activities. In response to the decline in consumer demand, the Spoon reduced the quantity of their order of said produce, thus resulting in a decline in

income for the producer and eventually limiting the impact the Spoon had on the producer.

The two approaches were chosen particularly for their ability to illustrate the complexity of the relationships the Spoon, not only has, but also mediates for the multiple actors and subgroups within its alternative food system. In addition, the flexibility and overlapping of the two approaches allowed us to explain phenomena and changes within this system over time, improving our ability to illuminate specific events and their importance in altering relations and moreover the impact of the Spoon.

### ***Grounded Theory***

Grounded theory is the systematic method of analysis that aids in constructing a theoretical assessment from data, with an explicit emphasis on analytical strategies and implicit guidelines for data collection (Charmaz and Belgrave, 2007). Grounded theory turns away from standardization and thus allowed us to analyse the impact of the Spoon and its relationships as an individual entity and as a specific case. Under our grounded theory analysis, our ability to analyse data was enhanced due to the fact that it fosters comparative analysis of the different actors and their varying findings and perceptions of the Seasoned Spoon and its impact on them. In the case of our study, grounded theory aided in analysing semi-structured interviews done with employees and producers. Analysis was strongly emphasized in our transcription of interviews and allowed us to highlight the different discourses that the multiplicity of actors exhibited in their responses to perceptions and the functioning of the Spoon. That is to say that analysing transcripts and data allowed us to not only study

concrete realities but also assess the conceptual meanings and understanding of the role of the Spoon according to the different actors and subgroups.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Assessing the socio-economic impacts that the Seasoned Spoon has upon producers, employees and consumers involves in depth analysis of concepts of social enterprise, how local food co-ops systems operate, and the idea of 'local foods' itself. As the Spoon works as a social enterprise and as a food cooperative, it often evokes diverse and sometimes contradictory ideas of what local food systems entail. Firstly, the café defines itself as a social enterprise. Social enterprises are change organizations; typically their purpose is to bring about change to improve social well-being (Diochon & Anderson, 2011, p.93). The Seasoned Spoon works as a change organization in the sense that its purpose is to challenge industrial food systems and educate community members on how local food systems are beneficial not only for health reasons but also socially. Furthermore, social entrepreneurship thus values local initiative and participation as a measure of principled practice, not only to enhance opportunities to promote social cohesion and collective action, but also in the belief that local participation is a foundation for positive social policy and social change (Crofts, 2003, p. 14). The café heavily relies on participation from community members and its policies respond to the democratic values of cooperative membership. In fact, social enterprises emphasize 'the community' as a resource and a site for intervention (Crofts, 2003). At the core of the literature on social enterprises there is a debate around the tension between the

commercial and social objectives of a social enterprise. The Seasoned Spoon defines itself as a non-profit organization, however scholars have argued that the line between for-profit and non-profit organizations is sometimes blurred. For instance, Ridley-Duff (2008) employs the concepts of social and economic rationality to explore the nature of social enterprise and he proposes that the idea of describing social enterprises as merely “not-for profit” has been replaced by the notion of more-than- profit (Diochon & Anderson, 2011). It is helpful to conceptualize the Spoon as a more-than-profit organization because as Ridley-Duff points out, “the “not-for-profit” characterization of social enterprise obscures a complex set of philosophical and moral commitments regarding who can profit from its operation and how these profits can be used” (Diochon & Anderson 2011, p. 96).

At the core of how the Seasoned Spoon defines itself, lies a strong sense of resistance against the mainstream industrial food complex. In recognizing the negative externalities of a global, industrial, food system, eating local has been proposed as a way to mitigate these negative social, ecological, economic impacts (Julian 2015, p. 6). As a result, local food systems argue for the re-embedding of food production, which also, as Lyson (2007) contends, “theorizes that bringing producers and consumers closer together spatially and socially will strengthen the personal connections between them, leading to consumers’ gaining knowledge of how their food is produced and a richer appreciation for its production practices, and to producers gaining a more educated and committed consumer based” (Julian 2015, p. 6). The Seasoned Spoon certainly attempts to re-embed the local into the campus food systems, by challenging the industrial

food complex personified by Chartwells. Their field to table approach clearly resonates with the idea of providing an alternative to food options on campus. Thus, as Martinez et al. (2010) argue, local food proponents seek to create or promote venues that reduce the number of “middle men” in food transactions between producers and consumers, linking farm fresh food with consumers directly (Julian, 2015, p. 11). The Spoon works in direct relationship with the Trent Vegetables Gardens to eliminate middlemen and provide direct, fresh and seasonal produce to its customers. Furthermore, as Cleveland et al. argue, “the motivations to achieve goals of alternative food systems within the mainstream structures requires what in mainstream logic would be classified as self-exploitation, but which in alternative logic could be classified as increasing personal well-being via social contribution, thus expanding the definition of personal well-being in time and space” (p.9). As a result, the alternative food system has a complete different logic to the one of the mainstream complex, which often lead to misjudgements and stigmatization of the former by the latter. Thus, it can also be argued that the counter-movement is counter-hegemonic in nature. As Satgar (2011) contends, “the emergence of a solidarity economy movement and successful solidarity economy food sovereignty alternatives has to be able to provide an effective counter-hegemonic challenge to the state and agro-food complex it supports” (p. 188). Part of the movement’s logic is understood to require fundamental changes in lifestyles, economic and social systems and to seek increases in quality of life rather than material consumption (Seyfang, 2007, p.125). However, it is important to note, as DeLind (2011) argues, that while there is no single answer to the question of what an

alternative food economy looks like, collective responsibility and place making must be central to more transformative efforts (Mount and Andree, 2013).

The counter-hegemonic movement, of which the Spoon is a part, relies heavily on community membership to generate legitimacy for its objectives and *raison d'être*. This membership includes representatives of the community and other stakeholders: partner organizations such as the vegetable gardens and customers. In addition to engaging with stakeholders and allowing them a voice in organizational affairs, social enterprises such as the Spoon are expected to make explicit efforts to be accountable to them (Moizer & Tracey, 2010, p.254). At this point, it is extremely important to discuss how the concept of the 'local food' mediates the relationships between stakeholders and the nature of this counter-hegemonic movement that the Spoon is part of. Local food can be understood in terms of three domains of proximity: geographical proximity, relational proximity, and values of proximity (Eriksen, 2013). Geographical proximity entails the explicit spatial locality, (e.g. area, community, place or geographical boundary) distance and/or radius (e.g. food miles), within which food is produced, retailed, consumed and/or distributed (Eriksen, 2013, p. 49). Relational proximity has to do with the direct relations between local actors (e.g. such as producers, distributors, retailers and consumers) reconnected through alternative production and distribution practices such as farmers markets, farm shops, cooperatives etc. (Eriksen, 2013, p. 49). Finally, values of proximity are the different values (e.g. place of origin, traceability, authentic, freshness, quality, etc.) that different actors attribute to local food (Eriksen, 2013, p. 49). These domains significantly help in understanding how local food is seen in the context



of the Seasoned Spoon. There is plenty of overlapping between the three categories and all of them inform how producers, employees and consumers see the functioning of the Spoon as a source of local food.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Producers**

In terms of economic impacts upon producers, the data revealed that there was a great variability depending on the size of the business exchange and on the season. Also, resource sharing was highlighted as an important positive economic impact. Resource sharing entails the exchange of material and human support. Firstly, the great variation in the absolute size of the economic impact was directly correlated to the size of the business. For dairy suppliers such as Kawartha Dairy, the economic impact of doing business with the Seasoned Spoon was insignificant. In addition, for other small businesses, baked goods for instance, the order was small in both, absolute and relative terms. However, this does not mean that the economic impact was limited. In fact, despite of the small size of the order, baked goods producers highlighted the great importance that engaging in business with the café had for them. The baked goods producer expressed that even though it was a small order it was still an important source of income and that it "...adds a little padding around my edges" and that "...I would miss the extra money that I make, it adds up." Furthermore, the informant added that it is very beneficial because even though it was a small amount, you can count on the extra money at the end of the month, which fills two gas tanks a month. Secondary economic benefits were also important for the baked goods

producer. For instance, the producer argued that by purchasing wholesale ingredients, they were able to save money since they did not have to buy ingredients for personal use at a full price retail store. Besides, the informant expressed that producing for the Spoon required growing zucchinis, which also supported personal use. On the other hand, for producers such as the Trent Vegetable Gardens, engaging in business with the café is extremely important, because their entire activity is dependent on the Spoon accepting their produce. Other benefits of working with Spoon were that the producer could access stores that sell organic local flour at affordable prices, which greatly benefited the producer. The informant agreed that they are “holding each other’s hands.”

For the Gardens, the amount of food produced that is donated to the café is approximately 75%. The gardens provide a high variety of produce. They consult the café’s chefs to coordinate the priorities and needs that the Spoon may have. For instance, the Gardens would produce vegetables that are more expensive to purchase such as tomatoes, eggplants, and greens versus onions and carrots that were cheaper to buy locally. The fact that most of their production went to the Spoon indicates that the impact, in terms of secondary economic impacts such as resource sharing, was extremely high. If the café were not to receive that produce, the gardens would not have expanded as much and would not have extended operations into the acre field garden. An important variable for the economic impact that the café had upon producers was seasonality. For instance, for the baked goods producers, the order from the Spoon was cut in half during the winter months. Furthermore, the producer added that catering was where more profit tended to be made. Catering orders picked up closer to Christmas,

and the profit increased. This is evidence of the effect of seasonality upon the amount of economic impact that the café had on the producer. The gardens ability to contribute to the Spoon was also affected by seasonality. However, the way in which it was affected was different. Due to the nature of farming, some crops may be more successful than others depending on the year. As a result, the amount of produce that is donated to the Spoon varies, and therefore the impact on the gardens also differs. Even though the produce is donated and therefore there is no financial transaction, the Seasoned Spoon does have an important economic effect upon the gardens. Mainly, this economic impact is expressed through resource sharing such as: coordinating volunteers, help in promoting and organizing events and workshops; supporting grant writing and allowing access to other financial support sources. One informant described how “the Spoon helps us retain the funding that we have and to obtain more funding; we can apply for grants through the Spoon that we cannot through the gardens since we do not actually have a business number.” Furthermore, the Spoon enables the gardens to have more public outreach while allowing the Gardens to fulfill their strong educational mandate in supporting local food systems. As the informant expressed, the gardens “probably would not have the same level of access to resources and funding if that produce was not also given to the Spoon and directly being sold to the students.”

In terms of the social impacts upon producers, a sense of community building and a connection marked by ethical affinity were highlighted as the most important effects. In fact, all producers consulted highlighted that the social impacts generated by working in partnership with the Seasoned Spoon outweigh

the economic impacts of income generation and shared resources. This is due to the fact that by working with the Spoon, producers feel part of a larger movement supporting local organic food systems. In terms of a sense of community belonging, one of the producers argued that she enjoys going to the Spoon and feels a strong sense of connection with the university community. She explained: "...when they had their 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary I was invited to the party, I am part of this community. I get to see the workshops and participate; I know that this is a café that I can always find great food at." The vegetables gardens described themselves as sister organization of the Spoon. The fact that they share all kinds of resources from grant writing support to volunteers is evidence of the level of commitment that they have to building a community around the values of local and organic food that is sustainable and affordable to community members. Furthermore, the sense of connection marked by an ethical affinity resonated amongst the producer informants. They all agreed that by working in partnership with the Spoon, they subscribe to the values of organic and sustainable field to table values. The baked goods informant argued that even though the order is small, it keeps her connected to a system that she believes in. This system is based on values of high food quality - organically produced and locally sourced. This is also reflected on the partnership that the café has with the Vegetable Gardens. As one of the informants argued, both organizations have a strong educational mandate by being located at the university. As a result, "...we are acting as tangible demonstration of a localized field to table food system; people are able to see the whole process from the growing, harvesting, distribution, processing, cooking and eating of food. By working together in that way we can demonstrate how a sustainable food system works here." The

informant furthermore expressed that this partnership is unique because “...even if you get food from farmers market a lot of them are driving from an hour away whereas the gardens are across the Faryon [campus] Bridge.” This means that by working together both organizations fulfill their educational mandate of allowing students access to learning how to produce and prepare organic food showing the field to table process.

### **Employees**

In terms of the economic impact for employees, the data highlighted income generation and the acquisition of transferable job skills. On the other hand, social effects upon employees include two broad categories: a shared sense of community building and a strong educational component. The economic and social impacts reinforce one another. However, in order to provide an in depth analytical examination of the impacts, the following discussion on the research findings will first explore the economic impacts and then the social effects.

The first set of economic impacts, income generation, was found to be highly significant in relative terms. In absolute terms, the wages are low and therefore they would give the impression that they do not have a significant impact.

However, relative to the overall employment income generation for the staff members interviewed, the income generated accounted for more than 70% in all cases, and 100% in most cases, of the total personal income. Employees interviewed expressed that even though the wages are low, they would miss the source of income if it ended. Besides direct income generation, working at the Seasoned Spoon provides savings in transportation for its employees. Since they

are students, the fact that the café is on campus allows them to save money in gas or other transportation costs since they do not have to commute to work. One of the employees, for instance, argued that he used to have another job that was farther away which paid more or less the same wage but that had longer shifts and the cost of commuting was higher. As one of our informants expressed, “...working at the Spoon has been quite helpful, particularly because before this year I was not eligible for OSAP and I was living out of a student line of credit for two years, which was pretty tight budget wise.” However, our informant furthermore explains how “...this year I got the maximum amount of OSAP so then I was able to have money from the Spoon, which makes it that I am not tight for groceries and paying rent and it has worked out that at the end of this year I have money left over to carry me out until I start working in mid- June.”

The second subset of economic impacts besides income generation was the acquisition of transferable job skills. These skills and work experience provide valuable assets for employees to compete in the job market. Besides kitchen work experience, informants highlighted skills such as leadership roles, managing volunteers and cash handling, closing the café and taking a food health safety course. When asked to describe their work, all informants agreed that paid staff are accountable for a great variety of tasks. In contrast to volunteers, employees are responsible for “...keeping track of activities and more responsible for things if they do not go well...” as one informant explained. As a result, informants felt that they gained strong leadership skills, especially by managing volunteers. As one of the interviewees stated, “...being a paid staff involves a lot of responsibility and leadership, you have to deal with cash and

serving people, you need to know what to do when some of the volunteers do not feel confident enough to do stuff, and you cannot miss your shifts like some volunteers.”

This impact is limited in scope, however, due to the nature of how staff wages are funded. More specifically, the fact that the Trent Work Study Program (TWSP) and Trent International Program (TIP) offer 67% of the total funding for staff payroll means that to be eligible for hiring, students must satisfy specific conditions. The data from the interviews reveal that most employees are OSAP recipients, which makes them eligible to work at the Seasoned Spoon. In one of the cases, one of the paid staff argued that because he was not originally an OSAP recipient he could not be hired even though he had plenty of volunteer experience at the restaurant. TIP funding is extremely limited and reserved for international students, which actually is beneficial in the sense that otherwise international students would not be able to work at the Seasoned Spoon because they are not OSAP recipients. As a result, the pool of students that can work at the café is limited, which further reduces opportunities to find student employment on campus.

In terms of the social impacts, the first set of impacts was the creation of a shared sense of community. All of the informants highlighted that the relaxed and inclusive working environment creates the perfect opportunity to feel as a part of a community. The sense of belonging was directly related to the purpose of the Seasoned Spoon. The fact that the café has a strong mission to provide an alternative source of food on campus creates the sense that people involved with

the restaurant have a common purpose or goal. The main goal consists of challenging the industrial food complex by showing how local food systems are healthier and more sustainable over time. As a result, employees feel part of a larger movement, and their sense of purpose solidifies in a strong sense of community and attachment to the Seasoned Spoon. For instance, informants stated that they met a lot of people by working at the Spoon, which made their university experience more amenable. Informants maintained that there is a “...positive, atmosphere there; I like being there and talking to volunteers, the food is also awesome.” Another informant described how “...working with a variety of people...” was a strong feature of the job since it provided the opportunity of interacting with different perspectives with the common goal of supporting local and sustainable food systems. One of the main factors influencing the creation of a strong sense of community is the location of the café. By virtue of being on campus, it allows easy and fast access to members of the university. The interviewees highlighted how the fact that the café is on campus allows them to have the perfect balance between work and school. One of the interviewees stated that “...it works great with school; you get your hours and you can change them according to your schedule.”

The second set of social impacts that the Seasoned Spoon has upon employees is the strong educational influence about local food systems and seasonal and organic food preparation, which led to some behavioural changes. As one of the informants argued, working at the Seasoned Spoon “...definitely changes your perspective, knowing that all food is sourced locally and all produce is seasonal, or frozen for when it was, is really good.” The strong educational mandate that



the café has in supporting how food can be locally produced to satisfy community demands has a direct influence on the employees. The educational approach is a sort of 'learn by doing' strategy that clearly has a strong effect on employees. Another interviewee contended that "...it really helps to learn how to use seasonal food and you learn how to use vegetables a lot." By being exposed to organic food preparation, informants felt that they learned how to properly work with vegetables. They explained how beneficial it was to learn how to use seasonal food and how to incorporate it as well as being creative with a limited set of ingredients. This learning led to a behavioural change in terms of how they see and prepare food. All informants expressed that their food habits had changed: "I eat much better, I consume way less meat." For employees, both economic and social impacts were extremely important. Income generation and transferable job skills were highlighted but many informants expressed the following sentiment: "I would miss it [the Seasoned Spoon] more socially than economically; it is not really about the money there, it's about the people."

### **Consumers**

In looking to determine the economic impact the Spoon exudes upon consumers, we divided the findings into two sections. This section of the report will present the findings from the consumer survey. The two categories include:

#### *1. Relation between food cost and quality and quantity*

In order to determine economic impact of consumers, analysis of the relationship between the Spoon and consumers began around discussions on the

cost of food and consumer response to the relation between the cost and both the quality and quantity of food.

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GRADE	Category of Analysis			
	<i>Food Taste</i>	<i>Nutritional Content</i>	<i>Price vs. Quality</i>	<i>Price vs. Quantity</i>
Excellent	17	27	9	0
Good	20	13	14	0
Fair	3	0	17	6
Bad	0	0	0	34

***Table 1.0. Illustrating the distribution of responses to the consumer surveys***

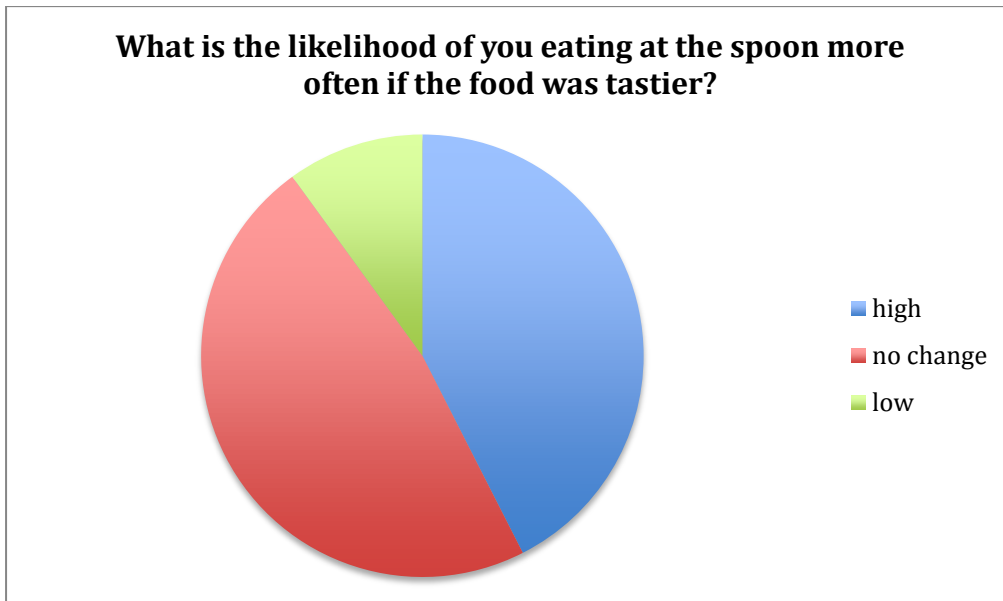
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In regards to the relationship between cost and quality, our survey looked to address questions around the tastiness and nutritional content of the food provided by the Spoon. Consumers were asked to grade both on a scale that ranged from excellent to bad and Table 1.0 (above) illustrates the results found. For nutritional content, we found that fewer than 70% of survey participants stated the nutritional content as being excellent, while the remainder of respondents stated it as being good. For tastiness, responses varied. Of the 40 survey responses, 43% stated the taste as excellent, 50% stated the taste as being good and the remainder felt that the taste was fair. Responses to the question on food cost in relation to quality saw much variation, as 23% felt the ratio was excellent, 35% stated its as being good and the remaining 42% stated the relation as being fair. We began to find that the term food quality is conceptualized and interpreted differently among consumers. Some students added that quality did not only entail nutritional content and taste but other

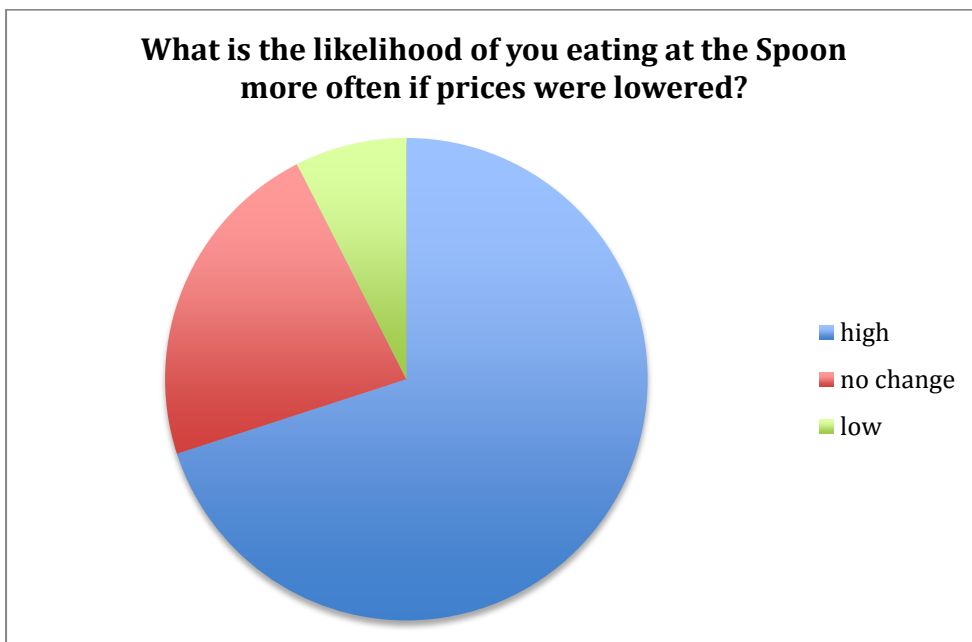
factors such as the restaurant environment. Others mentioned that food was not warm enough when served to them, which would decrease the quality and enjoyment of their meal.

In analysing the relation between food prices and quantity, the survey asked for different degrees of satisfaction. We found that 15% of consumers stated the price-quantity ratio as being fair and around 85% of the remaining respondents stated the sense of inadequacy in regards to the ratio. In attempting to determine whether the perceived notion of small portion servings influenced the ability of the Spoon to increase its impact upon consumers, Figures 1.1 and 1.2 (next page) illustrate the responses. Seventy percent responded that a decrease in the price of the food as the Seasoned Spoon would increase the likelihood of them choosing to eat here more often.. Hence, we would argue that a decline in the prices or an increase in the quantity and portions would increase the impact the Seasoned Spoon has on a substantial number of its consumers and their likelihood of eating at the restaurant on a more regular basis.

In regards to changes and improvements in the tastiness, the survey reported that around 43% of respondents felt that an improvement in taste would increase their likelihood of eating at the Spoon more often, while 48% felt that improvements in the taste would not change the likelihood of them increasing the frequency and regularity of the meals they eat being at the Seasoned Spoon.. These findings go further in supporting the argument made earlier around the perception, definition and interpretation of food quality showing quality includes a multiplicity of contributions.



*Figure 1.1, above, illustrating consumer responses to improvements in taste at the Seasoned Spoon*



*Figure 1.2, above, illustrating consumer responses to declines in food price and their role on increasing consumer spending*

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## *2. Proximity to the Seasoned Spoon- The role of living on campus against living off campus*

Seeing as the Spoon is located on the Trent University campus, the proximity of consumers and the choice and distances they have to travel in order to eat in the café will likely play a role in determining the impact that the Spoon has on them as an individual. Within this context, findings were expected to reflect an increased consumption of food from the Seasoned Spoon from those respondents that lived on campus-and thus had to travel smaller distances to purchase food- than those respondents that lived off campus. Our findings however, did not meet expectations. From the 40 participants that filled out the surveys, 14 lived on campus while 26 lived off campus. From the 14 on campus surveys filled, the average number of meals that they had at the Spoon on a weekly basis was 1.45 - broadly similar to the 1.40 average meals of off-campus students. For example, within the group of students that stay on campus, none of them stated having more than two meals a week at the Spoon, while the range of meals for off-campus students ranged from one to four meals a week..

The fewer number of meals that on-campus students had and thus the lower impact the Spoon had was further investigated and we found that one major factor contributed to this limited impact. Students that reside on campus are all under a student meal plan, provided by Trent University, in collaboration with the main campus food service provider, Chartwells. From the designated \$3600 with their meal plan, only \$200 is eligible to be spent at food providers

outside of those under Chartwells, including the Seasoned Spoon. As a result, students' consumer choice becomes limited and furthermore in order to eat at the Spoon they must pay from outside of their meal plan. The role of external actors and the fact that the Seasoned Spoon works within a university network must not be ignored but strongly emphasized as a factor limiting its impact on campus-living consumers. This existence within the university structure and the prioritizing of Chartwells provides strong evidence as to why students on campus eat less meals at the Seasoned Spoon than off campus students and has thus marginalised the potential for the Spoon to expand its impact.

In analysing the social impact of the Seasoned Spoon in regards to consumers, emphasis was placed on the Spoon playing a central role in providing an alternative source of food both to and within the mainstream industry-based provision of food. In order to understand this juxtaposition between mainstream and alternative food source we must clearly define both. The mainstream food complex is, in the industrialized world, dominated by large, private corporations, driven by profit and is highly concentrated spatially and structurally, resulting in high levels of production. In contrast, the alternative food system is defined as looking to foster and drive food sustainability and increased localization while minimizing negative environmental and social externalities. (Cleveland et al, 2014). Furthermore, seeing as it is a cooperative, its mandate includes driving social change within the community.

### *3. The Role of Educational Workshops in fostering behavioural change*

In addition, the Spoon acting as not only an alternative food source but also as a cooperative should entail an educational aspect that drives behavioural changes within the community, thus including consumers. Educational workshops at the Spoon are specifically tailored to enhance consumer awareness and equip them with skills that will allow them to further drive an alternative food source ethic. We found that while educational workshops were emphasized and highlighted, consumers felt that they did not play a significant role in changing behavioural attitudes. Rather, of the 40 surveys collected, 37 consumers felt that the educational workshops provided them with intangible skills that, while very helpful in improving their lives, were not mainly centred on changing behavioural attitudes towards the mainstream food provision complex. Consumers particularly emphasized the benefits and increased knowledge in practices such as wine making, soap making and multicultural cooking lessons from a multitude of regions throughout the world but argued that their behavioural attitudes saw little change. However, when asked why the Seasoned Spoon was seen as important and why consumers chose to eat food provided by The Spoon, almost 80% of survey participants highlighted the Spoon as providing an alternative means of food to large food corporations. Hence, we found that while the educational workshops did not enhance a counter industry food system narrative, it was the mere existence of the Spoon within an existing industry based school food provision system that enhanced a counter industry food system narrative. This allowed for consumers to foster an increased embeddedness in a sustainable consumption ethic and alternative food system.

## Recommendations

Consumers highlighted the inadequacy in the relation between food cost and quantity and 80% of survey respondents felt that food portions were insufficient for the amount of money paid. We would firstly recommend either a reduction in the price of food or an increase of food portions. Not only will this increase consumer satisfaction, but also decreasing costs could allow for an increase in consumer spending at the Seasoned Spoon and thus drive up the impact of the cooperative.

Secondly, consumers felt that greater emphasis could be placed on educational workshops given the overall mandate of the cooperative in promoting alternative food systems. Recommendations include more focus of workshops placed on teaching about alternative food. This might include workshops on seasonal crops within the region and teaching consumers how to grow their own crops. Not only does this fall well within the educational mandate and the core beliefs and message of the Seasoned Spoon, it increases the impact of the Spoon in expanding the pool of people that are aware and practicing sustainable consumption and alternative food ethic.

Thirdly, the \$200 cap on on-campus students annual meal plan has limited the Seasoned Spoon's impact on consumers. This is furthermore exacerbated by the fact that on-campus students are in stronger proximity to the Spoon and that if provided the opportunity to eat at the Spoon more often, they responded positively. This would not only allow for the Spoon to increase its impact on



consumers but could foster a relation with the university to allow for a space for an alternative food system to work within a mainstream industrial food complex.

Fourthly, we would encourage the Seasoned Spoon to increase advertisement and outreach of its brand and message to allow for the attraction of a bigger pool of consumers, particularly those outside of Environmental Science and International Development studies. While the current consumer base ensures that the Spoon spreads an alternative food ethic, its reach would expand if the Spoon could find ways of attracting more diverse consumers.

The Seasoned Spoon's impact could be enhanced through a restructuring of divisions of labour. Employee interviews highlighted a lack of fluidity in the division of labour, in particular the coordination in shift rotation as well as a disturbed flow in dishwashing. An employee emphasized that "...it is too bad that there isn't that dish shift the whole year because it just means that volunteers get stuck doing dishes, one of the mandates of the spoon is providing experience to people and opportunities and so if you are spending your time on dishes then you are really not getting the educational opportunities and learning how to work with vegetables." A day-long rotating dishwashing shift will not only improve and maximise efficiency of duties, it will also ensure that tasks are not always repetitive and allow employees and volunteers to garner a complete set of skills and education while rotating responsibilities.

Analysis found that from the 14 student employees that receive an income, the Spoon is responsible for only 33% of the total cost of wages. The other 67% of

wages comes from the Trent Work Study Programme (TWSP) and the Trent International Programme (TIP). As the Spoon has a mandate looking to enhance community development, we recommend a staff restructuring of to allow for more student jobs. This will further foster an improvement in the division of labour within the daily management of the restaurant and increase the impact the Spoon has on employees and students. An employee highlighted the benefits of working at the Seasoned Spoon, as providing, “...highly attractive jobs due to proximity to classes, on campus, and flexible shifts that help balance school work.”

## CONCLUSION

This report has described, analysed and explained the main socio-economic impacts that the Seasoned Spoon has upon producers, employees and consumers. In terms of methodology, mechanism based approaches, process tracing, and ground theory were used to inform the analysis of the raw data. In order to gather data, we conducted semi-structured interviews with producers and employees, and elaborated a survey for consumers. The Seasoned Spoon works as a social enterprise that finds its *raison d'être* in being part of the larger counter-hegemonic movement against the mainstream industrial food complex. By connecting producers and consumers following the field to table philosophy, the café is able to satisfy its mandate of providing local organic food and educating community members as well. The data revealed that for producers, social effects outweigh economic effects. A sense of community and shared ethical affinity were highlighted. Economically, income generation was limited but resource sharing between producers and the Spoon was highlighted as one

of the main benefits. For employees, the economic impact is substantial in relative terms. Even though wages are low, they constitute a large percentage of the total overall income generated by employees. Socially, employees also highlighted the sense of community belonging that comes from being part of the café and the knowledge learnt about local food systems and organic food preparation. For consumers, the data revealed that in terms of economic impacts there is an inadequacy in the ratio between food cost and quantity. Furthermore, it was found that the \$200 limit that students with a meal plan have to spend at the café seriously restricts the scope of economic impact upon the student population. Socially, not all educational workshops were in line with the overall educational mandate and there was a strong correlation between IDST and ERST programs and the likelihood that these students consume at the Spoon. This means that the café is seen as catering to a very specific students group and therefore this further limits the scope of impact. In terms of recommendations, a small reduction in the price of food has the potential to increase the number of consumers. Furthermore, more focus on workshops that allow for consumers to acquire knowledge and skills on organic local food system would be beneficial while maximizing workshop resources. Moreover, an increase in the \$200 meal plan spending cap could significantly increase the number of students consuming at the Spoon (though clearly this recommendation is outside the scope of action of the Spoon). Another important recommendation is to increase advertisement and outreach of its brand and message to attract consumers outside of an Environmental Science and International Development background. Another highlighted recommendation would be the implementation of a constant dishwashing shift in accordance with a structured shift rotation

whereby division of labour is specified allowing all paid staff and volunteers to get experience in all areas while maximizing efficiency. Further research would include a wider range of interviews and surveys being realized in order to find out overall trends and patterns. Also, a financial assessment may be helpful in exploring the options that the Spoon may have to expand operations and provide a more efficient utilization of resources to maximize student employment while attracting more consumers to the healthy, organic and local food that is being prepared at the Seasoned Spoon.



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## APPENDIX

Semi-structured interview questions:

### **Farmers and Producers**

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#### ***What is the socio-economic impact of the Seasoned Spoon on producers?***

1. How would you describe the nature of your relationship with the Seasoned Spoon? In which activities do you engage with the Seasoned Spoon?
2. How often do you engage in business with the Seasoned Spoon?
3. What kind of produce do you supply? For each individual crop, what percentage of the sales goes to the Seasoned Spoon? (Percentage of crop sales in relation to total crop sales-trying to understand if some crops have bigger impact)
4. Do you sell to other places? If yes, who are these stores? Are there any pros and cons that come with selling to the Spoon instead of other places? Price guarantees, easier negotiations, quality standards. Do prices differ between different buyers?
5. Are there any additional positive and negative effects associated with working with the Spoon beyond income generation?
6. Is there was anything that you could change in your relationship/partnership with the Spoon what would it be?

### **Employees and Volunteers**

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#### ***What is the socio-economic impact of the Seasoned Spoon on employees?***

1. What is the nature of your relationship with the Seasoned Spoon? Volunteer or paid worker?
2. What percentage of your total income comes from the Seasoned Spoon? How do you feel about the wages? Fair?
3. If you were not working at the Seasoned Spoon would you be searching for employment elsewhere? Looking to understand whether the fact that it is on campus has affected your decision in seeking employment here.
4. Are there any additional positive or negative effects associated with working at the Spoon besides income generation? Would these help in looking for employment elsewhere if you were to leave the Spoon , or not(transferable skillset, contacts, experience)?



5. How would you describe your relationship with your co-workers? How do you feel about the way your shifts are scheduled in relation to school?
6. How did you hear about the opportunity for employment/volunteering at the Spoon?

### **Volunteers**

1. How long have you been a volunteer at the Spoon?
2. What made you decide to become a volunteer for the Spoon? How did you hear about the volunteering opportunity?
3. What do you plan on gaining from your experience as a volunteer at the Spoon?
4. Are there any additional positive or negative effects associated with volunteering at the Spoon? Would these help in looking for employment elsewhere if you were to leave the Spoon, or not (transferable skillset, contacts, experience)?

### **Consumers**

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***What is the socio-economic impact of the Seasoned Spoon on consumers?***

\*For consumers the survey will be provided

## **Survey: Assessing the socio-economic impacts of the Seasoned Spoon**

The objective of this survey is to gather information in order to assess the socio-economic impacts of the Seasoned Spoon. The assessment will be conducted as part of the academic requirements for IDST 4220 in conjunction with the TCRC. All information will remain confidential.

### **Preliminary questions:**

- 1 Do you live on campus?
- 2 On average, how many meals a week do you have at the Seasoned Spoon?

3 What is your major program of study?

**Please circle your answer.**

1 How would you rank the food quality?

- a. Excellent
- b. Good
- c. Fair
- d. Bad
- e. Poor

2 How would you rank the nutritional content of the food?

- a. Excellent
- b. Good
- c. Fair
- d. Bad
- e. Poor

3 How would you describe the value of a meal (, i.e. the price relative to the quality)?

- a. Excellent
- b. Good
- c. Fair
- d. Bad
- e. Poor

4 What is the likelihood of you eating at the Seasoned Spoon more often if the food was tastier?

- a. High
- b. No Change
- c. Low

5 What is the likelihood of you eating at the Seasoned Spoon more often if waiting times were reduced?

- a. High
- b. No Change
- c. Low

6 What is the likelihood of you eating at the Seasoned Spoon more often if prices were lowered?

- a. High
- b. No Change
- c. Low

7 Did you attend any educational workshop offered by the Seasoned Spoon, if Yes, which one?

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8 Did the workshop help you develop a better understanding of the issues discussed or not?

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9 Did the workshop lead you to change your behavior or not in any way? If yes, give examples.

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10 Any additional comments:

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11 Would you be interested in taking part in a short interview? If yes, please provide contact information.

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